THE PROGRESS IN ORIGEN SCHOLARSHIP THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE SINCE THE MID-
point of this century has given contemporary theology some fresh insight into the problems the
Church faced in its early centuries. Moreover, Origen’s writings themselves have proven to be a gar-
den ripe with a plentiful harvest, perhaps containing even some forbidden fruits. As the first theo-
logian to write what might be called a systematic account of the faith, Origen worked with a certain
freedom that later theologians lacked. Of course this freedom did not mean that Origen’s theology was
free of all influence, for modern Origen scholarship is quick to point out the non-Christian, Jewish and
Greek influences upon his work.¹ And, there was, of course, a double-edge to this freedom. Positively, it
allowed for the integration of Greek ideas into Christianity to articulate the faith in a rational and spiritual
manner. On the other hand, Origen’s speculation sometimes took him into territories later viewed as heretical.²
Nevertheless, most scholars agree that Origen was a man of the Church³ and his theology is full of insights that
are valuable for systematic theology today.⁴

Perhaps one of the most valuable debates within Origen scholarship takes place over Origen’s understanding of
the historicity of the faith.⁵ The question of the historicity of the faith, and the Church, is one of those peren-
nial questions that appears once again at the heart of the modern ecclesiological discussion.⁶ Within the theology of
Origen this question finds its focus in his interpretation of scripture and the corresponding understanding of the
Christian faith. At issue in this discussion is the nature of the faith; i.e., the historical character of the life of faith in
the present. From the Roman Catholic perspective, this includes the question of the historicity of the Church, for in
the Roman Catholic tradition faith is always an ecclesial event, one that takes place in the life of the Church. There-
fore, an examination of historicity of the faith will necessarily include a discussion of ecclesiology.⁷

SCRIPTURE, WORSHIP AND THE HISTORICAL NATURE OF FAITH

The life of faith in the present lives by its contact with the redemptive activity of Christ, where, through his
life, death and resurrection, sin is overcome and the “new creation” is inaugurated. This contact with the Christ-event,
which is the basis for the act of faith, finds its locus in the worship of the Church. According to this religious view,
worship is not simply a ceremony peripheral to the life of faith, rather, it is an objectively effective encounter with
the life-giving event that informs the life of the believer. Not only does this ecclesial worship provide a personal en-
counter, but it is the a priori that orders, structures and informs the life of the believer. In the Christian tradition, the
historical revelation of God discloses the objectively true nature of reality as well as its order and meaning. Worship
appropriates this intelligible character of the revelation in its totality. This means that the Christ-event structures the
worship of the Church which in turn informs and structures the faith of the believer and the life of the Church in the present. 
Therefore, variations in the forms of worship issue in different interpretations of the liturgy, which then imply and result in distinctly disagreeing religious understandings of the Church. Such sectarian disagreements reflect different views of God’s revelation and the mediation of that revelation in the present; i.e., these various and distinct versions of Christianity reflect various understandings of the historicity of the faith. Therefore, the concrete character of worship places it at the center of any discussion of the faith. Worship is the focal point at which the doctrinal tradition bearing upon the historicity of the faith, Christ and the Church come together.

Within the Roman Catholic tradition, sacramental mediation has been traditionally understood to be the primary form of the worship of the Church. Gerhard Ebeling rightly points to this as the fundamental characteristic of Roman Catholicism that distinguishes it from the Lutheran tradition. Nevertheless, the liturgy of the word has always played an essential role in the worship of the Church and that role has been affirmed by both Vatican II and almost universally by theologians of the latter part of this century. This reaffirmation of the importance of the liturgy of the word in the worship of the Church has not, in most cases, been understood to replace the centrality of the sacraments in the life of the Church. Nevertheless, this development has increased the influence of biblical scholarship on the life of faith, an influence that now extends far beyond its immediate scholarly findings to affect the manner in which scripture, as part of the worship of the Church, is understood. Changes, then, in the procedures of scripture scholarship which call into question the historicity of the biblical revelation are bound to bring about changes in the manner in which the worship of the Church and historicity of the faith, and the Church, are understood. This concern about the relationship of the scripture scholarship to the historicity of the faith lies at the heart of the great theological debates of this century.

