THE GREEK TRADITION OF ALLEGORIZATION
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

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When Gregory of Nyssa interpreted the Canticle of Caticles allegorically he was using a tradition of interpreting "inspired" texts that went back to the time before Socrates. To use the word "inspired" here may seem to be overstating the case somewhat, for inspiration in its biblical sense is not the same thing as poetic inspiration, yet the Greek attitude to poetic inspiration does have a resemblance to the Jewish, for the words of the inspired text have an authority and wealth of meaning that they otherwise would not have. Furthermore, the Greek doctrine of inspiration influenced the later Christian doctrine through the mediation of Philo Judaeus. The Jews accepted scripture as the word of God; in trying to explain this Philo drew on the doctrine of Plato. It was therefore in Platonic terms that the early Christian apologists attempted to explain inspiration. It was modified by Origen, who rejected the identification of scriptural inspiration with mantic inspiration. Yet Josef Pieper expressed his amazement in finding in Aquinas "a description of the process of revelation virtually the same as that contained in Plato's Phaedrus".

It will be helpful therefore to examine more closely Plato's doctrine of inspiration. Of his four types of inspiration only two concern us here, the mantic and the poetic.

In Plato's dialogue Phaedrus Socrates held the oracles in the highest respect. He claimed that the greatest blessings have come through madness when it is a gift of the gods (διὰ μανίας θείας μέντοι δόσει διδομένης). What did he mean by this? That the prophetess at Delphi and the priestess at Dodona when they were mad conferred many benefits on Greece, but few when they were in

1 R.N. Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Eerdmans, 1975), 19.
3 Athenagoras, Leg. 9; Tertullian, Adv. Marc., 4, 22.
4 Origen, Contra Celsum, 7, 3-4.
6 Phaedr. 244a.
their right mind. The verb mainomai is difficult to translate; it can mean, among other things, to be mad with wine, and to be beside oneself with joy. Here Plato is speaking of divinely sent madness. For a translation of this word Pieper goes to Virgil's description of the oracle (A. 6, 11f.), Magnam cui mentem animumque Delius inspirat vates, ("into whom the seer of Delos breathes mighty insight and inspiration") thus connecting mainomai with inspirare. He is then able to paraphrase this section of the Phaedrus as follows:

Human nature is so placed within its plane of existence that it remains essentially open to the sphere of the divine. Man is so constituted that, on the one hand, he can be thrown out of the autonomous independence of his thinking by inspiration, which comes to him as a sudden, unpredictable force from outside. On the other hand, this very abandonment of critical sovereignty may bring him an abundance of insight, of light, of truth, of illumination as to the nature of reality which would otherwise remain completely out of his reach. For we are dealing not with self governing human genius, but with something bestowed by another, a higher, a divine power. Nor is this merely an abstract possibility: man's being is at times overpowered by inspiration. It is something that actually happens. But when it does happen, it does so in such a manner that sophrosyne and all that goes with that is forcibly annulled, however much the dignity of the human person depends upon it. Inspiration takes the form of theia mania, of the self's not-being-with-the-self -- so that the state of being inspired may well seem madness to the "multitude".

Socrates shows the same respect for oracles in the Apology (33c). When told by Chaerephon that the Delphic oracle had said that there was no one wiser than Socrates, he accepted that the oracle told the truth, but he knew that even when the surface meaning was clear only a fool would take the oracle at its face value. One must search for its hidden meaning; this the Greeks called hyponoia, literally undersense. Among the pre-Socratics Heraclitus showed that he was aware that the oracle spoke in riddles and needed interpretation:

ο ἄναξ, ο θ ι η τ δ μαντείον ἐστι τ ὑ τ ἐν Δελφοῖς, ο ούτε λέγει ούτε κρύπτει ὁλλά σημαίνει.8 ("The Lord who owns the Delphic Oracle neither tells nor conceals but indicates")

The god's mode of utterance (sc. in the Delphic oracle) is said to be neither direct statement nor concealment, which would mean falsehood... but signifying, giving a sign. There is no doubt that Heraclitus is referring to the Delphic practice of giving advice in

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7 Pieper ibid., 56.
8 Diels - Kranz, 22, fr. 93; henceforth this work will be referred to as DK.
indirect form, by imagery, riddle and ambiguity, so that it was obvious to a man of sense that an oracle required an interpretation. Even when the surface meaning is clear it may be necessary to look for a meaning underneath - as Oedipus discovered to his hurt when he forgot to ask which man was his father.9

So far we have established two points: first, that Socrates and the pre-Socratics surprisingly accepted the oracles as divinely inspired utterances; secondly, that these oracles required interpretation. We find, too, examples of cryptic utterances that are not oracular. This type of challenging puzzle appealed to the Greeks. For them it was characteristic of the wise man to see the message latent even in what appeared to be ordinary speech. Empedocles and Heraclitus used that sort of language in expressing their philosophic truths. It is not clear whether this was done expressly or because they were unable to express such truths otherwise. Kahn says:

one can scarcely miss the Delphic elements in Heraclitus’s own style. But the notion of men who 'listen without comprehension', who fail to understand because they have 'barbarian souls' is presented as a characterization of the human condition not reality itself, or the nature of things, that requires close investigation and readiness to discover the unexpected, 'for it is trackless and unexplored' ... This parallel between Heraclitus's own style and the obscurity of the nature of things, between the difficulty of understanding him, and the difficulty in human perception, is not arbitrary: to speak plainly about such a subject would be to falsify it in the telling, for no genuine understanding would be communicated. The only hope of 'getting through' to the audience is to puzzle and provoke them into reflection. Hence the only appropriate mode of explanation is allusive and indirect: Heraclitus is consciously and unavoidably 'obscure'.10

This is a fundamental principle, that there are truths too great to be encapsulated in definitions. That is why the philosophic myth was created. With all of this Gregory of Nyssa would have been in fundamental agreement: it is the principle presupposed in his mystical interpretations. But there is a fundamental difference between these oracular sayings and the later allegorical interpretations as practised by Gregory; these enigmatic sayings are tied to the literal meaning; once they have been interpreted it is obvious that the meaning is latent in the text. There is nothing fanciful in them. Allegorical interpretation, however, is purely fanciful and has no relation to the basic meaning of the sentence.

