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PROLOG

Få tidigkristna teologer har haft en så omfattande och varierande reception i kristendomens historia som Origenes av Alexandria (ca 185–254). Detta beror delvis på att Origenes är en av de mest produktiva kristna teologerna genom tiderna och lämnade efter sig en stor mängd bibelkommentarer, predikningar och teologiska avhandlingar, men det har också att göra med innehållet i hans exegetik och teologi. Hans allegoriska bibeltolkning kom att influera många tidigkristna författare, men delar av hans teologi sågs också som mycket kontroversiella, framför allt hans syn på den framtida uppståndelsen och frälsningen. Inte mindre än två "origenistiska kontroverser" uppstod, en i slutet av 300-talet och en vid mitten av 500-talet; båda med utgången att Origenes läror fördömdes som heretiska.

Trots denna utveckling kom Origenes genom århundradena att fortsätta influera kristna tänkare, och framför allt har han i modern tid väckt ett stort forskningsintresse. Författare som Henri Crouzel och Hans Urs von Balthasar verkade under 1900-talet för att återupprätta Origenes genom att ifrågasätta den polemik som riktats mot honom och föra fördjupade diskussioner om hans teologiska bidrag. Origenes verk gavs ut i nya editioner och översättningar, inte minst i serien *Sources Chrétien-*nes.

Ett tydligt resultat av detta intresse för de alexandrinske teologen är den internationella Origeneskonferens, *Origeniana*, som anordnas i regel vart fjärde år sedan 1973. Den nutida forskningen om Origenes täcker vitt skilda områden: Hans förhållningssätt till den hellenistiska filosofin och till gnosticismen; hans exegetik, eskatologi, och kyrkosyn; hans roll som predikant, lärare och filosof. Inte bara hans egen teologi och exegetik, utan också receptionen av denna i senare kristendom har studerats. Universitetet i Århus har länge varit ett nordiskt centrum för Origenesforskning, med flera internationella Origenesforskare och som samord-

nare för det EU-finansierade forskningsprogrammet *The History of Human Freedom and Dignity in Western Civilization*, som avslutades 2021 (se www.itn-humanfreedom.eu/). Även vid Lunds universitet har mycket uppmärksamhet riktats mot Origenes under de senaste åren, med diskussion av Origenes-texter inom ramen för patristikseminariet, och besök av en ledande Origenesforskare, John Behr.

Även den Patristiska dagen 2023 ägnades åt Origenes, med titeln "Origen of Alexandria and His Legacy". Vid Centrum för teologi och religionsvetenskap i Lund hade vi glädjen att ta emot tongivande Origenesforskare som presenterade aktuell forskning på området. Artiklarna i årets PNA bygger alla på föredrag som hölls vid detta symposium, och därmed präglas även denna volym av ett Origenes-tema.

Tre av artiklarna fokuserar på Origenes egna texter, medan två behandlar hans senare reception. Miriam De Cock undersöker hur Origenes såg på exegetens roll i medicinska termer, som själens läkare som kunde bidra till en människas inre tillfrisknande från synd. Carl Johan Berglund analyserar Origenes syn på martyrskap, och visar hur den alexandrinske teologen argumenterade för att martyrdöden var något gott och eftersträvansvärt. I en artikel som jämför Origenes exegetik med den valentinianske teologen Heracleons, undersöker Lavinia Cerioni utifrån ett genusperspektiv hur de båda författarna tolkar den samariska kvinnan i Johannesevangeliet.

När det gäller senare Origenes-reception, fokuserar Anders-Christian Jacobsen på hur Erasmus av Rotterdam använde sig av Origenes teologi i debatten om fri vilja under 1500-talet. Genom Valeria Desys bidrag får vi en inblick i hur den mycket inflytelserike kyrkohistorikern Adolf von Harnack förstod och framställde Origenes.

Med detta nummer kan vi därmed lova PNA:s läsare en god inblick i den mest aktuella forskningen om en av kristendomens mest betydande tänkare.

Katarina Pålsson

MEDDELANDEN

Collegium Patristicum Lundense

Collegium Patristicum Lundense har under 2023 anordnat en patristisk dag med temat *Origen of Alexandria and His Legacy* (mer om detta nedan). En patristisk afton arrangerades den 29 mars då Christian Høgel höll ett föredrag med titeln *Den tidiga grekiska Koranen. 82 fragment av en komplett översättning från före år 870 e.Kr.* Vid en patristisk afton den 17 oktober presenterade Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen sin översättning av Romanos Meloden, i föredraget *Nattens Sange – Att översätta Romanos Meloden till danska.*

Svenskt patristiskt bibliotek VIII, *Teologi efter Nicaea*, är under arbete, med Daniel Wihlborg och Katarina Pålsson som redaktörer. Boken kommer att publiceras under våren 2024. Översättningsseminarier arrangeras inom ramen för patristikseminariet vid CTR.

I samband med den patristiska dagen den 24 april ägde också Collegiets årsmöte rum. Vid detta valdes följande personer till styrelseledamöter: Samuel Rubenson (omval), Britt Dahlman (omval) Katarina Pålsson (omval), Andreas Westergren (omval), Thomas Arentzen (omval), Simon Pedersen Schmidt (omval), Karin Zetterholm (omval) och Maria Stureson (omval), Christian Høgel (ny styrelsemedlem). Thomas Arentzen valdes till ny preses. Samuel Rubenson tackades för lång och trogen tjänst. Styrelsen har under året haft fyra protokollförda möten (26/1, 15/5, 21/8 och 21/11) och därutöver har redaktionsutskottet och symposieutskottet var för sig handlagt sina respektive ärenden.

Styrelsen håller Collegiets hemsida, patristik.se, uppdaterad med information om patristiska aktiviteter av intresse för medlemmarna.

Katarina Pålsson

The Newman Institute Research Seminar in Late Ancient and Byzantine Cultures

In the academic year 2022–23, the Newman Research Seminar in Late Ancient and Byzantine Cultures continued to meet in hybrid form, both at the Newman Institute and online. In this way, we found we could benefit from the input of people outside Sweden without additional costs, and we even had a small number of additional members for a while joining us online. In the autumn term we had a strong archaeological component among speakers. In the first three meetings, we had papers from Dr Ioanna Arvanitidou (Rome/Thessaloniki) on “Basilica Church Plans in Northern Greece” (28 September), a more popular design for the area than expected; Dr Paschalis Androudis (Thessaloniki), who talked about his research on the “Sculptures of the Monastery of Chilandar on Mount Athos” (12 October), again an art form that is not associated with Orthodox churches, but that has some attestations from the medieval period on the Holy Mountain; and Professor Jordina Sales-Carbonell (Barcelona) who talked about “Churches and Theatres in Late antique Spain” (26 October), more specifically on a phenomenon she investigated, which saw the close combination of church structures within Roman amphitheatres across the Empire. One example is in Tarragona, in Southern Spain. Professor Sales-Carbonell explains the combination with the cult of martyrs in their places of execution. The last two seminars of the term were more philological. Adrià Lull (Valencia) gave a paper on the Platonic education of Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople from his doctoral work (9 November). We finished the term on 23 November with an in-person speaker, Professor Julia Doroszewska (Warsaw), in a joint event with the Department of Philology and Linguistics, Uppsala University, which ended in a nice pre-Christmas meal. Doroszewska gave a very interesting paper entitled “Sainly epiphanies and theatrical modes” drawing on a large body of early medieval hagiographies.

After the Christmas break, we resumed meetings in the Spring term with my paper on “Performing the Bible at Dura: a Panel of Elijah and the Widow of Sarepta as *tableau vivant*” (18 January), which was getting a final run before publication. The papers in this term were more varied. Anna Usacheva (Helsinki) presented a chapter from her forthcoming book, “Public Personae and Publishing Strategies in the 5th Century Roman Empire: Jerome and Rufinus” (15 February). Rebecca Krawiec

(Canisius College, Buffalo, NY) ran past the seminar a paper presented at a conference in honor of David Brakke, to perfect it for publication, entitled: "Death on the Nile: Ascetic Practice in Egyptian Monasticism" (15 March). Canisius is a small Jesuit college like Newman, so we were particularly pleased to have this transatlantic contact. Also from the US was our next speaker, Adriano Duque (Villanova University, Pennsylvania), who teaches in the Spanish Department of this Augustinian Catholic University, but presented an interpretation of an early Christian text from a legal point of view, "Rereading Blandina's Martyrdom" (29 March). A welcome home visit was paid to us from Södertälje by Professor Davor Dzalto (St Ignatius/EHS Stockholm), who discussed an encyclopedia-format article he was preparing for publication on "Iconodoulia and Iconoclasm" (19 April), while another Orthodox speaker was entirely online because it was organized by my colleague Mårten Björk for the Philosophy and Theology seminar in cooperation with ours. The theological level was indeed quite high. The speaker was Isidoros Katsos (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Oxford) who talked about "The Metaphysics of Light" (11 May) from his book that was just published, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral Literature: From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford University Press, 2023). Another seminar in presence, in collaboration with the Department of Philology and Linguistics, Uppsala University, saw the visit of a doctoral student from the Catholic University of Leuven, Niels De Ridder (KU-Leuven), discussing hagiographical texts on "Jews in Byzantium". On this occasion we also had an end-of-year party in the courtyard of Newman blessed by good weather. A last, low-key seminar was the presentation by Maros Nicak (Comenius University, Bratislava) on "Narsai: Poetry and Theology in the *Sōgītā* on Cyril and Nestorius" (30 May). Dr Nicak was a visiting Scholar at the Department of Philology and Linguistics, Uppsala University, where he was perfecting his Middle Persian. Even though the Syriac was beyond the expertise of the seminar, we enjoyed Maros's enthusiastic presentation.

Barbara Crostini

Forum for Patristik

Forum for Patristik afholder normalt to møder om året på henholdsvis Aarhus Universitet og Københavns Universitet. Den 30. januar 2023 afholdt Forum for Patristik i København sit seminar nummer 50. Temaet

var synd og frelse i oldkirkens teologi. Gitte Buch-Hansen, lektor i teologi ved Københavns Universitet, holdt et oplæg om arvesynd hos Filon og Paulus. Anders-Christian Jacobsen, professor i dogmatik ved Aarhus Universitet, holdt et oplæg om synd og frelse hos Origenes. Nils Arne Pedersen, lektor, dr. theol. ved Aarhus Universitet, holdt et oplæg under titlen "Blev der nogensinde opfundet en arvesyndslære?".

Den 14. august 2023 afholdt Forum for Patristik i Aarhus sit seminar nummer 51. Mattias Sommer Bostrup, adjunkt, ph.d., holdt et oplæg om reformationen og den oldkirkelige tradition. Christian Houth Vrangbæk, ph.d., holdt et oplæg om Erasmus og hans portrætteringer af kirkefædre. Nils Arne Pedersen, lektor, dr. theol., holdt et oplæg om fadervor som dåbsbøn i oldkirken.

Næste seminar i Forum for Patristik kommer til at handle om den nikæenske trosbekendelse i anledning af jubilæet i 2025. Programmet kan findes på www.patristik.dk. Forum for Patristik kan kontaktes på forum@patristik.dk.

Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch

Societas Patristica Fennica (SPF)

Patristiska Sällskapet i Finland (*Societas Patristica Fennica*) ordnade 28 april 2023 i Vetenskapernas hus i Helsingfors en patristisk dag med temat "Gamla källor, nya idéer: hurdana metoder används idag i forskningen av den tidiga kristendomen?" Docent Damaskinos av Xenofontos föreläste om nya metoder i liturgisk forskning med temat "Hur kan man nå försvunna ljud, dofter och rörelser". TD Harri Huovinen behandlade studiet av kyrkans medlemskap i Kyrillos av Jerusalems texter, och TD Eetu Manninen berättade hur han i sin doktorsavhandling hade använt modern teknologi i studiet av utvecklingen av Augustinus tänkande. I paneldiskussionen berättade docent Timo Nisula om hur man forskar om retoriken i Augustinus predikningar, PhD Siiri Toiviaiainen Rø problematiserade sättet som den filosofiska kontexten av källor ofta presenteras, och doktoranden Tomi Ferm talade om patristik som antikforskning. Temat "nya metoder" väckte stort intresse, och det beslöts att ordna ett nytt tillfälle för behandlingen av andra nya metoder och hjälpmedel.