THE MODERN PROBLEMS

A. Scripture

In order to understand the situation in Roman Catholic theology today, it is necessary to consider two of the most significant theological “events” of this century. The first of these “theological events” effected a methodological change in the way in which Catholic theologians viewed scripture. This new method, having its roots in the Enlightenment, came to fruition in the middle of the twentieth century. Its most famous exponent in this century was Rudolf Bultmann; hardly a scholar today but lives in the shadow of his work. Bultmann’s method of interpreting scripture has had a most significant influence on the methods of contemporary biblical scholarship. There have been, no doubt, those biblical scholars who have consciously separated themselves from the work of Bultmann; nevertheless, his central themes continue to influence most biblical exegesis, even that work done by theologians in the Roman Catholic tradition.

The primary effect of Bultmann’s work was to call into question the historical character of scripture. He assumes that the central theological problem is with history and the ability of history to mediate divine truth; i.e., revelation.

Bultmann, accepting the enlightenment interpretation of history, understands the present time to be closed to the mediation of God’s grace. God’s redemptive activity has its own intelligibility, its own integrity, that can never be compromised; i.e., it can never be the object of historical mediation. In this approach to history, revelation as event is not possible; i.e., the presence of the divine in fallen creation is not possible. Redemption then becomes an “other-worldly” event, taking place at the end of time.

The effects of his view of history were many, but in particular the use of this exegetical method presupposed that by reason of its historical nature the New Testament was unable to mediate the revelation, the divine self-communication in any normative manner. Following this method, Bultmann understood the scripture to be
simply a product of the early Christian communities, the witness of the early Church proclaiming the kingdom of God, presuming a distance between the actual life and teaching of Christ and the scripture as the product of the early Church. The “objective” content of the scriptures then is not essential to the gospel message. And this history, or mythology, produced by the early Church, needed to be “demythologized” in order that the believer may encounter the true offer of salvation. In effect, the “objective” character of scripture was understood to be inessential. What really mattered was the offer of salvation found at a deeper level.

The effect of this exegetical method was to redefine the historical character of the faith. In the Protestant tradition, where scripture is at the center of liturgical life, Bultmann’s reinterpretation of scripture lead to an emphasis on faith as a personal encounter with the promise of salvation proclaimed in the scriptures. The faith, so understood, no longer includes any “objective/historical” dimension, but becomes simply the moment of encounter, decision, wherein man’s being is at stake. Here there is a direct priority given to the personal response to what is preached over the content of the preached word.

Some theologians, following Bultmann, tended to deny the significance of the question concerning the historicity of the faith. For them, whether the events recorded in scripture happened or not was a mute question. What is essential to such theologies is the message and the proclamation that called one to faith. Another group of theologians influenced by Bultmann accepted the limited historical character of scripture, but saw that in order to understand the scripture as a whole they had to get behind the witness of the community to some “authentic words of Jesus.” The reason for this was that it became necessary amid the variety of New Testament themes to find the key to interpreting scripture. If there was no priority of some themes over others, all interpretations of scripture would be equally legitimate. Consequently, the “new quest for the historical Jesus” was launched in an attempt to counteract the total dehistoricization of scripture thought to be operative in the work of Bultmann; i.e., to root the interpretation of Scripture in the actual words of Jesus. Still, they tended to accept his major premise: that the New Testament is primarily a proclamation of the early Church whose account of the events of Christ’s life are not objectively true. One need not find what Jesus actually did, but what he said. This was necessary if one were to unlock and unify the diversity of scripture. A third group of theologians, including Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, tried to re-establish the event character of the faith lost by Bultmann’s denial of the significance of the historical dimension of the faith by pointing out that language itself is an event. According to them, the world is given in language and there can be no differentiation between the historical event and the proclamation of that event. In this theology, story, myth and narrative are the primary theological categories. A fourth group, a vastly diverse group, is made up of those theologians who attacked the work of Bultmann. Here men like Karl Barth, Oscar Cullmann and numerous Roman Catholic theologians have fought against what they believe to be the dehistoricizing tendency of Bultmann’s theology. Common to these theologians is their understanding of the historical character of the revelation as essential to its very nature of the Christian faith. Thus, they deny that the biblical narrative is the result of the mythologizing of some ineffable core message. As Cullmann clearly points out, salvation history is not a later addition to a central message, but constitutive of the revelation itself. Consequently, the gospel message cannot be reduced to some truth abstracted from the events themselves. Such reductionism would distort the gospel by taking away the “stumbling block” of Christ crucified. According to these men, it is exactly the historical character of the Christ-event that is distinctive, and to endanger that would be to endanger the faith.