To summarize, we may say that the oracles, if we are to accept Plutarch's evidence on the Sibyl, were the first examples of inspired utterances in Greece;

10 ibid., 123-4.
they required interpretation. This search for the hidden meaning of *hyponoia* was to continue and find its full flowering in the School of Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria, for example, says that Scripture keeps its meaning hidden for several reasons: "first that we may be disposed to search and always sit up over the discovery of the saving words, secondly because it is not suitable for everybody to understand...therefore the holy mysteries are hidden in parables and kept safe for the selected men and for those who, coming from *pistis* (faith) are admitted into *gnosis* (knowledge)." ¹¹

The Greeks regarded the poets also as inspired. Cicero said: "saepe enim audivi poetam bonum neminem (id quod a Democrito et Platone in scriptis relictum esse dicunt) sine inflammatione animorum existere posse et sine quodam adflatu quasi furoris" ¹² ("I have often heard that no man can be a good poet - as they say Democritus and Plato have left on record - who is not on fire with passion and inspired by something very like frenzy"). Clement of Alexandria said:

"καὶ ὁ Δημόκριτος ὤμοιως ἡμιτής δὲ ἄσσα μὲν ἄν γράφῃ μετ’ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ ἰεροῦ πνεύματος, καλὰ κάρτα ἐστίν’..." ¹³ ("And Democritus likewise 'what a poet writes with frenzy and divine inspiration is truly good'...".)

...Socrates says in the *Phaedrus* (245a) that it is a kind of possession or madness (*καταχωχή* τε καὶ *μανία*). The poem is not the work of art (*τέχνη*) but of divine influence (*θεία δυνάμει*). Under this influence the mind of the poet is suppressed (*νοῦς μὴ πάρεσην*) and the god uses the poets to utter things of great value (*ταύτα λέγοντες οὕτω πολλοῖς ἄξια*).

It is this statement "of great value" which causes the difficulty. How do we know what is of great value? To ask the poet himself is usually not satisfactory: he is himself often unable to tell us. Moreover, not all that poets say is acceptable, for they often teach what is disreputable about the gods and so persuade others to follow this example. Can we attribute this false teaching to divine inspiration? If we consider Plato's teaching in the *Republic* (379), I think that we may not, since god (ho theos) cannot be the cause of evil but only of good. It is clear then that we must distinguish in the poet what is true (and hence may be inspired) from what is false and therefore not inspired. This must be done by reason and argument.

We must draw a distinction between allegory properly speaking, and allegorical interpretation or allegorization. Allegory is a literary figure; if the author intended an allegory, then to interpret it as such is to interpret it literally. This

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¹¹ Strom. 6, 15, 126. 1-2.
¹² Cic. *de Orat.* 2, 46, 194. (*DK.* 68, fr. 17.)
¹³ Strom. 6, 18, 168, 1. (*DK.* 68, fr. 18.)
is exegesis, drawing out the meaning of a text. To interpret allegorically means to treat as an allegory what is not written with an allegorical purpose. This is eisegesis, reading a meaning into a text. There is a long history of this in Greece; it affects poetry, notably that of Homer and Hesiod. Basil the Great, for example, says that the whole of Homer's poetry is a eulogy of virtue. This merely repeats the saying of Anaxagoras that Homer's poetry treats of virtue and justice. This is an important testimony. It shows how the desire to allegorize Homer lasted over 800 years to the time of Gregory. To see lessons of virtue in Homer is not in itself allegorical, since even historical events can teach a moral, but it is a basic prerequisite, and to see the whole of the epic in that light would demand allegorical interpretation of at least some parts.

Gomperz sees this allegorizing tendency as an attempt to salvage the credibility of Homer in a rationalistic age: "Already in the sixth century Theagenes of Rhegium had applied the panacea of allegory to the authority of Homer which Xenophanes had assailed so bitterly.... Even Democritus and Anaxagoras did not disdain to contribute their mite to the allegorical interpretation of the national poetry". Metrodorus of Lampsacus (fl. 5th cent. BC) pushed this allegorical interpretation to the extreme: (ειπεν)...τῶν δὲ θεῶν τὴν Δήμητρα μεν ἡπαρ, τὸν Διόνυσον δὲ σπλήνα, τὸν Ἀπόλλω δὲ Ἡσυχίαν. ("Of the gods, Demeter is the liver (seat of the hot passions), Dionysus the spleen (seat of ill temper), Apollo the bile (seat of bitter anger)"). He may have been led to this by Empedocles, who personified and deified the elements of the Cosmos:

of the roots of all things hear me first speak. Zeus the white splendour, Hera carrying life, and Aidoneus, and Nestes whose tears bedew mortality.

Lambridis says that Zeus is the sun, Hera the earth, Aideneus the air, and adds, "this habit of Empedocles to designate his elements and, as we shall see, also his forces, with names of gods and other mythological beings is unfortunate, for it leads to confusion". Empedocles is allegorizing here deliberately.

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15. DK. 59, fr. 11.
16. e.g. Od. 8, 26ff.
18. DK. 61, fr. 4.
19. DK.. 21B, fr. 8 quoted by H. Lambridis, Empedocles, a Philosophical Investigation (Alabama, 1976), 44.
20. ibid.
It is usual to see this tendency to allegorize as an attempt to "save" Homer's poetry. Gomperz agrees with Renan that Philo's allegorizing "is founded in piety and not in arbitrary wantonness". Nash, too, sees allegorical interpretation as a way of bridging a sacred past with a more enlightened present. It is the commonly accepted view. Tate, however, disagrees. He does not see allegory arising from an attempt to make Homer relevant, but from the desire of philosophers to attach the authority of Homer to their own cause. It is positive rather than negative. While supporting the traditional view admits the difficulties in defending it: "Il est logique et traditionnel de penser que c'est le souci de défendre Homère et ses dieux contre leurs détracteurs qui a engendré l'allégorie; mais les données chronologiques sur cette période sont si floues qu'il est difficile de rien affirmer." ("It is logical and traditional to think that it is the concern to defend Homer and his gods against their detractors which has given rise to allegory; but the chronological data for this period are so hazy that it is difficult to make any positive assertions.")

