



THE METHOD OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO ORIGEN: Observations of Origen's Homily on Rahab in Joshua 2:1-24

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Abstract

The practice of interpreting Scripture by the Church Fathers has become a precious legacy and has significantly contributed to the development of current methods of interpreting Scripture. One of the figures in this context is Origen. This paper explores Origen's method of scriptural interpretation through observation of his homily on the figure and story of Rahab (Jos 2:1–24) contained in his Homilies on Joshua. The research method used is a literature study. Based on the analysis of his homily on Rahab, it was found that Origen intensely used allegory as a method to convey profound spiritual meaning in interpreting Scripture. In addition, he also combined allegorical with other methods such as typological, Scriptura scripturae interpres, Christological, and ecclesiological. The findings can make significant contributions for Christians today. First, by interpreting the physical violence in the story of Rahab as 'spiritual violence', Christians are invited to counteract and prevent the misuse of violent texts in Scripture as motivation and justification for committing wrongdoing. Secondly, by placing Rahab as a symbol of divine love and mercy, Origen shows that all people can belong to the family of God through faith in Jesus, repentance, and good deeds.

Keywords: *Origen, method of scripture interpretation, homily, Rahab, allegory, typology.*

Abstrak

Praktik penafsiran Kitab Suci oleh para Bapa Gereja telah memberikan kontribusi besar terhadap perkembangan metode penafsiran Kitab Suci saat ini. Salah satu tokoh penting dalam konteks ini adalah Origenes. Tulisan ini berusaha mengeksplorasi metode penafsiran Kitab Suci menurut Origenes, melalui observasi terhadap homilinya tentang sosok dan kisah Rahab (Yos. 2:1-24) yang dimuat dalam *Homilies on Joshua*. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam tulisan ini adalah studi literatur. Dari analisis terhadap homilinya tentang Rahab, ditemukan bahwa Origenes secara intensif menggunakan alegori untuk menyampaikan makna rohani yang mendalam dalam menafsirkan Kitab Suci. Selain itu, ia juga mengkombinasikan alegori dengan metode-metode lain seperti



tipologi, Scriptura scripturae interpres, kristologis, dan eklesiologis. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi signifikan bagi umat Kristen saat ini. Pertama, dengan menafsirkan kekerasan fisik dalam kisah Rahab sebagai 'kekerasan rohani', umat Kristiani diajak untuk mencegah penyalahgunaan teks-teks kekerasan dalam Alkitab sebagai motivasi dan pembenaran untuk melakukan kesalahan. Kedua, dengan menempatkan Rahab sebagai simbol kasih dan belas kasihan ilahi, Origenes menunjukkan bahwa semua orang dapat menjadi bagian dari keluarga Allah melalui iman kepada Yesus, pertobatan, dan perbuatan baik.

Katakunci: *Origenes, metode panafsiran Kitab Suci, homili, Rahab, alegori, tipologi*

A. Introduction

Scripture, as one of the foundations of Catholic teaching, not only provides historical narratives and moral guidance but is also at the heart of Catholics' theological understanding. Throughout Christian history, the Church Fathers have made valuable contributions through their profound and inspiring interpretations of Scripture. Through their interpretation, we can see how the Scriptures shaped and guided early Christians' understanding of doctrine, morality, and spiritual life. The Patristic period, or the period of the Church Fathers, is considered to begin at the end of the New Testament period (about 100 CE) and continue until about the 8th century CE. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Christian writings of the first century were nothing but interpretations of the Scripture texts.¹

One of the Church Fathers who extensively 'worked' with the Bible was Origen (183-245). Origen was the first early Christian scholar to work through biblical books systematically and provide Christian exegesis for the biblical canon. He wrote many homilies, commentaries, and exegetical notes on Scripture.² Origen's writings on the Bible enormously influenced later Christian biblical interpretation.³

In agreement with Mckenzie, Henri de Lubac believes that the interpreters need to also approach Origen's homilies in order to understand his interpretational framework. The reason why is that these are exegetical applications of Origen.⁴ Therefore, this paper will discuss the method of interpreting Scripture according to Origen by analyzing his homily. The Bible text that will be analyzed to understand his interpretation method is the story of Rahab in Joshua 2:1–24, found in his Homilies on Joshua. By exploring Origen's interpretation of the story and character of Rahab, it is hoped that we can find unique aspects of his interpretation that may not be found in other interpretations.