It may be thought that the influence of Bultmann has waned in as much as most scripture scholars rarely refer to him today. It is true that most biblical scholars no longer explicitly invoke Bultmann’s work, but there, is evidence that on a very fundamental level the influence of Bultmann endures. Only recently Cardinal Ratzinger’s statement on biblical scholarship in the West accurately points to the continued influence of Bultmann. That is, contemporary biblical scholarship, like Bultmann, tends to dehistoricize or at least redefine the nature and significance of historical events as the basis for the faith. These scholars look at Scripture and find it difficult to say what Jesus actually did or said. As a matter of fact, in most instances (except for a few scholars such as Cullmann) the emphasis is placed not on what Jesus did, but what he
said, or what the early Church said he said. In most cases, there is no immediate access to what Christ did. Faith becomes a witness to a witness.

It is exactly at this point that the question of the historicity of the faith and what this means becomes most evident. If the Christian faith is rooted in the revelation of God to man in history, then that faith must live by its relationship to those normative events. Most would agree. But the question becomes both one of the nature of the original revelation and of the nature of the present mediation of that norm to Christians living in the present. How can modern Christians participate in that long-ago event by which they are saved? If our life of faith in the present is determined by the revelation of Christ and the means of access to that event is our worship, then when one redefines the historicity of the scripture, which is a source of Christian worship, our understanding of faith will also change and so will the way in which we see the Church. If this is the case, then the exegetical method of Bultmann, which denies the historical character of the revelation or at least the significance of the historical for the present act of faith, must have far reaching consequences for ecclesiological discussion.

B. Ecclesiology

The second “event” that characterizes the theological focus in the latter part of this century is the Roman Catholic preoccupation with ecclesiology. This concern with ecclesiology did not begin with Vatican II. However, after the Council, certain shifts within ecclesiology do appear in Roman Catholic theology. Prior to Vatican II, ecclesiological discussion found its focus in the mystery of the Church, the sacraments and the sacramental nature of the Church. Here one finds Mystici Corporis at the center of the theological speculation about the Church. One need only look at Henri de Lubac’s great work, The Splendour of the Church to see an example of this sacramental emphasis.

At the heart of this ecclesiology, the Church is understood to be the mystical body of Christ, having its life in Christ and linked to the Incarnation. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the continuity with the events at the source of its life is the worship of the Church, a worship understood to be sacramental with its focal point in the Eucharist. As the redemptive activity of Christ found its locus in the cross, the Eucharist, the representation of that salvific event, is understood to be a participation in that event at the heart of the Church. The life of the Church was informed by that Eucharistic event and its historicity reflected the historicity of that worship. The Church was understood to be a sacrament.

Vatican II’s document on the Church, Lumen Gentium, likewise begins with likening the Church to a sacrament. “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of a sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind, that is, she is a sign and instrument of such union and unity.” Nevertheless, the primary emphasis in Roman Catholic ecclesiology since Vatican II has not been on the sacramental notion of the Church. In most cases primacy is given to a new sense of openness to the world and the Church must be seen in that light. Here the primary concern is no longer with the mystical or sacramental nature of the Church. In general, post-Vatican II ecclesiology is more concerned with the place of the laity and the relationship of the Church to the social order. In some unfortunate instances contemporary ecclesiology has associated the traditional sacramental understanding of the Church with the institutional Church (Avery Dulles’ term) and has in some instances rejected them together. This is evidenced by their break with the traditional structure of the Church and with the traditional understanding of the sacraments, and has in some instances insisted upon a redefinition or the construction of new sacraments. Whether such ecclesiastical movements are consistent with Vatican II will be a matter of debate for some time and cannot be solved here. But significant for our purpose is the change in contemporary ecclesiology from an understanding of the Church as founded by and focused on the sacraments and on the sacramental nature of the Church, to an ecclesiology which understands the Church as simply the People of God and whose focus is on social justice. This latter primarily political “model” reflects a shift in the way in which the historicity of the faith is understood. In much of contemporary ecclesiology the emphasis is not on the sacraments, but on a liberating political praxis.