The facts are these: at the end of the sixth century BC there arose a vigorous opposition to the immoral image that Homer presented of the gods; at the same time allegorical interpretation began to appear. Most scholars simply linked the two as cause and effect. Tate rejected this view. He refers to the many pre-Socratic philosophers who interpreted Homer's poetry allegorically in conformity with their philosophy, and says that they did this to gain the support of Homer's authority. This, however, is an assumption and the texts he uses could equally be used by the first group. These two views do not exhaust the possible interpretations. It is bad methodology, I believe, to attribute the causes of what must have been a naturally evolving process to the explicit and conscious intervention of a few philosophers, especially when we consider that this took place over a long period of time and that what we know of their teaching is gleaned from a few surviving fragments. People do not usually stand outside their cultural heritage and milieu. When the pre-Socratics came to a purer concept of the divine they saw the myths and poets in a new light. The philosophers thus acted as prophetic figures and their influence permeated, but did not overthrow, the cultural heritage. Being used to interpreting oracles the Greeks began to see new meanings in the poets, especially in those parts which

21 Gomperz, op. cit., 379.
22 H.S. Nash, "The Exegesis of the School of Antioch" Journal of Biblical Literature, 11, (1892), 22.
24 J. Tate, "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation". 23 (1929), 142-154; 24 1930), 1-10; also "The Beginnings of Greek Allegory", 41 (1927), 214-215.
they rejected for philosophical or ethical reasons. We must remember, too, that for the Greeks there was something oracular about Homer.25

Plato often expressed his philosophy in allegory (myth) because of the freedom this gave him. Myth lacked rigid definition and contradictory myths could co-exist without cancelling each other out. Even Plato, as we shall see, 26 would have had no difficulty in using the Olympic mythology for his own purpose. Thus new levels of meaning would become apparent and allegorical interpretation would become more common. We see this same process with Pythagoras, who claimed he went down to Hades and saw the souls of Homer and Hesiod in torment because of their false narratives about the gods.27 It is interesting to note that, though Pythagoras rejected the theology of Homer and Hesiod, he expressed this rejection in the conventional images of the day, themselves derived from Homer and Hesiod. His followers, however, still read and accepted the poets but they read them in the light of their master’s teaching.28 Tate’s article, I believe, implicitly supports this view. He testifies to the strength of the Homeric tradition. The philosophers by incorporating their teaching into this tradition are making it intelligible to the people of their day. This would explain “the desire of speculative thinkers to appropriate for their own use some at least of the mythical traditions”.29 The use of genuine allegory among the pre-Socratics was probably much more common than the surviving evidence suggests. Pythagoras used the conventions of poetry but Parmenides actually allegorized them in his Proemium: “He tells of a chariot journey through gates to a goddess, but what he really describes is the transition from ignorance to knowledge”.30 Far from appealing to Homer and Hesiod for support he is actually claiming a superior inspiration to theirs. There was no purpose in Parmenides’ use of allegory if it was not going to be understood. We may infer from this that the Greeks were accustomed to seeing a meaning in poetry deeper than the literal.

The Christian interpretation of the OT is an analogous process and, being better documented, should help us to understand better this earlier movement from literal to allegorical interpretation. The early Christians read the OT in the light of the Christ-event. It was natural for them to see in many persons and events

26 See p.23 below.
27 Diog. Laert. 8, 21.
28 Boyancé, op.cit., 121-124. It is surprising to see the disciples holding an opinion so contrary to the one attributed to their master. This gives added weight to Boyancé’s view that Pythagoras’ opposition is the invention of a later Platonist, Heraclides Ponticus, in his Abaris, following Plato’s rejection in the Republic. See ibid., 122, n.6.
29 Tate, C.Q., 23 (1929), 142.
in the OT similarities in the life and deeds of Christ. They did not have to save the OT; it was always sacred to them, but the meaning of the OT was certainly enriched for them as they saw the coming of Christ foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament. We may also compare the Rabbis' practice of seeing the Law in the whole of Sacred Scripture and so of interpreting it accordingly, i.e. allegorically. There was no need to do this, but they brought their own mindset, as Barr says, to this interpretation, with allegory as the result.

An examination of Democritus of Abdera's teaching gives an indication of how this process arose. Democritus rejected Providence, i.e. that the world is guided by the gods and subject to their control. He said that man's belief in the gods arose from observation of natural phenomena such as thunder. He also said that men invent fables about the time after death (ψευδεα περι του μετα την τελευτην μυθοπλαστεοντες χρονου). The gods give good things, not evil, to mankind and love only those who hate wrong-doing. Much of what Homer taught is contrary to this, yet Democritus admired Homer not merely for his beauty of style but because, under divine inspiration, he expressed important truths about the world, truths which otherwise could not be expressed for it is the work of a divine nature always to express what is kalon. Kalos for the Greeks indicated something that was sound, whole and healthy. It referred especially to the world of the divine; it indicated the possession of virtue: θείου νοι το άει τι διαλογίζεσθαι καλόν. Democritus could not have accepted Homer's teaching literally, though we have no evidence that he specifically rejected it. If he was still able to praise Homer it must have been because he looked for a deeper meaning in the text in the light of his own beliefs.

What was the attitude of Socrates to allegorical interpretation? It is not so easy to say, since interpreters of the sources in Xenophon and Plato differ. Xenophon in the Symposium (3, 5–6) shows Socrates supporting the undersense in Homer. Niceratus had related how his father made him learn Homer by heart so that he might become an upright man. Antisthenes replied that all the rhapsodists could

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31 Note especially Matthew's use of typology to prove that Christ was the Messiah.
34 *DK*. 68, fr. 30.
35 *ibid.*, fr. 297.
36 *ibid.*, fr. 175.
37 *ibid.*, fr. 21.
38 *T.D.N.T.*, iii, 537.
39 *DK*. 68, fr. 112.
do this, yet there was never a more foolish group of people. Socrates agreed with this and contrasted the simplicity of the rhapsodists with the profundity of the allegorical interpreters who applied themselves to the hidden meanings, the only important ones. On the face of it this is clear enough, showing Socrates as a supporter of the undersense. Pépin, however, comments, "On s'accorde à admettre que cette dernière remarque exprime la pensée d'Antisthène plus que celle de Socrate".40 ("One has to accept that this remark expresses the thought of Antisthenes rather than that of Socrates").

