

ORIGEN'S APPROACH TO SCRIPTURES FOR MODERN READERS

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Summary

The field of biblical interpretation has undergone strong influences in recent centuries and has been a highly questioned field of study for conservative theologians. Faced with the interpretative movement whose center stopped being the text and became the reader, the interpretation of biblical texts, especially in academia, changed significantly. The problem is that these changes did not remain within the academy, but went beyond the academic limit and reached the church and society. Given this scenario, the analysis of the approach to Scripture by the great Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria (185 – 253 AD) will be very fruitful. Origen's interpretative work is commonly evaluated negatively. It is almost unanimous among those without a deeper knowledge of the theologian's writings the position that Origen used and abused the allegorical method of interpretation, thus distorting the correct meaning of the biblical text. It is necessary to recognize that, on some occasions, when applying this method, the Alexandrian exegete distanced himself from the original meaning of the sacred text. However, as in almost every situation in life, in Origen's case it

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is important not to “throw the baby out with the dirty water.”

However, contrary to what many may think, the theologian of Caesarea held the Word of God in the highest regard and believed in the transformative power of this Revealed Word. Therefore, Origen's approach to the Word of God will certainly be beneficial to the modern reader.

Keywords

Origen – Scripture – Approach

Introduction

One of the most common pastoral concerns today regarding reading the Scripture is the aridity, lack of depth, and personal transformation in the believer's engagement with the Scriptures. This problem results from a long-time theology that weakened the role of Scripture for the readers and made them no longer approach biblical texts with the intention of meeting Jesus himself in Scripture. It is possible to trace this problem from Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), and Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677). Related to Hobbes, Boersma observes that “having rejected the sacramental link between heaven and earth [he] turned the reading of Scripture into a purely natural exercise of historical scholarship” (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 8). Regard to Spinoza, Boersma explains:

Spinoza [...] came to reject the kind of connection between visible and invisible things that Origen had posited as real; Spinoza could no longer see the universe as sacramental. Interpretation, therefore, was no longer driven by the search for (participatory) correspondences between things that are manifest and those that are hidden. Spinoza was among the first instead to look behind the biblical text for historical origins, arriving at positions that adumbrated viewpoints commonly associated with the later higher biblical criticism of nineteenth-century German scholarship (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 9).

The conclusion is:

Both Hobbes and Spinoza recognized that there is, in fact, a close link between metaphysics and interpretations, and that treating interpretations of Scripture as a historical investigation of empirical (visible) realities by means of purely natural, rational abilities has inescapable metaphysics implications. It is only possible to pull off such a drastic restriction of interpretation to visible things by denying their sacramental connection to heavenly, invisible realities – in Hobbes’s case by excluding the latter, and in Spinoza’s case by radically immanentizing them. Put differently, modern hermeneutics in the tradition of Hobbes and Spinoza is predicated on a radical dichotomizing between visible and invisible things, between heaven and earth – or, we could also say, between nature and the supernatural ... Today’s heirs of Hobbes and Spinoza – for all their clamoring about “objectivity” – are unable to escape metaphysical assumptions when interpreting Scriptures (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 9).

Some heirs of Hobbes and Spinoza are, for example, Bultmann and his program of demythologizing the Bible, the classical liberal interpretation of the Scriptures, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and its historicist approach, and, recently, the post-colonialism interpretation. Therefore, today most believers read the Scripture influenced by such approaches to the Scriptures, without spiritual profit.

However, in Origen, as a “church man,” (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 115, 122) a dedicated pastor² and teacher,³ that was seriously concerned about the spiritual growth of the believers under his care (DECHOW, 1988, p. 472), it is possible to find some very insightful ways to rediscover a transformative approach to Scripture, because he loved the Scriptures, and for him it were important, should be interiorized, and formed his thought and life (HEINE, 2019, p. 16-17). Moved by his concern, Origen was leading to the Scriptures and, consequently, he led people under his care to the Scripture to meet Christ and grow spiritually.

² Routley says that “Origen is never a mere don, never a dehumanized pedant. He has always an eye on the simple believer.” (ROUTLEY, 1957, p. 26).

