

A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL EXEGESIS:
DE LUBAC'S *HISTOIRE ET ESPRIT*

The last half dozen years have seen a spirited discussion of the exegesis of the early Christian writers. This discussion has centered about what has come to be called the "spiritual exegesis" of the early writers, and, in particular, about the possibilities of a renaissance of spiritual exegesis in modern times. The readers of this journal have been informed of this controversy in the review of Walter J. Burghardt (XI [1950], 78-116). One will find in this article all the points of the discussion set forth with the greatest clarity; and, if one wishes to pursue the subject further, one will find there references to all the writings which had appeared up to that date. It is unnecessary, therefore, for me to present again the contemporary context of the most recent work of P. de Lubac, which comes, as he himself describes it, as "a chapter in the history of spiritual exegesis."¹

The book merits the special attention which we give it here for several reasons. It is the most weighty contribution to the discussion of early Christian exegesis. But it is more than another item in a controversy which many feel has been prolonged beyond necessity or utility. In a review of P. Daniélou's *Origène* in this journal (X [1949], 446), I expressed the hope of a more purely inductive study of Origen's exegesis, based on his exegetical work rather than on the fourth book of the *Periarchon*, on the basis of which the common opinion of Origen's exegesis has been formed. This task has been undertaken by P. de Lubac. No such study of the exegesis of the father of allegorism has been made before. It does not lose its value as a standard work simply because it arises from an apologetic for one side of a contemporary discussion. This reviewer believes that the positive exposition of Origen's exegesis is not inseparably connected with some of the conclusions which de Lubac draws for contemporary theology. When one considers de Lubac's unsurpassed familiarity with patristic and theological literature, and his gifts of exposition and argument, one expects a work of more than ephemeral significance. We reviewers should be more cautious in applying the tag "definitive." This book is the work of a pioneer in the field, and it will certainly stimulate further investigation and discussion, which is bound to modify some of its conclusions; but from this point of vantage (which is also, in its own way, that of a pioneer) it appears that the substance of de Lubac's work will endure.

¹ Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit: L'Intelligence de l'écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950. Pp. 448). The book incorporates several articles of P. de Lubac which have appeared in various journals, as well as his introductions to the homilies of Origen in the *Sources chrétiennes*.

I

The importance which we attach to the work justifies us in presenting a somewhat extended summary of its contents, while we reserve any discussion or criticism until our conclusion. De Lubac begins with a summary of the complaints against Origen, ancient and modern. It is of interest to observe that the character of the complaints has not changed much from Epiphanius to de Faye. The complaint, in substance, is that Origen rejected, or at least imperiled, the primacy of the literal sense of the Bible in favor of an allegorical sense which is at best freely inventive, at worst fantastic and unorthodox. De Lubac is at pains to show throughout his book that most of Origen's critics have not read his exegetical works.

De Lubac devotes little attention to the principles of interpretation which are set forth in the *Contra Celsum* and the *Periarchon* (pp. 30-38). These, he asserts, are simply not the principles which are found in the exegesis of Origen.² For the first of these two works he quotes Origen himself: the *Contra Celsum* is an apologetical work in which Origen urges *ad hominem* that the allegorization of the biblical narratives is no more unreasonable than the allegorization, or rationalization, of the Greek myths which was fashionable in the erudite Greek world of the day. His explanation of the *Periarchon* is less satisfactory. But he points out that allegorism is found in all the patristic exegetes, including men like Diodorus and Theodore of Mopsuestia.

De Lubac finds it necessary to justify his employment of the homilies, especially the homilies on the Hexateuch, as the basis of his work. There are two reasons why they are open to objection. The first reason is that they are preserved only in the translation of Rufinus, which is known to be imperfectly faithful; how free it is cannot be determined exactly. De Lubac believes that the type of exegesis which he is discussing does not demand a verbally faithful translation in order that the mind of the writer may be understood. The second reason is that Origen's great commentaries exhibit his more properly exegetical work. De Lubac responds that the commentaries do not exhibit so clearly that which is distinctive of Origen's work: "spiritual exegesis, altogether inspired by the Christian mystery." De Lubac agrees with Daniélou, most recently, and others, on the importance of mysticism in Origen's exegesis (pp. 44-45).

Origen's exegesis was affected not only by the attacks of the pagan Celsus on Christianity, but even more decisively by Jewish arguments based on a

² Daniélou's discussion (*Origène* [Paris, 1948], p. 145 ff.) is somewhat weakened because the homilies, which he quotes extensively, are interpreted by the *Periarchon*.

strictly (not to say crassly) literal interpretation of the Bible, and by the arguments of the Gnostics, who, departing from a similar literal basis, fancied they discovered an irreducible contradiction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. The fact helps to explain Origen's methods, even if it does not in itself justify them. Certainly these fruits of literal exegesis were not such as to recommend themselves; neither were they such as justify Origen's basic idea that the Bible is essentially mysterious, that it cannot possibly mean just what it says, that the Christian has failed to apprehend its meaning unless he searches out some idea hidden under the words of the text. Such, at least, appears to have been the idea which came to Origen's mind as the answer to Jews and Gnostics alike. Origen himself, as de Lubac points out, derived his allegorism from St. Paul, or thought he did (p. 69). The word itself is Pauline; but the antecedents of Pauline allegorism lie, in part, in rabbinical exegesis.³