This remark is consistent with Pépin's view that Socrates was not in favour of allegorical interpretation. Referring to Plato's Ion (530 c,d.) he says:

Socrate y prononce un éloge moqueur des rhapsodes, qui ne se contentent pas de connaître les vers d'Homère, mais doivent pénétrer sa pensée profonde et la communiquer à leurs auditeurs; Ion, lui-même rhapsode, prend naïvement le compliment au sérieux et reconnaît avec simplicité qu'il emporte sur tous les autres interprètes du poète.41 ("Here Socrates gives a mock eulogy of the rhapsodes who are not content to know Homer's lines, but have to penetrate to the deep levels of his thought and communicate it to their audience; Ion, himself a rhapsode, naively takes the compliment as serious, and ingenuously accepts that he surpasses all the other interpreters of the poet").

Pépin reads this as Socratic irony. I do not think however, that Pépin has correctly interpreted the texts. What are the facts? In both texts Socrates has a very low opinion of the rhapsodists; in both he praises the allegorical interpretation of Homer. This is straightforward enough in Xenophon, but in Plato interpreters have regarded what Socrates said as irony and read this interpretation back into Xenophon. Yet considering the whole context of the Ion I do not think that this is so, unless we must also take everything that Socrates says here about poets and inspiration as ironic.42 The irony seems to be directed rather at the rhapsodists as interpreters of Homer; they are not qualified to seek the deeper meanings. The irony is in the words: (535a): And you, rhapsodes, interpret what the poets say, don't you? expecting an affirmative answer. There is also the reference in Xenophon, Smp. 4, 6-7) to the knowledge of the charioteer and the naïve reaction of Niceratus. We may therefore accept both passages at face value, admitting Socrates' acceptance of allegorical interpretation. Whether Socrates believed that there actually was an undersense is a different question and one which it is probably impossible to answer. Certainly, Socrates would not have agreed with the surface meaning of the poems and the challenge to seek an undersense would be seen as beneficial.

40 Pépin, op.cit., 106.
41 ibid., 100.
42 cf. Phaedrus, 245a.
because it provoked the listeners to deeper thought; in Xenophon it is the profundity of the allegorical interpreters that Socrates praises.\textsuperscript{43} What Socrates did reject above all was the easy recourse to poets such as Simonides for proof of an argument instead of producing convincing proofs.\textsuperscript{44}

It was this very provocation to search more deeply for the truth that was seen by Aristotle as the value of myth: διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἥρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν......διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πώς ἔστιν ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων.\textsuperscript{45} ("For it is through the act of wondering that men now begin, and originally began, to philosophise (search for truth)....so that the myth-lover is a philosopher in a sense, since myths are composed of wonders").

He interpreted Homer in the light of his philosophy.\textsuperscript{46} This was not like the arbitrary allegorization of Metrodorus, nor was it a blatant attempt to make an Aristotelian of Homer as the Stoics later stoicized him. It was just that he held the poets to be inspired\textsuperscript{47} and taught that they had a clearer insight into the nature of things:

Poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singular. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do, which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters.\textsuperscript{48}

Thus, though poetry may seem to deal with particular people or events, its theme is universal truth. It is not surprising then that Aristotle read the poets in the light of his own knowledge and saw his teachings reflected there. Moreover, he claimed the right to reinterpret myths, or rather, to see deeper meanings in

\textsuperscript{43} The irony in the situation should not have escaped the reader: "Irony is a type of allegory, a ψευδολογία", said Pépin (p.49); the writer says one thing but expects the reader to understand another. The correct interpretation of Plato’s dialogues depends on the correct appreciation of his irony.

\textsuperscript{44} Protagoras, 347e.

\textsuperscript{45} Metaph. 2,982b, 12-19.

\textsuperscript{46} e.g. he treated Iliad 8, 20-22 as an allegory of his teaching on the Unmoved Move, M.A. 4, 699b-700a.

\textsuperscript{47} Rhet. 3, 7, 1408b19 and Pro. 30, 1, 954a38.

them. "There is a meaning also in the myth of the ancients which tells how Athene invented the flute and then threw it away". \(^{49}\) Aristotle comments on this: "It was not a bad idea of theirs, that the goddess disliked the instrument because it made the face ugly; but with still more reason may we say that she rejected it because the acquirement of flute-playing contributes nothing to the mind, since to Athene we ascribe both knowledge and art". Thus the position of Aristotle is similar to that of Socrates presented in Xenophon and Plato.

It was because of evil teachings in Homer that Plato banned his poetry from the ideal state, though he found things to praise in Homer\(^ {50}\) and sometimes quoted him with approval.\(^ {51}\) It is because of this that some think that Plato rejected allegorical interpretation. He said that the bad influence of some of Homer's stories could not be eliminated, even if they had an *undersense*. He did not, however, deny this *undersense*, but said that children would not perceive it, and even if they did, it would not counteract the harm done by the literal sense. In this he is neither accepting nor rejecting allegorical interpretation. What he does is to question its practical value, as in the story of Socrates and the myth of Boreas.\(^ {52}\) Even if we admit the worth of what is contained in the *undersense* there is the practical problem of interpretation; the interpreter himself would need to be inspired in order to interpret them. In time, however, Plato came to question whether poetry could in any way satisfactorily express the truth, being itself a product of the imagination and at third remove from reality.\(^ {53}\)

This rejection of the practical value of allegory has caused confusion, since Plato makes constant use of myths and these myths are really allegories, according to Frutiger.\(^ {54}\) There would seem to be a contradiction here in Plato's attitude. It is important, however, to note the distinction between the search for an *undersense* that may or may not have been intended by the author and is therefore arbitrary, and the composition of myths where the *undersense* is intended by the author and meant to be recognized by the reader. Myths were important for Plato in the presentation of his philosophy. For Plato true knowledge is the knowledge of unchanging forms. If he wishes to speak of this changing world it must be in terms of true opinion (or the doxa). Of this Pépin says: "Le mythe qui n'est pas une fiction gratuite, mais un récit symbolique lourd de signification, s'apparente

\(^{49}\) *Pol*, 7, 6, 1341b 5-8. (vol.X of the above series, tr. B Jowett).

\(^{50}\) *Rep.*, 383a.

\(^{51}\) *ibid.*, 389e.

\(^{52}\) *Phaedr.*, 229c-d.

\(^{53}\) *Rep.*, 596b-598d.

à l'opinion vraie, et procure le meilleur mode d'expression du probable".\(^{55}\) ("Myth which is not a pure fabrication but a symbolic tale heavy with meaning is wedded to true understanding and produces the best way of expressing what is probable.)