Sällskapet har under år 2023 gett ut två volymer i serien *Studia Patristica Fennica*: en finsk översättning av Athanasios den Stores brev till

Serapion (övers. Tomi Ferm) samt ett samlingsverk om Jerusalem under den tidiga kyrkans tid, Varhaiskirkon Jerusalem (red. Serafim Seppälä).

Mera information om *Societas Patristica Fennica* och dess verksamhet hittas på hemsidan: www.suomenpatristinenseura.fi/pa-svenska/, på Twitter: Suomen patristinen seura @patristiikka, och på Facebook: www.facebook.com/SocietasPatristicaFennica

Anni Maria Laato

Center for Studiet af Antikken og Kristendommen (C-SAC), Aarhus Universitet

C-SAC hosted or co-hosted the following seminars and workshops in 2023:

On February 8, we celebrated the publication of Professor Anders-Christian Jacobsen's new book *Origenes. Liv, teologi, reception, 2022* with a seminar with presentations by Professor Kasper Bro Larsen and the author. Origen's exegesis of the New Testament received special attention.

For three days, March 22, May 10 and May 15 there were reading-seminars connected to Associate Professor Christian Thru Djurslev's (PI) project, *How Christians Stole the Past*. The seminars focused on reading book 3 of Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* and were chaired by the project team, Valeria Dessey and Tue Søvsø and the PI. The team presented comprehensive empirical evidence derived from traditional and computer-assisted readings of patristic authors on how vital arguments from history and chronology were for many patristic authors. Theophilus was then studied in depth as an example demonstrating the diligence with which he attempted to synchronise Near Eastern, Jewish, Greek and Roman chronologies.

In May and June, Postdoctoral Fellow Sara Contini, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, and assistant Professor Fernando Soler, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, visited Aarhus. During their stay a seminar with the following papers was arranged (May 26):

Soler, *A nutritional perspective on the Jesus of the Gospels*

Cerioni, *Women and eucharistic meals: ritual eating and drinking in early Christianity*

Contini, *"For all and None." Dignity of human souls in Jerome's exegesis of Isaiah 51:12–13 and Ecclesiastes 3:18–21*

From August to September, C-SAC was visited by PhD student Maja Menzel from Jena and briefly by postdoctoral scholar Ryszard Bobrowicz, KU Leuven. During their visits, a seminar was arranged (September 7). Here, Bobrowicz presented his project, *The Emergence of Canon Law*, which is part of the collective research project, *Dissenting Church*, and Menzel presented a paper on *The reception of Origen in Erasmus' Annotations on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. While the two papers seemed to have little to do with each other, some interesting common perspectives emerged on how authority is constructed.

On October 11, PhD-student Margrethe Kamille Birkler presented the paper *Envisioned and actual queer space in the monasteries of Egypt in late antiquity* – and where to go next.

It is a tradition for C-SAC to celebrate Christmas with a joint seminar with the research programme *Classical Antiquity and its Heritage*. In this year's seminar on December 6, Associate Professor Troels Myrup Kristensen, presented the paper *Late Antique Religious Landscapes and the Scales of Mobility at Alahan, Turkey*.

For more information, contact Jakob Engberg, je@cas.au.dk

Jakob Engberg

Johannesakademin

Johannesakademin har under 2023 anordnat ett sedvanligt 6 juni-seminarium som detta år handlade om den kristna traditionens erfarenheter av tider av kris och hot: "Bot och hopp i klimatkrisens tid". Medverkade gjorde Lena Bergström, Petra Carlsson, Patrik Hagman, Peter Halldorf och Annika Spalde.

Den 6–8 oktober hölls ett symposium om Isak syriern, "Gå in i stillhetens kultur". Huvudtalare var Sabino Chiala, prior i Monastero di Bose. Övriga medverkare var Valentina Duca, Patrik Hagman, Charbel Rizk och Samuel Rubenson.

Under hösten 2023 och våren 2024 anordnas en ny kurs, "Den kristna kulturens historia", vilken består av 15 föreläsningar där olika uttryck av kristen tro behandlas: konst, musik, litteratur, arkitektur och andra kulturella former. Föreläsningarna behandlar bl.a ikoner i bysantinsk tradition, musiken och det heliga, lovsångens historia och bokens historia. Föreläsare är Helena Bodin, Eric Schüldt, Emma Audas, Mia Åke-

stam, Robin Johansson, Samuel Rubenson, Simone Kotva, Hanna Källström, Per Holmberg, Joel Halldorf, Ellen Vingren, Robert Eriksson, Peter Halldorf och Patrik Hagman.

Under 2023 har de två grupper som översättningsseminariet numera består av fortsatt sitt arbete med varsitt kapitel av den systematiska samlingen av *Ökenfädernas tänkespråk*. En grupp träffas i Johannesakademins lokaler i Linköping under ledning av Britt Dahlman. I denna grupp pågår arbetet med den svenska översättningen och ny grekisk utgåva av kapitel 20 och 21. Den andra gruppen har endast digitala träffar. Den arbetar med kapitel 11 och leds av Per Rönnegård. Två digitala lördagstillfällen är planerade till den 27/1 och 16/3. De fysiska lördagsträffarna planeras äga rum den 23/3 och 27/4. Tidigare volymer av Paradiset finns utgivna i serien *Silentium Apophthegmata*, <https://www.silentiumskrifter.se>. Den som vill anmäla sitt deltagande och få del av förberedelsematerial kan skriva till Britt Dahlman: britt.dahlman@ctr.lu.se

För aktuellt program och ytterligare information, se Johannesakademins hemsida: www.johannesakademin.se

Britt Dahlman

Masterprogrammet Religious Roots of Europe i Lund

Vad betyder titeln till masterprogrammet Religious Roots of Europe (RRE)? Det var en av de frågor som några jurister ställde i höstas när RRE utvärderades. Programmet handlar ju inte alls om Europa, utan om Mellanöstern, menade de! Så kanske kan det marknadsföras på ett annat sätt? Kanske: "Sök Europas religiösa rötter i den egyptiska öknen, längs Sidenvägen, och i Jerusalem!" En utväxling som denna, med vänligt kritiska kollegor, gav flera goda tankar.

Det är inte alltid lätt att beskriva ett program som innehåller patristik, judaistik och islamologi i en salig blandning, men kanske kan några av följande masterarbeten ge en fingervisning. På ett gemensamt seminarium före terminsstart presenterades fyra arbeten samtidigt.

Det är väl få framläggningar som har varit så lyckade om man ser till den variation, relevans och kvalitet som de representerade: Ula Chowaniecs studie av en nutida judisk poet i "Weaving Identities The Secular Jewishness in Irena Klepfisz's Works", Alexandra Lembke-Ross uppsats om moderskap i senantika, till synes asketiska texter: "Motherhood

and Martyrdom: The Maternal Body in The Diary of Perpetua”, Davide de Lorenzos kontextualisering av den tidiga muslimska bönen i olika samtida kristna traditioner i ”From Dawn to Dusk: Studying the Origin of the Islamic Fivefold Daily Liturgy in the Qur’ān” och Carina Perstadius försök att läsa Thomasevangeliet som senantika skolövningar, krior, i ”The One and Only God: A Chriic Discussion on Monotheism in The Gospel of Thomas”. I våras försvarade också Amer Sare ett arbete om ”The Roots of Arab Islam as a State Identity: A Numismatic Approach to the Emergence of Arab Islam as a Public Identity in the Near East during the Rule of ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705 C.E.)” Som sagt, en salig blandning av patristik, judaistik och islamologi!

Under hösten började den femtonde kullen studenter i RRE och i vanlig ordning kom de från hela världen: från Gambia, USA, Sydkorea och Sverige. Några afrikanska studenter fick dock inte visum i tid och hindrades från att starta. När gamla och nya studenter i programmet möttes på kompaktseminarium i Lund, besökte de synagogan i Malmö och lyssnade till en offentlig föreläsning av den nye professorn i grekiska och latin, Christian Høgel, som handlade om en tidig översättning av Koranen till grekiska.

Två gamla RRE-studenter i Lund, Lucie Perez och Mariette Minnemann, blev under året antagna som doktorander i Köpenhamn och i Lund, men har behållit kontakten till programmet genom att hjälpa de nya studenterna.

Andreas Westergren

Forskningsprojekt

Auktoritet, samhälle och individuell frihet – det latinska klosterväsendet och rötterna till Europas utbildningsideal (ELAM: Early Latin Monasticism)

Forskningsprojektet om det tidiga latinska klosterväsendet har under 2023 haft en intern workshop på Mariavalls kloster där vi också fick möjlighet att presentera och diskutera vårt material, våra frågeställningar och preliminära resultat för en monastisk publik, vilket var mycket givande. Därutöver ordnade projektet ett mindre symposium i Lund den 9–10 juni med följande program:

Peter Gemeinhardt: *Institutionalizing the Charisma? Early Christian Monasteries between Ascetic Practice and Organization*

Marilyn Dunn: *Notes on the emergence and role of the earliest Latin monastic rules*

Albrecht Diem: *Regulating and educating in Early Latin Monasticism*

Matthieu Herman van der Meer: *Returning to the world? Codex Harley 5041 on monk-preachers*

Elisabet Göransson: *Notes on the earliest manuscript transmission of Jerome, Rufinus and Cassian*

Katarina Pålsson: *Scripture, authority and community in Jerome*

Samuel Rubenson: *Rufinus and the shadows of Egypt and Cappadocia*

Britt Dahlman: *John Cassian and the Rhetoric of Education*

Henrik Johnsén: *The use of John Cassian in monastic rules*

Projektet har genomgått sin halvtidsutvärdering och avslutas i december 2024. Under 2024 presenteras preliminära resultat vid den patristiska dagen i Lund den 2 april. En internationell slutkonferens planeras att äga rum i början av december 2024.

Samuel Rubenson

Jesaja i gränslandet mellan judiskt och kristet

Projektet *Jesaja i gränslandet mellan judiskt och kristet* är finansierat av Finlands Akademi Polin-institutet för åren 2022–2026. Projektledare är professor Antti Laato. Jesajaboken blev den mest citerade och tolkade gammaltestamentliga boken i den tidiga kristendomen. Kristen tolkning, som såg det nytestamentliga evangeliet förutspått i denna bok, fick ändå inte sin början i ett tomrum, utan var på många sätt beroende av den judiska tolkningen av samma bok. Projektet fokuserar på det ömsesidiga förhållandet mellan tidig kristen och judisk tolkning av Jesajaboken. Bara sporadisk uppmärksamhet har fästs vid den här aspekten i tidigare forskning. I tillägg till att projektet visar hur den judiska receptionen påverkade den kristna, och hur olika tolkningsmässiga teman levde vidare i den tidiga kyrkan, leder projektet också till en fördjupad förståelse av hur den antijudiska teologin utvecklades i den tidiga kyrkan, samt hur detta nya polemiska förhållande blev synligt i judisk exeges under rabbinsk tid.

Anni Maria Laato

Beyond the Garden: An Ecocritical Approach to Early Byzantine Christianity

Det Uppsala-baserte prosjektet *Beyond the Garden* (Vetenskapsrådet) sjø-sattes 2019 og ble avsluttet høsten 2023. Med et økologisk blikk har forskningsprosjektet særlig fokusert på trær – kristnes komplekse interaksjon med trær i tidligkristne fortellinger om og visuelle framstillinger av trær. Foruten en rekke artikler og foredrag har to monografier kommet ut av prosjektet: *Byzantine Tree Life: Christianity and the Arboreal Imagination* (av Thomas Arentzen, Virginia Burrus & Glenn Peers, 2021) og Arentzens *Våketrær: et essay om røtter og hengivenhet* (under utgivelse på norske Verbum 2024). I forbindelse med prosjektet har følgende to konferanser gått av stabelen: “*In no way does life differ from the sea*”: *Approaching the Non-Human in Byzantium and Beyond*, online mai 2021, og “*The sound of your leaves implores the Creator*”: *Relating to the Non-Human in Byzantium*, Metochi (Lesbos), mai 2023. Foredragene fra sistnevnte er under redigering for utgivelse i bokform (red. Laura Borghetti & Thomas Arentzen).

Thomas Arentzen

Ad fontes and Accommodatio. Erasmus' Portrayal of Church Fathers in his Patristic Prefaces (avhandlingsprosjekt)

On May 25 Christian Houth Vrangbæk, successfully defended his PhD-dissertation, *Ad fontes and Accommodatio. Erasmus' Portrayal of Church Fathers in his Patristic Prefaces*. The public defence was chaired by Professor Peter Lodberg and the opponents were, Professor Mark Vessey, University of British Columbia, Professor Outi Merisolo, Jyväskylä Universitet and Associate professor Jakob Engberg. Professors Anders-Christian Jacobsen and Bo Kristian Holm had been the supervisors.