De Lubac, after treating the background of Origen's thought, takes up the question of Origen's attitude towards the literal sense (p. 92 ff.). Here, because of the vagueness of Origen's terminology, is a question which is difficult to solve (p. 113 ff.). It is doubtful whether the modern exegetical "literal sense" corresponds to anything in Origen's thought. His own term is rather "historical"; where he employs "letter" or "literal," he usually does so in a pejorative sense, with particular reference to Jewish exegesis. It certainly does not mean the modern literal sense. It is a commonplace of manuals of introduction that Origen denied the existence of a literal sense in some passages of both Old and New Testament. This means that he denies the historical reality of an event, or the force of a law or precept. De Lubac does not contest this, but pleads that the principle is rarely applied.

Most discussions of the triple sense of Scripture in Origen are based on *Periarchon*, IV, 2, where Origen distinguishes "somatic," "psychic," and "pneumatic."⁴ Here the somatic sense is defined by Origen as the "obvious" sense (*historialis*, added in the version of Rufinus, represents nothing in the Greek), and it is not easily identified with the modern literal sense. Psychic and pneumatic seem to represent degrees of understanding of what is "typed" and "figured" in the somatic sense rather than two distinct senses; they are subjective rather than objective. De Lubac points out that neither here nor elsewhere in Origen's works is there a systematic exposition of the senses of Scripture; and he proposes two other tripartite schemes which are

³ Cf. Buechsel in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart, 1949), I, 263; Prat, *Theology of Saint Paul* (Westminster, 1949), I, 19-23; Meinertz, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Bonn, 1950), II, 52-54.

⁴ Koetschau, *Origenes Werke* (Leipzig, 1913), V, 305-23.

found in the homilies as representing more accurately the principles of Origen's interpretation (p. 139 ff.). These are: historical-moral-mystical, and historical-mystical-moral. In spite of the identity of terms, they are not exactly the same. Historical, in each scheme, approximates the modern literal sense much more closely than the "somatic" of the *Periarchon*. In the first scheme, the moral sense is similar to the tropological sense of the medieval interpreters, and the mystical sense is the typical or allegorical content, referring to Christ, the Church, the truths of faith. Here, as in the *Periarchon*—de Lubac points out the resemblance—the second and third senses correspond to degrees of spiritual progress. The mystical sense of the second scheme is identical with the mystical sense of the first scheme, while the moral or spiritual sense of the second scheme refers to the historical sense as a type and figure of the journey of the Christian soul towards God. It may be contrasted with the moral sense of the first scheme as mysticism to asceticism; the analogy is not de Lubac's. The triple sense of the Bible which is derived from the trichotomy of human nature: body-soul-spirit, appears in the homilies as well as in the *Periarchon*. De Lubac finds the roots of this trichotomy in the Bible, especially in St. Paul, rather than in Philo or in any non-Christian writer (p. 150 ff.). De Lubac is more reserved than Daniélou in admitting the influence of Philo upon Origen's principles, although he concedes dependence in some features of his allegories.⁵

Origen saw the unity of the two Testaments not only in their author and in a single plan of salvation, but also in the person of Christ and in His Church. He himself appealed to the Gospel for this understanding of biblical unity (Jo. 5:39; Lk. 24:27). But beyond this, Origen really believed—if we are to take him at his word—that the Old Testament was incomprehensible and unintelligible unless it was "spiritually" understood; the word is that of St. Paul. In practice, this means that there is no detail of the Old Testament which does not signify Christ and His Church; and while there may be doubt in the mind of Origen whether the significance is properly apprehended, there is no doubt that it is present.⁶ Every one has heard of the ingenious, sometimes bizarre, interpretations which this exegesis has achieved; de Lubac retails a great many of them.

The problem of the spiritual sense in Origen is more properly a problem of the Old Testament, and most discussions of his exegesis treat it as such; but the principle of spiritual interpretation has its place in the New Testa-

⁵ The question is discussed by Daniélou in *Origène*, pp. 179-90.

⁶ Daniélou asserts that the principle that the whole of the Bible has a figured sense is a principle of Philo which is foreign to the primitive Christian conception (*Origène*, p. 182). De Lubac appears to insist that in Origen's time, at least, it had become traditional. There is an unresolved contradiction here.

ment also.⁷ Here also the historical sense is sometimes denied. De Lubac shows—and his arguments appear convincing—that cases alleged by Origen are instances of the literal metaphorical sense as opposed to the proper literal sense, a distinction which Origen never made. For him, the metaphorical sense is included under the spiritual sense. But the principle of mysteriousness is applied to the New Testament as to the Old. The words of the Gospels and Epistles, like those of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, contain hidden meanings, to be discovered by an investigation of each word, each detail of the text. As de Lubac points out, this principle is evident with greater clarity in Origen's attempts to harmonize the Gospels (pp. 203–4).

But we do less than justice to Origen's "transformation of the sensible Gospel into the spiritual Gospel" if we forget the principle, which de Lubac so clearly expounds, that the life of the Christian is the life of Christ (pp. 206–17). It is a Pauline idea; the Christian relives in his own life the death, burial, resurrection, and glorification of the Savior. It is expressed in the doctrine of the mystical body, of which Origen is, with Irenaeus, one of the first great doctors. It justifies the attempt to find this mystery in each word and action of Christ.