Myth allowed him "a certain prudent imprecision" for he used it where "he wishes the precise extent of his own intellectual commitment to remain unclear."\(^{56}\) This lack of precision was itself stimulating and challenging. Plato therefore would not have rejected the myths but only what is discreditable in them. I agree with Grube who claims that, though Plato did not believe in the Olympians, he would nevertheless have accepted the mythology (having removed what is objectionable) as the most convenient way of expressing the new doctrine. "Once the more objectionable myths have been removed, he probably thought it an unprofitable task to destroy the old gods (even if such a task had been possible) when these old moulds might still be used as effectively as any other to express new ideas, new conceptions of divinity".\(^{57}\) What else is this than to read new meanings into the old text - to see in it a new undersense or υπόνοια?

The philosophy of Plato with its dual cosmos, the world of appearances and the world of reality, created the intellectual climate in which allegorical interpretation flourished. Taught by the philosophers that the world that we experience is only a reflection of the real world, it was natural for the Greeks to interpret what they read and heard in the poets as only a reflection of reality and to look deeper for what was real. The very insistence of Plato that what the poets said was only the imitation of an imitation\(^{58}\) would have reinforced their desire to search out the real meaning.\(^{59}\) It is surprising that Plato did not see this, as his later followers did, but his attention was concentrated on the question of true knowledge. It is even more surprising that it was the down-to-earth, scientific Aristotle who rejected this aspect of Plato's teaching and reverted to that of Socrates.\(^{60}\)

The word υπόνοια was used both for the deeper meaning latent in the words of oracles and riddles and for the meaning that interpreters found in poems that was different from the literal. This distinction must gradually have become very

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\(^{55}\) Pépin, op.cit., 119.

\(^{56}\) cf. Heraclitus, above, pp.14f.


\(^{58}\) See n. 53 above.

\(^{59}\) There was an affinity between this philosophy and the spirituality of Judaism and Christianity, so that it is not surprising to see allegorical interpretation used by Philo on Jewish Scriptures and continued by the later Christian Neoplatonists.

\(^{60}\) Metaph, 2.982b, 12-21.
obvious for in the time of the Stoics a new word appeared, (άλληγορικῶς), which was derived from άλλας and άγορευειν. Heraclitus (1st Cent. A.D.) defines allegory thus: ὁ γὰρ άλλα μὲν άγορεύων τρόπος, ἐτερα δὲ ὃν λέγει σημαίνων, ἐπωνύμως ἀλληγορία καλείται.61 ("The trope which says one thing and means other things other than it says takes its name "allegory" from 'saying' and 'other'.")

The Stoics were probably the first who deliberately allegorized the poets to bring the teaching of the poets into line with their own philosophy and to use the authority of the poets to support their teaching.62 The anthropomorphisms of the poets were in conflict with the Stoic view of God, the rational principle that maintained order in the universe. They claimed that popular religions gave the name of a god to the benefits received from the gods, 63 and to personified virtues and passions.64 Hesiod, for example, saw the gods of Homer as personifications of the forces of nature: rebus inanimis atque mutis per quandam significationem (hyponoia) haec docet tributa nomina.65 ("He teaches that these names (of gods) have been assigned by a sort of undersense (hyponoia) to lifeless and dumb objects."). Rackham in the Loeb edn. says simply allegorically.

The Stoics gave a veneer of respectability to their allegorization by basing it on etymology, usually erroneous. For the Stoics there was an intrinsic and necessary connection between the nature of a thing and the word that expressed it - the logos physikos or ratio physica. This was so whether the word for the thing was Greek or Latin.66 This gave the appearance of authenticity to their allegorization, but in reality it left them very vulnerable. Cicero put a trenchant criticism of the Stoics' convenient etymologies into the mouth of Cotta, showing thereby the absurdity of their whole system of allegorization:

In enodandis autem nominibus, quod miserandum sit, laboratis. Saturnus, quia se saturat annis, Mavors, quia magna vertit, Minerva, quia minuit aut quia minatur, Venus, quia venit ad omnia, Ceres a gerendo. Quam periculosa consuetudo! In multis enim nominibus haereditis. Quid Veiovi facies, quid Vulcano? Quamquam, quoniam Neptunum a nando appellatum putas, nullum erit nomen quod non possis una littera explicare unde ducit sit: in quo quidem magis tu

61 Ps-Heraclitus, All., 5, 1.
62 Cic., D., 41.
63 ibid., 2, 60.
64 ibid., 2, 61.
65 ibid., 1, 36. See also 2, 63-70.
66 e.g., "Saturnus autem est appellatus, quod saturaretur annis", etc. ibid., 2, 64.
mihi natate visus es quam ipse Neptunus.67 ("But as for your strained etymologies, one can only pity your strained misplaced ingenuity. Saturnus is so called because he is 'sated with years', Mavors because he 'subverts the great', Minerva because she 'minishes' or because she is 'minatory', Venus because she 'visits' all things, Ceres from gero 'to bear'. What a dangerous practice! with a great many names you will be in difficulties. What will you make of Vejovis, or Vulcan? though you think Neptune comes from 'nare to swim' there will be no name of which you could not make the derivation clear by altering one letter").

Among the chief opponents of Stoic allegorization were the Epicureans. On what grounds did they base this opposition? They were certainly opposed to the doctrines that the Stoics sought to prove by allegorizing the poets, the anti-anthropomorphism and their stoicization of Homer and Hesiod. But did they oppose allegorization on principle or, being opposed to the result, did they automatically extend their opposition to the method also, without sufficient reason? Pépin seems to make just such a confusion when he argues that, since the aims of both Stoics and Epicureans were similar (both wishing to purify the common concept of the gods), the Epicureans should have been more in sympathy with Stoic allegorization:

N'est-ce pas un programme analogue...que poursuivaient les Stoïciens dans leur effort pour voir clair dans la mythologie d'Homère et d'Hésiode? La religion qu'ils proposaient est certes différente de celle d'Epicure, mais l'une et l'autre ne postulent-elles pas le même refus de la piété traditionelle? Il semble, dans ces conditions, que l'épicurisme aurait dû ménager d'avantage l'allégorie stoïcienne.68 ("Surely the Stoics followed an analogous programme in their struggle for clear perception in the mythology of Homer and Hesiod? The religion that they put forward is certainly different from that of Epicurus, but both equally took for granted the same rejection of traditional piety did they not? In these circumstances it seems that Epicureanism ought to have made better use of Stoic allegorization").