I am suggesting here that there is a connection between the attack on the historicity of the faith launched by Bultmann and the present redefinition of the historicity of the Church that has taken place in contemporary Roman Catholic ecclesiology. If the sacramental basis for the Church is being redefined, relativized or understood to be of less importance, then the word and scripture must become in proportion more important to the life of the faith. But, if contemporary scripture scholarship is influenced by a method that explicitly calls into ques-
tion the historical nature of that faith, this method will ultimately shape the ecclesiology which accepts the fruits of this kind of exegesis. To examine this relationship fully would take a far more extensive analysis than is possible here, but it is important to note the essential link between the historicity of the Church and the way in which scripture is interpreted.

In considering then the question of the proper understanding of the historicity of the Church, one must consider the manner in which scripture is understood. For if there is a connection between the interpretation of scripture and the historicity of the faith, the contemporary methodological dehistoricization of the scriptures must result in a corresponding dehistoricization of the faith. Here a short excursus into the theology of Origen might be helpful, for in many ways he struggled with the same issue that we find before us today.

ORIGEN AND THE HISTORICITY OF THE CHURCH

At the heart of Origen studies lies a question that is also at the focal point of contemporary theology. This is the question of the historicity of the faith. At stake in this issue is the very nature of the revelation of Christ and the nature of the faith that arises from that revelation. For what appears to be at issue in the debate over Origen’s orthodoxy is whether on the one hand in his exegesis, Origen preserves the historicity of the faith and remains a faithful member of the Church, or on the other hand Origen reinterprets the faith in the light of Greek philosophy in such wise that its historicity is lost; i.e., he becomes a gnostic. In pursuit of this question one finds oneself involved in the disagreement between two of the masters of Origen studies, Henri de Lubac and R. P. C. Hanson.

Both men see the discussion surrounding Origen’s theology and orthodoxy to be focused on the manner in which Origen interprets scripture as the source of Christian life. Hanson believes that Origen breaks from orthodox Christianity under the influence of Greek philosophy, resulting in the dehistoricization of the faith. On the other hand, de Lubac understands Origen to have retained the historical character of the faith, thereby remaining faithful to Christianity.

According to Hanson the real difficulty with Origen’s theology is his neglect of the historicity of the revelation of Christ. Origen, despite the fact that he believes in the historical truth of the Bible, fails to see these events as important. Hanson argues that the rationalism of Origen “strives to dissolve this ‘particularity’ into general truths and abstract principles.” It is this dehistoricizing that Hanson sees running throughout Origen’s theology and separates him from the proper understanding of Christianity.

It is no coincidence that we should find the same defects in Origen’s doctrine of the sacraments that we have already found in his attitude toward history; the two subjects are inextricably bound together. In bidding farewell, politely yet cheerfully, to the reality of God’s activity in history, Origen is bidding farewell to the reality of the sacraments.

The neglect of the event character of the Christian revelation, Hanson locates in the exegetical methods of Origen, an exegetical method heavily influenced by the allegorical method of Philo. Under his Platonizing influence, Origen’s use of allegory strips the biblical revelation of its historical character. The truths of the Christian message are reduced to an intuitive knowledge of timeless ideas external to history. According to Hanson, Origen tries to solve the problem of “externalizing” the faith by focusing the religious experience in the individual Christian. The Christ-event is thus described by Origen as an epinoia. That is, since Christ finds himself among human beings of different spiritual levels, it is only fitting that He direct his call to a level that each believer can understand. Christ appears to men at their own spiritual levels. As such the human historical Jesus becomes lost among the many individual impressions of the faithful. Historicity is sacrificed.

In order to understand this more fully one must look at the anthropology underlying Origen’s exegesis. This exegetical method reflects the tripartite division of man into body, soul and spirit. To each part of the human corresponds an appropriate level of Scripture, the highest of which is the spiritual man and the spiritual sense of scripture. The literal, historical senses of scripture are said to belong to the simple Christian.
quenty, it is through allegory that the spiritual message of the Bible is opened to the spiritual men. But what concerns Hanson is that in the process the historicity of the faith, what Origen labels the literal or figure appears to be insignificant.\(^5\) Now Hanson agrees that Origen never totally forsakes the historical meaning of scripture, still he believes that Origen only regards it as valuable as parable or symbol, but not in their totality as historical events. Because of this inadequate understanding of the scriptures, the life of faith, founded on such an understanding of Scripture, must also be deprived of its historical character. History and its difficulties are resolved into the religious experience of the contemporary believer.\(^4\) An inadequate exegetical method results in the dehistoricization of the faith in the present.