Jakob Engberg

Know Yourself: Echoes and Interpretations of the Delphic Maxim in Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Philosophy

Forskningsprosjektet *Know Yourself: Echoes and Interpretations of the Delphic Maxim in Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Philosophy*, har fra 2019–2022 arbeidet med tolkninger og henspillinger på «kjenn deg selv»-maksimen i en rekke ulike antikke tekster, med vekt på de fire første århundrene etter Kristus. Prosjektet har vært ledet av Ole-Jakob Filtvedt ved

MF i Oslo. En internasjonal forskergruppe har arbeidet med materialet som inkluderer Johannesevangeliet og Tomasevangeliet, tidlig-kristne tenkere som Ireneus, Klemens av Aleksandria, Origenes, Tertullian, Gregor Thaumaturgus, Gregor av Nyssa og Augustin, en mosaik fra San Gregorio-klosteret i Roma, og tekster fra ulike andre tradisjoner (Platon, Filon, Seneca, Epiktet, Plutark, Plotin og hermetisk litteratur). Prosjektet bidrar ikke bare til vår kunnskap om maksimens resepsjonshistorie, men også til det omdiskuterte spørsmålet om hvordan temaet selverkjennelse utvikles og diskuteres i antikke kilder. Prosjektet er avsluttet og resultatene er under publisering i en antologi på De Gruyter.

John Kaufman

Pågående danska projekt

PhD-student, Eva Elisabeth Houth Vrangbæk, *What is Love other than Will. An Investigation of Augustine's Concept of Love and Will Assisted by Computational Methods*. The project is ongoing and expected to be completed in 2024.

Postdoc Lavinia Cerioni, *Origen on Gender: The feminine as an intellectual category in the works of Origen of Alexandria*, Marie Curie, February 2021 to March 2024.

Associate Professor Christian Thrué Djurslev, *How the Christians stole the past: contestation, education and interaction in imperial literary culture, 2022–2025*.

Jakob Engberg

Pågående finska projekt

Harri Huovinen arbetar med projektet *The Place of Religious Experience in Late Ancient Ecclesiology*.

Serafim Seppälä arbetar bl.a. med projekten *Relationship of God and Animals in Theodoret of Cyrrhus*; *Two Brides in Dispute: the Synagogue and the Church in Syriac Dialogue Poems*; *A Symbol in Tension: the Cross in the earliest Christian-Muslim Encounter*.

Anni Maria Laato

Konferenser och seminarier

Lunds universitet, 24 april 2023

Den patristiska dagen: Origen of Alexandria and His Legacy

Patristiska dagen arrangerades av Collegium Patristicum Lundense den 24 april vid Centrum för teologi och religionsvetenskap i Lund. Temat för dagen var *Origen of Alexandria and His Legacy*. Föredrag hölls av Carl Johan Berglund (Åbo Akademi), Miriam De Cock (Dublin City University), Lavinia Cerioni (Aarhus Universitet), Samuel Rubenson (Lunds universitet), Giovanni Hermanin de Reichenfeld (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum), Anders-Christian Jacobsen (Aarhus Universitet) och Valeria Dessy (Aarhus Universitet). Föredragen följdes av ett panelsamtal med talarna och Hans Engdahl (University of Western Cape). Därefter sammanträdde Collegiets medlemmar till årsmöte, och dagen avslutades med en middag.

Katarina Pålsson

Stockholm, 26–27 april 2023

The Paideia European Institute for Jewish Studies seminar

The Paideia European Institute for Jewish Studies met April 26–27, 2023. A broad range of current research topics was presented, from Yiddish language to Antisemitism to Jewish spaces to Jewish – Christian relations. Wally V. Cirafesi (Lund University) gave a keynote lecture titled “Architecturalizing Resistance: Ancient Synagogues as a Response to the Christianization of Palestine”. In the lecture, Cirafesi discussed the various material and spatial strategies that ancient Jews employed to both construct their sense of Jewish identity and resist the growing power of imperial Christianity in 4th–6th century Palestine.

Wally V. Cirafesi

University of Valencia, 4–7 september 2023

Second International Conference on Early Christian Literature, Late Antiquity and Byzantine Hagiography: “Imitationes Christi and Women Martyrs”

Ángel Narro bjöd för andra gången in forskare i patristisk och bysantinsk litteratur till en konferens om martyrb berättelser med kvinnlig huvudperson. Från Norden deltog denna gång Barbara Crostini, Newmaninstitutet, med ett paper om Theklas närvaro bland väggmålningarna

i Dura, och Carl Johan Berglund, Åbo Akademi, med ett föredrag om Perpetuas värdighet på arenan i Karthago.

Carl Johan Berglund

Lunds universitet, 11–13 september 2023

Judaism and Trajectories of Religious Interaction: From the New Testament to the Qur'an. An International Symposium

Symposiet var uppbyggt kring diskussion och deltagarna hade uppmanats att presentera idéer, texter eller specifika problem som de för närvarande arbetar med. Programmet bestod av fem olika delar: *Jesus-orientation as an Expression of Judaism; Jesus-oriented Groups and the Formation of Rabbinic Judaism; Interaction between Jews and Christians; Jewish and Christian Legacy in the Qur'an* och *Interaction between Jews, Christians and Muslims*. Deltagarna kom från Tyskland, Storbritannien, Kanada, USA, Norge och Sverige.

Karin Hedner Zetterholm

Åbo Akademi, 28–31 maj 2024

The Challenge of Poverty: Theological Responses in Early Christian Literature and Global Christian History

Ett av den nytestamentliga litteraturens tydligaste utmaningar är dess fattigdomsideal – att var och en med ett överskott av ekonomiska resurser ska dela dessa med dem som har mindre, så att inga betydande ekonomiska skillnader kvarstår inom den kristna gemenskapen. Hur har den utmaningen bemötts i patristisk litteratur och senare kyrkohistoria, och hur kan vi formulera en fattigdomsteologi för nutiden som varken är alltför förenklad eller alltför naiv? För att studera den frågan inbjuder vi fem internationellt erkända forskare till Åbo – John Barclay, Helen Rhee, Susan Holman, Elina Vuola och Chammah Kaunda – för att tillsammans med doktorander och andra forskare närma sig frågan från olika perspektiv inom bibelvetenskap, patristik, kyrkohistoria och missionsvetenskap. Mer information finns på <https://polinstitutet.fi/poverty>

Carl Johan Berglund

NYA PUBLIKATIONER

NYA AVHANDLINGAR

Airijoki, Moa, *Tending the Garden of the Monks: Investigation of a Medieval Copto-Arabic Apophthegmata Patrum Recension*, Universitetet i Bergen, 19 januari 2024.

Huovinen, Harri, *Images of Divine Participation: A Reappraisal of Fourth Century Views on Church Membership* (Studia Patristica Fennica, 18), University of Eastern Finland, 9 December 2022.

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Ahonen, Marke, "Akhilleus ja filosofit" ["Achilles and the philosophers"], i: A. Bergman (red.), *Kristityt ennen kristittyjä: Vanhan liiton pyhät kirkkoisien silmin* [Christians before Christians: the saints of the Old Covenant through the eyes of churchmen] (Studia Patristica Fennica, 16), Helsingfors: Suomen patristinen seura – Patristiska samfundet i Finland 2022, 9–32.

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Anttila, Miikka, "*Mons umbrosus et condensus*: Gregorius Suuren luontometaforat" ["*Mons umbrosus et condensus*: The nature metaphors of Gregory the Great"], i: A. M. Laato (red.), *Kohti vapautta: Varhaiskristillisiä tulkintoja vapaudesta, unista ja maailmankuvasta* [Towards freedom: early Christian interpretations of freedom, dreams and world-view] (Studia Patristica Fennica, 21), Helsingfors: Suomen patristinen seura – Patristiska samfundet i Finland 2023, 171–184.

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Sammanställning av Britt Dahlman

ARTIKLAR

ORIGEN ON THE HOMILETIC EXEGETE AS PHYSICIAN OF THE SOUL

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Abstract:

In this paper, I examine a selection of Origen's homilies in which he comments on the healing or medicinal properties of scripture, followed by an analysis of passages in which he discusses the role of the exegete in the healing process. I argue that the analogy of the healing physician helps Origen make the case that the ideal exegete is one who has had both the appropriate training in the discipline and, accordingly, the knowledge concerning when and how to apply said training for the sake of healing the sinful souls of his audience members. These general claims of Origen concerning the role of the exegete provide us with insight concerning his self-understanding as one such exegete-physician. Accordingly, I attend to the rhetorical use to which Origen put the metaphor of the physician as he worked to present himself as an authoritative, well-trained interpreter.

Key Words:

Origen of Alexandria, ideal exegete, early Christian soul care, homiletic exegesis

Introduction

The past decade has seen an exciting resurgence of scholarship on health, healing, medicine, and disability in Christian late antiquity. Excellent work has recently been conducted on such topics as the medical contexts of early monastic spiritual direction; late ancient thought on

bodily deformities, wounds, and scars; and the relationship between hospitals and Christianity in antiquity to name but a few.¹

This resurgence has in part been made possible due to developments in the fields of both the history of medicine and the study of ancient philosophy; in the past few decades, scholars of both fields have increasingly begun to emphasize that in antiquity the disciplines of medicine and philosophy overlapped a great deal,² since both concerned themselves with “‘healing’, or ‘attitudes and actions with regard to health and sickness.’”³ Philip van der Eijk puts it this way:

scholars in ancient philosophy have come to realise that a number of “philosophers” too had their own particular reasons for being interested in areas and themes that we commonly associate with medicine and for pursuing these interests in a variety of forms, theoretical as well as practical – and, in so doing, were interacting with medical writers in the setting of their agendas, the formation of their ideas, concepts and methodologies and in their practical activities.⁴

¹ See for example the very recent book of Jonathan L. Zecher, *The Medical Art of Spiritual Direction in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), Oxford: OUP, 2022; Heidi Marx, “Religion, Medicine, and Health”, in: Nicholas Baker-Brian and Joseph Lössl (ed.), *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons 2018, 511–28; Sethina Watson, *On Hospitals: Welfare, Law, and Christianity in Western Europe, 400–1320*, Oxford: OUP, 2020; Heidi Marx and Kristi Upson-Saia, “The State of the Question: Religion, Medicine, Disability and Health in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8:2 (2015), 257–72. See also the recent special issue of edited by Kristi Upson-Saia that is dedicated to “Rethinking Medical Metaphors in Late Ancient Christianity” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2:4 (2018). Note also the forthcoming collection of essays edited by Susan R. Holman, Chris L. de Wet, and Jonathan L. Zecher, *Disability, Medicine, and Healing Discourse in Early Christianity: New Conversations for Health Humanities*, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2024.

² See especially the following within the substantial amount of literature on the topic: Philip van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, Cambridge: CUP, 2009; Jacques Brunschwig and Martha C. Nussbaum (eds.), *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge: CUP, 1993; Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton: PUP, 1994.

³ Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 6.

⁴ Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 9.

A major underlying assumption of all thinkers of this period, an assumption that accounts to some degree for the overlap in the functions of the physician and the philosopher, was that the body and the mind/soul were so tightly connected that the treatments of the ailing body and the mind/soul shared some common features as well.⁵ It has furthermore been demonstrated that in this construal, protreptic becomes a key element in medico-philosophical therapeutics aimed at identifying the root of soul sickness and helping the patient return to health, particularly as it developed within the virtue ethics of moral philosophy.⁶

This insight concerning philosophical protreptics has been particularly useful for scholars of Christianity in late antiquity, for the tool obviously lent itself well to the Christian project of healing the sinful soul, especially in homiletic contexts. Christian preachers, like the moral philosophers of their past and present, can thus fruitfully be understood to be engaged in the therapeutic work of caring for the health of the souls under their care. To date, the corpus of John Chrysostom has received the most attention within this framework.⁷ The words of Wendy Mayer, whose work has been instrumental in this discussion, are illustrative of this development in Chrysostom scholarship:

if we are to accept that John viewed himself primarily as a Christian philosopher and psychagogue, then we should perhaps also consider that in his approach to exegesis he inherited or at least drew upon another aspect of that tradition. The performance of exegesis is not alien to the role of a therapist raised in the traditions of the Hellenistic moral philosophers.⁸

⁵ Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy*, 27.