B. Method

This paper uses a literature study method. The primary source is Origen's homily on the story and character of Rahab in *Homilies on Joshua*, translated by Barbara J. Bruce. The secondary sources are other writings that discuss Origen's method of interpreting Scripture. In this paper, I will first analyze Origen's homily on the story and character of Rahab. Then, I will discuss and explain Origen's method of interpreting Scripture based on observations of his homily.

¹ Agus Widodo, "Metode Menafsirkan Kitab Suci Menurut Origenes: Obeservasi Atas Homili Origenes Tentang Yes 7:10-15," *Orientasi Baru*, 25, no. 2 (Oktober, 2016): 137.

² Michael Graves, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 66.

³ The Church Fathers who used Origen's interpretation method include Eusebius of Caesarea, Evagrius of Ponticus, Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus of Alexandria, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome of Stridon. Graves, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 66-67; Widodo, "Metode Menafsirkan Kitab Suci Menurut Origenes," 138, 154.

⁴ Liviu Ursache, "Origen's Interpretational Framework," *Hermeneia: Journal of Hermeneutics, Art Theory and Criticism* 14, (2014): 108. <https://hermeneia.ro/archive/nr-14-2014-concept-and-image-2/>.

C. Result And Discussion

1. Background of *Homilies on Joshua*

The book of Joshua is one of the many books that Origen studied and interpreted. His interpretation of this book was poured into his homilies.⁵ Origen's homilies on Joshua are only available in Rufinus' Latin translation, aside from a few fragments found in *The Philocalia* of Origen and Procopius's *Catena on the Octateuch*.⁶ This study uses Barbara J. Bruce's English version of Origen's Homilies on Joshua. Origen's follower Pamphilus claimed that Origen never recorded his homilies; instead, they were given in person, and scribes recorded his words so future generations could hear them.⁷

The clues in Origen's homilies on Joshua and Jeremiah lead most scholars to estimate that the *Homilies on Joshua* were written about 249-250 CE.⁸ In his homily on Jeremiah, Origen speaks of missing the days when martyrdom served to strengthen the faith of believers, which leads most scholars to date that the homily on Jeremiah was written shortly after the persecution was reduced, i.e., in 240 CE. There also appear to be signs that Christians were once again facing persecution, as he makes reference to his homilies on Jeremiah in his Joshua homilies. These indications suggest that Origen wrote his final homilies on Joshua sometime during the Decian persecution (249–250), which is also when he passed away. Although its dating is uncertain, this homily still shows Origen's concern for the people and their leaders, who had become weak in faith.⁹

Generally, the way Origen expounded the Scriptures in the Homilies on Joshua was not by examining each clause separately, as in a commentary, but a presentation geared to open up the minds of the hearers and stir up their spirit.¹⁰ Origen was likely to take the Scripture as a whole rather than to exegete each passage. He thought that the exegetical idea could not be separated from the overview.¹¹ In this homily, Origen touches on deeper mysteries reserved for those who fully dedicate themselves and those willing to listen. What is important in his eyes is not to speculate on the profound meaning of the Bible but to receive it with a living faith and to "adapt one's conduct to the words of truth" it contains.¹²

2. Analysis of Origen's Homily on the Story and Character of Rahab (Joshua 2:1-24)

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites were ready to enter the Promised Land. They were immediately met with a tremendous challenge: the city of Jericho, the first city conquered in Canaan. Joshua, as the leader of Israel, in place of Moses, sent two spies to scout the

⁵ Other homilies from Origen include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Judges, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Graves, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 66.

⁶ Only twenty of Origen's 574 known homilies on Jeremiah and one on 1 Samuel survived the purges of the fifth and sixth centuries in their Greek form. About 250 endured in Jerome and Rufinus' Latin translations. Barbara J. Bruce, "Introduction," in Origen, *Homilies on Joshua (Fathers of the Church Patristic Series)*, trans. Barbara J. Bruce, ed. Cynthia White (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 13.

⁷ J. Bruce, "Introduction," 19.

⁸ J. Bruce, "Introduction," 19.

⁹ J. Bruce, "Introduction," 19.

¹⁰ J. Bruce, "Introduction," 15.

