

Does Allegorization Incite Violence? Origen's Interpretation of Exo 1:15-22

Origen interprets the Exodus narrative as an allegory of Christian spiritual life. The Pharaoh's commandment to kill the male newborn Hebrews and to let the female ones live was not obeyed by the midwives. In Origen's perspective, the midwives did the opposite: They spared the male ones and killed the female ones. Of course, he interprets the text in an allegorical way, in which the female children represent the flesh, the perishable, and luxury. These have to be killed – on the spiritual level – whereas the “male”, i.e. reason, spirituality, and renunciation, has to be kept alive. Although only “verbal”, Origen's interpretation implies a lot of violence, much more than the biblical account which focuses on non-violence.