⁶ On this development see Gill, "Philosophical Therapy", 339–360.

⁷ See the essay of Wendy Mayer: "Shaping the Sick Soul: Reshaping the Identity of John Chrysostom", in: Wendy Mayer and Geoffrey G. Dunn (ed.), *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium: Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen* (SVC 123), Leiden: Brill, 2015, 140–164. See also Robert G. T. Edwards, "Healing Despondency with Biblical Narrative in John Chrysostom's *Letters to Olympias*", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28:2 (2020), 203–231; David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching*, Oxford: OUP, 2014.

⁸ Mayer, "Shaping the Sick Soul", 151.

In other words, according to Mayer, since Chrysostom situated himself within the Hellenistic medico-philosophical tradition, students of his exegesis should move beyond analyzing it solely within the context of Jewish and Christian modes of scriptural interpretation and should focus as well on his own goals of exegesis, namely, the healing of his audience members' souls. For, in a very real way, Chrysostom expected that his interpretation and preaching on the appropriate sections of scripture contributed to this end as he directed his energy toward teaching his audiences how to regulate their souls with respect to their mindset, emotions, and desires vis-à-vis the scriptural text.

I contend that Origen had similar goals for his exegesis, although his comments on the topic are much less extensive than those that we find in Chrysostom's corpus.⁹ For one thing, it is less clear that Origen situated himself within the medico-philosophical tradition. Perhaps for this reason, Origen's voice is much less considered in the above-mentioned discussions. Nevertheless, Origen does frequently make use of the analogy of the physician and his medicinal remedies as a way of describing Christ, scripture, and the exegetical task within his preaching.¹⁰ This has been observed in a 1999 study, *Cristo médico, según Orígenes*, in which Samuel Fernández provided a thoroughgoing treatment of Origen's understanding and use of the metaphor of the physician as it applies to God and Christ, and to a lesser degree, to scripture and the scriptural interpreter.¹¹ After his treatment of Origen's use of the metaphor

⁹ Origen comments more generally (and positively) on the science of medicine throughout his corpus. See, for example, *Contra Celsum* 2.67; 3.6, 121–3, 222–5, 42, 61–62; 4.15; *Comm. Matt.* 13.6; *Hom Num* 17.1.3. For a general treatment of Origen's assessment of medical theory and its role within his theology, see David G. Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology in Origen", in: HPC Hanson and Henri Crouzel (ed.), *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies, University of Manchester September 7th–11th, 1981*, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985, 191–199.

¹⁰ It is well known that Origen considered Christ to be a physician of souls. See the following examples: *Peri Archon* 3.1.15; *Philocalia* 27.9; *Contra Celsum* 2.24; 4.15.

¹¹ Samuel Fernández, *Cristo médico, según Orígenes: La actividad médica como metáfora de la acción divina* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 64), Roma, 1999. For other treatments of Origen's understanding of the metaphor of Christ as physician, see the recent article by Francesco Rotiroti, "The Violent Shepherd: Constructing Legitimate Violence in Pre-Ni-

throughout his corpus, Fernández spends approximately 10 pages of his nearly 300-page work on Origen's understanding of scripture's healing capacity and much less directly, on the interpreter himself. A key observation of Fernández was that it is the presence of Christ in scripture that results in its healing power.¹² Fernández went on to demonstrate that for Origen, scripture's healing capacity was only recognized by "the saint" who had had special preparation in acquiring the knowledge of scripture's medicinal value. However, Fernández's emphasis was not on the exegete so much as the exegetical methods required to deal with the healing capacities of scripture.¹³

In this paper, I will build on the substantial work of Fernández, though I give much more attention to Origen's comments on the difficult and puzzling nature of the medicine (τό φάρμακον) of scripture,¹⁴ and accordingly, to his comments about the required training and spiritual maturity of their ideal interpreter, the homiletic exegetical physician (ιατρός).¹⁵ I begin with a close analysis of a selection of passages from Origen's exegetical homilies in which he discusses the healing or medicinal properties of scripture, followed by an analysis of passages in which he discusses the role of the exegete in the healing process. I argue that the analogy of the healing physician helps Origen make the case that the ideal exegete is one who has had both the appropriate training in the discipline and, accordingly, the knowledge concerning when and

cene Christianity", *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 109:1 (2023), 1–52. Rotiroti provides an exhaustive examination of the discursive violence of the pastor-shepherd vis-à-vis the biblical metaphor in the first few centuries of the church's existence. He demonstrates that of the pastor's role is to separate the infected livestock from the healthy, thus overlapping in function with the physician. See his treatment of Origen in this connection in particular on pages 32, 48, and 50.

¹² Fernández, *Cristo medico*, 277.

¹³ Fernández, *Cristo medico*, 274, 276–277.

¹⁴ The Greek term τό φάρμακον can also be translated as poison, and I will discuss the harmful capacity of scripture below. Unfortunately, the relevant example discussed below is no longer extant in Greek, and thus we must work with the Latin translation. The term used in that example is *venenum*.

¹⁵ I use the Greek medical terminology here, though five of my eight passages are unfortunately Latin translations of the original Greek.

how to apply said training¹⁶ for the sake of healing the sinful souls of his audience members.¹⁷ These general claims of Origen concerning the role of the exegete provide us with insight concerning his self-understanding as one such exegete-physician. My contribution, then, is that I attend to the rhetorical use to which Origen put the metaphor of the physician as he worked to present himself as an authoritative, well-trained interpreter. In so doing, I add the important voice of Origen to the current discussion of the ways in which ancient Christians made use of medical metaphors in their writings. In the period prior to what is typically understood as Late Antiquity, such influential Christians as Origen also worked with the notion that scripture had healing properties and that the capable homiletic exegete resembled a physician.

The Mysterious Medicinal Properties of Scripture

In several instances throughout his exegetical homilies in particular, Origen describes scripture in terms of its medicinal properties. We will examine four examples. The first two work together to demonstrate that the healing power of scripture is the result of Christ's presence therein. The third shows that for Origen, scripture can be difficult to understand, but that it does its healing work simply by virtue of being spoken aloud,

¹⁶ As will become clear throughout the remainder of this article, my findings concerning Origen's presentation of the exegete-physician as one who has had the appropriate specialized training, corroborate the findings of a forthcoming study by Jeremiah Coogan, who has demonstrated that Origen styled himself an elite specialist reader of Gospel literature in particular, or what he calls "a conduit of disciplinary knowledge." Coogan compares Origen's presentation of disciplinary knowledge formation concerning the Gospels to that of the disciplines of medicine, forensic oratory, jurisprudence, and literary criticism in his forthcoming article, "Failed Gospels and Disciplinary Knowledge in Origen's *Hom-Luc. 1*", in: Esther Brownsmith, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and Marianne Bjelland Kartzow (ed.), *Unruly Books: Rethinking Ancient and Academic Imaginations of Religious Texts*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.

¹⁷ We will see throughout this article that sin is the overarching ailment of the Christian for Origen, though he sometimes specifies particular conditions, such as the weakness or weariness of soul, an attachment to worldly things, and he even alludes to the inhabitation of evil powers, which require removal from the Christian's soul. The medicine found in scripture and applied appropriately by the exegete-physician has the capacity to heal all of these wounds. For a more extensive list of the various ailments of the Christian soul, see Fernández, *Cristo medico*, 89–104.

regardless of its being understood by the hearer. The fourth is similar: it demonstrates that Origen thought the remedies of scripture to be concealed and to do their work gradually and mysteriously.

The first example occurs in an admittedly ambiguous passage in Origen's second homily on Jeremiah, particularly concerning the words of Jer 2:22, "'Even if you wash in lye and cover yourself with soap, you are yet stained in your iniquities before me,' says the Lord." Here Origen explains to his audience that "bodily lye" does not have the capacity to cleanse the sinful soul, but that instead "one needs to see that the Word has every power, and just as he has the power of every Scripture, so the Word has the power of every ointment and he is the most cleansing power of any purifying agent."¹⁸ It is notoriously difficult to translate ὁ λόγος in Origen (and in much contemporary literature), as he uses the term to refer not only to Christ the Word, but also to the scriptures generally, to a specific passage or verse of scripture, to a teaching, or even to rational thought itself.¹⁹ In this passage it is no less difficult to know exactly how to translate the term, and accordingly, to differentiate Christ the Word from the prophetic scriptural words.²⁰ Nevertheless, this ambiguity actually proves my point, for both the personal *Logos*, Christ, and the scriptural *logos*, seem to be in view. While the cleansing power of Christ the Word is the primary emphasis, Origen connects this power to scripture itself, and he does so in connection with medical terminology, i.e., τὸ φάρμακον. The main point for our purposes is that the cleansing power of scripture and Christ are bound together, and it

¹⁸ *Homilies on Jeremiah 2.2*, in: *Origenes Werke XI. Die Homilien zum Buch Jeremia*. Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Alfons Fürst und Horacio E. Lona (OW, 11), Berlin: De Gruyter 2018; Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings 28* (Fathers of the Church 97), trans. John Clark Smith, Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2010. (OW 11:148; FC 97:25). Ἀλλὰ χρὴ εἰδέναι, ὅτι ὁ λόγος πᾶσαν δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ ὡσπερ πάσης γραφῆς δύναμιν ἔχει, οὕτως ὁ λόγος ἔχει παντὸς φαρμάκου δύναμιν καὶ παντὸς τοῦ καθαρίζοντος δύναμις ἐστι καὶ σημεῖον ὁμολογίας.

¹⁹ For a recent discussion of the difficulties of translating the term, see Joseph W. Trigg's comments in his introduction to his recent translation of Origen's Homilies on the Psalms. Trigg, "Introduction," to *Homilies on the Psalms: Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* (Fathers of the Church 141), Washington D.C., CUA Press, 2020, 30–31.

²⁰ That the reader can be certain that Christ is in view at all here is clarified by the following section of the homily, in which Origen uses the term "Jesus" rather than "Logos." See *HomJer 2.3*.

is sin, in all of its variety, that must be cleansed or healed by Christ.²¹ Origen goes on in the remainder of the homily to explain in more detail how exactly Christ himself cleanses, i.e., he baptizes with water and fire (Luke 3:16), but this is not our main interest here.

That Origen considers Christ's presence in scripture to be medicinal is corroborated by a brief passage in Homily 16 of his *Homilies on Genesis*. As Origen comments on Genesis 12:10, "there came a famine in the country, and Abraham went down to Egypt to dwell there, since the famine prevailed in the land," he makes use of Amos 8:11, "Behold the days come, says the Lord, and I will send forth a famine on the land, not a famine of bread nor thirst for water, but a famine for hearing the word of the Lord," to authorize his move to provide a figurative reading of the famine in the verse at hand.²² This spiritual famine, Origen claims, prevails over sinners, who are overly concerned with earthly things and who are thus unable to perceive spiritual things. This then is the particular form of sin, that is, the ailment that requires healing, in this context. He goes on to mention in passing the medicinal properties of the Gospels in particular. Within an indirect comment on the benefits of each section of the (still developing) canon, Origen says: "They do not hear the commands of the Law; they do not know the reproaches of the prophets; they are ignorant of the apostolic consolations; they do not experience the medicine of the Gospel (*evangelii medicanum*)."²³ He says no more about the medicinal properties of the Gospels here, though he goes on to say that,

The Gospels will invite you to recline also in the bosoms of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob "in the kingdom of the Father" [Matt 8:11], that there you may eat "from the tree of life" [Rev 2:7] and drink wine from "the true vine" [Jn 15:1], "the new wine with Christ in the kingdom of his Father" [Matt 26:29].²⁴

²¹ Cf. *HomEzek* 3.8.

²² *Homilies on Genesis* 16.4, in: *Origenes Werke VI. Homilien Zum Hexateuch*. W. A. Baehrens (ed.), Berlin: de Gruyter, 1920 (GCS, 29), Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Fathers of the Church 71), trans. Ronald E. Heine, Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1981. (GCS 29:140; FC 71:219).

²³ *HomGen* 16.4 (GCS 29:140; FC 71:219–220).

²⁴ *HomGen* 16.4 (GCS 29:140; FC 71:220–221).

In light of this description of the Gospels' content, and in light of the previous passage in which we saw him tie Christ so tightly to scripture, we might surmise that the section of scripture, i.e., the Gospels, which present directly the life and teachings of Christ, would be particularly potent medicine. Indeed, it is typical of Origen to treat the Gospels²⁵ as distinct amongst the scriptural writings because they contain "the narration of the deeds, sufferings, and words of Jesus," and thus the foundational Christian message of salvation, as he says elsewhere.²⁶ That said, as we saw above, Origen thinks Christ is to be found in all of scripture, and therefore, all of scripture is medicinal, as we will see more clearly in what follows.

