Rethinking How We Discuss the Ancient Interpretive Practice of Allegory:

Aligning Current Conversations with Ancient Practices

The ancient interpretive practice of allegory can be challenging to understand within its historical context. One reason for this challenge is the dissonance between (1) the ways in which current conversations about the ancient interpretive practice of allegory discuss it and (2) how this practice actually operated within its historical context. This paper discusses three areas of dissonance and provides helpful solutions based upon this presenter's own examination of over fifty allegorical expressions from Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Palestine. This paper moves the scholarly conversation on ancient allegory forward by closing three gaps between how allegory is discussed today and how it operated within the ancient world.

The first gap is that there are variegated definitions and uses of the term "allegory." Of greatest significance are the distinctions of "allegory" and "allegoresis." This paper demonstrates that the concepts behind these terms—"allegory" as "creation of text" and "allegoresis" as "response to text"—are not useful for understanding how the ancient interpretive practice of allegory operated. Rather than discard these terms, this paper presents a way to employ them that not only is useful but also aligns with the character of allegory within the ancient world.

The second gap is that the distinction between "prescription" and "description" often is not maintained in discussions of ancient allegory. The concepts behind these terms— "prescription" as "suggestion" and "description" as "observation"—are distinct but not mutually exclusive. This paper examines how these concepts operated within the ancient interpretive practice of allegory and provides a meaningful way to employ them in current conversations.

The third gap is that some recent interpretive frameworks—those used to distinguish one expression of ancient allegory from another—are anachronistic. For example, some frameworks are based on concerns that were not the concerns of ancient allegorists. Of greatest significance are the frameworks of "allegory" and "typology" and the concerns upon which they are based (e.g., "terminology" and "historicity"). This paper demonstrates why these frameworks cannot produce historically-accurate understandings of ancient allegory and proposes different frameworks that contextualize our understandings of the ancient practice appropriately within its historical context.

This paper will reference every expression of the ancient interpretive practice of allegory that is used to support its arguments. Time, however, allows only some examples to be discussed at length (when helpful for the argument). The authors and texts used are as follows:

From Egypt, (1) Aristobulus, (2) *The Blinding of Truth,* (3) *The Book of the Dead*, (4) *The Lion and the Mouse,* (5) Philo, (6) Pseudo-Aristeas, (7) Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus, (8) *The Quarrel of the Body and the Head*, and (9) *The War of Cats and Mice*.

From Greece, (1) *Allegory of the Cave*, (2) apologists of Homer (e.g., Theagenes of Rhegium and Pherecydes of Scyros), (3) Artemediorus, (4) Callimachus (via Athenaeus), (5) Chrysippus (via Plutarch), (6) Cicero (i.e., his description of allegory as found in Greece), (7) Demades (via Pseudo-Demetrius), (8) Heraclitus, (9) Hermogenes, (10) Plutarch, (11) Pseudo-Demetrius, (12) Quintilian (i.e., his description of allegory as found in Greece), (13) Strabo, (14) Tryphon, and (15) Tryphon II.

From Italy, (1) Cicero, (2) Horace, (3) Lucretius, (4) Ovid, (5) Quintilian, (6) *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and (7) Virgil.

From Palestine, (1) Hebrew book of 2 Samuel, (2) Hebrew book of Ezekiel, (3) Hebrew book of Psalms, (4) Josephus (*in absentia*), (5) letters of the Apostle Paul, and (6) the sectarian texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls (i.e. *Damascus Document* and *Pesher Habakkuk*).