

is lost, but according to Jerome, who used it, the treatises numbered 2000. His exegetical works covered all the books of the OT and NT in one of three forms: scholia, homilies, or commentaries. Today we have parts of only two of the commentaries: those on John and on Matthew.

- a. Hermeneutics: Origen gave us the first technical treatise on hermeneutics from a Christian perspective. It is found in book IV of his work On First Principles from which I take the following excerpts.

(II, 4) Indeed, it seems to us that the correct method of approaching the Scriptures and grasping their sense is the following, taking it from the texts themselves. In the Proverbs of Solomon we find this kind of directive concerning divine doctrines in Scripture: "And you, write down those things threefold in your counsel and wisdom that you may reply with words of truth to those who ask you" [Prov. 22:20-21]. This means, one should inscribe on one's soul the intentions of the holy literature in a threefold manner; the simpler person might be edified by the flesh of Scripture, as it were (flesh is our designation for the obvious understanding), the somewhat more advanced by its soul, as it were; but the person who is perfect and approaches the apostle's description: "Among the perfect we impart wisdom although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away; but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" [1 Cor. 2:6-7], by the spiritual law which contains "a shadow of the good things to come" [Heb. 10:1]. For just as the human being consists of body, soul, and spirit, so does Scripture which God has arranged to be given for the salvation of humankind.

(II, 9) But if the usefulness of the legal prescriptions as well as the logical coherence and the smooth flow of the historical narrative were automatically evident everywhere, we would not believe that it is possible to find some other sense in the Scriptures besides the obvious one. For this reason the Word of God has arranged the insertion of certain offensive features, of stumbling blocks and impossibilities amid the law and historical narrative. He wanted to avoid that, being totally carried away by the plain text and its unspoiled charm, we either would disregard its teachings altogether because we did not find any lessons worthy of God, or would refuse to move beyond the letter and not learn anything more divine.

Quoted from K. Froehlich, transl. and ed., Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).