It is exactly this line of thought that Hanson carries through his analysis of Origen. And in each issue, whether scripture, sacraments, Christology, eschatology or ecclesiology, the same criticism is launched against Origen: he fails to give sufficient weight to the historicity of the revelation and the consequent life of faith.

Against Hanson, Henri de Lubac defends the orthodoxy of Origen. He views the exegetical method of Origen to be essentially different from the one described by Hanson. De Lubac, unlike Hanson, locates Origen first of all as a man of the Church.\(^5\) In his assessment of Origen he, like Jean Danielou, sees Origen's theology as primarily apostolic and pastoral in tenor.\(^5\) His work is governed by the desire to fulfill the apostolic tradition to which he claims a full and faithful allegiance. According to de Lubac, Origen's teachings have a single purpose, to bring the believer to a deeper faith.\(^3\) In order to understand this more clearly it is important to look at how de Lubac approaches Origen's exegetical method.

Like Hanson, de Lubac understands Origen to accept the literal dimension of Scripture.\(^5\) But unlike Hanson, de Lubac understands Origen to preserve the historical significance of Scripture for the act of faith.\(^5\) The truth of salvation history remains firm. This faith is for the simple Christians, who, despite the fact that they do not grasp the profundity of the spiritual message of Christ, are “armed by Jesus” and are considered to be among the saved. The objective, historical level then has an essential role in the act of faith, sometimes mediating the Logos to the simple; other times it is used by the Spirit to lead men to deeper reflection.\(^5\)

One soon discovers that Hanson and de Lubac differ radically over Origen's understanding of Scripture. Unlike Hanson, who believes that in the emphasis upon the spiritual dimension of Scripture the historical significance is lost, de Lubac sees Origen preserving all dimensions of Scripture by emphasizing their unity in the Spirit.\(^5\) This spiritual unity of the senses of Scripture, according to de Lubac, has not only an ontological primacy, but is a unity including the “wisdom of the universe” and the whole economy of salvation.\(^5\) It is exactly this unity and economy that de Lubac finds at the heart of Origen's understanding of the biblical revelation: Origen even calls Scripture “one Book.”\(^6\)

De Lubac does not suppose that Origen thinks one need not go beyond the literal sense of scripture to a deeper spiritual understanding, but this does not diminish for Origen the importance of the literal; for it is the first stage of understanding, that leads to a greater spiritual understanding of the whole.\(^6\) The whole is unified by the Spirit and the “presence” of the Logos in Scripture. Furthermore, the Spirit who unifies the Scripture is also the Spirit whose mediation is located in the economy of salvation. (The importance of this should become evident later.)

Secondly, again unlike Hanson, de Lubac does not see the tripartite division of the soul as a division of man according to nature but as three levels of free moral development and therefore, once more, as historical.\(^6\) A corollary is that what the scripture reveals is not simply knowledge: it does not only teach, as the gnostics hold;\(^6\) rather, the scriptures, like Christ, come to transform or empower the believer, a conversion mediated by scripture, Church and Eucharist. The tripartite division of man, then, reflects his spiritual development and the varied stages of Scripture are necessary if the Gospel is to be preached to all men, yet none of the levels are denied salvation. There is a certain equality in faith among all members of the Church. It reflects the fact that salvation comes from and by the Christ and not from any predetermined nature or special knowledge.\(^5\)

De Lubac's understanding of Origen's use of scripture appears to be rooted in a deeper knowledge than Hanson displays of the very nature of Scripture, the knowledge that Scripture is really sacramental in nature. At numerous times de Lubac points out that Origen perceives Scripture to be “the sacrament of the Gospel,” and it is this very sacramentality that appears to be the
key to unlocking Origen’s interpretation of Scripture. As sacramental the meaning of Scripture adheres to the figure, but it is not limited to the figure, for the historical itself is real, yet really, objectively symbolic. Scripture, then, is the mediator of the plan of God and cannot be divorced from the event of that historical economy. Moreover, as the historical revelation of the Christ, scripture as sacramental is efficacious; i.e., not producing a special intelligence, but imprinting on the soul of the believer the mystery of Christ as revealed in history. As a matter of fact de Lubac describes Origen’s understanding of faith as a process, likened to the economy of salvation found in salvation history. He calls it an organic process, whereby one is integrated into the economy of salvation.