In a third example, we are given more detail as to *how* scripture does its healing work. In homily 20 on the book of Joshua, Origen makes the following statement:

Therefore, O Hearer, if you observe that sometimes you recite in your ears a Scripture that you do not understand and its meaning seems obscure to you, submit nonetheless to its chief benefit: By the hearing alone, as if by a certain incantation, the poison of the noxious powers that beset you and that plot against you is expelled and driven away.²⁷

There is much that could be commented upon here, but given our present purposes, we will leave aside the "magical" overtones of the passage, particularly Origen's use of the term "incantation," and focus in particular on Origen's explanation of the healing power of the spoken words of scripture to drive out the poisonous powers besting the

²⁵ I use Gospels in the plural here, despite Origen's use of the singular "Gospel" in this particular context, given that we clearly have a description of the various sections of the "canon."

²⁶ For example, see his preface to his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.12–14, 20, in which he privileges the Gospels over the rest of the components of scripture.

²⁷ *HomJosh* 20.2, in: Origène. *Homélie sur Josué*. Texte latin de W.A. Baerhens (GCS 30), introd., traduction et notes par Annie Jaubert. (Sources chrétiennes, 71), Paris: Cerf 1960. Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* (Fathers of the Church 105), trans. Barbara J. Bruce, Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2002 (SC 71:412; FC 105:176–177).

hearer.²⁸ Further, the words of scripture need not be understood for this power to take effect. Origen then goes on to remind his audience of a key teaching concerning the nature of inspired scripture, namely, that it is inherently “useful” whether we understand its usefulness or not.²⁹ It is in this context that he draws on the analogy of medicine and the physician’s work to describe scripture’s healing capacity:

Doctors (*Medici*) are accustomed at times to offer some food and at other times to give some drink that is prescribed, for example, to alleviate dimness of the eyes. Yet in consuming the food or in drinking, we do not perceive that it is useful and that it benefits the eye. But when one day passes, and another, and a third, the power of that food or drink, when conveyed to sight in its own time, through certain secret ways, little by little cleanses the faculty of seeing. Then at length we begin to understand that that food or drink benefited the eyes...Therefore, we should also believe this about Holy Scripture, that it is useful and benefits the soul even if our perception at the present does not understand why. For, as we have said, both the good powers that assist us are refreshed by these discourses and are fed, and the hostile ones are made inert by these meditations and are driven away.³⁰

Like the remedies prescribed by doctors, the remedies available in scripture (recited aloud) do their healing work even apart from the understanding of the patient-hearer. Furthermore, the remedial nature of scripture does its work gradually, just like the remedies of physical medicine, cleansing the hearer little by little, presumably after repeated

²⁸ For a thorough and highly interesting treatment of this homily, see the essay of C. Michael Chin, “Who is the Ascetic Exegete? Angels, Enchantments, and Transformative Food in Origen’s Homilies on Joshua”, in: Hans Ulrich Weidemann (ed.), *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourses*, Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013, 203–218. He deals in greater detail with the incantational aspect of the passage, but he is more interested in how the incantation of scripture functions within the human-angelic exegetical dialectic set up by Origen in the homily. Origen says more about the incantational magic of the chanting of scripture in the first part of this homily. See *HomJosh* 20.1.

²⁹ *HomJosh* 20.2 (SC 71:412, 414; FC 105:177).

³⁰ *HomJosh* 20.2 (SC 71:414; FC 105:177).

exposure to its teachings.³¹ In this context, one of the principal achievements of the healing recitation of scripture is its driving out certain hostile, toxic powers, presumably demons, from the Christian soul.

The healing capacity of scripture is thus present to the hearer or receiver of them regardless of whether its words are understood. However, the remedies of scripture are also frequently intentionally hidden to the average reader, and they are often deceptive in nature. This we will see in the final example of this section, for which we return to the Jeremiah homilies. In his twentieth homily on Jeremiah, Origen addresses the theme of the medicinal nature of scripture within the context of a discussion of the words, “you deceived me Lord, and I was deceived,” and the theological problem they present concerning God’s nature. That is, Origen asks, how is it that God can be said to deceive? Origen here presents the analogy of the physician (ιατρός) who deceives the patient who is unable to handle the truth of the surgery required for her healing, and thus, “[the physician] hides that surgery, the cutting knife, under the sponge, and again he conceals, as I shall call it, under the honey the nature of the bitter and the annoying drug (τὸ ἀηδέες φάρμακον), wanting not to mislead but to heal the one who is cured (βουλόμενος οὐ βλάψαι ἀλλ’ ἰάσασθαι τὸν θεραπευόμενον).”³² Like this benevolent yet deceptive physician, God is the physician of the human race, and what he prescribes is healing for all, even if he must, on occasion, deceive us.³³ Having used this analogy to articulate God’s benevolent deception, Origen then goes a step further, claiming that scripture itself is medicinal in that it presents such teachings about the nature of God: “With such remedies (φαρμάκων) the whole divine Scripture is filled, and some of what is concealed is pleasant, but some of what is concealed is bitter.”³⁴ Not only then does God provide the Christian believer with (deceptive) remedies, God does so vis-à-vis scripture, and, in a similarly deceptive manner, scripture’s remedial teachings are often

³¹ See Fernandez’s discussion of this passage in *Cristo medico*, 275.

³² *HomJer* 20.3.2 (SC 238:260; FC 97:226).

³³ In *HomJer* 14.1–2, Origen describes the prophets as physicians, based on a similar analogy to the one discussed here.

³⁴ *HomJer* 20.3.2–3 (SC 238:260, 262; FC 97:226). Τοιοῦτων φαρμάκων πεπλήρωται ὅλη ἡ θεία γραφή, καὶ τινὰ μὲν ἐστὶ χρηστὰ κρυπτόμενα, τινὰ δὲ ἐστὶ πικρὰ κρυπτόμενα. Note here as well that in *HomJer* 14.1–2, Origen claims that the prophet Jeremiah is also a healer or physician of sorts.

hidden to the patient. Origen does not claim here that a capable and trained exegete is required to discern the concealed remedies of scripture, but as we will see in the next section, he does make such claims elsewhere.

In this section, we have seen that for Origen, scripture possesses the power to heal the ailing (read, sinful) Christian soul, first and foremost due to Christ's presence within it, perceived perhaps most forcefully within the Gospels themselves, though throughout the rest of scripture as well. These medicinal scriptures, however, are not easy to understand, and indeed their remedies are concealed. In some instances, they even seem useless or superfluous, thereby posing danger to the uninitiated or careless reader who might skip over them and miss their difficult and/or hidden medicinal value.

The Homiletic Exegete is Like the Physician

Given Origen's understanding of the medicinal scriptures described above, it is no wonder that he makes the argument that they require a skilled, well-trained interpreter. In this section, I will examine three passages in which Origen is explicitly concerned to describe the homiletic exegete's role in the healing process. Again, he does so by way of the medical analogy. We will see that in all three cases, Origen uses the medical metaphor to argue that the homiletic exegete is one who has undergone appropriate training for the task of working with the obscure and difficult yet medicinal scriptures. In a fourth and final passage, I will examine Origen's comments concerning what he considers to be a "heterodox" treatment of scripture, in which the potentially healing scriptures instead become a poisonous drug in the hands of the wrong interpreters.

The Exegete-Physician Has Been Well-Trained for the Task

In the first brief example, Origen makes a direct statement about the relationship between the physician and the exegete. This discussion occurs in his first homily on the Gospel of Luke as he deals with the words "Just as those who from the beginning saw and were ministers of the Word handed it down to us" of Luke 1:2. For Origen these words "implicitly teach us that the goal of one discipline is the discipline itself,

while the goal of another discipline is its application (*in opera computetur*),³⁵ for the ministers of the word both saw and handed the word down, and the term “minister” itself implies application.³⁶ Origen then proceeds to offer examples of each kind of discipline; he suggests that geometry is one in which the discipline itself is the end goal, whereas in medicine one must both amass knowledge and be able to apply the knowledge appropriately. The physician should learn the theory and principles of medicine *and* be able to incise wounds, prescribe regulated diets, detect fevers, and treat humours. Without the application of such principles, this knowledge is useless. It is precisely in this respect that the exegete’s science is like that of medicine, Origen claims: “There is a relation like that of the science of medicine to its application in the knowledge and service of the Word (*Simile quid scientiae medicinae et operi etiam in notitia ministerioque sermonis est*).”³⁷ So in this example, we have Origen’s (suggestive, if brief) claim that it is not only a thoroughgoing knowledge of the contents of the medicinal scriptures that is required of the exegete, but rather the appropriate *application* of the various parts of scripture in service to those under his charge.

For our second example, we turn to Origen’s eighth homily on Leviticus, where he provides more detail concerning the ways in which scripture can be said to have healing properties than we saw in our above examples, as well as comments concerning the exegete’s role in the healing process. In particular, he comments on the exegete’s training in the aspects of scripture that heal which ailments. Origen begins the homily in which he deals with the Levitical law codes on leprosy by reminding his audience that “our Lord Jesus Christ is called a physician (*medicum*) in the divine scriptures,” followed by a quotation of Matt 9:12–13, “The healthy need not a physician but those who are sick. For I

³⁵ *Homélie sur saint Luc* 1.5, in: Origène. *Homélie sur saint Luc*. Texte latin et fragments grecs de M. Rauer (GCS), introd., trad. et notes par Henri Crouzel, François Fournier, et Pierre Périchon, (Sources chrétiennes, 87), Paris: Cerf 1962. Origen, *Homilies on Luke* (Fathers of the Church 94), trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1996 (SC 87:106; FC 94:8).

³⁶ *HomLuc* 1.5 (SC 87:106; FC 94:8).

³⁷ *HomLuc* 1.5 (SC 87:106; FC 94:8).

came not to call the just but sinners to repentance."³⁸ Origen first describes the "ordinary physician," who is trained within the school of medicine, where he learns how to identify the appropriate herbs, minerals, and animal organs for the preparation of useful medicines for the body.³⁹ The person without this training, should she find herself in the fields or mountains where such resources are found, would simply pass by these herbs "like cheap hay."⁴⁰ Such is the case with ordinary medicine. In the case of heavenly medicine, in which Christ is "the heavenly physician (*caelestem medicum*)," the Word of God "prepares medications for his sick ones, not from potions of herbs, but from the sacraments of words (*aegris suis non herbarum succis, sed verborum sacramentis medicamenta conquirat*)."⁴¹ In other words, Christ prepares the medications that are to be found in the sacramental words of scripture.

Here enters the discussion of what I take to be Origen's description of the qualifications of the homiletic exegete-physician, for Origen begins by bidding his audience: "Enter into his medical clinic, his Church (*hanc stationem medicinae eius Ecclesiam*)," thus acting as a kind of guide or junior physician under the study of Christ, the heavenly physician.⁴² He continues, explaining that only the interpreter who has been trained in the medicinal capacities of scripture knows how to discern within the verbal sacraments the medications that are found therein, just as the one trained in the school of medicine knows which herbs contain healing properties in the fields. This is training that prepares the physician under Christ's tutelage to identify that which heals within the vast expanse of scriptural words. Like the one who has not received ordinary medical training, Origen explains, "If anyone sees these verbal medicines (*verborum medicamenta*) scattered inelegantly through books as through fields, not knowing the strength of individual words, he will overlook them as

³⁸ *HomLev* 8.1.1 in: Origène. *Homélies sur le Lévitique, tome II (Homélies VIII–XVI)*. Texte latin, traduction, notes et index par Marcel Borret, (Sources chrétiennes, 287), Paris: Cerf 1981. Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* (Fathers of the Church 83), trans. Gary Wayne Barkley, Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1990 (SC 287:8; FC 83:153).

³⁹ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:153).

⁴⁰ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:153).

⁴¹ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:153–154).