¹¹ Ursache, "Origen's Interpretational Framework," 110.

¹² Ursache, "Origen's Interpretational Framework," 110.

city. On the way, these two spies happened to come to the place where Rahab and the king of Jericho ordered that the spies be arrested. Rahab keeps them safe and helps the spies escape.

To understand how Origen reads the story of Rahab in Joshua 2, we must first understand his view on the figure of Joshua. Origen never considered the Book of Joshua as a historical event because he saw Joshua as a model of Jesus rather than a historical man. Origen states that,

Joshua does not so much indicate to us the deeds of the son of Nun, as it represents for us the mysteries of Jesus my Lord.¹³

Although the Book of Joshua is literally about a Jewish military leader, for Origen, it is primarily about Jesus, who leads Christians into battle against passions.¹⁴

Therefore, our Lord Jesus will come, and he will come with the sound of trumpets. But just now, let us pray that he may come and destroy “the world that lay in wickedness” and all things that are in the world, because “everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes.”¹⁵

Origen’s description of Joshua is relevant and helpful in understanding how he interpreted the story of Rahab in his homily.

As previously stated, Origen did not provide a precise chronological sequence (explaining verse by verse) of the tale of Rahab in Joshua 2. Of the 26 parts of Origen’s homily on the Book of Joshua, Rahab is mentioned separately in only a few parts. Origen introduces the character of Rahab in his first homily, where he refers to her as a “harlot” (see Jos 2:1).

...our Jesus sends spies to the king of Jericho, and they are received hospitably by a prostitute.¹⁶

In his third homily, Origen clarifies that the harlot he refers to is Rahab.

...the spies are sent by Jesus to Jericho and are received by the prostitute Rahab.¹⁷

There is no doubt that most of the Church Fathers regarded Rahab as a “prostitute”.¹⁸ Some Church Fathers appear to have been embarrassed by Rahab’s profession and attempted in various ways to limit her history of sexual immorality. For example, Ambrose (340-395) described her as a “chaste” harlot. Here, Ambrose adds the adjective ‘casta’ (sacred) to this attribute and uses the term ‘casta meretrix’ (sacred harlot) regarding Rahab as a type of the Church.¹⁹ Ephrem, on the other hand, praised her sexual ‘boldness’ because it was used to serve Christ.²⁰

Rahab was no longer identified as a prostitute after she received both spies in her home, according to Origen.

¹³ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.3 (Barbara J. Bruce, 29).

¹⁴ Mark Chenoweth, “Origen’s Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua,” *The Christian Libertarian Review* 2, (2019): 101.

¹⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 6.3 (Barbara J. Bruce, 72-73).

¹⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.4 (Barbara J. Bruce, 31). In Origen’s homily on Joshua, the word harlot or prostitute often relates to the figure of Rahab.

¹⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.3 (Barbara J. Bruce, 46).

¹⁸ See Augustine, “Exposition on Psalm 87:5,” <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801087.htm>; Chrysostom, “Homily 27 on Hebrews 3,” <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240227.htm>; Irenaeus, “Against Heresies Book 1 Chap. 13,” <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103113.htm>; Clement, “First Epistle to the Corinthians 6:5” <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>.

¹⁹ J.P.K. Kritzinger, “Rahab, Illa Meretrix,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 17, no. 1 (2006): 23.

²⁰ Phil J. Botha, “Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary-The Bold Women in Ephrem the Syrian’s Hymn *De Nativitate* 9,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 17, no.1 (2006): 2, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10226486.2006.11745765>.

...the prostitute who received the spies sent by Jesus was no longer a prostitute since she received them.²¹ Once she was a prostitute, but now “a pure virgin, to one man” she has been united, to Christ.²²

The spies received by Rahab were understood by Origen as “messengers of God” who came to prepare the way for Jesus.