De Lubac is correct in asserting that Origen’s interpretation of Scripture preserves the historicity of the faith by linking the process of faith to Scripture which implants in one’s soul the model of salvation history. But Origen is also able to do this by linking scripture to the Eucharist and to the life of the Church. Scripture, Church and Eucharist are at the center of the faith in the present stage of the economy of salvation. The three define each other. In the Eucharist, the old sacrifice of the flesh is replaced by the Word given in the Church. In the Eucharistic encounter one receives the bread of life, which sanctifies those who partake of it. It is the visible continuity of the sacrifice of Christ at the center of the Church. Scripture, like the Eucharist, mediates the Logos in the present through visible creation. The literal is not by-passed, but acts as the sacramental sign, effective beyond itself. Scripture, “the sacrament of the Gospel,” takes “on the veil of the letter” just as Christ took on flesh. The sacramentality of Scripture is further affirmed by Origen in two ways. First, he understands Scripture to be efficacious. Since Scripture mediates the fullness of the mystery of salvation given in the revelation of Christ, it transforms the life of the believer. It acts something like a sacrament, mediating the grace of Christ. Second, the effects of Scripture are to link the believer to the economy of salvation. In the act of faith, the whole of the mystery of salvation, historically revealed in the incarnate Christ, informs the life of the believer through the mediation of the Church. Some special knowledge is not revealed to the believer; rather, the individual in his act of faith is drawn into the process of salvation, a process mediated by the Church.

Here, unlike Hanson who presupposes that Origen’s exegetical method leads to the dehistoricization of the faith, de Lubac understands Origen to preserve the historicity of the faith simply because his exegetical method permits it. It is a method that links the believer to the process of redemption in history, especially in the present in the life of the Church. The Church then becomes the present locus of the salvific activity of God.

According to Origen, the faith is not simply a private affair, nor is the Church simply the union of all believers, but the res sacramenti, the effect of the worship of the Church. The Church is “caused” by the effective activity of the Logos mediated by Scripture, and stands in the present economy as public witness to Christ’s offer of salvation in the midst of fallen creation. In the Church, the impression of the Logos which is in all of creation is given perfectly.

According to de Lubac, in Origen’s ecclesiology the historicity of the Church mirrors the historicity of Scripture. Despite his emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of Scripture and human life, Origen never forsakes the figurative level of Scripture or the Church. They never lapse, as Hanson believes, into an esoteric doctrine of a spiritual elite. The Church and Scripture act like a “sacrament” and it is precisely in this sacramentality that Origen’s theology appears to retain the historicity of the faith. Time and space are not forsaken, but become the
mediator of the redemptive activity of Christ. It is the sacramentality of reality that scripture, the Eucharist and the Church affirm.\(^7\)

CONCLUSION

The example of the discussion from Origen scholarship shows how different interpretations of Origen’s approach to scripture lead to totally different understandings of the faith. In this discussion at the heart of Origen scholarship, it becomes easy to identify the relationship between scripture and ecclesiology, especially where the problem of the historicity of the faith is concerned. It is this concern to preserve the historicity of the faith that was the concern of the Church Fathers and once again one finds this issue of the theological discussion of our century; i.e., a debate concerning the historicity of the faith wherein the very nature of the faith is a matter of dispute. It begins with the premise that the historicity of the faith in the present reflects the manner in which the sources of that faith is to be understood. Therefore, worship, as the locus of one’s encounter of the divine, becomes the focal point of any examination of ecclesiology. It is in this context that the effects of scripture scholarship on ecclesiology becomes most evident.

One of the challenges then of the last part of this century will be to re-examine the exact nature of modern scripture scholarship to see if it leads to an adequate presentation of the faith. There can be no doubt that the historical critical method which now dominates contemporary biblical scholarship has made extensive contributions to modern theology. Yet, there is evidence that it may hold certain presuppositions that lead to a de-historicization of the faith and a denial of the traditional view of the sacraments and the Church. Whether such presuppositions hold up or not, they should not escape a careful examination by contemporary theology.

NOTES


2See Hanson’s *Allegory and Event*. He understands Origen to have deviated from the orthodox Christian faith on a number of matters. His arguments take one to the very heart of the systematic problematic in the theology of Origen; the problem of historicity.


4Some of the results of the work in Origen studies on theology in general can be found in the writings of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Both were influenced by Origen’s theology.