⁴² *HomLev* 1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:153). One could argue that through the homiletic-exegetical context Origen also trains those under his charge to become those who have these exegetical skills themselves.

cheap things, as not having any elegance of word.”⁴³ However, the person who

in some part learns that the medicine of souls is with Christ (*Qui vero parte ex aliqua didicerit animarum apud Christum esse medicinam*) certainly will understand from these books which are read in the church how each person ought to take salutary herbs from the fields and mountains, namely the strength of the words, so that anyone weary in soul may be healed not so much by the strength of the outward branches and coverings as by the strength of the inner juice.⁴⁴

This rich quotation indicates several things. First, the one who would act as a kind of exegetical physician must have some kind of understanding of Christ’s capacity to heal the soul in order to discern the manner in which scripture heals and in turn to be able to participate in the healing provided by Christ, the heavenly physician. Second, each person who encounters the words of scripture in the Christian assembly has some responsibility or part to play in the taking or receiving of scripture’s remedies – it is not the sole responsibility of the physician exegete to ensure that an individual member is healed. Third, the spiritual ailment in question in this example is the weariness of the soul. Fourth, the words of scripture themselves possess a kind of strength or power, which we have seen previously, thought here particularly when their “inner” meaning is understood and offered by the exegete.

Fifth and finally, given Origen’s own recent invitation to his audience to come and enter with him Christ’s clinic, he effectively acts as their guide, and thus his description of the person who understands that the medicinal efficacy of scripture for the healing of weary souls is with Christ is, I argue, a kind of indirect autobiographical statement concerning his own role. This becomes all the more evident as he goes on throughout this homily to provide various readings of the passage’s “inner juice,” after concluding his introduction by saying, “Therefore, let us see what diverse and varied medications for purification (*diversa et quam varia purificationum medicamenta conficiat*) this present lesson effects

⁴³ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:154).

⁴⁴ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:154). Cf. *HomNum* 27.1.4, 7. In this context it is human weakness that scripture can heal. In *HomNum* 14.2.10 it is articulated as sin.

against the uncleanness of birth and the infection of leprosy.”⁴⁵ As exegetical homilist, Origen claims, albeit indirectly, to have had the appropriate training in the medicine of souls vis-à-vis the fields of the scriptures, which in this context he explains to mean that his knowledge of Christ’s healing power, which is present to the trained reader, has prepared him to be able to discern which words of scripture are of medicinal value.⁴⁶ It also apparently allows him to understand and offer the words’ “inner juice” to his audience.

In our third passage, from homily 39 on Jeremiah, now preserved only in the *Philocalia*, Origen presents again the analogy of the training of the physician-herbalist and the exegete of scripture, though in this context he is much more careful to say that such a role is reserved for the few, not the many. The restrictive nature of his comments in this homily begin already in the first (rather lengthy) sentence:

As every herb has its own virtue whether for the healing of the body, or some other purpose, and it is not given to everybody to know the use of every herb, but certain persons have acquired the knowledge by the systematic study of botany, so that they may understand when a particular herb is to be used, and to what part it is to be applied, and how it is to be prepared, if it is to do the patient good; just so it is in things spiritual; the holy person is a sort of spiritual herbalist (βοτανικός πνευματικός), who culls (ἀναλεγόμενος) from the sacred Scriptures every jot and every common letter, discovers the value of what is written and its use (χρήσιμον), and finds that there is nothing in the Scriptures superfluous ... But it is not for everybody to know the power and

⁴⁵ *HomLev* 8.1.2 (SC 287:10; FC 83:154). Origen will go on to treat the uncleanness of birth and leprosy as code for the sinful condition of the soul.

⁴⁶ Origen was not the first Alexandrian to compare exegetical training to that of medicine. In *Stromateis* 1.9.43, Clement of Alexandria associated knowledge of the arts in general with the skilful application of scripture, and he included medicine as one such subject. He did not, however, develop the medicinal metaphor to the extent that Origen does.

use ... but those physicians (τῶν ἰατρῶν) who are expert anatomists can tell for what use every part, even the least, was intended by Providence.⁴⁷

So again, as we saw above, the trained exegete, here referred to as “the holy person,” for in Origen’s view, only the spiritually mature person can interpret scripture appropriately, is like the physician in that he or she is able to discern the use of every part of scripture, all of which is useful, as we Origen claim above. Origen stresses repeatedly in this passage that this task is simply not for everyone. This he says again a third time:

you may regard the scriptures as a collection of herbs, or as one perfect body of reason; but if you are neither a scriptural botanist (βοτανικὸς τῶν γραφῶν), nor can dissect the words of the prophets (μητε ἀνατομεὺς εἰ τῶν προφητικῶν λόγων), you must not suppose that anything written is superfluous, but blame yourself and not the sacred scriptures when you fail to find the point of what is written.⁴⁸

Again, we find the theme of the usefulness of every part of scripture regardless of the understanding of the reader, and again we find the comparison of scripture to a field or collection of remedial herbs waiting to be properly identified and used by the trained interpreter. The distinctive contribution of this passage of the *Philocalia* then is Origen’s repeated warning that such a task is not for everyone, and that it is in fact reserved for the “scriptural botanist,” who, like the botanist-physician of physical medicine, has had systematic training, and who is apparently also one of the elite, that is, a member of Origen’s highest category of his tripartite division of Christian believers, the “perfected ones.”⁴⁹ I suggest that Origen considered himself to belong to this group, given

⁴⁷ *HomJer* 39, preserved in *Philocalia* 10.2, in: Origène. *Philocalie 1–20 Sur les Écritures et La Lettre à Africanus sur l’histoire de Suzanne*. Introduction, texte, traduction et notes par Marguerite Harl, (Sources chrétiennes, 302), Paris: Cerf 1983. Origen, *Philocalia* trans. George Lewis, Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1911. (SC 302:368; trans. George Lewis, 52).

⁴⁸ *HomJer* 39, preserved in *Philocalia* 10.2 (SC 302:368; Lewis, 52).

⁴⁹ This is a very common way that Origen refers to mature Christians. See the classic discussion of them in his tripartite schema of believers in *Peri Archon* 4.2.4.

his own development of the analogy and his own self-understanding as inhabiting the position of adjudicating just who is and is not fit for the careful dissection of scripture.

In these three examples then, Origen claims that the exegete, like the physician, must receive the appropriate training in order to work effectively; that is, the exegete must be trained in the identification of the parts of scripture that contain medicinal teachings, as we saw in the first of the two passages, but the exegete must also be trained in the knowledge of how to apply his knowledge about scripture appropriately, as in our second passage. Of course, Origen's use of the analogy goes a step further, for he does indeed understand scripture to have healing capacities, and thus the analogy is particularly apt.

Scripture is Poisonous in the Wrong Hands

Now to our final passage, which is concerned with Origen's presentation of what he considers to be heterodox scriptural interpretation. While the trained (and orthodox) exegete has the capacity to heal by his or her appropriate treatment of the medicinal scriptures, in the wrong hands, the text can actually become poisonous and harmful for those receiving the teaching of those who are not trained.⁵⁰

In his thirty-first homily on Luke, Origen makes such a claim about heterodox teachers. As he discusses the devil's use of scripture in the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4, Origen presents Marcion as one who "reads the Scriptures as the devil does."⁵¹ The devil, Origen explains, reads not to become better, but to "use the simple, literal sense for killing those who are the friends of the letter" (*sed ut de simplici litera eos, qui amici sunt literae, interficias*).⁵² In other words, the devil, and those heterodox teachers whose skewed teachings are influenced by him, take advantage of the simple believers, who are not ready to move beyond the letter of the text. Accordingly, Origen warns his audience, they ought to be careful of trusting every speaker when they hear scriptural quotations and they must consider what kind of person the speaker is. Such a

⁵⁰ Here I wish to thank Jared Secord for his suggestion at the 2022 Canadian Society of Patristics Society meeting to pursue the question of the scriptures' capacity to poison or harm in the hands of the wrong teacher.

⁵¹ *HomLuc* 31.3 (SC 87:378; FC 94:126)

⁵² *HomLuc* 31.2 (SC 87:378; FC 94:126)

person might be “infected with the poisons of heresy” (*et venenis infectus haereseos*), and the devil himself might even be in him, citing the scriptures.⁵³ Even if the words of scripture are themselves medicinally powerful when they are simply spoken without explanation, if the speaker of scripture is himself infected with the poisons of heresy, so too is their scriptural teaching, Origen claims with great rhetorical force. Such instruction concerning how to approach potentially poisonous scriptural teaching from the likes of Marcion and Basilides works to reinforce Origen’s claims that the exegete’s training and spiritual maturity are of the utmost importance for the appropriate (read, orthodox) handling of the scriptures.

Conclusion

Based on my analysis of this selection of passages from Origen’s corpus, we can say that he likened scripture to medicine and the exegete to the physician so as to articulate scripture’s potential to heal the Christian person, whether the particular ailment be an unhealthy attachment to earthly things, a weak or weary soul, or the inhabitation of evil forces within the believer. The remedies found in the pages of scripture, however, are often difficult and concealed by the bare words, and can thus appear to be useless to the untrained eye. They therefore require a homiletic exegete-physician to draw out the medications contained in the “inner juice.”

The analogy of the physician, furthermore, allows Origen to articulate an important aspect of his conception of the ideal exegete, namely, thoroughgoing training in the science of interpretation. In the admittedly few examples examined here, the primary way in which the exegete resembles the physician is that (s)he has had rigorous training in both the identification of the appropriate remedies (i.e., the parts of scripture that heal a particular ailment) and in their application to the patient. By implication, given the exegetical-homiletical context in which these comments are found, Origen thus claims to belong to the

⁵³ *HomLuc* 31.3 (SC 87: 378; FC 94:126). Cf. *HomJosh* 20.2 where Origen discusses capacity of the recitation of scripture to remove “the poison of the noxious powers” besetting his hearers. This text we discussed in the previous section. Cf. *HomNum* 21.2.2 where Origen discusses the potentially carcinogenic material, bitumen, which he describes as “the fuel and nourishment of fire” in the context of a heterodox interpretation of scripture.

elite group who have had such training and who put it to use. The example of the poisonous scriptural teaching of the heterodox interpreter allows Origen to make more or less the same point – his hearers should be wary of the teacher who has not had the appropriate training, and worse, who is willing to take advantage of those who have not advanced beyond the level of the initiate.

While I have discussed Origen's use of the *analogy* or *metaphor* of the physician and his medicine as he describes the office of the exegete and the nature of scripture, I do so with the suspicion that for him, it is more than an analogy or metaphor.⁵⁴ Given the great overlap between medicine and philosophy, and indeed the Christian philosophy of an author such as Origen, we do well to pause and dwell on the extent to which he might actually have understood scripture to heal the soul who receives its application at the hands of the well-trained exegetical physician, and this in a very real way. For Origen, the appropriate selection, interpretation, and application of scripture is a matter of spiritual life and death. That is, there is real and serious help to be given or harm to be done by the exegete, and that is why thorough and rigorous training is required.

⁵⁴ Here again, I am influenced by Mayer's work. See her article, "Medicine and Metaphor in Late Antiquity: How Some Recent Shifts are Changing the Field", *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2:4 (2018), 440–463. As Mayer argues, it is a delicate and complex process to tease out how a metaphor was employed, as well as how literally or figuratively it was expected to be understood.

THREE REASONS TO DIE IN ORIGEN'S *EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM*

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Abstract:

In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen writes to his friends Ambrose and Proctetus, both of whom seem to be in immediate danger of being executed for their Christian confession and failure to worship the Greco-Roman gods. Instead of advising them on how to avoid death, he encourages them to be happy with their fate, and even to jump for joy over being allowed to suffer for Christ. This paper identifies three important arguments behind the theologian's stance that martyrdom is to be embraced rather than avoided: (1) passing from earthly life into death is a net gain for Christians; (2) the alternative, denying Christ and sacrificing to the pagan gods, is an act of evil; (3) martyrdom is the only truly worthy ἀντιμισθία ("payback" or "repayment") that Christian believers can offer their divine patron.