³ Whitham states that Origen was “the most gifted and remarkable man that the Church had produced since St. Paul” (WOOD, 1967, p. 37). Blackman defends that Origen is “the first of the great Biblical exegetes, basing his whole theology on the Bible” (BLACKMAN, 1957, p. 95). Chadwick says that “the text and exposition of the Bible stand at the very centre of Origen’s work” (CHADWICK, 1984, p. 71). Wood states that Origen was the first systematic theologian of the Church (WOOD, 1967, p. 38).

The current challenges can be related to the problems that Origen⁴ faced and dealt with. In *On First Principles* 4.2.1, he introduces: “it seems necessary also to explain how certain people by failing to read or understand Scriptures correctly have given themselves up to a great many errors, since the way one ought to approach the understanding of divine letters is unknown to a great many people.” In what follows, Origen highlights the Jews’ and heretics’ errors.

On the Jews’ error, Origen explains: “They suppose that what was prophesied of Him (i.e., Jesus) should be understood according to the letter” (*On First Principles* 4.2.1). On the heretics’ errors, Origen observes:

When they read them (i.e., the Scriptures), the heretics did not dare say that they were not the Scriptures of God, but they nevertheless suppose they are that Creator God’s whom the Jews worshiped and who they think should be believed to be only just but not good. They think that the Savior came to proclaim to us a more perfect God, whom they deny to be the Creator of the world (*On First Principles* 4.2.1).

⁴ It’s important to be aware about Origen’s presupposes in approaching the biblical texts. Decock points it out: “Origen lived at a time long before we became critically aware of the cultural differences between the world in which the biblical writings originated and the world of the present readers. At that time there was no vivid sense of the difference, or even tension, between what the text ‘meant’ and what it ‘means.’ For Origen, as for all his predecessors, the focus was simply on what the text ‘means.’” (DECOCK, 2011, p. 7).

Origen summarizes the reason of the errors: "... the reason those we have just mentioned have a false understanding of these matters is quite simply that they understand Scripture not according to the spiritual meaning but according to the sound of the letter" (*On First Principles* 4.2.2; TRIGG, 1983, p. 120). This is the very problem faced today by many believers in engaging with the Scriptures. Influenced by such interpretative currents that drain the power and depth of Scripture, they cannot find spiritual profit in engaging with the Word of God.

Further, Origen points out other two reasons for bad approaching to the Scriptures: "either because people bring too little zeal to the training of their minds or because they think they know before they have learned, it happens that they never begin to learn" (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2). Thus, it is possible to summarize the problems that Origen points out in the approach to Scripture as, first, the incapacity of readers to go beyond the "letter," and second, the little zeal or the presumption of knowledge of those who read the Word of God.

Therefore, based on pastoral concerns, like Origen was (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 129, 198), this paper will argue that, although some of Origen's interpretations may be strange and heterodox,⁵ the

⁵ "Our basic problem in reading Origen today is that we tend to read him in terms of the standards of scholarly exegesis" (VON BALTHASAR, 1984, p. XI).

Alexandrian exegete can help us approach and read spiritually the Scripture in order to have spiritual growth and benefit.⁶ In order to do so, Origen's *On First Principles*, book IV, chapters one through three,⁷ will be analyzed because, as Boersma summarizes: "Origen's *On First Principles* is intended to give pedagogical guidance on how to encourage people in their ascent to greater spiritual maturity and more in-depth reading of the Scripture" (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 22). Founded on it, although many topics could be addressed, this paper will address only three of them, which are, Origen's high view of Scripture, his approach to Scripture, and the result in the believers' lives when the first two topics are observed.

⁶ Lightfoot defends that, although Origen committed mistakes, he was "a deep thinker, an accurate grammarian, a most laborious worker, and a most earnest Christian, he not only laid the foundation, but to a very great extent, built up the fabric of Biblical interpretation" (LIGHTFOOT, 1902, p. 227). Wood observes that "[T]oo often, no doubt, he overreached himself, but despite his philosophical inclinations, he constantly aimed at being a Biblical theologian. He was careful to draw a distinction between his own speculative opinions and the assured Word of Scriptures" (WOOD, 1967, p. 38).