Origen's conception of the "eternal Gospel" is more open to attack. In his exegesis, the New Testament as well as the Old Testament is the type and figure of things to come: of the eschatological kingdom of God. De Lubac rejects, not without indignation, the charge that Origen believed in two Gospels and two redemptions (pp. 217–44); as the Law was "spiritual" in the sense that it was a type of things to come, so the Gospel is spiritual in the same way (pp. 229, 289–90). This leads into a discussion of the whole theology of Origen; the question was also taken up by Daniélou, who refused to admit the validity of the charge. For Origen, human history is a projection of angelic history.⁸ The question, in the mind of this reviewer, cannot be regarded as settled.

⁷ De Lubac believes that this is not out of harmony with modern exegesis: "En pensant observer dans nos Évangiles un genre d'historicité assez souple joint à une interprétation en profondeur de la réalité qu'ils avaient mission d'annoncer au peuple, il n'est pas loin de s'accorder avec les meilleurs de nos historiens récents, les croyants comme les autres" (p. 200).

⁸ "Nous retrouverons une troisième fois cette théologie de l'histoire à un niveau supérieur de profondeur, au plan de la théologie des anges. Nous verrons, selon la perspective d'Origène, que l'histoire humaine n'apparaît finalement que comme la projection, *umbra et exemplar*, d'une histoire céleste . . . L'histoire se déploie sur un double plan, sur le plan céleste d'une histoire éonienne, pour parler comme Berdiaeff, et sur le plan projeté de l'histoire de l'humanité. Ainsi nous avons ici une vision nouvelle, une Weltanschauung unique, qui n'est ni pure immobilité ni pur devenir, mais la perspective chrétienne d'une histoire qui se déploie sur deux plans correspondants . . ." (Daniélou, *Origène*, p. 157).

There is an apparent antithesis between the allegorism of Origen and the "economy" of which Irenaeus is the author. Harnack regarded this antithesis as irreducible (p. 250). Origen possessed little or no historical sense; in this, de Lubac observes that he did not differ from his contemporaries, nor, indeed, from any exegete before the nineteenth century. De Lubac maintains that the two are not entirely irreducible, and that "economy" was, in Origen's time, an accepted principle of exegesis. But it is fundamental to his treatment that all revelation is contained in the Old Testament, and that the only evolution of revelation is subjective, not objective. The economy consists merely in the obscurity of the enunciation. For Origen, the patriarchs and prophets possessed the full knowledge of the divine revelation which was later communicated to the apostles; but they could not enunciate it except in types and figures (pp. 258-59). This is scarcely the economy of Irenaeus and other writers. It is rather, as de Lubac himself calls it, a "transformation"; the fact of Christianity, of the Incarnation, has made all things new, including the Old Testament itself (pp. 267-77). This transformation has as its effect, in de Lubac's phrase, the "creation of the spiritual sense." Jesus has made the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel one, so that one is read in another (pp. 276-77). This means, in the last analysis, that the spiritual sense is a necessary fulfilment of the literal sense, the "history." The history is not intelligible without the spiritual interpretation. It is a denial not of the reality of the history, but of its intelligibility (pp. 278-94). But, as de Lubac admits, Origen seeks intelligibility not by studying the Old Testament as a preparation for Christ—the principle of economy—but as a prefiguring (p. 281).

Origen's theory of inspiration—if we justly synthesize that which Origen has said in scattered remarks—is determined by the spiritual sense. The Bible must have a spiritual sense, because it is the work of the Spirit. "To say that the Bible has a spiritual sense is equivalent to saying that it is inspired" (p. 296). Those who admit only the literal sense deny inspiration. Origen does not distinguish inspiration and revelation; de Lubac thinks that this failure protects him from the contrary confusion of "the reduction of inspiration to a guarantee of inerrancy" (p. 298). Revelation for Origen, here as elsewhere, means the mysterious. Hence the understanding of the Bible must be spiritual in this sense also, that the same Spirit who composed the mysterious book must reveal the mystery to the reader. Origen tends to ignore the human element in the composition of the Bible (p. 304), and thus seeks mystical significance in the smallest details of the text: why Jesus *begins* to wash the feet of the disciples, and does not simply wash them; why He does not wash Peter's feet first, although Peter is always

named first. Such examples could easily be multiplied beyond reckoning. Origen presupposes that the Spirit must speak things worthy of the Spirit, which means that the words must have a spiritual sense; if it is not immediately apparent, then it must be hidden under some figure or detail of the text.⁹ De Lubac maintains that "his affirmation that there is a spiritual sense everywhere in the Bible and extending to the whole must be retained" (p. 307), and this in spite of the fact, admitted by de Lubac, that, while it may be deceptive for the historian, it may be fecund for the believer.¹⁰

The Bible is not only the Spirit; it is also the Word. As the Word was incarnate in the flesh, so also the Word is incarnate in the Bible. Christ is everywhere in the Bible (pp. 336-46). He is the spiritual sense. To the spiritual sense in the Bible corresponds the image of God in the soul: the intelligence of the spiritual sense (p. 347). The Bible is also a world; like the visible world, it declares the glory of God. It is the Word Incarnate, like the Eucharist, which is the food of the soul. This analogy has left Origen open to attack. De Lubac shows clearly that the writers who have accused Origen of denying the Real Presence simply have not read him.¹¹ Finally, as the Word is incarnate in the flesh and in the Bible, so is He incarnate in the Church.