Key Words:

Origen of Alexandria, death, martyrs, souls, apostasy, cup of salvation, patronage, *beneficia*, *officia*

Origen, Martyrdom, and the *Exhortation*

Martyrdom was never far from Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254 CE). According to the account by the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea

(ca. 263–340 CE), his father Leonidas was beheaded in a persecution of Alexandrian Christians before Origen’s seventeenth birthday.¹ At eighteen, Origen allegedly found the city entirely devoid of Christian teachers, readily took on the duty of teaching those attracted to the movement himself,² and thus became a potential target of anti-Christian violence.³ At least six of his early students are said to be martyred.⁴ After moving to Caesarea Maritima, he also experienced persecutions during the reigns of Maximinus Thrax (235–238 CE) and Decius (249–251 CE).⁵ In the latter, Eusebius describes how the aged Origen was kept in chains

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¹ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.1, 6.2.12, in: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2: Books 6–10, ed. H. J. Lawlor, trans. J. E. L. Oulton (Loeb Classical Library, 265), Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1973; cf. Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Christianisme antique, 1), Paris: Beauchesne 1977, 414–15; Henri Crouzel, *Origène* (Chrétiens aujourd’hui, 15), Paris: Lethielleux 1985, 22; Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (The Early Church Fathers), London: Routledge 1998, 5. Eusebius’s data regarding Origen should be among the more trustworthy of Eusebius’s accounts, since he reports (6.2.1; 6.14.8; 6.19.10; etc.) having access to at least a hundred (6.36.3) of the letters Origen left behind, and being in personal contact with several of Origen’s students; cf. Nautin, *Origène*, 19–24; Crouzel, *Origène*, 17; Ronald E. Heine, trans., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Fathers of the Church, 71), Washington, D.C.: CUA Press 1982, 3–7. Origen himself mentions his father’s martyrdom in Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4.8.1, in: *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel*, ed. by R. Pearse, trans. by M. Hooker (Ancient Texts in Translation, 2), Ipswich: Chieftain, 2014, 150.

² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3.1–3, 6.3.8, gives the impression that the eighteen-year-old Origen was officially appointed as teacher by the bishop of Alexandria, but it is more likely that his teaching began more humbly with *ad hoc* seminars in his home, and was endorsed by the bishop only when his teaching activities became too extensive to ignore. Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, 60–64.

³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3.3–7. Crouzel, *Origène*, 23–24, speculates that Origen and his mother were neither Roman nor Alexandrian citizens, and therefore able to survive a persecution primarily focused on these two categories.

⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.4.1–3, names five men and one woman named Herais.

⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.28, 6.39.5.

and tortured almost to death.⁶ Rowan A. Greer asserts that Origen deserved the title of martyr even though he did not die until after he was released.⁷

Throughout these experiences, Origen seemingly never wavered from his position that Christians should embrace any chance to die for Christ. According to Eusebius, Origen was so eager to suffer martyrdom at his father's side that his mother had to hide his clothes to keep him inside.⁸ Allegedly, he wrote to his father to urge him not to hesitate to accept martyrdom, especially not on account of his family.⁹ Later, when his students were imprisoned, sentenced to death, and executed, he reportedly visited them openly, and came dangerously close to being

⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.39.5. Cf. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 24–25.

⁷ Rowan A. Greer, *Origen* (The Classics of Western Spirituality), New York: Paulist 1979, 5.

⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.2.3–5. Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 5), Berkeley: University of California Press 1983, 58–60, finds Eusebius's way of introducing his biographical account of Origen with four anecdotes illustrating his protagonist's radical ideals to be an excellent example of how ancient biographers embodied philosophical ideals in credible historical form. She finds all four anecdotes – Origen's desire to become a martyr (6.2.3–6), his letter to his father (6.2.6–7), his early knack for biblical interpretation (6.2.7–10), and his father's way of kissing his chest as a dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit (6.2.11) – to be believable even if untrue, and remarks (101) that Eusebius's task was never to find the historical Origen, but to create a convincing portrait “by capturing in prose the ideals which that man represented.” In contrast, Nautin, *Origène*, 35, 413–15, has no confidence in Eusebius's account of Origen's early years. Greer, *Origen*, 3, remarks that the anecdotes sound like legends, but still capture Origen's zeal. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 8, accepts that Origen wanted to follow his father into martyrdom, but not Eusebius's embellishments to the story. Christoph Marksches, “Eusebius als Schriftsteller: Beobachtungen zum sechsten Buch der Kirchengeschichte”, in: *Origenes und sein Erbe: Gesammelte Studien* (TUGAL, 160), Berlin: de Gruyter 2007, 223–38 (233), finds Eusebius's presentation well in line with the ideal prescribed in rhetorical handbooks.

⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.2.6. Eusebius claims to quote the letter verbatim, and it may have survived to Eusebius's time among the writings left behind by Origen in Caesarea. Pace Nautin, *Origène*, 35, who maintains that Eusebius must be quoting from a recollection of the event that Origen wrote down later.

lynched.¹⁰ Even after his own imprisonment and torture, Eusebius has him encouraging his fellow survivors.¹¹

The same positive attitude is apparent in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*,¹² a treatise seemingly written in 235 CE,¹³ when the new emperor Maximinus Thrax (235–238 CE) consolidated his imperial power by executing a number of Christian *archontas* (“leaders”),¹⁴ several of which were members of the previous imperial household.¹⁵ Allegedly, Origen himself had taught the outgoing emperor’s mother, Julia Avita Mamaea (180s–235 CE),¹⁶ before she was killed in Maximinus’s purge.¹⁷ Origen’s

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3.4; cf. Crouzel, *Origène*, 57–59; William H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*, Oxford: Blackwell 1965, 322.

¹¹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.39.5.

¹² The writing is extant in three ancient manuscripts from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Maria-Barbara von Stritzky, *Aufforderung zum Martyrium* (Origenes Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung, 22), Berlin: de Gruyter 2010, 3–5, proposes that it participates in the ancient genre of *logos protreptikos*, together with Tertullian’s (ca. 155–220 CE) *Ad martyras* and Cyprian’s (ca. 210–258 CE) *Ad Fortunatum*.

¹³ Paul Koetschau, ed., *Origenes Werke* Vol. 1: *Die Schrift vom Martyrium; Buch I–IV Gegen Celsus* (GCS, 2), Berlin: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung 1899, ix; Prosper Hartmann, “Origène et la théologie du martyre d’après le protreptikos de 235”, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 34.1 (1958), 773–824 (774); Pamela Bright, “Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom and Its Biblical Framework”, in: C. Kannengiesser & W. L. Petersen (eds.), *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 1), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1988, 180–99 (181); Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 9.

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.28. Eusebius’s description finds support in the *Liberian Catalogue*, which states that the Roman bishop Pontian and his presbyter Hippolytus were deported to Sardinia in 235 CE. Cf. Theodor Mommsen, *Chronica Minora: Saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, volume 1 (Monumenta Germaniae historica: Auctores antiquissimi, 9), Berlin: Weidmann 1892, 73–76; Hartmann, “Origène et la théologie du martyre”, 774–79; G. W. Clarke, “Some Victims of the Persecution of Maximinus Thrax”, *Historia* 15.4 (1966), 445–53 (451).

¹⁵ See Herodian, *History of the Empire* 6.8–8.5, in: *Herodian* vol. 2: Books 5–8, ed. and trans. Charles R. Whittaker (Loeb Classical Library, 455), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970. Cf. Trigg, *Origen*, 43; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 7–8; Heine, *Origen*, 167–68; David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge 2014, 167–71; Pat Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, London: Routledge 2015, 83–87.

¹⁶ Herodian, *History of the Empire* 6.9.7; cf. Elizabeth Kosmetatou, “The Public Image of Julia Mamaea. An Epigraphic and Numismatic Inquiry”, *Latomus* 61.2 (2002), 398–414.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.21.3–4; cf. Crouzel, *Origène*, 37–38; Adolf Lippold, “Maximinus Thrax und die Christen”, *Historia* 24.3 (1975), 479–92 (483).

addressees Ambrose and Protoctetus, both of whom seem to be in immediate danger of being executed,¹⁸ may have been caught up either in this imperial expurgation or in a concurrent local persecution in Cappadocia,¹⁹ where Christians were blamed for a series of earthquakes.²⁰ Throughout the *Exhortation*, Origen insists that Ambrose and Protoctetus should never submit to the authorities' demands, but welcome the affliction (Origen, *Mart.* 1, 42), enter the contest (21), be eager for martyrdom (39), drink the bitter cup (28), and be happy to suffer for Christ (4).

In previous scholarship, researchers readily acknowledge that Origen's advocacy of martyrdom is both genuine and deeply rooted in his personal experiences,²¹ but leaves the argument he presents for his view

¹⁸ Origen, *Mart.* 36, in: Stritzky, *Aufforderung*. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.28. Ambrose is known as Origen's sponsor and mentioned by name in many of his works. Heine, *Origen*, 167–68, suggests that he may have been holding high office under Maximinus' predecessor Severus Alexander (222–235 CE), which would make him a given target in Maximinus' purge. Nautin, *Origène*, 73–75, similarly suggests that Ambrose was part of the former imperial household and therefore targeted.

¹⁹ It is not entirely clear whether Eusebius's designation of Protoctetus as *πρεσβυτέρος τῆς ἐν Καισαρεία παροικίας* ("an elder in the community in Caesarea"; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.28) refers to Caesarea in Cappadocia or Caesarea Maritima in Syria Palaestina, where Origen lived. Nautin, *Origène*, 78, even suggests that the designation is ignorant speculation by Eusebius.

²⁰ The local bishop Firmilian (c. 200–268 CE) confirms the local persecution and reports that many fled to safety in neighboring areas. Cyprian, *Ep.* 75.10, in: *Thasci Caecili Cypriani Epistulae*, ed. Wilhelm von Hartel (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 3.2), Vienna: Geroldi Filium Bibliopolam Academiae, 1871; trans. by Rose Bernard Donna, *Saint Cyprian: Letters 1–81* (*The Fathers of the Church*, 51), Washington D. C.: CUA Press, 1964. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.27. See also Friend, *Martyrdom*, 391; Clarke, "Some Victims", 196, 450; Nautin, *Origène*, 72–73, 432–33; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 7–8.

²¹ Koetschau, *Martyrium*, x, xiv–xv, asserts that the *Exhortation* reflects Origen's inner life more than any other of his writings. Friend, *Martyrdom*, 391–93, proclaims him to be an outright zealot for martyrdom. Nautin, *Origène*, 441, maintains that his torturers' insistence on keeping him alive robbed him of a desired martyr title. Crouzel, *Origène*, 183, argues that Origen's reflections are grounded in a life lived under constant threat of martyrdom. Bright, "Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom", 181, finds the *Exhortation* to be "intense in emotion." Trigg, *Origen*, 44, avows that Origen's sincerity in commending martyrdom is beyond question. And Jan Willem van Henten, "The Christianization of the

unanalyzed. Paul Koetschau lists a number of points Origen makes, including the possibility of a heavenly reward, warnings against apostasy and idolatry, and the duty to repay God's good deeds towards us, but does not analyze his overall argument.²² Prosper Hartmann has a detailed list of Origen's claims,²³ but no analysis of main and supportive arguments beyond a passing remark that for Origen, martyrdom is the ultimate proof that you love God, amounts to choosing your soul before your body, and leads to a more intimate knowledge of God.²⁴ Greer briefly suggests that Origen's views are determined by his conviction that martyrdom is "demanded by the Christian religion."²⁵ Bright points to the high priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews as the "obvious focus" of Origen's thoughts about martyrdom,²⁶ without providing any logical link between this focus and Origen's positive stance. Other scholars declare that Origen viewed martyrdom as "the fullness of Christian perfection,"²⁷ "the highest form of Christian life,"²⁸ or a God-given gift that Christians are duty-bound to accept,²⁹ without discussing how Origen's argument builds toward such a principle.

The dearth of analyses of Origen's argumentation is likely connected to the difficulty of the task, as Origen neither presents literary-critical analysis of passage after passage as in an exegetical commentary,³⁰ nor

Maccabean Martyrs: The Case of Origen", in: J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (BETL, 241), Leuven: Peeters 2010, 333–51 (334), asserts that Origen would gladly have accepted martyrdom himself.

²² Koetschau, *Martyrium*, xii–xiv.

²³ Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 783–823.

²⁴ Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 793–94.

²⁵ Greer, *Origen*, 2.

²⁶ Bright, "Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom", 193.

²⁷ Marco Rizzi, "Origen on Martyrdom: Theology and Social Practices", in: G. Heidl & R. Somos (eds.), *Origeniana nona: Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time* (BETL, 228), Leuven: Peeters 2009, 469–76 (469).

²⁸ van Henten, "Christianization", 334.

²⁹ Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 13–14.

³⁰ On Origen's use of ancient literary criticism, see Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (PTS, 28), Berlin: de Gruyter 1986; Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft,

conforms to the usual rhetorical structure of exordium, narration, argumentation, recapitulation, and conclusion.³¹ Indeed, several scholars have noted how rough and unordered the *Exhortation* appears, almost as an *ad hoc* collection of arguments presented as they appeared in the author's mind. Hartman declares it to be written in haste and without concern for style,³² Bright finds it vacillating between didactic reflection and dramatic urgency,³³ Greer notes that Origen has not attempted to "forge his insights into any systematic view,"³⁴ and Stritzky suggests that Origen strived for a simpler language than he ordinarily would.³⁵

Disentangling the rhetorical and argumentative structure of Origen's *Exhortation* to understand why he advocates for martyrdom is thus a larger task than what can be accomplished within a single article. But as a first step, this article argues that three of Origen's more important arguments for why martyrdom should be embraced rather than avoided are the perceived advantages of earthly death, the despicability of any alternative available to the addressees, and the opportunity to present a suitable reciprocal gift to one's divine patron.