Those spies, who are sent before the face of Jesus, can also be considered the messengers of God, just as it is written, “Behold I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your paths” (Mt 11.10; Mk 1.2). This passage, fulfilled invisibly through others, was fulfilled visibly through John, about whom this was also written. Because the scribes and Pharisees did not believe him, the Lord spoke concerning the baptism of John and said that the “prostitutes and publicans who believed” (Mt 21.32) were baptized. The same thing is fulfilled in the fact that the prostitute received the spies of Jesus and is snatched away and brought back from the destruction of every hostile nation.²³

Here, Origen describes John the Baptist as one of God’s messengers who came to prepare the way for Jesus.²⁴ In Matthew 21:32, we read that “...John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you (the scribes and Pharisees) did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.” Origen interpreted Rahab’s acceptance of Jesus’ “messengers” in Jericho as analogous to the reality in which prostitutes accepted and supported Jesus’ teachings while his opponents rejected them. Rahab was finally lifted from the gates of destruction due to her good works.

...the prostitute received the spies of Jesus and is snatched away and brought back from the destruction.²⁵

Further, Origen reinterpreted Rahab’s name as “breadth”, in which he wanted to connect the figure of Rahab with the Church.

Let us see, finally, who that prostitute is. She is called Rahab, but Rahab means “breadth.” What is breadth, therefore, if not this Church of Christ, which is gathered together from sinners as if from prostitution? She says, “That place is too narrow for me. Make me a place where I may dwell. Yet who has nurtured these for me?” (Is 49.20–21). And again, it is said to her, “Lengthen your stakes and enlarge your tents” (Is 54.2). Therefore, that one is “breadth,” the one who received the spies of Jesus.²⁶

In this context, Rahab is depicted as a symbol of the Church of Christ, collected from sinners as if from prostitution. Rahab, whose name means “breadth”, symbolizes the inclusive and open nature of the church to all, regardless of background or past. The church, like Rahab, provided shelter and reception for those considered outcasts by society. The phrase “lengthen your stakes and enlarge your tents” in Is 54:2, as cited by Origen, refers to the church’s expansion to accommodate an increasing number of people seeking salvation and acceptance.

²¹ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.4 (Barbara J. Bruce, 31).

²² Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 6.4 (Barbara J. Bruce, 73).

²³ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.3 (Barbara J. Bruce, 46-47).

²⁴ Origen described angels as messenger and John the Baptist as the incarnate angel who prepared the way for Christ. Origen, “Commentary on John,” *Book 1:13-14*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101501.htm>.

²⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.3 (Barbara J. Bruce, 47).

²⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.4 (Barbara J. Bruce, 47).

Origen, who gave Rahab a new name and changed her ‘identity,’ was influenced by faith, which was evident in Rahab’s genuine and good actions. Origen saw Rahab as an example of the transformative power of faith. He shows that even someone who comes from an unkind background can be changed by faith and become part of God’s plan.

...prostitute who received the spies of Jesus...stations those she has received in the higher places and deposits them in the high and lofty mysteries of faith. For no one who is sent by Jesus is found down below lying on the ground, but remains in the higher places. Not only that person persists in the higher places and summits, but also the prostitute who receives them becomes, instead of a prostitute, a prophet. For she says, “I know that the Lord your God has delivered this land to you” (Jos 2:9). You see how that one who was once a prostitute and impious and unclean, is now filled with the Holy Spirit: She makes confession of past things, has faith in present things, prophecies and foretells future things. Thus Rahab, whose name means “breadth,” is extended and goes forward to where “his sound goes forth into all the earth” (Ps 19.4; Rom 10.18).²⁷

Origen begins by saying that Rahab placed the spies she had received in higher places and kept them in the high and sublime mysteries of faith. It means that Rahab has raised the spies of Jesus to a higher level in their understanding of God. He has helped them to see and understand divine truth. Origen later said that Rahab had become a “prophet.” It means that Rahab has become a person who proclaims God’s message. He had helped the spies to understand God’s plan for Israel. This was further proven when Rahab told the spies, “I know that the Lord your God has delivered this land to you” (Jos 2: 9) and gave the spies ‘good advice’:

“Go through the mountains” (Jos 2:16). Do not proceed through the valleys, shun low and dispirited things, proclaim those things that are lofty and sublime.²⁸

Rahab’s advice to the spies to “go through the mountains” is a metaphorical instruction to pursue the path of spiritual elevation and divine enlightenment. Mountains symbolize the heights of spiritual understanding and divine nature. By urging the spies to traverse this mountainous area, Rahab essentially guided them to a life of higher consciousness and a relationship with God. Further, Rahab’s advice to “do not proceed through the valleys, shun low and dispirited things” indicates a rejection of worldly pursuits, worldly distractions, and negative emotions. The valleys represent a world full of earthly concerns and limits that might stifle spiritual growth. Rahab encourages the spies to focus on their spiritual objectives. Rahab also had been filled with the Holy Spirit, according to Origen. It shows that Rahab has experienced God’s presence and power in her life. She was changed into a new person by the Holy Spirit. Rahab, whose name means “breadth,” advanced to the point that her voice could be heard by all the earth (cf. Ps 19.4; Rom 10.18). Therefore, she might be an example to everyone.