⁹ De Lubac accepts this principle with the qualification that human criteria are not adequate to judge what is worthy or unworthy of God. Daniélou, who quotes Prat in his favor, accepts it simply (*Origène*, pp. 149, 180).

¹⁰ ". . . On ne saurait parler d'exégèse rigoureuse. C'est que le principe qui guide Origène n'est pas d'ordinaire l'intuition d'une certaine unité du monde biblique ou la perception de certaines influences. C'est un principe de pure foi, qui fait fi de toutes les diversités empiriques. Aussi l'exégèse qui en résulte nous paraît-elle surtout multiplier l'arbitraire; et en effet, toujours du point de vue de la pure histoire, on n'en peut juger autrement. Mais peut-être, en un autre sens, est-elle ce qui nous en sauve. Ou plutôt, l'arbitraire humain qu'elle multiplie indéniablement ne porte pas préjudice autant qu'on pourrait le craindre à la valeur du sens divin qu'elle veut dégager. Décevante pour l'historien, elle est souvent féconde pour le croyant. Au fond, ce que recommande et pratique Origène, qu'est-ce autre chose qu'un recours au principe appelé, encore d'après un mot de Saint Paul, 'l'analogie de la foi'? Or, quand on se règle vraiment sur l'analogie de la foi, ou encore, lorsqu'on soumet son interprétation à 'la règle de la piété,' on ne fait jamais dire au texte biblique ce que l'on veut; le sens qu'on lui découvre est toujours de quelque manière un sens biblique" (p. 314).

¹¹ "Quand, sous un fait ou une réalité sensible, il cherche un fait spirituel, il ne s'agit pas du tout pour lui de substituer 'au sens propre une métaphore, au sens naturel une accommodation arbitraire.' Il s'agit uniquement de découvrir la signification de ce fait ou de cette chose, la raison dernière pourquoi ce fait a eu lieu, la réalité dernière dont cette chose est le symbole anticipé. . . . Après ces explications, il est aisé de voir que lorsque Origène parle de l'Eucharistie comme d'un corps 'typique et symbolique,' il ne nie pas pour autant la réalité de ce corps" (pp. 361-62).

In conclusion, de Lubac asks what remains of the work of Origen. It is, of course, a cultural monument at least as worthy of attention as the customs of the Minoan Age or the beliefs of the monks of Khotan (p. 375). The exegesis of Origen arose in response to the necessities of his time; it is a part of the living development of the Church. Whatever may be the validity of allegorism for modern Catholics, it is an unalterable fact that the allegorical approach contributed much to determine the form and the course of development of Christian thought.

De Lubac next addresses himself to the question of terminology. The term "allegory," in spite of the fact that it is Pauline, and was accepted for so long in Latin tradition, seems less apt in view of the modern usage of the word.¹² To speak of the sense intended as the literal sense, as some have done, is simply misleading. "Typology" de Lubac regards as a neologism, perhaps Lutheran in origin; and it suggests a restricted significance which is too narrow for the interpretation of the Fathers. He suggests that we speak of "spiritual sense" and "spiritual exegesis" for several reasons; the chief reason is that "the spiritual sense, understood as a figurative or mystical sense, is the sense which, objectively, touches the realities of the spiritual life, and which, subjectively, cannot be attained except as the fruit of a spiritual life" (p. 391). He grants freely that this understanding is not subject to the control of method, that it can never reach perfect objectivity. But "if we are to recover something of the spiritual interpretation of the Bible of the early Church, we must approach the problem both with greater profundity and with greater liberty" (p. 394). And this spiritual movement, he is sure, must continue.¹³

De Lubac distinguishes between the spiritual and the religious sense of the Scriptures. The religious sense, he says, is a historical sense (p. 395). He seems to identify it entirely with the history of Hebrew religion. The

¹² De Lubac and Daniélou differ in their understanding and evaluation of typology and allegorism, which adds an unfortunate confusion in a terminology which is rapidly approaching confusion compounded with chaos. Fr. Burghardt sets forth the difference with remarkable lucidity (THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, XI [1950], 80-84, 92-95, 98-101, 107-109), and makes it unnecessary for me to enter into the question here. The article reviewed by Fr. Burghardt on pp. 80-84 has been incorporated into *Histoire et esprit*.

¹³ The term "spiritual sense" is employed in the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, 25-27 (NCWC Eng. trans., pp. 13-14), in a sense which is identical, or nearly identical, with the typical sense as described in the standard manuals. This, no doubt, helps to explain de Lubac's caution, approaching timidity, in suggesting this designation. The term is apt, I think, for the style of interpretation under discussion; it is unfortunate that it has already been adopted in an authentic document. But since it has, it is hard to see how de Lubac's term can be accepted without an even more intolerable equivocation of terminology.

spiritual sense is not historical, at least not in the same way; it understands the Old Testament "in the light of the Christian present" (p. 397). De Lubac does not wish to make the opposition formal; rather he desires that the two senses should move with each other to a point of meeting. But he believes that this is impossible unless they remain distinct.