⁷ Lietzmann claims that *On First Principles* "was the first Christian system of theology, the first bold attempt to combine Christian pronouncements about God, the world, and man, in a closely-knit, and strictly logical system of doctrine, and it stands in majestic isolation in the history of the Early Church." (LIETZMANN, 1950, p. 301). Wood, in his turn, compares Origen's majestic work to Calvin's *Institutes*. (WOOD, 1967, p. 45). For a different opinion, see CHADWICK, 1984, p. 72.

1. Origen's high view of Scripture

Origen's high view of Scripture should be the starting point here because this is the foundation of Origen's approach to God's Word. Related to it, there are at least three topics. First, for Origen, the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. Second, even being the inspired Word of God, it is possible for the simplest one to understand and get spiritual benefit from it. Third, because the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, and the simplest people can profitably engage with it, it is possibly a profound and personal experience with the Scriptures.

1.1. Scripture as inspired Word of God

Origen states in *On First Principles*, 4.2.2 that “the sacred Scriptures were not composed by any human words but were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were also delivered and entrusted to us by the will of God the Father through His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ.” It is very important to note that, for Origen, the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God (HEINE, 2019, p. 67), “the ultimate source of truth” (TRIGG, 1983, p. 120). The first feature of Scriptures as the inspired God's Word is the inspirational process is driven by the Triune God. The Holy Spirit inspires the biblical writers, and the Father delivers and entrusts the sacred texts to us “through” Jesus Christ. The second feature is that

Origen comprehends that all Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, are the inspired God's Word, as Torjensen observes: “[Origen's] argument for the divinity of the Old Testament focuses on the person of Moses,” and “his argument for the divinity of the New, on the person of Jesus” (TORJESEN, 1985, p. 17).⁸

Thirdly, as a church father, Origen's high view of the Scriptures is related to the fact that, for him, the Scriptures should be seen as a sacrament, and should be read accordingly (BALTHASAR, 1984, p. XIV-XV; BOERSMA, 2017, p. 1). Fourth, understanding the Scriptures as a sacrament, for Origen, the starting point of his exegesis is Christology (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 122), as clarifies De Lubac: “Christ is ... at the center of his innermost experience. It is the sound of his voice that Origen seeks everywhere in Scripture” (LUBAC, 2007, p. 221). Thus, for Origen, Christ is the center of Scriptures.

Fifth, there is a pneumatological feature in Scriptures. Torjensen, dealing with the sense and meaning of Scripture for Origen, observes that, for the Alexandrian exegete, “It is the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writers of Scriptures, who intended that they be understood spiritually and He has given the spiritual sense for the purpose of edification” (TORJESEN, 1986, p. 145). Thus, behind the

⁸ Grant observes that “Origen's exegesis is based on a rigorous doctrine of verbal inspiration” (GRANT, 1957, p. 96).

inspirational process as mentioned above, there are a spiritual understood and edification. Further, she advances: “Since the goal of inspiration is the nurture of souls, the spiritual doctrines are contained in Scriptures in an order that leads from knowledge of the inferior to knowledge of the superior and eventually toward perfect knowledge of God (TORJESEN, 1986, p. 145). Also, this pneumatological feature in the Scriptures takes the readers to a superior knowledge of God.

Lastly, based on the features above, Scriptures contains spiritual teaching, as Torjesen summarizes:

This dimension of Scripture is present in every form of the inspired writings. The law contains “types” that convey spiritual teachings. In the prophets there are dark sayings hinting at a spiritual truth. In the Gospels there is the *nous Christou*, a christological mystery. In the book of Revelation there are unspeakable mysteries, and even in the epistles of Paul there are words that lead to great and lofty insights (TORJESEN, 1985, p. 19).

Thus, Torjesen’s definition on Origen’s doctrine of Scriptures is right: “Origen’s doctrine of Scripture would read as follows: Scriptures is nothing other than the teachings of Christ; the divinity of Scriptures is nothing other than the divine power and effectiveness of these teachings. The inspiration of Scripture is nothing other than the divine origin of these teachings” (TORJESEN, 1985, p. 18).