Next, Origen interpreted the scarlet thread that Rahab hung in the window of her house to save her and her family as a symbol of the blood of Christ shed on the cross.

She herself puts the scarlet-colored sign in her house, through which she is bound to be saved from the destruction of the city (Jos 2.18–21). No other sign would have been accepted, except the scarlet-colored one that carried the sign of blood. For she knew there was no salvation

²⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.4 (Barbara J. Bruce, 48).

²⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 49).

for anyone except in the blood of Christ.” Also, this commandment is given to the person who was once a prostitute: “All,” it says, “who will be found in your house will be saved. But concerning those who go out from the house, we ourselves are free of them by your oath” (Jos 2.17). Therefore, if anyone wants to be saved, let him come into the house of this one who was once a prostitute. Even if anyone from that people wants to be saved, let him come in order to be able to attain salvation. Let him come to this house in which the blood of Christ is the sign of redemption.... Let no one persuade himself, let no one deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved. If anyone goes outside, he is responsible for his own death. This is the significance of the blood, for this is also the purification that is manifest through the blood.²⁹

Here, Origen also wants to underline that sinners can be saved only in the house of one who has been a prostitute. Nevertheless, all outside Rahab’s house shall perish, just as all outside the Church.³⁰ In this context, the well-known principle, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, appears in Origen’s interpretation, in which only those in Rahab’s house are saved.³¹

Again, salvation came by the sign of the scarlet thread that hung at the window. Here, Origen uses the analogy of the ‘window’ with the incarnation of Jesus Christ to see the divine glory. Just as the windows that enable the householder to see outside, the divine glory can also be seen through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus, salvation was also given through the ‘window’.

...window is that which illumines the house and through which we receive light... the incarnation of the Savior did not give us pure wine and the whole aspect of divinity, but through his incarnation, just as through the window, he makes us behold the splendor of the divinity. For that reason, so it seems to me, the sign of salvation was given through a window.³²

Rahab showed strong faith, along with her entire family, and accepted the Israeli spies with dedication. It caused her to be fully accepted in the community of the Israelites, and even Origen stated that Rahab is united with Israel to this day, which means until the end of time.

When Jericho is overthrown, only the prostitute Rahab is saved. For it is written concerning her, “And Jesus restored Rahab the prostitute and all her father’s house; and she was joined to Israel up to this very day... that is, it persists up to that age.”³³

While the historical-critical method sees the phrase “up to this very day” as an etiological device, Origen uses the phrase to compare Rahab to Moab (Gn 19:37) and the word of God (Mt 28:15), where it all remains until the end of time.

...when it says, “This one is the father of the Moabites up to this very day” (Gn 19.37), it signifies until the end of the age. And, again, in the Gospel it is said that “this word has been spread abroad among the Jews up to this very day.” (Mt 28.15).³⁴

In addition, Origen also discusses Rahab as a symbol of all who have been saved by Jesus, including “those of the Gentiles.” Rahab, as a gentile woman, was said by Origen to be a descendant

²⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 49-50). Other interpretations of the scarlet cord as the blood of Christ can also be found in the writings of Clement, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and also Ambrose and Augustine. Chenoweth, “Origen’s Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua,” 107.

³⁰ Chenoweth, “Origen’s Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua,” 107.

³¹ Kritzinger, “Rahab, Illa Meretrix,” 26-27.

³² Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 49-50).

³³ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 7.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 79).

³⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 7.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 79).

of an Israeli family. By citing Rom 11:17, Origen compares Christians of other nations to wild olive branches embedded in the roots of a good olive tree. Origen argues that this is an appropriate analogy to describe the relationship between Rahab and the people of Israel, where Rahab and those who have been implanted in the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are also bound and united with Israel to this day.