The key point, as de Lubac sees it, is the continuity of Old and New Testament—a continuity which is not interrupted by the unparalleled novelty of the Incarnation and the Christian fact. "The spiritual sense of the Bible is the New Testament itself" (p. 400). Without the New Testament the plan of God in the Old Testament has no term.

De Lubac shows that spiritual exegesis has a long and honorable history. From St. Paul and the very beginnings of the Church through the patristic age, the Bible was not regarded as a *locus theologicus*. There was then no distinction between "the literal interpretation of the Bible with its dogmatic moment" and its "mystical interpretation . . . for the edification of the soul" (p. 416). Origen was really not an exegete; "his purpose was less to explain the Scriptures than to explain everything else by them" (p. 414). It was in the Antiochene school that exegesis began to live its own life (p. 414). And the history of mysticism through the patristic and medieval periods, as de Lubac reminds us, is intimately linked with spiritual exegesis; we cannot imagine the one without the other. De Lubac finds the beginning of the decline of the spiritual sense in the medieval *summae*; St. Thomas wrote, voicing the conviction of his contemporaries: "Ex solo sensu litterali potest trahi argumentum" (p. 423). After the sixteenth century there was no longer any possibility of exploiting the spiritual sense; the controversies with the Protestants, and later with the rationalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, demanded other weapons. With de Lubac we may regret that this development led so many theologians to an unnecessary disdain of the spiritual sense.

De Lubac thus describes his own idea of what spiritual exegesis must be (p. 432):

Naturally our spiritual exegesis—on the supposition that it be revived—will remain christological, purely christological, and it will not overlook any of Christ's dimensions any more than it did in the past. Its course will be directly contrary to the one taken by an unenlightened science with consequences which were, on many an occasion, lamentably destructive. It will make a definite effort to remain open, on all occasions, to the "wondrous depth" of the divine words which filled St. Augustine with awe and love. We will be different in this respect alone that we will be more painstaking in our endeavor to avoid ever giving occasion for the impression that the foundations of our exegesis have been weakened by deficiencies

of criticism. This preoccupation will force us quite often to give up the procedure of the ancients and the reasons which, in their mind, justified it, even though we remain faithful to their fundamental principles. We will imitate their habitual modesty rather than their methodology. Although we will give as much attention as they did themselves to the Mystery which is signified in history, we will give more, perhaps, to the historicity of the figure; or, at least, we will be more aware of the way of proceeding which is imposed on us by an accurate knowledge of that historicity. And in this way we will make a real effort to unite our modern "historical sense" to that profound "sense of history" which their spiritual exegesis could draw from the text.

De Lubac contrasts two attitudes of the believer before the Bible (p. 436). The one, "objective and impersonal," treats the Old Testament as a record of the past, a divinely inspired record of a past providentially directed, but nonetheless a document of primarily historical value. This attitude he calls "correct but incomplete." The second, "dangerous if it has no reference to the first," regards the Bible as a living message; the phrase is not vague if one has followed de Lubac's exposition of Origen's thought. This, he says, has been the attitude of the "spirituels" in the Church. De Lubac is not unaware that this division suggests the bipolarity of the Protestant view, and he is at pains to show that it is not the same (pp. 438-40). But he would attribute any similarity to the fact that the Reformers did not abandon entirely their Catholic heritage, which survives among contemporary Protestants also. He places the dilemma: either the Bible contains Christ and the realities of the Gospel everywhere—which does not agree with history and criticism—or the Bible is no more than a witness of the past, not of Christ. From this dilemma he sees no escape except through spiritual exegesis.

II

It is evident, I hope, that the book should be judged under two aspects: the one, its exposition of Origen's exegesis; the other, its plea for a renewal of spiritual exegesis. The exposition of Origen's exegesis is extremely sympathetic, but it is based upon the work of Origen itself. The quotations and citations are abundant; the reader may follow de Lubac easily and examine the sources for himself. Origen's critics, he says, have not read his exegetical works. This is hard to say of some of the eminent scholars whose names are included among Origen's critics; but it should be conceded that they have read them against a background of settled opinion. Whether the sympathy of de Lubac has obscured his vision any more than secular prejudice has obscured the vision of others does not admit a categorical affirmation or denial.

The exegetical writings of Origen are themselves a sufficient support for de Lubac's contention that the *Contra Celsum* and the *Periarchon* do not exhibit Origen's principles of exegesis; and the reviewer believes that this method of treating Origen's exegesis, which is standard procedure in manuals, should be abandoned. De Lubac's explanation of Origen's terminology may serve as the basis of treatment, or at least as the basis of further examination.

