

Exegesis from Clement to Gregory: *historia* and *oikonomia*

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1) “Therefore, mosaic philosophy is divided into four parts: the historical part (τὸ ἱστορικὸν); that which is legislative, strictly speaking, whose proper objective is moral activity; the third part is that which concerns worship and which is proper to the natural consideration; and fourth and most important, the theological form, contemplation, which Plato says is proper to true mysteries.” (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 28, 176, 1, 1 – 2, 3: GCS 52, 108)

2) “By comparing histories with histories and ethical discourse with laws and commandments, you see, [Celsus] which are better suited to convert, even suddenly, those who listen, and which of them can harm the listener.” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 18, 4-7: SCh 132, 120)

3) “And we have said this as an anticipation for the whole history (ἱστορίαν) recounted in the Gospels as regards Jesus, not to incite the people of the most acute ingenuity to a naive and irrational faith, but with the intention of showing that, for those who read, more prudence and more research is necessary and, so to speak, it is necessary to delve into the will of those who have written, in order to discover for what purpose each thing has been written.” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 42, 24-30, SCh 132, 188)

4) “In fact, we do not need to think that historical realities (τὰ ἱστορικά) are figures of historical realities (ἱστορικῶν) and that corporeal realities are figures of corporeal realities, but the corporeal realities are figures of spiritual reality, and historical realities (τὰ ἱστορικά) of intellectual realities (νοητῶν).” (Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*, X, 18, 110, 4-6: SCh 157, 448)

5) “If the story (ἱστορία) of what is said of him is a simple and unadorned narrative, since our narrative purposely omits the amplifications of facts cleverly contrived, so also this, for those who judge the facts rightly, would be no small testimony, so as not to purposely amplify the miracles of him whom we commemorate. Instead, the remembrance of what he accomplished (τὴν μνήμην τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν πραγμάτων), like an innate beauty flourishing on a face without any superfluous care of cosmetic art, is sufficient for the most perfect praise.” (Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, GNO X/1, 26, 25 – 27, 6)

6) “If it is possible to change the tone of voice according to the noble example (μεγαλοφυΐαν) of the Apostle (cf. Gal 4, 20) and understand allegorically (ἀλληγορικῶς) the meaning of history (τὸν νοῦν τῆς ἱστορίας), even if clearly the historical truth remains valid (τῆς ἱστορικῆς ἀληθείας).” (Gregory of Nyssa, II, *Contra Eunomium*, 85, 1-4; GNO I, 251, 22-25)

7) “And the Apostle says that what is to be found by a higher consideration is the Lord, that is, the Spirit. In fact, he says that when one is converted to the Lord, the veil is removed: the Lord is the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:13-14). And he says this by contrasting the Lordship of the Spirit with the slavery of the letter. In fact, just as he contrasts that which gives life with that which gives death, so he contrasts the Lord with slavery.” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, III, 5, 11, 5 – 12, 3; GNO II, 164, 4-11)

8) “And indeed the great Apostle says that the Law is spiritual, including in the name Law also the historical narratives (τὰ ἱστορικὰ διηγήματα), so that all Scripture inspired by God is law to those who read it, for it teaches those who listen attentively not only by evident precepts, but also by narratives of historical facts (διὰ τῶν ἱστορικῶν διηγημάτων), in order to a knowledge of the mysteries (παιδεύουσαν παιδεύουσαν πρὸς τε γινῶσιν τῶν μυστηρίων) and a pure life (πρὸς καθαρὰν πολιτείαν); the great Apostle, therefore, did exegesis as he pleased, seeking utility (πρὸς τὸ ὠφέλιμον) without worrying about what to call the form of his exegesis (τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἐξηγήσεως).”

(Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum*, GNO VI, 5, 9-18)

9) “I think that to those who have been initiated into the practice (τῷ μεμνημένῳ) of historical explana-

tion (τῆς ἱστορικῆς ὑφηγήσεως) it is clear, from what has been said, the coherent succession (τὴν ἀκολουθίαν) of progress in virtue, which the discourse demonstrates by narrating, in the appropriate order (ἀκολουθῶς), the series of meanings hidden in the historical realities (τῶν ἱστορικῶν αἰνιγμάτων).” (Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, II, 39, 1-4; 128)

10) “Behold the blessed Sabbath of the first creation of the world, recognize by that Sabbath that this Sabbath is the day of rest, which God blessed more than all other days. For on this day truly rested the Only-Begotten One who is God from all His work, celebrating the Sabbath in His own flesh, by the economy according to His death (διὰ τῆς κατὰ τὸν θάνατον οἰκονομίας), and returning again, by virtue of the resurrection, to be what he was, he raised with himself all that lay dead, becoming life and resurrection and dawn, aurora and day for those who were in darkness and the shadow of death. Even [sacred] history (ἡ ἱστορία) is full of the corresponding blessing for you: the father of Isaac does not spare his beloved son, and the Only-Begotten becomes an offering and sacrifice and the lamb sacrificed in his place. It is indeed possible to see in the [sacred] story (ἐν τῇ ἱστορίᾳ) the whole mystery of piety (πᾶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον).” (Gregory of Nyssa, *De tridui*, GNO X/2, 274, 12 – 275, 4)

11) “Philosophy according to the divine tradition, in fact, affirms and confirms providence. Because if this were eliminated, the economy that concerns the Savior (ἡ περὶ τὸν σωτῆρα οἰκονομία) would seem to be a myth, and we would be motivated according to elements of the world and not according to Christ (Col 2, 8). In fact, the teaching that is faithful to Christ professes the divinity of the Creator, connects providence even with individual events, and knows that the nature of the elements is mutable and created, teaching one to act according to the possibility of being made similar to God and to accept the economy (τὴν οἰκονομίαν) as a guide to each instruction.” (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I, 11, 52, 2, 1- 3, 5, GCS 52, 34)

12) “And for the desire of making us perfect through a series of gradual stages that lead to salvation and are adapted to an effective education, the beautiful economy serves (τῇ καλῇ οἰκονομίᾳ) the Logos, full of love for men, first exhorting, then educating, and finally teaching.” (Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, I, 1, 3, 3, 5-9: SCh 70,112)

13) “Remaining immutable in His essence [God] condescends to cure the human realities with His providence and economy (τῇ προνοίᾳ καὶ τῇ οἰκονομίᾳ).” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, IV, 14, 18-19: SCh 136, 216)

14) “Before becoming visible and in the flesh [the Word] had already come for those who were perfect.” (Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*, I, 7, 38, 1-2: SCh 120, 80)

15) “But we want to explain how his subtle corporeal disappearance from the scaffold would not be useful to the whole economy (τὴν οἰκονομίαν ὅλην). The events that happened to Jesus and that were put into writing do not contain in the mere writing (ψιλῆ τῇ λέξει) and in the narrative (τῇ ἱστορίᾳ) the whole understanding (θεωρίαν) of truth. In fact it shows that each of them is also a symbol (σύμβολον) of something else for those who know how to more intelligently question Scripture.” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 69, 1-7: SCh 132, 446)

16) “So that in nothing can the purpose (ὁ σκοπός) of the divine economy (τῆς θείας οἰκονομίας) be harmed, nor is any contribution of time with regard to the mystery (πρὸς τὸ μυστήριον) diminished in the passage of time.” (Gregory of Nyssa, *In Basilium*, GNO X/1, 114, 14-17)

17) “It can be observed that this is also the case in the Gospels, where the discourse, which is conducted according to what is convenient to the subject, signifies the divine element by means of the higher and more suitable indication to God, while it signifies the human element by means of the lower and humble one. Likewise also in this part [of the verse] we can see that Solomon is prophetically moved and has conveyed the whole mystery of the economy (τὸ τῆς οἰκονομίας μυστήριον)” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III, 1, 45, 7 – 46, 3; GNO II, 19, 14-20)