If you want to see more plainly how Rahab is bound to Israel, consider how “the branch of the wild olive tree is implanted in the root of a good olive tree (Rom 11.17)... those who have been implanted in the faith of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are rightly called attached and “joined to Israel up to this very day.” For we have been attached up to this very day in the root of those former ones, we, the branches of the wild olive taken up from the nations, who at one time were dealing with harlots and worshiping wood and stone instead of the true God.³⁵

In short, for Origen, Rahab was a symbol of God's love and mercy. He taught that all people, including those from other nations, can become members of God's family and be saved by faith in Jesus.

3. Origen's Method of Interpreting the Scriptures

Based on his discussion of Rahab's character and story, we are now going to explore the method of interpreting Scripture according to Origen.

Allegory-Typology

In his treatise *on First Principles*, Origen discusses Scripture from various perspectives. He affirmed that the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the Old Testament and New Testament, were written based on divine inspiration. Origen also argued that Scripture has a dual meaning, namely literal meaning and spiritual meaning. The literal meaning is the apparent meaning on the surface, whereas the spiritual meaning is the hidden meaning.³⁶ Origen developed various methods of Scripture interpretation, namely the literal method, the typology and allegory methods, the *esegesi orante* method, and the method of interpreting the Scripture with the Scripture (Scripture interprets Scripture). The last is its *ōphéleia* criterion of interpretation, which means providing spiritual benefit to both the interpreter and the audience.³⁷

Origen's method of interpretation is closely related to the model of interpretation that developed in Alexandria, namely allegory³⁸. Allegory was used in Alexandria because Christian interpreters needed to give convincing explanations of Christian teachings amid Greek culture,

³⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 7.5 (Barbara J. Bruce, 79-80).

³⁶ Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 144-145.

³⁷ Agus Widodo, “The Methods and Criterion of Origen and Maximus Confessors Exegesis in Interpreting Scriptures Verses on Violence: its Relevance to Prevent Radicalism and Fundamentalism,” *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 2, no. 1 (February, 2020): 9. <https://ejournal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JAOT/article/view/2248>.

³⁸ The word “allegory” comes from the Greek ἅλλα ἀγορεύειν (*alla agoreúein*) means “to say other things”. Thus, allegorical interpretation is a process to understand and gain the meaning of a word or sentence that literally says something but wants to say something else. See Footnote n. 26 of Widodo, “The Methods and Criterion of Origen and Maximus Confessors Exegesis,” 9

where Gnostic teachings were especially threatening.³⁹ In response to this threat, Christian interpreters in Alexandria used allegory as a method to maintain and reinforce the unity of the Old and New Testaments, particularly when the Gnostics overused allegory to change the literal meaning to strengthen their ideas.⁴⁰

There are three reasons why Origen interpreted the Scripture allegorically.⁴¹ *First*, many prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament that were interpreted by Jewish were not fulfilled by Jesus. According to Origen, allegorical reading to understand the deeper meaning of a text can overcome Jewish objections to the model of Christian Scripture interpretation. *Second*, in response to the overly literal interpretation of the Jewish interpreters, in which they fail to see Jesus in the text. Origen considered that accepting biblical texts literally without allegorical understanding could carry the risk of erroneous comprehension. *Third*, to oppose the Gnostic model of interpretation. Origen did realize that much of the Bible text was ill-conceived, rationally inconsistent, or even morally controversial. All of them aim to encourage interpreters to find deeper meaning through allegorical interpretation. For him, all texts of Scripture must have spiritual meaning and not only literary meaning. If only taken literally, the texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament would make no sense.

Related to the story of Rahab in Joshua 2, we can see that Origen's interpretation is completely allegorical and spiritual. His interpretation of Rahab is not made verse by verse because he simply does not see a need to provide an interpretation for every single Bible verse. After all, it is more important to him that there is an allegorical meaning than what that meaning is.⁴² According to Origen, Rahab was not just a historical woman who lived at a specific time but also a symbol of faith and redemption. Using the allegory method, he relates Rahab to broader theological concepts, such as the role of faith in salvation or the Church as a place of 'refuge' for the faithful.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is said that Rahab was saved from destruction because of her faith, which was not expressed only verbally but also showed through concrete actions (11:31). In addition, in the Epistle of James, it is said that Rahab's act of hiding two spies and helping them escape from Jericho was one of the actions that proved the truth of her faith (2:25).⁴³ Following what is stated in both texts, Origen continues seeking in Rahab the relation between faith and action.

