

- a. Much of the interpretation of the Bible is what we might call theological rather than exegetical in the strict sense. The early Fathers faced a number of fundamental theological challenges. Two of the most important were those raised by Judaism and by Gnosticism (including Marcionism). The fundamental issue here was the relationship the Church to the OT. In regard to the first of these challenges, the question was, how could the Christians claim to be the true heirs and correct interpreters of the OT and yet not be Jews? On the other hand, Gnosticism so radically reinterpreted the OT as to make it the work, at least in part, of a strange god.

Much of the concern then of the early Fathers is with the question of the relationship of the testaments: how new is the NT? How can the OT be claimed as a "Christian" book? The solution was worked out mainly along the lines of fulfilled prophecy and typology. The OT belongs to the Christians because it is filled with specific prophecies which have now found their fulfillment in the events surrounding Jesus Christ. Further, the OT is filled with historical foreshadowings (types) of the ultimate realities which have now been manifested in Christ. The fullest example of this kind of argument is seen in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew (ca. 160).

There are about half a dozen major typological themes worked out in these early writers: Adam--Christ; Joshua--Jesus; the sacrifice of Isaac; etc. If you wish to pursue this further, you may consult J. Danielou, From Shadow to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers (Westminster, M.D.: Newman, 1961).

- b. What exegesis there is tends to be limited mainly to short interpretive summaries of passages or to the association of texts. There is little of what we might call grammatical exegesis. It is significant that it is only at the end of this period that the first consecutive biblical commentary is produced. Hippolytus of Rome wrote a commentary on the book of Daniel about the year 200.

Even Hippolytus' work has very little in the way of what we today would call exegesis. They would quote Scripture, but not really explain it.

2. The Alexandrian school--one of the most significant influences on Christian exegesis came from the catechetical school at Alexandria. This city was the home of the Jewish philosopher Philo and was a major center of Hellenistic culture. The school was founded in the late second century by a man named Pantaeus, who was then succeeded by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. While we know little of Pantaeus, we have a substantial number of writings from Clement and Origen. Both relied heavily on allegorization in the interpretation of Scripture.

Origen (ca. 185-253) was undoubtedly one of the great minds of the church and one of its most prolific writers. Because of later controversies surrounding his ideas, most of Origen's work has been destroyed. The complete list of his writings drawn up by Eusebius