Therefore, Origen approached the Scriptures as the real inspired Word of God.

1.2. The possibility of the simplest to get the Scriptures

Despite Origen's high view of the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, for him, the simpler believers can comprehend correctly the "mysteries and types of spiritual" of the Scriptures: "Now the fact that certain mysterious dispensations are disclosed by the holy Scriptures is something everyone, I think, even the more simple believers, will admit" (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2) According to Origen, these "mysteries [do] not escape even an ordinary understanding" (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2) as well as, "forms and types of hidden and sacred matters" (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2). So, it is very interesting how, for Origen, his high view of the Scriptures is not in opposition to the possibilities of understanding the Scriptures meaning for the simplest person.

It is possible for the simplest one to understand the Scriptures because, for Origen, there is a benefice from the first level⁹ of meaning of the Scripture: "Now the whole multitude of believers, which believes quite faithfully and simply, is a witness to what great

⁹ Origen's understanding of interpretation levels of Scriptures will be described below.

profit lies in the first meaning, which I have called narrative” (*On First Principles*, 4.2.6). He develops it:

Moreover, in the legal passages of Scripture the law of truth is sown and prophesied by amazing teaching of wisdom; each one by some divine art of wisdom is woven into a kind of garment and veil for the spiritual meanings. And this is what we have called the garment of the letter itself, since it has been woven by the art of wisdom, *a great many can be edified and make progress who otherwise would be unable to do so* (*On First Principles*, 4.2.8. My highlights).

Heine, explaining Origen’s answer to Celsus, reports:

Origen replied that it was because God cares for all people, not just the educated, that he employed a style that common people could understand in Scriptures. Once they have taken their initial steps in the faith, these very people can be introduced to the doctrines hidden in Scriptures ... the perception of deeper meaning in Scripture is not dependent solely on a person’s intelligence or education, but depends on the energy and time one invests in studying Scriptures and, perhaps even more importantly, on the effort one makes to live as it teaches (HEINE, 2019, p. 71).

Thus, for Origen, the simplest people should have access to the Scriptures, as well as understand them.

1.3. The reader's experience with the inspired Word of God.

The natural result of the two topics above is the experience that readers' Scriptures can have with it. Origen, highlighting the necessity of "diligence," "reverence," and "great zeal," explains the experience of the Scriptures' reader:

... if someone considers the prophetic writings with all diligence and reverence they are worth, while he reads and examines with great care, it is certain that in that very act he will be struck in his mind and senses by some more divine breath and will recognize that the books he reads have not been produced in a human way, but are words of God. And in himself he will discern that the books have been written not by human art or mortal eloquence but, if I may say so, by the elevated style of God. And so. The splendor of the coming of Christ, by illuminating the Law of Moses with the radiance of truth, removed that veil which had been placed over the letter, and laid open for all who believe in Him to good things that were hidden covered within (cf. 2 Cor. 3:15-16) (*On First Principles*, 4.6.1).

Origen quotes the prophetic writings, the Law of Moses, and Paul's letters, but this experience can be applied in all Scriptures. So, he believes that the reader "will be struck in his mind and senses," realizing that the Scriptures are God's Word. Therefore, because the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, and can be understandable

even for the simplest one, in engaging with it the reader will be hit, and convinced that the biblical text is “words of God.”

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, for Origen, the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, even the simplest one can engage beneficially with it and, as a result, the Scriptures’ readers can be experienced be “struck” by it. In the face of the academic hijacking that the Scriptures have suffered throughout history, Origen’s conceptions of the Scriptures are very important, because they can be tools for current readers to get rid of aridity and lack of depth.

2. Origen’s approach of Scripture

After discuss Origen’s high view of Scripture, it is important to approach how Origen understood the right way to read and interpret the Scripture. There is a classical Origen’s approach to the Scriptures in three levels (*On First Principles*, 4.2.4),¹⁰ but what will be analyzed here is the way that Origen points out for approaching the Scriptures.