There is, however, a question whether we are really talking about the exegesis of Origen. De Lubac affirms that the homilies show what is distinctive about the exegesis of Origen, and this is true; there is no small distance between the homilies and the great commentaries on the New Testament. Origen never abandons his principle that the Bible is essentially mysterious; but the commentaries do not exhibit the fantasies which we find in the homilies. It is unfortunate that we have none of Origen's strictly exegetical works on the historical books of the Old Testament.¹⁴ We may be sure from his own words that they would differ from the homilies.¹⁵ If we may judge from the New Testament commentaries, they would retain the principle of the mysteriousness of the Bible. This principle could be enunciated in such a way that it would be acceptable; but as Origen enunciated it, it carries in itself the seeds of unreason. This traditional complaint is not met by de Lubac, in the opinion of this reviewer. We should bear in mind Daniélou's remark that the principle that the whole of the Bible has a figured sense is foreign to the primitive Christian conception. Nor is it possible to found the principle upon the New Testament. Coppens points out that the allegorical method is used with great restraint in the New Testament.¹⁶ The remark could be expanded, but it should not be ignored. The number of texts which are adduced by de Lubac (and by other defenders of the spiritual exegesis) is small, and these few texts keep recurring in their writings. But they do not represent the characteristic use of the Old Testament in the New.

The question of Origen's attitude towards the "literal" sense, or towards

¹⁴ De Faye, *Origène* (Paris, 1923), I, 72-73; Altaner, *Patrologie* (Freiburg, 1950), p. 168. There is no complete exegetical work on the Old Testament except the commentary on the Canticle of Canticles; and no work could be less apt to illustrate Origen's literal exegesis.

¹⁵ "Non enim nunc exponendi Scripturas, sed aedificandi Ecclesiam ministerium gerimus" (*Hom. Lev.*, VII, 1; Baehrens, *Origenes Werke* [Leipzig, 1920], VI, 370). "Nos non tam Scripturas commentantes nunc loquimur, quam populum de his, quae recitatae sunt, consolantes" (*Hom. Judic.*, VIII, 3; Baehrens, *Origenes Werke* [Leipzig, 1921], VII, 510).

¹⁶ *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, XXIII (1947), 186.

the reality of Old Testament history, is not settled with satisfaction. It is true that Origen rarely denies the existence of historical truth; but the principle is not affected by the number of instances of its application. In all fairness, most of Origen's applications of the principle can be found in other Christian writers also; many of them are passages for which modern exegesis has found no satisfactory solution. Origen, in his homilies, recurs without delay to the spiritual, mysterious meaning; this method attempts to find some validity in the text, but it never, of course, solves the exegetical problem. There is nothing in the principles of Origen's exegesis to limit the denial of the historical sense; other writers of the Alexandrine school were less sober than Origen.

Perhaps it is a point in favor of Origen that he is not, in the homilies, interpreting the Bible, as he says himself. The homilies are spiritual writing, in the ordinary sense of the word. Where the letter offers no spiritual fruit—as it does not in most of the Hexateuch—homiletic had nothing to say without recourse to allegorism (p. 107). It is certainly no pastoral fear of distracting the audience by introducing difficulties; Origen gladly introduces them, in order that the audience may be induced to seek out the mystery of the spiritual sense.

I doubt that de Lubac's assertion that the spiritual interpretation of Origen is always founded on the literal sense, or that it is always preceded by a discussion of the literal sense, can be sustained. Origen did not believe in the primacy of the literal sense, as modern exegetes understand it. Had he done so, he could hardly have used such illustrative examples as body and spirit, the Word Incarnate and the flesh, and so on.¹⁷ These point not only to the idea of the Bible as essentially mysterious, but also to the conviction that the mysterious element is of much greater value than the envelope

¹⁷ This point, together with some others, is illustrated in *Hom. Gen.*, II, 6 (Baehrens, VI, 36-37): "Verum quoniam arca, quam describere conamur, non solum bicamerata sed et tricamerata a Deo construi iubetur, operam demus et nos ad hanc duplicem, quae praecessit, expositionem secundum praeceptum Dei etiam tertiam iungere. Prima enim, quae praecessit, historica est veluti fundamentum quoddam in inferioribus posita. Secunda haec mystica superior et excelsior fuit. Tertiam, si possumus, moralem temptemus adicere, quamvis et hoc ipsum, quod neque 'bicamerata' solum dixit et siluit, neque 'tricamerata' tantum et cessavit, sed cum dixisset 'bicamerata', addidit et 'tricamerata' nec absque huius ipsius expositionis, quam habemus in manibus, videatur esse mysterio. Nam tricamerata triplicem hanc expositionem designat. Sed quia non semper in scripturis divinis historialis consequentia stare potest, sed nonnunquam deficit . . . non solum 'tricamerata' sed et 'bicamerata' arca contextitur, ut sciamus in scripturis divinis non semper triplicem, quia non semper nos historia sequitur, sed interdum duplicis tantummodo sensum expositionis insertum."

in which it is contained. Whatever may be the result expected from such an approach, it will not be a deeper understanding of the Bible. Origen, as de Lubac is careful to show, approached the Bible in his homilies as the preacher, and no one will deny the theological and spiritual abundance of the homilies; the question is whether these treasures proceed from his exegesis.

The question of the terminology of Origen is one which has created much misunderstanding of his principles. Much of the confusion of Origen's interpreters has come from their failure to realize that a single term may have totally different meanings in different contexts. I think any one who pursues Origen's exegetical practice in the homilies will agree that de Lubac has done more than any other writer to bring terminology and practice into order, whatever be our evaluation of the principles involved. Future discussions should take de Lubac's exposition as their point of departure.