Given his age in comparison with that of Zeno it is probable that Epicurus did not know much about Stoic allegorization, and there is no record of his opposition to it, only that of his later followers.69 But his opposition to the philosophic myth has been recorded.70 Logically then, he would not have been more sympathetic to the related figure of allegory, much less allegorization.

67 ibid., 3, 62.
68 Pépin, op.cit., 135.
69 Pépin, op.cit., 236.
70 Ps-Heraclitus, op.cit., 4.
Pépin seems to be guilty of another non-sequitur. He recalls that many ancient critics accused Epicurus of plundering Homer for his philosophic ideas. He claims that these accusations, whether true or false, should have made the Epicureans more sympathetic to Stoic allegorization. I do not see how this follows, for, if true, it would mean that Epicurus interpreted Homer literally, not allegorically. It would seem then, on the evidence, that the followers of Epicurus were faithful to the spirit of his teaching in opposing Stoic allegorization and that the opposition was concerned not merely with the results but extended to the method also.

The allegorical method of interpreting literature flourished among the Hellenists of Alexandria. Philo Judaeus learned this method from them, and through his influence it was adopted by the Christian community of Alexandria, who inherited both the Jewish and Greek traditions. The knowledge that they had of God's relationship with mankind was based on revelation. But this had to be interpreted in the context of Greek culture, so that their thinking about God was influenced by Greek philosophical thought, which did much to shape their theology. Philo was the first to make use of this twofold stream of thought. The synthesis that he made became the model for the early Alexandrian Christian writers so that his influence upon Christian theology and mysticism has been profound.

Philo's principle for interpreting scripture was that the whole of scripture has a spiritual meaning but that not all of it was to be interpreted literally. Anything unworthy of God, or contradictory, or absurd, was to be rejected. The criterion is thus fairly subjective and the necessity of always finding an allegorical interpretation, while judging the value of the literal, seems to have kept Philo ambivalent at times. Thus he allegorized the life of Abraham while accepting it historically, but he rejected the idea that Cain built a city (Gen 4.17).71

Clement of Alexandria under the influence of Platonism saw a mysterious correspondence between the material and the spiritual, which is reflected in language. Language is limited and material; when we speak of God we can only use metaphors, symbols, comparisons - all inadequate. But the mind guided by the principles of analogy raised them to the spiritual level; there is the material sense, but also, if we look closely, we may by analogy see a higher, more

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71 "Indeed Cain did not build a city all by himself as the statement would literally imply, but still there is no doubting of the fact that Cain was a real person and the founder of a city". H.A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol.1, (Cambridge, Mass., 1947) 125. We must be cautious too about Philo's "literal sense": it contains more than we would regard as literal. The criterion for him was whether the word itself was accepted in its literal meaning. If it was, then Philo regarded that interpretation based on it as literal, even though his explanation read more into the text than was actually there. For Philo allegorical interpretation was present only when the literal meaning of the word was changed. Cf. H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, (3rd ed., Cam., Mas., 1956), 33.
spiritual meaning. This does not cancel the material meaning; it is superimposed on it. In fact Clement explicitly states that it is only by retaining the literal sense that we come to the true spiritual meaning. The danger is that when one comes upon a text that is, for example, unworthy of God, or contradictory, the interpreter may put aside the literal sense altogether. He would justify this to himself by saying that he is giving what the author means, and so would consider that he is still adhering to the literal text. This may throw some light on the ambivalence of Philo to the literal text that we saw above, for Clement drew heavily from Philo. Philo may indeed have always intended to retain the literal meaning, but was led inadvertently by certain difficulties to lose sight of it. Clement, awed by the sacredness of scripture, maintained that there could be nothing commonplace or banal in it. This view was not derived from Philo, as far as I am aware. It was taken later by Origen. It meant that what was commonplace was given a mystical meaning. Both Clement and Origen went further, seeing a spiritual meaning in every word and in every letter, which partly explains the care Origen took to establish the texts as accurately as possible. The Stoic concern for etymology as a tool for uncovering the deeper meanings is here revived; it will flourish also in Gregory of Nyssa's interpretations of scripture. Clement in his reaction to Gnosticism and his desire to establish the true Gnosis claimed that God did not easily reveal his truths to the carnally minded; a certain discipline and study was necessary for the spiritually minded so that they would see below the surface and come to the spiritual truth. This is what the Greeks had always done when confronted with divine oracles, as we have seen.

The literal and the spiritual interpretation are compared to body and soul.

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72 Strom.3, 16 P.G. 9. 533, B-C.
Den Boer has a helpful comment on the difference between literal and allegorical, which may also apply to Philo: "In 38,1, Clement addresses himself to heretic sects which take passages from the Holy Scriptures, meant to be taken allegorically, in a literal sense. Some heretics hold that one should lead a lascivious life in order to obtain salvation, as it says in the prophets (Malachi 3,15): 'Yea, they that tempt God are even delivered'. Now it is curious to see that Clement himself gives an explanation of these words which follows the method of historical exegesis: he traces the connection in which the words were spoken and gives an explanation which suits the text. So we would call this explanation literal. Yet he speaks disapprovingly of those who take these words literally, as it is meant allegorically. Hence we may conclude that by 'allegorical' Clement means: the text in its context, and by 'literal' the isolated text which is explained as if it were a word by itself."

73 C. Mondésert, Clement d'Alexandrie (Paris, 1944), 132-146.
74 ibid., 138. Mondésert gives examples in n.2.
75 ibid., 133-134. See also Wolfson, Philosophy, 47.
οι μὲν τὸ σώμα τῶν Γραφῶν, τὰς λέξεις καὶ τὰ ὄνοματα, καθάπερ τὸ σῶμα τὸ Μωυσέως, προσβλέπουσιν, οἱ δὲ τὰς διανοιὰς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ὄνομάτων δηλοῦμενα διορώσι.76

"Some look at the physical aspect of the scriptures, the texts and the words as if they were the physical body of Moses, others see through to the meanings and what is revealed by the words."