Further, Origen also used the method of typological interpretation to interpret Rahab. Although they seem the same, it is important to note that the literary characteristics of allegory and typology differ in the Bible.⁴⁴ Unlike allegory, which uses many metaphors and images to convey a truth or idea, typological patterns in Scripture are more discrete as real phenomena-people and

³⁹ The Gnostics tended to view that the Old Testament as inferior to the New Testament and considered creation to be a grave mistake.

⁴⁰ Other Alexandrians who interpreted scripture allegorically are Philo, Clement, and Justin. A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 144-149, 154-155.

⁴¹ A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 158-159.

⁴² Chenoweth, "Origen's Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua," 94.

⁴³ Randy Frank Rouw, "Kepercayaan Rahab Berdasarkan Yosua 2:1-24," *Jurnal Jaffray* 15, no. 2, (2017): 202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25278/jj71.v15i2.259>.

⁴⁴ Just as there is much figurative and nonliteral language - metaphor, hyperbole, sarcasm, synecdoche, and metonymy in the literary world, so there are many parables, symbols, analogies, prophecies, allegories, and typologies in the Bible. Brent E. Parker, "Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction? A Brief Examination of Figural Reading," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 60.

events-correspond and anticipate future fulfillment in similar, yet distinct people and events—primarily Jesus Christ and the redemption he accomplishes.⁴⁵ Typology in Scripture manifests in two distinct but related. First, “horizontal typology” shows where God has providentially designed specific Old Testament personalities, events, institutions, and activities to correspond to, foreshadow, and prefigure increased and intensified New Testament realities in and through Jesus Christ. This form is a typology pattern that commonly appears in Scripture. The second and rare form of typology, known as “vertical typology,” is directed toward correspondences between the heavenly and earthly realms (for example, the heavenly and earthly tabernacle, and the priesthood; see Exod 25:40; Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5, 9:22-25).⁴⁶

Origen’s interpretation of Rahab in his homily also belongs to the typological interpretation. Here, he sees Rahab as a type or image that refers to something greater or higher in a theological context. In Origen’s typological view, Rahab, a prostitute in the Book of Joshua, is considered a type of isolated, sinful human soul in the New Testament. In the *homilies on Joshua* 3.3, Origen references the text of Matthew 21:32 to interpret that Rahab’s acceptance of Jesus’ “messengers” in Jericho is similar to the reality in which the prostitutes accept and support Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 21:32. Here, Origen groups Rahab with prostitutes who receive and trust Christ. Thus, Origen wanted to affirm that truth and salvation can be had by those who are open to the teachings and calling of Jesus, regardless of their background or profession. This example shows how easily Origen moved between the New Testament and Old Testament.

4. Interpreting the Scripture with the Scripture

As explained before, Origen believed that the Holy Spirit inspires the Bible, so he stated that the Old Testament and The New Testament are one. For him, the New Testament is a continuation and fulfillment of the promises in the Old Testament. For this reason, Origen developed a method called “Scripture interprets Scripture” (*Scriptura scripturae interpres*). Shortly, this method wants to interpret a verse with other verses with lexical and conceptual similarities.⁴⁷ Related to his interpretation of Rahab, Origen says that the spies Joshua sent to Rahab’s house (Jos 2:1) were the ‘messengers of God’ who came to prepare the way for Jesus. He connects it to Matthew 11:10 and Mark 1:2, which speak of Jesus sending His messengers to prepare the way for him (see *Homilies on Joshua* 3.3).

5. Interpreting Scripture Christologically

Origen believed Christ was present throughout the Bible, including in the words of Moses and the prophets.⁴⁸ Henri de Lubac believes that Christ Jesus is Origen’s master and the key to interpreting the Old Testament. All the mysteries of the Old Testament are hidden in Him.⁴⁹ Therefore, Origen believed that Scripture (OT and NT) is a harmonic unity that leads to the understanding of Christ as the center and final destination of divine revelation.

⁴⁵ E. Parker, “Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction?” 61.

⁴⁶ E. Parker, “Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction?” 61.