Origen's almost total lack of historical sense is excused by the same lack in almost all ancient and medieval exegesis. This should be conceded; but it should also be conceded that there were degrees. An exegete such as Theodore of Mopsuestia, whatever may have been his faults, exhibits a surprising historical sense, with little limitation other than technical. Origen's unhistorical approach made it difficult for him to assimilate the concept of "economy"; to this reviewer, at least, de Lubac has not made it clear that Origen ever merged allegorism and economy. Is it a justification of his attitude to say that "the preparation passes, the prefiguring remains"? For the figure, surely, passes also when the reality arrives. The reality is illuminated both by the preparation and by the prefiguring; the question turns on the objectivity of the figurative interpretation. It is true that Old Testament history is unintelligible without a "spiritual" interpretation; but are we not begging the question when we identify "spiritual" interpretation with the exegesis of Origen?

Quaintly enough, the "spiritual" exegesis of Origen is, in a way, the most crassly literal of schools, for it accepts the rabbinical principle that there is no detail of the text without significance—the choice and order of words, repetitions, merely scribal variations or errors, and so on. Origen shared this principle with many other early Christian writers, but it cannot be canonized on that account. Such a preoccupation with the letter is characteristic of the Alexandrine rather than the Antiochene School, which at times knew how to refrain from seeing the mystery of the spiritual sense in the servile translation of Hebrew idioms in the Septuagint. De Lubac admits that such subtleties are often arid—let us say they are almost always arid.

III

So much may be said—and it is little enough—of the work as an exposition of the exegesis of Origen. We come now to the question of the book as a plea for spiritual exegesis, anticipated to some extent in the above paragraphs. The revival of spiritual exegesis has already come under fire in a number of European journals; the attackers, like the defenders, have at times spoken with more zeal than temperance. To this feature of the discussion the reviewer wishes to contribute nothing. And it may clarify the issue if I state at once that this book appears to be touched in no way by the words of the Encyclical *Humani generis* concerning spiritual exegesis.¹⁸ For de Lubac, there is never any question of literal exegesis *giving way* to spiritual exegesis; and he is sincerely convinced that spiritual exegesis is without value, even dangerous, unless it is founded on scientific exegesis. He regards spiritual exegesis as a necessary enlargement of exegesis, without which the Bible will not have its *full* value in Catholic life. With this premise, I take the liberty of questioning some of the conclusions of the book.

If spiritual exegesis must rest upon the foundation of scientific exegesis, then there must be some connection between the two; and, in the nature of the process, the connection ought to be interior and organic, not merely casual. Origen's principle, which de Lubac says must be retained, that there is a spiritual sense present everywhere in the Bible and extending to the whole, does not admit such an interior connection. De Lubac himself admits that the principle, deceptive for the historian, may be fecund for the believer. For Origen, at least, there was no interior connection between the two senses; hence there can be no connection between the two exeges. De Lubac has not, as this reviewer sees it, restated the principle in such a way as to bring the two together. A summary presentation such as this is very likely to distort the author's views, particularly in a matter where such close argument is required. But de Lubac's view suggests, to this reader, that the intelligence of the Bible, and, indeed, the intelligence of the Bible on the highest level, is independent of the apprehension of the literal sense. De Lubac follows Origen in saying that this is not exegesis in the rigorous sense; but he has not shown the function of exegesis in the rigorous sense in this

¹⁸ "Ac praeterea sensus litteralis Sacrae Scripturae eiusque expositio a tot tantisque exegetis, vigilante Ecclesia, elaborata, ex commenticiis eorum placitis, novae cedere debent exegesi, quam symbolicam ac spiritualem appellant; et qua Sacra Biblia Veteris Testamenti, quae hodie in Ecclesia tamquam fons clausus lateant, tandem aliquando omnibus aperiantur. Hac ratione asseverant difficultates omnes evanescere, quibus ii tantummodo praepediantur, qui sensui litterali Scripturarum adhaereant" (*AAS*, XLII [1950], 570).

intelligence of the Bible. It would appear that the scientific study of the Bible (supposing that such a study is possible) can contribute nothing to the spiritual understanding of the Bible, and that faith, led by the principles of Origen, will find its way into the full spiritual understanding of the inspired word. Exegesis, in this program, is left with the unpleasant and profitless task of grubbing in the dry dust of erudition. It may be granted that exegesis often appears to be nothing more; but that, I think, is a defect of exegetes, not of their science. It seems a perilous extreme to abandon the science (for I believe de Lubac's opinions involve this) in favor of the "analogy of faith" as thus described. Nor does it aid one to see the connection between scientific and spiritual exegesis when de Lubac tells us that spiritual exegesis neither interferes with scientific exegesis nor is to be carried out by the scientific exegete.¹⁹ Is the scientific exegete, perhaps just because of his science, less apt for the task of spiritual exegesis? Who, one wonders, should be more apt?

The same cleavage between scientific and spiritual exegesis appears in de Lubac's distinction between the spiritual sense and the religious sense of the Bible. There is more here than de Lubac's identification of the religious sense with the historical treatment of religion, inadequate as it is; it implies a break in the continuity of Old and New Testament, upon which de Lubac elsewhere lays so much stress. If "spiritual exegesis" is not the more profound intelligence of the religious sense of the Bible, then the reviewer does not know—even after perusing de Lubac's brilliant plea—what it may be.