5This discussion finds its locus in the discussion of Henri de Lubac and Richard Hanson. In *Ésprit et Histoire*, de Lubac defends the orthodoxy of Origen by arguing that Origen preserves the historicity of the faith. Hanson, in *Allegory and Event*, proposes the opposite, that it is exactly the historicity of the faith that is sacrificed by Origen.

6One finds the historicity of the Church a matter of debate from the earliest time. It is the question at the heart of most of the early heresies, especially Docetism, Arianism, and Donatism. It is also the question at the heart of the Reformation controversies. In modern Roman Catholicism the problem of historicity is most acute in the discussion of the sacraments and relationship of the Church and the world. See Edward Kilmartin, S.J., “Apostolic

7 That the ecclesial dimension of faith is essential to the life of faith is affirmed in the Church documents of this century such as *Mystici Corporis*, AAS 35 (1943) 193-248; *Mysterium Fidei*, AAS 57 (1965) 753-774; *Mediator Dei*, AAS 39 (1947) 521-595; and *Lumen Gentium*, AAS 57 (1965) 5-67. In all of these documents, the sacramental and mediatory role of the Church is emphasized. The believer comes to faith in the Church, the Body of Christ. It is here that Christ is present in fallen creation.


10Dei Verbum, AAS 58 (1966), 817-830.


13Waldstein, “The foundations of Bultmann’s work,” p. 115. In his article he quotes Karl Neufeld, S.J., from his article “Theologie durch Kritik: Tod Rudolf Bultmanns,” StZ (1976) 773. “In scientific exegesis and theology Bultmann’s work is alive - perhaps more intensely than ever. His contributions are present as foundations, for the most part invisible ones, in most works which dominate New Testament exegesis and theology today.” This position has been affirmed most recently by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Foundations and Approaches of Biblical Exegesis,” * Origins*, 17 (1998).

14The list of criticisms of Bultmann’s work are endless. These criticisms appear to focus upon his understanding of history. Robinson, *The New Quest for the Historical Jesus and Theology as History*. Robinson points out some of the negative reaction to Bultmann’s theology within Protestant theology. Also see Oscar Cullmann, *Savation as History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).


16Jean Daniélo, “Demythologizing and the School of Alexandria,” pp. 51-58, in *Rudolf Bultmann in Catholic Thought*. He understands that Bultmann, under the influence of Kant, minimizes historical mediation of truth in favor of language. Waldstein, likewise points out that under the influence of the enlightenment, Bultmann sees the objective, the historisch, as opaque to the mediation of the divine. Waldstein, “The Foundations of Bultmann’s Work,” pp. 121ff.


18Rudolph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 153. “In his faith he is already above time and history. For although the advent of Christ is an historical event that happened ‘once’ in the past, it is at the same time, an eternal event that occurs again and again in the soul of any Christian in whose soul Christ is born, suffers, dies and is raised up to eternal life. In his faith the Christian is a contemporary of Christ, and time and the world of history are overcome. The advent of Christ is an event in the realm of eternity which is incomensurable with historical time.”

19Ibid., pp. 132ff.


23These divisions rely largely on those that James M. robinson and John B. Cobb use in *The New Hermeneutics* and *Theology as History*. These are mainly theologians who, like Bultmann, accept the historicist premise that oast historical events have little or no relevance in the present. They appear to range in style and degree from someone like Schillebeeckx, who deies the significance of the bodily resurrection to someone like Gordon Kaufman, who sees all ideas of God as simply human conventions. Despite their differences, they share the historicist premises of modern thought which denies the significance of past events as a basis for faith.

24Robinson, *The New Quest for the Historical Jesus*.


28There are both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians who attempt to hold together the words and events. Especially see Oscar Cullmann and Wolfgang Pannenberg. On Roman Catholic side see Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

29Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, pp.33ff. Here the question of the historicity of the faith is asked most poignantly.


31This sacramental focus of the Church is also found in the post-conciliar document *Mysterium Fidei* by Paul VI. See pp. 2, 11.

32The event character of faith was understood to reflect the event character of the sacraments. The event character of the sacraments and consequent historicity was traditionally affirmed by the doctrines of real presence, transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass. Any attempts at understanding the Eucharist apart from these doctrines must be careful to preserve the historicity of the faith that is implicit in them. See Yves Congar, *The Revelation of God*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Sheppard (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. 175ff. Also, De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, pp. 107ff.

33*Lumen Gentium*, AAS 75 (1965), 1.


