The Hexaemeron of Basil the Great († 379), delivered before a Caesarean congregation on three separate days in mid-378 towards the end of his career, is often held up as an example of Basil’s opposition to the allegorical method of exegesis. The locus classicus for this conclusion is Basil’s discussion of the meaning of the creation of the firmament, and in the ninth homily where he makes an even more explicit stand against the use of allegorical interpretations and declares that he prefers the literal sense: “πάντα ὡς εἰρηται οὕτως ἐκδέχομαι.”

In the Hexaemeron and elsewhere, Basil shows a familiarity with the allegorical method. In about 358, he and Gregory of Nazianzus edited the Philocalia, a compilation of the writings of their admired Origen. The first section of the Philocalia is devoted to Origen’s exegetical principles. The selection is concerned with the divine inspiration of scriptures, the problems of biblical language and stresses the importance of spiritual exegesis. Therefore, there can be no question that Basil was well acquainted with what is commonly called the “Alexandrian” allegorical method. The fact that he included Origen’s hermeneutical formulation at the beginning of the Philocalia may even suggest that he was not at all critical of it around 358 CE.

Bardy’s observation that the Philocalia contains very little allegorical exegesis—and thus should be seen as a subtle apology for Origen—misses his own point about the anthology as being aimed at presenting a rounded picture of Origen’s many-faceted output and hence must of necessity be selective. It is also doubtful, as Junod has pointed out, that the effects of Epiphanius’ polemics against Origen, such as can be found in the Ancoratus and Panarion, had already been felt and thereby provoked a response from Basil and Gregory in the form of the Philocalia. The chronology itself seems to speak against this theory.
In his *Homily on the Psalms*, Basil employs the allegorical method alongside a literal or “historical” interpretation. Basil’s debt to and acquaintance with Alexandrian exegesists is certainly not limited to his knowledge and use of Origen’s work. In fact, his borrowing from Philo Judaeus’ *De Opificio Mundi* for his sermons on the six days of creation is perhaps more pronounced, and the opening sections of Philo’s exegesis and Basil’s *Hexaemeron* show striking similarities, especially insofar as they both deal with the fact that Moses was the revealer of the divine truth.

If we acknowledge this background of Basil’s association with the characteristic method of the Alexandrian school, shall we then posit a novel negative reaction against the allegorical method in the *Hexaemeron* where Basil discusses the meaning of the firmament and also later in the ninth homily? Or, put more crudely, did Basil convert to an anti-allegorical position just before his death?

A reasonable conjecture might be that Basil’s attitude towards the Alexandrian school of allegorical interpretation was influenced very strongly by the so-called “Antiochene school” represented by people such as Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. This straightforward thesis seems to derive its primary impetus from the diametric opposition between the two schools in modern scholarship. Standard works on the history of biblical exegesis almost always pits the Alexandrian school against the Antiochene school.

I argue in this paper that the tricky question of influence with reference to Basil and the Antiochene school, and, in particular, Diodore of Tarsus, requires examination in the context of a shared set of assumptions about the need to shield the uninitiated from free exegesis. This involves the view that knowledge, especially knowledge about authoritative scriptures, should not be carelessly disseminated, because it is both a source of power and of danger, and is not uncommonly perverted by others for their own purposes and thereby giving rise to heresy. Instead, following an Origenist division of Christians into three stages of spiritual advancement, Basil was leading his humble congregation by the hand in a gradual anagogy, using the literalist hermeneutics which he considered to be most appropriate to his audience.

Diodore of Tarsus, the teacher of John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, was active around Antioch at