I believe, although de Lubac does not say so, that the renewal of ancient spiritual exegesis which he desires is proposed because of a dissatisfaction with modern scientific exegesis. This dissatisfaction is not peculiar to de Lubac; I am sure he is well enough acquainted with exegetes to know that many of them also are dissatisfied. While the methods of modern exegesis are proved sound, they do, in simple fact, fail much of the time to present the Bible—at least the Old Testament—as a spiritual message. The exegete feels that much of his learning is barren, that it does not rise to the level of wisdom. He knows that this feeling is shared by his auditors. And he may at times, in desperation, wonder whether such approaches as that of de Lubac

¹⁹ Daniélou gives spiritual exegesis a greater place in exegesis as a whole: "...l'exégèse contempera avec une ironie amusée ces jeux qui lui paraissent surajoutés au sens de l'Écriture. Or précisément l'exégèse spirituelle, pour Saint Thomas et toute la tradition, fait intégralement partie de l'exégèse proprement dite. Elle en constitue la moitié. Et si l'exégèse critique indispensable est pour nous apporter la base solide sans laquelle bien des détails nous échappent, elle est absolument insuffisante et elle doit être complétée par l'exégèse spirituelle" (*Dieu vivant*, 14 [2nd quarter, 1950], p. 91).

may not offer an escape. Science should not cut one off from the word of God. Exegetes will not take kindly, as I am sure de Lubac knows, the suggestion that they be reduced to hewers of wood and drawers of water in the temple of the word. Nor to this writer, at least, does this uninspiring destiny seem to exhaust the possibilities of his trade. Within the limits of this review, I should like to point out that there is another way.

The exegete can never feel confidence in an approach to the Bible which is so free of method and control as the spiritual exegesis. It reminds one—I trust the allusion is not offensive—of the “voice of the Spirit” of early Protestantism; indeed, this inner voice has not fallen silent in modern Protestantism. The devout Protestant has created for himself two worlds of the Bible: the world of scientific exegesis, a world dominated by so rigorous a method that most Catholics find it a world of simple rationalism; and the world of faith, where God speaks to the reader of His word without permitting Himself to be cramped by critical principles. The whole of Catholic tradition, I think, abhors such a division; and I fear that de Lubac has not succeeded in cleansing Origen of all suggestion of the same spirit.

G. Courtade has pointed out that the ordinary double classification of the senses of the Bible into literal and spiritual does not leave room for what he calls “the sense of history,” the meaning of the history itself, and not of the text in which it is related. “We are convinced that history follows a direction, and for that reason we must attribute to it some meaning.”²⁰ This is what Origen wished to do, and what de Lubac rightly wishes done in our own times. This is the exploration of the religious sense of the Bible; and this is the work of biblical theology. It is not surprising that de Lubac fails to mention this discipline; the name suggests such works as that of Ceuppens, which is a manual of proof-texts, or that of Heinisch, which, while it is probably the best modern Catholic work on biblical theology, is disappointing to any who seek in it a “spiritual understanding.” The discipline of biblical theology is in its infancy; yet it has the principles and the methods by which it may bring forth the “spiritual sense” of the Bible in a new way. Catholic exegetes have concentrated their attention, perhaps too exclusively, upon the apologetic and controversial aspects of their field; worthy and necessary as such studies are, it appears that they may have reached a point of diminishing returns.²¹ The rise of biblical theology

²⁰ *Recherches de science religieuse*, XXXVI (1949), 136–41.

²¹ Jean Coppens has sketched some of the possibilities of biblical theology (*Les harmonies des deux Testaments* [Tournai–Paris, 1949], pp. 112–16). They deserve a summary repetition. One should not Christianize the Old Testament by substituting the propositions of Christian theology for the true and original meaning. We should look for the

in non-Catholic circles is a phenomenon which deserves more attention than it has received.²² If, in the words of the Sovereign Pontiff, we may hope that "our own times also will contribute something to the deeper and more accurate interpretation of the Sacred Scripture," biblical theology must be the voice with which the exegete speaks in the Church. Biblical theology is a positive discipline; it cannot advance by the methods of speculative theology. It cannot pretend to be a synthesis of Catholic doctrine, for it is based upon a single source of revelation. It must lean, as Origen did, upon the analogy of faith. But it is objective; its results are drawn from the text itself, understood in all the light which modern research casts upon it. It possesses the peculiar resources of our own time: the instruments of modern historical research, which make it possible for us to enjoy a *historical* understanding of the Bible impossible in earlier centuries. We do not make the mistake of believing that this peculiar historical understanding is the peak of biblical insight; but it is in harmony with the spirit of our age, which has seen such spectacular successes in the investigation of the past. Catholic exegetes have scarcely begun to create a "spiritual understanding" of the Old Testament based upon the vast resources of modern historical and philological science. The promise, I believe, is fair. The controversy over the "spiritual exegesis" ought to bring Catholic exegetes to look to their unrealized potentialities.

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permanent values, the definitive and transcendent message which is peculiar to the Old Testament. We should choose from the elements of its religious message those which have a closer affinity with New Testament doctrine; this is the best guarantee of their perfect and permanent value. We should not neglect secondary affinities, thematic or purely verbal.

²² R. V. Schoder, S.J., *American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXVII (1947), 81-101, summarizes and discusses a number of articles from non-Catholic theological journals which deal with the revival of biblical theology.