⁴⁷ Widodo, “The Methods and Criterion of Origen and Maximus Confessors Exegesis,” 10.

⁴⁸ A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 156-157.

⁴⁹ Ursache, “Origen’s Interpretational Framework,” 110.

In his Christological interpretation, Origen first argues that Joshua's role is not limited to physical conflict but instead focuses on the 'spiritual war' against lust. In this understanding, the story of Joshua is considered a symbol of the spiritual warfare embodied by Jesus Christ. Origen considers Joshua as a prefigurative figure who directs the meaning of the narrative towards the meaningful dimension of spiritual victory and inner transformation obtained through Christ. In addition, Origen also considers Rahab's use of the scarlet thread as a profound symbol, referring to the essential meaning of Christ's blood shed on the cross. In his vision, this event reflects a strong connection between salvation and the use of signs and symbols in the history of human salvation. Origen interprets that the scarlet thread is not merely a symbol of blood but also creates a symbolic link between Rahab's actions and Christ's redemption. Origen also used the analogy of a window as a place for laying a string of scarlet thread. For him, the 'window' became a kind of access point, reflecting the role of the incarnation of Christ as a means to see and feel divine glory.

6. Interpreting Scripture Ecclesiological

Although it was not explicitly stated, Origen frequently used an ecclesiological approach in interpreting Scripture. This is because Origen regards the church teaching handed down from the apostles as authoritative. Origen believed himself to be obedient to the Church's embraced tradition.⁵⁰ In other words, Origen firmly held to the Church's teachings. Here, Origen uses an interpretive approach that highlights the role and meaning of the church in biblical texts.

In his homily, we can see that Origen understood Rahab as the church by first interpreting the name of Rahab as "breadth." Here, Origen makes a metaphorical connection, implying that the term "breadth" is emblematic of the Church of Christ. Origen's reference to Isaiah 54:2 strengthens the idea of extension within the church. Finally, the conclusion is that Rahab, symbolizing "breadth," represents the Church of Christ, which welcomes the sinners and provides a spacious place. This connection is made through the metaphorical interpretation of Rahab's name and her actions, particularly her acceptance of the spy of Jesus, which strengthens the idea that the Church is a place of acceptance and spiritual extension.

Further, Origen also understood Rahab's house as a Church. Here, Origen emphasizes that only those who live in the house of Rahab will be saved, while all those outside will perish, as well as all those who live outside the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). The slaughter of everyone in Jericho except those who lived in Rahab's house highlights her faith and loyalty to God, which is the main point of Origen's allegory. Moreover, he understood that Rahab was not just a symbol of the church but also the "engrafting" of other nations. Here, we can see that Origen's view of Rahab as a Church can also be inclusive. It means that the Church remains open to the peoples of other nations, provided they have sincere faith and want to become disciples of Christ.

D. Conclusion

A closer observation of Origen's interpretation of Rahab's story shows that he used an intense allegorical approach. Origen saw this story as an instrument for conveying a hidden and

⁵⁰ Graves, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 68.

profound spiritual meaning. We can conclude that here, Origen tended to disregard the historical-critical interpretation. This is clearer when he changes the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 from physical violence into spiritual violence, which necessitates faith and repentance. What makes this interpretation even more intriguing is how Origen uses this allegorical method and other methods, such as the typology, *Scriptura scripturae interpres*, Christological, and ecclesiological.

Origen's interpretation of Rahab provides meaningful, significant, and relevant insights. *First*, it is frequently claimed that religious teachings are the source of many violent acts (slavery, abuse, and murder) that occur in the world. In Christianity, this phenomenon sometimes happens because of the misuse of violent texts in the Bible, especially from the Old Testament, one of which is the Book of Joshua.⁵¹ Origen's interpretation helped us to stop the misuse of these violent texts and taught us not to use them as justification for wrongdoing. *Second*, Origen stated that the story of Rahab is a symbol of divine love and mercy. He taught that each individual can become a part of God's family through faith in Jesus, repentance, and good works. His message emphasizes the importance of seeing all people with love beyond social and ethnic boundaries. Her portrayal of Rahab broadens our understanding of salvation as a universal calling and reminds us of the transformative power of faith and good works. Thus, Origen's interpretation encourages us to apply the values of God's love and grace in every aspect of life.

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⁵¹ Cf. Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 2.

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