¹⁰ For a very insightful explanation about Origen’s approaching to the Scriptures, see TORJESEN, 1986, p. 138-147.

2.1. The requirements to approach the Scriptures

As presented above, the simplest person can approach beneficially the Scriptures, but it does not mean that there are no requirements to do so. Based on Origen's *On First Principles*, it is possible to present three requirements for approaching the Scriptures. The first requirement is the personal requirements. Origen argues that,

[...] we must rely on great zeal and effort so that each reader may with all reverence understand that he is pondering words that are divine and not human and that have been sown into the holy books. Therefore, the understanding that we consider should be observed rightly and logically in interpreting the holy Scriptures is, we think, of this kind (*On First Principles*, 4.3.5).

For Origen, “great zeal,” “effort,” and “all reverence” should be applied in understanding and approaching the Scriptures as divine words and “holy books.” In doing so, the Scriptures’ reader will interpret and find what is right (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2).

The second requirement is the “rule of faith.” Origen observes that

we shall try to make clear to them what seems to us the right way of understanding Scripture, observing that rule and discipline which was delivered by Jesus Christ to the apostles and which they delivered in succession in their followers who teach the heavenly Church (*On First Principles*, 4.2.2).

This “rule” is the “rule of faith” (DECOCK, 2011, p. 3), and Daly emphasizes: “it was Origen’s ecclesiastical *rule of faith* that was decisive. This is what provided the structure and substance of his particular hermeneutical circle; this is what, in effect, determined his interpretations of the bible” (BALTHASAR, 1984, p. XVII). Boersma explains this “rule”:

That is to say, the Scriptures were linked to the liturgy and the faith of the church. We often think of biblical exegesis as lying within the purview of the academy and of liturgy as the domain of the church; not so the church fathers. For them, the way we read the Bible has everything to do with how it functions in the church ... *Lex orandi, lex credenda* is the catchphrase expressing this conviction: the rule of prayer (the liturgy) is closely linked to the rule of faith (what we believe) ... the early church’s preachers and theologians were keenly aware of the close link. It means that the exegesis of Scriptures did have concrete boundaries guidelines, and points of verification, and these were given by the church’s liturgy and confession. It is because exegesis wasn’t a self-governing endeavor but instead functioned within an ecclesial setting that no one expressed the fear that typology and allegorizing might run amok (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 83).

The third requirement is the hermeneutical rule that the Scriptures should interpret the Scriptures. Origen asserts that “we think that the way that seems to us right for understanding the Scriptures and seeking their meaning is such that we are taught what sort of understanding we should have of it by no less than Scripture itself” (*On First Principles*, 4.2.4). So, as observed by Heine, “he looked to Scripture itself for his guidelines” (HEINE, 2019, p. 74). Daly observes two benefits of it. First, he highlights that such rule keeps “the sacredness of the whole bible over against the heretics, especially the gnostics, who accepted only parts of it as inspired.” Second, “it removed much of the danger of arbitrariness from his interpretations.” His conclusion is that, “Origen’s interpretations made so much sense in the context of the whole bible is a major reason for his massive influence in the development of the golden age of patristic theology” (BALTHASAR, 1984, p. XVII).

Therefore, according to Origen, personal engagement, the “rule of faith,” and hermeneutical rule are the requirements in approaching the Scriptures.

2.2. The difficulties in approaching the Scriptures and its profit:

Even obeying the requirements presented above, for Origen, there can be difficulties in the interpretation of the Scriptures and this is not a bad thing. He explains:

But if in all the parts of this garment, that is, the narrative, the logical coherence of the Law had been kept and its order pre-served, because we should have a continuous way of understanding, we should not believe that there was anything shut up within the sacred Scriptures in addition to what is disclosed on the first appearance. For this reason the divine wisdom has arranged for there to be certain stumbling blocks or interruptions of the narrative meaning, by inserting in its midst certain impossibilities and contradictions, so that the very interruption of the narrative might oppose the reader, as it were, with certain obstacles thrown in the way. By them wisdom denies a way and an access to the common understanding; and when we are shut out and hurled back, it calls us back to the beginning of another way, so that by gaining a higher and loftier road through entering a narrow footpath it may open for us the immense breadth of divine knowledge (*On First Principles*, 4.2.9).

