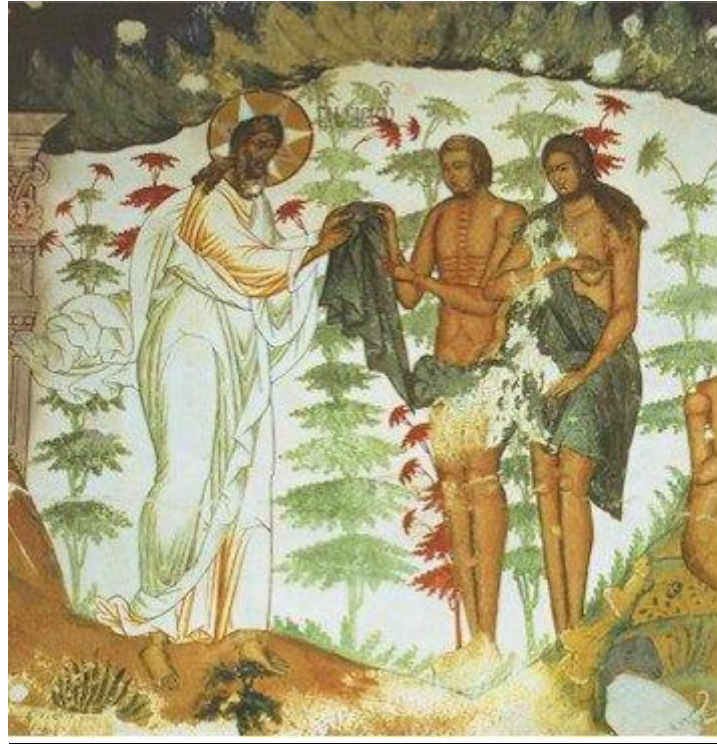


Allegory and Typology in Genesis, the Scriptures generally and the Fathers - and why this matters for our Christian lives ...



The occasional use of allegory in the Scriptures, is where persons and/or events or stories convey, symbolically, either a hidden or ulterior meaning. The only unambiguous allegorising in Genesis as far as I am aware is the reference to the heel bruising the serpent in Genesis 3:15. "Allegory" is a very specific form of symbolism where a sub narrative is discerned underneath the main narrative. Adam and Eve are representative figures of all humankind down the ages, not allegorical ones. In the New Testament, perhaps only the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12 // Matthew 21:33-46) is a true allegory, simply because there is a plain (not hidden) equivalence in the story pointing to the Father, Christ and Israel. In the Fathers, allegory is really quite uncommon. The most egregious example of distorted exegesis is given by St Augustine's interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which he allegorises in terms of each actor in the narrative standing for someone or

something else. He almost entirely neglects the central point of the parable: "who is my neighbour?" All parables have one central point, and this should not be obscured by overlaying it with other meanings and references (allegory).

Allegory is also not the same as typology, where the references prophetically allude to subsequent events that connect to them. An example of typology is the bush in the wilderness that was "burning" yet unconsumed. Since God's Word (the Logos NOT the Bible!) was speaking to Moses and since the bush was unharmed by the fire of the Godhead, the Fathers took this to be a "type" of the Incarnation. On account of her purity, the Virgin's womb was the "bush" because she was not consumed by the Child within her. This is not allegory at all because if the bush were an allegory it would have direct symbolic references at the time of the incident itself. Typology is retroactive and sees in former things presages of the new.

Adam and Eve then are representative figures, corporate personalities, in both Jewish and Christian biblical exegesis ... corporate personalities indicating both who we are and how we are (created yet fallen). Their story is OUR story. If I were to say that: "Uncle Sam once again spread his wings in the misadventure of Iraq," nobody would dream of concluding (for the sentence to be true) that "Uncle Sam" was an actual person. Everyone knows that "Uncle Sam" is the corporate personality of the US. However, we use that term because human beings relate most vividly to persons in a narrative not ideas or conglomerates. It is the same with Adam and Eve, although much more powerfully because they represent ALL of us in a salvation context. In the New Testament St Paul refers to the final, last or new Adam as Christ and there are representative characteristics in each (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 and 45-49). Adam has a corporate personality (all humankind) and Christ, in the Person of the Logos, Whom He is, incorporates in the Incarnation all that is human and redeems it, such that His corporate personality is now the Church in Him,

the Body of Christ. Adam and Eve are venerated as saints in the Orthodox Church because they stand for a new regenerated humanity ... as in the icon of the resurrection where they are pulled by Christ out of the grave. They HAVE TO BE corporate personalities for that icon to "work."

The Scriptures contain other references to the theological fusion of corporate personalities, notably the Suffering Servant motif in Isaiah 52 and 53. Sometimes the Servant is characterised as the suffering liberator (the Messiah), at other times as Israel himself (pre-figuring the Church of the Messiah).

In the Fathers, St Irenaeus went on to conclude that the Virgin was the New Eve because she incorporated in the Church all those whose sin was undone by her voluntary assent to God's work in the Incarnation. In the Annunciation and Virginal conception of Jesus, she bruised the serpent's heel. She appears again in this context in Revelation 12:1-6 where she becomes a type of the persecuted Church (the context of that book).

NOTHING of the power of Genesis 1-3 is taken away by concluding that Adam and Eve are representative figures not historically verifiable individuals. Indeed, to assume that they are individuals makes the theological connections more obscure, quite aside from the dissonance between such an approach and what we know about human origins from the fossil and DNA records. Quite aside also from the different genres of sacred literature we find in the Scriptures themselves, a diversity of genre and interpretation that the Fathers themselves follow and reflect ... not just in Alexandria (Origen et. al.) but in Antioch as well.

The Scriptures operate on many different levels. Sometimes the history is to the forefront along with the significance, sometimes the history, more obscurely is in the background but still provides the context for the story. Is it necessary, for example to believe that Job existed for this magnificent example of spiritual wisdom

literature to speak to our condition? Of course not. Did he actually exist? Probably, yes. Is that issue crucial for the wisdom in the book? No. Are all the events in Job historical in character? How could they be when the work contains a scene in the beginning of the book where Satan appears before God to contend for Job's soul?! Who were the witnesses to that dialogue? Does that matter that nobody was there at the encounter to record it? No. Was it perhaps revealed to Job in a dream subsequently? Maybe. Who knows?! Such a dream or vision is not recorded in the book ... and so on and so on. These pointless and irrelevant questions entirely miss the point of wisdom literature. Job is a book about how we deal with innocent suffering in the context of faith. THAT'S the point! It's the same with Adam and Eve ... it's OUR story until Christ came.