38This debate, although dated to a degree, provided a context out of which modern Origen scholarship was spawned and is a debate which provides one with an example of the theological significance of scripture and its relationship to the problem of the historicity of the faith. The debt of modern Origen scholarship to the studies of Henri de Lubac and Richard Hanson is well recognized. For an example of a representative of current Origen scholarship see Henri Crouzel, *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).


40Ibid., p. 278.

41Ibid., p. 219.

42Ibid., p.329.

43Ibid., pp.49ff. Unlike Greek allegory which he understands to be totally non-historical, Hanson concedes that Philo begrudgingly accepts the historicity of Old Testament events, but regards the allegorical meaning to be of greater significance.
If the historicity of the faith is sacrificed so too are the Church and sacraments.

45Ibid., p. 280. If the historicity of the faith is sacrificed so too are the Church and sacraments.


48P. Arch., IV, 2, 8. Also see Henri Crouzel, *Origen et La Philosophie*, pp. 92, 95, 105.


50Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, pp. 275ff. These remarks remind one of Oscar Cullmann’s attack on the dehistoricizing effects of Bultmann’s exegetical method. See Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*.


52Ibid., pp. 125, 126.


54Ibid., pp. 47, 76, 117.

55Ibid., pp. 79, 200, 201. See Ex.h. 10:2, C.C. IV, 49; Gen.H.7,2.

56Ibid., pp. 84-86.

57Ibid., p. 107.

58Ibid., pp. 301 (P. Arch. 1, 3, 1).

59Ibid., pp. 352-353.

60Ibid., pp. 208ff. See Lev.h. 1,4.

61Ibid., p. 284.


63Ibid., pp. 262ff. The scriptures do not simply teach, just as Christ did not simply teach. (See pp. 272, 277).

64Ibid., pp. 269ff.

65Ibid., p. 206. (See Luc.h. 21).

66Ibid., pp. 282, 296. History is the mediation of the plan of salvation, providence. To see this clearly one need only look at the discussion of God and providence in the *Of First Principles*. (P. Arch. II, 6; IV, 1, 7). Origen scholar Lothar Lies in his excellent book *Wort und Eucharistie Bei Origenes: Zur Spiritualisierungstendens des Eucharistieverstandnisses* (Tyrolia Verlag, 1978), Lies describes the Eucharist as a word-event. Here the sacramental nature of the Scripture leads him to liken the sacraments to the use of Scripture in the theology of Origen.

67De Lubac, p. 164. Here the mystery is revealed in the love of Christ for his Church. The soul, through the mediation of Scripture, is the spouse of the Logos as Christ is the spouse of his Church.

68Ibid., pp. 266ff.

69Ibid., pp. 369ff.

70Hom. Lev., 5:8. The new sacrifice is one of praise, one of the heart. (Lev 2:5, 5:10)

71C. Cel 18:33.


73Luc, h. 21.

74Lev. 1:1, 91.


76Ibid., p. 143, 164.

77Danielou, Origene, pp. 74-75. “He represented Christianity as history, as the working-out of a divine plan meant to bring human creatures little by litter to acknowledge God’s excellence, of their own free will.” The link
between Christianity and salvation history is further evidenced by Origen’s discussion of the “pre-existent Church” in his *Commentary on the Canticles of Canticles*.

78Although the term *res sacramenti* has a medieval origin, one finds resonances of the same idea in the theology of Origen. In both medieval and Origen’s usage, the term describes the link between the sacraments and the Church, an effect of the sacramental life of the Church. See Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L’Eucharistie et L’Églises Moyen Age. Études historiques. Deuxième édition, revue et Aumentée* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), pp. 67ff.

79It is precisely on this point that Origen separates himself from the Lutheran and Reform traditions. In Origen’s theology, history is both intelligible and mediates the plan of God. It is not opaque to the mediation of God’s grace. It almost sounds as if in the present stage of the economy of salvation Christ is present in the Scriptures, Eucharist and Church *ex opere operato*. See P. Arch. 1, 1, 1-8; 1, 2, 1-5; 2, 4, 1-3; 3, 5, 7; 3, 6, 8-9. Here the link between the Logos and the created order is clearly stated. See Lothar Lies, *Origenes Eucharistielehre im Streit der Konfessionen: Die Auslegungsgeschichte seit der Reformation;* ser. *Innsbrucker Theologische Studien* 15, (Innsbruck, Wein: Tyrolia, 1985) and *Wort und Eucharistie bei Origenes*. 