It is very interesting how Origen understanding the difficulties in approaching the Scriptures. He teaches that these “stumbling blocks” or “interruptions” come from “divine wisdom.”

This happens because God, in his divine wisdom, wants to guide the reader behind the “common understanding,” to “the immense breadth of divine knowledge.” Related to it, Daly states that the difficulties in interpret the Scriptures should lead the one for searching “for the deeper, spiritual meaning behind these words” (BALTHASAR, 1984, p. XV). Thus, the challenges in approaching the Scriptures should be understood as God’s actions for a deeper and bigger Scriptures’ knowledge by the reader.

2.3. The dependency of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Scripture correctly

Thirdly, in Origen’s approach to the Scriptures, it is needed to point out the dependency of God in doing so. Origen recognizes that, “To be able to find them (i.e., “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”) we need the help of God, who alone can ‘break in pieces the doors of bronze’ by which they are shut up and hidden and who ‘cuts asunder the bars of iron’ (Is. 45:2)” (*On First Principles*, 4.3.11).

He highlights, especially, the Holy Spirit’s dependency. First, to comprehend that the Scriptures are not human words, but divine ones: “As well, the understanding of divine letters must be kept to that rule by which is said is judged not according to the common character of the word but according to the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who is inspired their writing” (*On First Principles*, 4.3.15). Second,

to get the truths in the Scriptures because, according to him, “the aim of the Holy Spirit is that we should understand that there have been woven into the visible narrative truths that, if pondered and understood inwardly, bring forth a law useful to men and worthy of God” (*On First Principles*, 4.3.4).

It is especially true when one faces difficulties to interpret the Scripture, because the Holy Spirit works in the midst of it, and leads the readers deeper into the text meaning, as Origen explains:

All these things, as we have said, the Holy Spirit arranged so that from them, since what first appears cannot be true or useful, we might be called back to examine the truth to be sought more deeply and to be investigated more diligently, and might seek a meaning worthy of God in the Scriptures, which we believe were inspired by God. And not only did the Holy Spirit arrange this for what had been written up to the coming of Christ, but since He is one and the same Spirit and proceeds from the one God, He likewise did the same thing also in the Gospels and the writings of the apostles. For even those accounts He inspired through them He did not weave together apart from the art of His wisdom, whose character we have already explained. Thus, even in these writings He mingled not a few things by which the order of the narrative account is interrupted or cut up so that by the impossibility He might turn and call back the mind of the reader to the examination of the inner meaning (*On First Principles*, 4.2.9).

Thus, for Origen, interpreting the Scriptures is a humble action based on dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Origen's approach to the Scriptures can help current readers to overcome some problems. First, his requirements can help them to overcome the mistake of interpreting the Scriptures "according to the letter" (Jews' error) and relativizing parts of Scripture, dividing them (heretics' error). Second, the benefits of difficulties in interpreting the Scriptures and the dependency on the Holy Spirit in doing it can help the current readers to overcome the lacking of zeal for the training of their minds, and the problem of the false assumption that they know before they have learned.

3. The consequence of Origen's approach to Scriptures

Lastly, as the consequence of Origen's high view of the Scriptures and his approach to it, the lives of those who approach the Scriptures in Origen's way should be transformed, because for him, biblical interpretation was a "way of life" (HEINE, 2019, p. 61). Origen, as a church father, was "interested in how the biblical text can transform its readers" (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 19), "concerned with the virtuous habits of the Christian life" (BOERSMA, 2017, p. 122). Decock explains Origen's goal of transformation in readers' lives through the Scriptures:

Origen approached the Scriptures as divine instruction, that aims at the transformation of the present readers and not merely at information about the past. The purpose of reading is that readers will grow in existential wisdom. They are also enabled to progress towards a fuller understanding of the meaning of the text in their own lives to the extent that they grow in that wisdom (DECOCK, 2011, p. 3).

