

Theological roots

[Herterodoxy, or departure from accepted doctrines, finds its roots in the . . .] hermeneutical approach adopted by the early Church Fathers, beginning with Origen.

Origen (AD 185-254) rejected the single meaning of a text of Scripture and adopted the Greek allegorical approach popular in secular mythological literature especially in the Alexandria, Egypt, region in which he lived. Before him the Jewish scholar Philo had done the same with Old Testament Scripture and rabbinical literature. From this backdrop Origen popularized a view of biblical interpretation which taught that every passage of Scripture had various levels of meaning from the literal, which was the simplest, to the allegorical, which was the most profound and was considered the deeper and richer form of biblical interpretation. Origen, and those who accepted this hermeneutic, looked for hidden, symbolic meanings within the biblical texts, meanings that in actuality were not intended by the author. The net result was that, rather than attempting to understand what the Scriptures were actually saying, foreign ideas were being read into the passages.

[DFT: The truth is even more sinister, as Origen employed teams of scribes to revise texts to "fit his doctrine." See "Which Version is the Bible?", Floyd Nolan Jones, p93, 167]

This method was guided by personal imagination instead of informed study which of course led to all sorts of fanciful and, at times, heretical, interpretations. Origen himself ultimately developed a number of recognized heresies such as universalism and the pre-existence of souls. Perhaps Origen's most influential book, as far as interpretation of Scripture goes, was his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in which his allegorical model was put on display. The groom in the Song was interpreted to be the Word of God and the bride as both the church of Christ and the individual soul. One author, who is supportive of Origen's views, wrote, "Almost all Christian spiritual and ascetic literature, ever since, has been indebted to Origen's foundational architecture of Christian mysticism."⁽²⁶⁷⁾

Later the desert fathers followed in Origen's footsteps.

Gerald Sittser wrote concerning this group,

Their overall approach to the Bible seems -- and, in fact, is -- foreign to the modern age. They jumped from text to text, as if by free association, making connections that would appear odd to us, and they interpreted the Bible allegorically, which gives the impression that their interpretation is informed more by fanciful imagination than by careful exegesis. ⁽²⁶⁸⁾

This approach to Scripture ultimately led to numerous schools of spirituality (ways of living out the gospel) such as Augustinian, Dominican, Benedictine, Ignatian and so forth. But ultimately they all had one thing in common, the so-called tripartite division of spiritual life. The *sine qua non* of this three-fold division consists of purgation, illumination, and union and is found in all forms of mysticism, not just Christianized forms. Greg Peters defines these terms:

The purgative way consists in one's active cleansing and is aided by spiritual exercises and ascetic practices, through the cultivation of humility and by practicing the virtues. Further advancement is made with the assistance of meditation, prayer and contemplation. The illuminative way is characterized by further meditation, prayer and contemplation, combined with, the reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, additional

spiritual exercises and a devotion to the Virgin Mary. The unitive way involves the exercising of proper Christian love until one experiences, or achieves mystical union with God as Trinity.⁽²⁶⁹⁾

Said more simply, purgation is emptying oneself not only of sin but of passion, desire and even of intellectual thought. **Illumination is what takes place when the Lord fills the emptiness of our souls and minds with extra-biblical knowledge and experiences and union is that mystical contact with God that cannot be rationally-described, only experienced. This is the goal of all mystics, yet the three-fold way of spirituality is not found in Scripture. It is a mystical invention rooted in the errant theology of those who were foundational in what we are calling spiritual formation.**