It is the spirit, rather than the letter, which gives life. To support this teaching Clement appealed to the Apostolic Tradition of Alexandria. Part of this tradition, he claimed, was a Secret Gnosis only for the spiritual or enlightened, and part of this doctrine was the allegorical method itself.77 Clement had good grounds in Alexandria for believing that this was handed down from ancient tradition; the tradition however came not from the Apostles but from Philo. Clement thus made the medium of expounding the Secret Gnosis part of the Secret Gnosis itself, and part of tradition. This was unique among the Churches.78 By the fourth century, however, the allegorical method had become general, except in those churches influenced by Antioch.

The allegorical tradition at Alexandria that we have been considering reached its full flowering in the works of Origen. Since Origen was the pupil and successor of Clement, what was said about Clement above applies to Origen also. But he had his own unique contribution to make. In De Principiis he outlined his theory of scriptural interpretation. For him there were three senses of Scripture, the literal, the moral and the spiritual, corresponding to the three parts of the human being - the body, the soul and the spirit. In his attention to the literal meaning he laid the foundations of scientific exegesis, and may be called the first scientific commentator of the Bible. For him every text had a literal and spiritual meaning, but not every text could be interpreted morally. To obtain the moral and spiritual sense he needed allegorization, and so abundant was his output that his influence on biblical interpretation was paramount until the Reformation.79 We must note this difference, however, between Origen and his successors. He wrote from within the tradition of allegorization. For him it was natural and part of his cultural milieu. This was not so for those who came later. They chose it deliberately, and it is instructive to see why they did so. For example, the contrast between the method of scriptural interpretation used by Basil the Great and that of his brother Gregory is enlightening.

76 ibid., 133-134. See also Wolfson, Philosophy, 47. 
78 Ad. Haer., 3.1. 
Basil the Great disliked allegorization; His sympathies were with the School of Antioch, strengthened, no doubt, by his friendship with Diodorus of Tarsus, and Meletius. Basil prided himself on calling a "spade, a spade":

οίδα νόμους ἀλληγορίας, εἰ παὶ μὴ παρ ' ἐμαυτοῦ ἔξωρων, ἀλλὰ τοῖς παρ' ἑτέρων πεπονημένοις περιτυχόν. Ας οἱ μὴ καταδεχόμενοι τὰς κοινὰς τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐννοίας,...Εγὼ δὲ χόρτον ἀκούσας, χόρτον νοώ, καὶ φυτόν, καὶ ἰχθύν, καὶ θηρίον, καὶ κτήνος, πάντα ώς εἴρηται οὕτως ἐκδέχομαι. ("I know the laws of allegory, even if I did not work them out by myself, but have come across them in the works of others. Those who do not accept the common meaning of the Scriptures.....But when I hear 'grass' I think of grass, and 'plant' and 'fish' and 'wild beast' and 'domestic animal' - I understand everything to mean what is said").

It was probably his controversy with Eunomius that led Basil to stand out so singularly against allegorization, just as the controversy with Arius kept Athanasius to the literal meaning. Certainly, he saw the tendency to allegorize as opening the way to all sorts of heresy:

Do not the Marcionites and Valentinians take their origin from there?

Basil's attitude to the allegorization of secular literature is not so clear. He sees much profit in the study of Greek literature but warns that discrimination is necessary. This would indicate that he took it literally and so was forced to reject some of it as unsuitable. Nowhere does he say everything in Homer is in praise of virtue, and clearly he could not say this unless he was interpreting it allegorically. Admittedly he does not make this statement about Homer on his own authority, and it might be suggested that he was not so well acquainted with Homer, but such an idea would be difficult to sustain, given his learning in literature and philosophy. We are left therefore in some perplexity.

Gregory would not have found his brother's attitude to allegorical interpretation congenial. Though he tried to remain loyal to the spirit of Basil and professed to follow the same laws of interpretation in his commentary on the Hexaemeron, Gregory still managed by subtle argument to explain away the literal meaning of the waters above the firmament, thereby coming into direct conflict with Basil,

80a Hom.9 in Hex., P.G. 29. 188 B-C.
81 de Margerie, op.cit., 138.
82 Hom.2 in Hex., P.G.29.36D.
83 To the Newly Baptised P.G. 29. 36D.
who on this very point had objected to those who interpreted the waters above and below the heavens as the good and bad spirits. Gregory explained Basil's attitude by saying that Basil was here adapting his interpretation to the capacity of his audience - though some may have been able to understand a higher interpretation, most would not have had the education to do so.

There seems to be an element of special pleading here: Gregory would have us believe that with a different congregation Basil would have favoured allegorical interpretation. Gregory saw all his writings as a continuation of Basil's work, but the commentary on the Hexaemeron (de Hominis Opificio) was especially so. It is not surprising, however, that once he had completed this he reverted to allegorization, which was more congenial to him.

Gregory needed the method of allegorization in order to develop his doctrine of mysticism. In fact we can see that Gregory made a deliberate choice in this matter. His first exegetical works the De Hominis Opificio and the Explicatio Apologetica in Hexaemeron were written to complete Basil's work on the Hexaemeron, in which, as we have seen, Basil explicitly rejected allegorization. Towards the end of the second work Gregory asserted with satisfaction that he never distorted the literal sense of the Bible into figurative allegory. Henceforth, however, he sought the spiritual or mystical interpretation only, for it allowed him to theologize freely on the spiritual life without being inhibited by the text. Gregory sought to build up with the help of ancient tradition (from which even askesis and asketes are derived) a complete theory of the content and goal of the Christian ascetic life. He gave monastic life its spiritual form (being more contemplative than his brother Basil) and a theology of monastic asceticism. He did this by presenting Christianity as culminating in the contemplation of the divine Being and its eternal Will, and the sanctification of man as a purification of the soul and a gradual ascent to the divine Being.