Thus, according to Decock, for Origen, the Scriptures aims the transformation of readers' lives, its purpose is the growth in wisdom, as the reader applies the text and its meaning to his own life. He summarizes the waited results by Origen for the Scriptures' readers: (1) moral purification, (2) recognition of the true value of everything created by God and the discovery of the infinite God, and (3) a never-ending progress in knowledge and love for God (DECOCK, 2011, p. 4).

There are some reasons for this transformation. First, because the Scriptures is the God's inspired Word, as observed by Torjesen:

...with this argument (i.e., that the Scriptures are the inspired God's Word) Origen means more than the power of certain teachings to persuade people of their truthfulness; rather, he intends the power of such teaching to persuade its hearers to change their way of life and become adherents and dedicated followers of the truth (TORJESEN, 1985, p. 17).

So, only by the fact that the Scriptures is God's Word, it can transform people. Second, as Decock explains, throughout the process of meanings, the transformation takes place: "This movement from the literal meaning to the spiritual meaning required a process of personal transformation in the reader" (DECOCK, 2011, p. 3). Thus, the engagement with the Scriptures is a way of transformation. Third, as the result of the first two reasons above, "the Scriptures [is] the Christian version of ... paideia" (DECOCK, 2011, p. 4). So, the Scriptures guides morally and ethically people, in a discipleship process. Lastly, the reading of the Scriptures transforms its readers "more and more into the likeness of God" (DECOCK, 2011, p. 1) because this is its purpose. Thus, the Scriptures, for Origen, restores the likeness of God in its readers.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that for Origen, the Scriptures are not mere letters and information, but as Paul states, "the power of God unto salvation (transformation) everyone" (Rom. 1:17). Thus, the current problem of lacking transformation in the believers' lives will be overcome when Origen's approach the Scriptures was observed.

Conclusion

In the face of our serious problems in reading and interpreting the Scriptures in a transformation way, this paper wanted to argue

that the Alexandrine exegete has very precious contributions to share with us, because, as claimed by Heine: “whoever would understand Origen must take the Bible into serious account, for it stood at the center of his work, his thought, and his entire life” (HEINE, 1997, p. 131). Therefore, although the understanding of the Scriptures is “an existential ... gradual and always imperfect understanding” (DECOCK, 2011, p. 5), for Origen, it is “a spiritual journey” (DECOCK, 2011, p. 4). In observing Origen’s high view of the Scriptures, and approaching it as he did, surely, our approach to the Scriptures will be deeper, and our lives will be transformed.

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RESUMO

O campo da interpretação bíblica tem sofrido fortes influências nos últimos séculos, e tem sido um campo de estudo bem desafiador para os teólogos conservadores. Diante do movimento interpretativo cujo centro deixou de ser o texto e passou a ser o leitor, a interpretação dos textos bíblicos, especialmente na academia, mudou drasticamente. O problema é que tais mudanças não permanecem dentro da academia, mas superam o limite acadêmico e alcançam a igreja e a sociedade.

Diante deste cenário, a análise da abordagem da Escritura do grande teólogo cristão Orígenes de Alexandria (185 – 253 d.C.) será muito proveitosa. O trabalho interpretativo de Orígenes é,

comumente, avaliado de forma negativa. É quase unânime entre aqueles sem um conhecimento mais profundo dos escritos do teólogo a posição de que Orígenes usou e abusou do método de interpretação alegórico, distorcendo assim o sentido correto do texto bíblico. É necessário reconhecer que, em algumas ocasiões, ao aplicar tal método o exegeta alexandrino realmente se distanciou do sentido original do texto sagrado. Porém, como em quase toda situação na vida, no caso de Orígenes é mister não “jogar o bebê fora junto com a água suja”.

Ao contrário, porém, do que muitos possam pensar, o teólogo de Cesaréia tinha a Palavra de Deus em altíssimo conceito e cria no poder transformador desta Palavra Revelada. Por isso, a abordagem de Orígenes da Palavra de Deus certamente será benéfica ao leitor moderno.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Orígenes – Escritura – Abordagem