As one who did not belong to the Alexandrian tradition Gregory was able to use it in quite a new way. If the best knowledge that we can have in this changing world is orthe doxa (a right view), and if, for Plato, the best way of expressing this was by means of myth, then it seems that, from Gregory's point of view, allegory, myth and parable would be the best ways for God to express himself. He used the biblical stories to shape his spiritual doctrine: "The biblical life of Moses offers a framework and a collection of symbols within it". If Plato's

84 Hom. 3 in Hex., P.G. 29. 73D-76A.
85 Concerning the Hexaemeron, P.G. 44.65 A-B.
86 "It was Gregory of Nyssa who transferred the ideas of Greek paideia in their Platonic form into the life of the ascetic movement that originated during his time in Asia Minor and the Near East and that soon was to display an undreamt-of power of attraction". W. Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (London, 1962), 99-100. See also W. Jaegar, Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius (London, 1965), 22 ff.
followers had seen the Myth of the Cave as god-given and divinely-inspired, then they would have had a warrant for the various suggestions and conclusions that it provoked. But Gregory did have such divinely-inspired stories to work on, and the conclusions that he drew from them were also accepted as a logical deduction from the data of the stories. The point about logical deduction is important. Gregory did not see his allegorization as arbitrary, as Origen's had been. According to his doctrine of Akolouthia 87 he built up a consistent system of interpretation, seeking the meaning of the words he was to interpret from the meaning they have in other contexts. Yet it cannot be denied that he interpreted the text within his own spiritual and doctrinal system, and so deduced his own spiritual doctrine from the text. This fact would have astonished Gregory since he seems to have been at pains to obtain an objective meaning. 88 He admits that there is a measure of contrivance to obtain an objective meaning, 89 and that it is possible to obtain more than one consistent teaching from a text, 90 so that logically he allowed that others might find a different meaning from his, 91 but he would have seen this as the riches hidden in Scripture. From his own point of view, however, there was nothing arbitrary in his method, and we sometimes see his perplexity when he is forced to hazard a guess. 92

The fourth century mystical interpretation of Scripture was, then, the culmination of a long history of interpretation of "inspired" texts among the Greeks. This was inimical to the development of accurate exegesis, but it did allow such writers as Gregory of Nyssa to develop a theology of mysticism, which would not have happened had they been tied to the literal text. "If allegory', as Dodds put it, 'offered the only possible escape from the tyranny of the letter', then Gregory escaped with a vengeance". 93

ADDENDUM

Palestinian Allegorization

There is no evidence to show that Alexandrian allegorizing had any effect on the rabbinical interpretation of the Bible in Palestine. For allegorization to take place in a culture pure allegory must be known and used. There are examples of

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88 Hom.6 in Cant., 6, 191, 5-6. P.G.44.900B.
89 Hom.12 in Cant., 6, 361, 11-15. P.G.44.1032A.
90 ibid., 6, 368, 3-6. P.G.44.1037B.
91 ibid., 6, 368, 3-6. P.G.44.1036C.
92 Hom. 13 in Cant., 6, 393, 15-19. P.G.44.1057B.
pure allegory in the OT. It was a device that suited the prophets; Nathan, for example, used it before David in his allegory of the lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4.)¹ The authors expected the people to recognise allegory and interpret it as such. An important step toward allegorization was taken when the Song of Songs was accepted as canonical. For this to happen it had to be interpreted spiritually, that is, allegorically. This was not the only Scripture that the rabbis interpreted in this way, but such allegorizing was always half-hearted and not extensive.² The literal text was not so important for the Alexandrians, and their arbitrary exegesis indulged in flights of fancy. This was never true in Palestine for there were always rigid rules to control allegorization, and these rules, far from undermining the literal sense, whether juridic or historical, tended to confirm it.³

Examples of allegory are found in the NT, but not frequently. Since Jülicher's monumental study, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu,¹ scholars have been slow to acknowledge allegory in the NT. Jülicher claimed that Jesus, a simple country preacher, could not have used the sophisticated device of allegory. Moreover his parables had only one point to make. The allegorical explanations therefore of Mk 4:13, Mt 13:36-43 and 49-50 could not have been by Jesus. They must have been allegorizations of the early Church. Later scholars are by no means so certain of these points. Vincent Taylor says, "The parables were meant to stimulate thought, to provoke reflection and to lead men to a decision. Explanations of parables may sometimes have been sought by the first hearers, and given by Jesus, as in rabbinic teaching".² Brown makes the point that the Hebrew mashal covers a whole range of literary figures such as parable, allegory, proverb, maxim and simile;" Simple allegory was within the plausible range of Jesus' preaching as we can see from contemporary Qumran and rabbinic examples. A Jesus who spoke exclusively in what moderns define as parables is a 19th century critical creation".³ He admits that the allegorical explanations of the Synoptics may have been expanded by the early Church but he thinks that basically the explanations go back to Jesus.⁴ Given the similarity between

¹ Other examples are the vine or vineyard used by Isaiah (5:107). Hosea (10:1), and Jeremiah (2:14-17) as well as the psalms (80:8-9). Ezekiel uses the allegory of the eagle (17:1-24).
³ The irony is that interpreters were far more likely to interpret an allegory as historic fact, than they were likely to allegorize history. Many took, for example, Ezekiel's dead bones as historical. See Bonsirven, "Exégèse Allégorique...", 520.
⁴ ibid., 391.
parable and allegory it would have been an easy step to read allegory into a parable where perhaps it was not originally intended. Tinsley's comment on the dynamics of parable and allegory is revealing:

It takes on a dynamic and creative life of its own.
It is no longer bound by the intentions of its author.
If Jesus did not want his speech to have this potency, he should have known better than to speak in parables, not to mention allegories! 5

Barnard also poses an intriguing question:

What if the parable of the Good Samaritan did not have one original, simple meaning in Jesus' eyes? What if the parable of the Prodigal Son was, in its original sitz-im leben, an allegory of God's dealings with Israel? Is Augustine so far-fetched in interpreting the latter parable in that way? 6

In commenting on Jn 10, Brown sees a series of parables (vv.1-5) and their allegorical explanations (vv.7ff.). Of the latter he says; "While not all the explanations of 7ff. need come from the one time or the one situation, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that we may find among them the traces of Jesus' own simple allegorical explanation of the parables in X, 1-5". Then he adds; "An effective way to see how simple an allegory we have in the explanation of the parables is to contrast what is said in the Gospel about the gate, the shepherd and the sheep with the elaborate patristic allegories built around John X".7

It is not surprising that Jesus used allegory, seeing that it is used in the OT. But it is not so easy to say if Jesus did use allegorization. If he did it was restrained and not at all like the complex allegorization of the patristic era.

Paul has two examples of allegorization: 1 Cor 9:9 and the Sarah-Hagar argument in Gal 4:21-31. These arguments, however, are in line with rabbinic argumentation and introduce nothing that is extrinsic to the two Testaments.

We may summarize by saying that Allegorization is very rare in the NT and when it does occur it is always in line with OT-NT thinking.