The First Reason: Earthly Death is Advantageous

Origen was first and foremost a biblical interpreter, and it is no surprise to find him opening the *Exhortation* with a quotation from the book of Isaiah, the interpretation of which will provide some structure for the first few pages of the treatise:

18), Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt 1987; Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012; Carl Johan Berglund, *Origen's References to Heracleon: A Quotation-Analytical Study of the Earliest Known Commentary on the Gospel of John* (WUNT, 450), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020, 53–73.

³¹ On Origen's use of ancient rhetoric, see Margaret Mitchell, "Rhetorical Handbooks in Service of Biblical Exegesis: Eustathius of Antioch Takes Origen Back to School", in: J. Fotopoulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, Leiden: Brill 2006, 349–67; Michael Duncan, "The New Christian Rhetoric of Origen", *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 46.1 (2013), 88–104.

³² Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 781–82.

³³ Bright, "Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom", 182.

³⁴ Greer, *Origen*, 17.

³⁵ Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 5–7.

Those who have been weaned from milk, who have been taken away from the breast – you should accept suffering upon suffering, accept hope upon hope, soon, soon, by the detestability of lips, by a foreign tongue.³⁶

This quotation serves several different purposes. First, it gives Origen occasion to praise Ambrose and Protocetus for having moved past the basics of Christian theology to more advanced topics, thereby preparing them for a potentially challenging message.³⁷ Secondly, it gives the seasoned exegete a scriptural starting-point for his reasoning, including two important keywords, “suffering” (θλίψις) and “hope” (ἐλπίς), which will recur throughout the treatise.³⁸ But most importantly, it encapsulates his first main argument for the favorability of martyrdom: there is something better to expect afterwards.

Far from underestimating the difficulties of martyrdom, Origen emphasizes that Isaiah predicts not merely a single experience of suffering for those who have been weaned from milk, but suffering upon suffering. But echoing biblical phrases, Origen asserts that any earthly hardships will eventually appear to be a “momentary, light suffering” compared to the “eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17; cf. Rom 8:18) that is being prepared for Christians after death. The one who truly loves God, and thirsts for him “as a deer longs for streaming water” (Ps 42:1), should despise the “earthen vessel” (2 Cor 4:7) that is his “body of death” (Rom 7:24) and separate his soul from every material concern.³⁹

³⁶ Isa 28:9b–11a LXX *apud* Origen, *Mart.* 1: Οἱ ἀπογεγαλακτισμένοι ἀπὸ γάλακτος, οἱ ἀπεσπασμένοι ἀπὸ μαστοῦ, θλίψιν ἐπὶ θλίψιν προσδέχου, προσδέχου ἐλπίδα ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρὸν διὰ φαυλισμὸν χειλέων διὰ γλώσσης ἐτέρας. Translations from ancient languages are my own.

³⁷ On the practice of *captatio benevolentiae* in ancient oratory, see Bruce Winter, “The Importance of the *captatio benevolentiae* in the Speeches of Tertullus and Paul in Acts 24:1–21”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 42.2 (1991), 505–31; Carl Johan Berglund, “Paul’s Rhetorical Efforts to Establish Good Will in First Thessalonians”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44.4 (2022), 539–60 (540–43).

³⁸ van Henten, “Christianization”, 335–36. The approach can be compared to how his exegesis of the Lord’s prayer forms the structure for the middle third of his treatise *On Prayer*. See Carl Johan Berglund, “Origenes exegetiska metodik i *Om bönen*”, in: C. J. Berglund & D. Gustafsson (eds.), *Ad fontes: Festskrift till Olof Andrén på 100-årsdagen*, Skellefteå: Artos 2015, 45–56 (47).

³⁹ Origen, *Mart.* 2–3.

He concludes this point by beseeching Ambrose and Proctetus to not merely be happy in their misery, but to rejoice, and even jump for joy:

Therefore, I urge you to remember, throughout the strife in which you find yourselves, the great reward that is in store in heaven for those who are persecuted and reproached on account of righteousness and of the Son of Man, to be happy, to rejoice, and to jump for joy, just like the apostles rejoiced when they were found worthy to be dishonored for his name.⁴⁰

In just a few words, Origen here traces an early Christian ideal of enduring anti-Christian persecution in view of heavenly rewards through the New Testament literature. The connection between persecution, reward, and joy is made as early as in Matt 5:10–12, where the Matthean Jesus declares that persecuted followers will receive a great reward in heaven, and in Luke 6:23, where the Lukan Jesus adds the exhortation to jump for joy. The mention of the apostles references Acts 5:40–41, where Peter and the other apostles are flogged for teaching and performing miracles in Jesus's name, and rejoice in being considered worthy of suffering for Christ.

But Origen goes one step further than that when he urges his readers outright to discard their earthly lives in order to be with Jesus:

Why, then, do we dither, and hesitate to discard the hampering perishable body that weighs the soul down, an earthly tent burdening a thoughtful mind, to be released from the bonds and depart from the ebbs and floods among flesh and blood? Let us thus, together with Christ Jesus, enjoy the leisure most suitable to happiness!⁴¹

⁴⁰ Origen, *Mart.* 4: Εὐχόμεν οὖν ὑμᾶς παρ' ὄλον τὸν ἐνεστηκότα ἀγῶνα μεμνημένους τοῦ ἀποκειμένου πολλοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς μισθοῦ τοῖς διωχθεῖσι καὶ ὄνειδισθεῖσιν ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου χαίρειν καὶ ἀγαλλιάν καὶ σκιρτᾶν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἐχάρησάν ποτε κατάξιωθέντες ὑπερ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἀτιμασθῆναι.

⁴¹ Origen, *Mart.* 47: Τί τοίνυν ὀκνοῦμεν καὶ διστάζομεν ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ἐμποδιζόν φθαρτὸν σῶμα, βαρῦνον ψυχὴν, βρῖθον νοῦν πολυφρόντιδα γεῶδες σκῆνος, ἀπολυθῆναι τῶν δεσμῶν καὶ ἀναλῦσαι ἀπὸ τῶν μετὰ σαρκὸς καὶ αἵματος κυμάτων; ἵνα σὺν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν τῆ μακαριότητι ἀνάπαυσιν ἀναπαυσώμεθα.

For a modern audience, such an open endorsement of death as advantageous to life can easily appear shocking and unconvincing.⁴² But in the Greco-Roman context in which Origen reasoned, there was less concern for avoiding death, and more concern for approaching it with calm, courage, and dignity.⁴³ Although the optimal death was to die peacefully in the company of grieving friends and family who would give you a proper burial,⁴⁴ death in battle was always honorable, and even suicide a perfectly acceptable option when faced with a criminal charge, defeat in battle, or unbearable shame.⁴⁵

Origen's positive view of death should be compared to similar stances in Greco-Roman philosophical literature. Plato (ca. 429–347 BCE) lets Socrates spend his last hours calmly teaching a dozen of his most faithful students that the human soul is immortal,⁴⁶ that the universe gives each soul a just fate after its earthly life,⁴⁷ and that any phil-

⁴² Cf. Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*, San Francisco: HarperCollins 1992, 152, who find Origen turning the world upside down here.

⁴³ Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome*, London: Continuum 2009, 41, 54; cf. Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2012, 27–29; Carl Johan Berglund, "A Desirable Death: The Philosophical Context of Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*", in: A. Fürst et al. (eds.), *Origeniana Tertia Decima* (BETL), Leuven: Peeters forthcoming.

⁴⁴ Hope, *Roman Death*, 50, 71–77, 122–32.

⁴⁵ Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 17, 22, 42–45; Adela Yarbro Collins, "From Noble Death to Crucified Messiah", *New Testament Studies* 40.4 (1994), 481–503 (482–84); Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and the Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (Studies in Classics, 10), New York: Routledge 2004, 2, 197–202; Catharine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2007, 32–33; Hope, *Roman Death*, 55–58; Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 27–29, 36–37.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Phaedo* 70a–107b, in: *Platonis Opera*, vol. 1: *Tetralogias I–II continens insunt Euthyphro, Apologia, Crito, Phaedo, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophista, Politicus*, ed. by E. A. Duke et al (Oxford Classical Texts), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Phaedo* 107c–115a.

osophically-minded soul should welcome the idea of leaving its annoyingly needy body behind to unhinderedly engage in philosophy.⁴⁸ Seneca the Younger (ca. 1 BCE–65 CE) views death not as a dangerous reef causing a shipwreck, but as a safe harbor in which he must eventually find refuge,⁴⁹ and a liberation from all earthly difficulties,⁵⁰ which is why he finds suicide an acceptable solution whenever a continued life in virtue is no longer possible.⁵¹ And Porphyry of Tyre (ca. 234–305 CE) asserts that the human body is as insignificant as the stalk of an ear of corn, or the amniotic sac that covers the fetus in the womb – necessary, surely, for the proper development of the immature specimen, but unceremoniously thrown away when the corn is harvested, the child born, or the immortal soul liberated from its material vessel.⁵² In the context of such notions of death as desirable, Origen’s insistence that his readers should not hesitate to lay down their earthly lives appears less shocking.⁵³

Origen’s stance is also consistent with his reasoning on earthly death elsewhere. In his *Dialogue with Heraclides*, Origen declares that he has discerned three different senses in which the Christian scriptures speak of human beings dying. Paul speaks of dying to sin (τῆ ἀμαρτία ἀποθνήσκω), which is an undeniably positive concept (Rom 6:2, 10), Ezekiel speaks of dying to God (τῷ θεῷ), which is unquestionably negative (Ezek 18:4), and Genesis speaks of ordinary earthly death, which is

⁴⁸ Plato, *Phaedo* 61e–69e. Victoria Vasquez, “Jesu död i Markusevangeliet – skamlig eller ärofull? En jämförelse mellan antika framställningar av ärofull död och Markusevangeliets passionsberättelse (14:32–15:39)”, *Svensk exegetisk årsbok* 85 (2020), 180–207 (184–85), describes how the ideal inherent in Socrates’s death eventually became an ingrained part of Greco-Roman culture.

⁴⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* 70.3–4, in: *Seneca: Epistles 66–92*, ed. and trans. Richard M. Gummere (Loeb Classical Library, 76), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920.

⁵⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* 24.17, in: *Seneca: Epistles 1–65*, ed. and trans. Richard M. Gummere (Loeb Classical Library, 75), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917.

⁵¹ Willy Evenepoel, “The Philosopher Seneca on Suicide”, *Ancient Society* 34 (2004), 217–43 (221–22, 233–34); Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors*, 145–51; Edwards, *Death*, 99–100.

⁵² Porphyry, *Marc.* 32, in: *Porphyry: Vie de Pythagore; Lettre à Marcella*, ed. Édouard des Places (Collection des universités de France), Paris: Belles lettres 1982. Cf. Helene Whitaker, “The Purpose of Porphyry’s Letter to Marcella”, *Symbolae Osloenses* 76.1 (2001), 150–68 (161).

⁵³ Cf. my full argument in Berglund, “A Desirable Death”.

when the soul leaves the body (Gen 5:5).⁵⁴ This third sense of death, which is undoubtedly the one Origen speaks of in the *Exhortation*, is neither good nor evil in itself,⁵⁵ but may leave the soul in closer proximity to God.

Thus, Origen is well in tune with Greco-Roman philosophy and consistent with his own analysis in other contexts when he argues that a would-be martyr should never fear a death that is merely a liberation from the earthly limitations of a persecuted Christian, but always have his mind set on the rewards that await the true believer in the kingdom of heaven.

The Second Reason: Apostasy is Evil

Origen's second main argument is also introduced by a scriptural quotation, providing him with two themes that will recur in the argument that follows: the importance of obeying God and the peculiar religious identity of Abraham's heirs.

It was once said by God to Abraham: "Leave your native soil (γῆς)" (Gen 12:1), and it could soon be said to us: "Leave the earth (γῆς) entirely." It is good to obey that, so that he without delay can show us the heavens, where what is called the kingdom of heaven is at hand.⁵⁶

With a pun on the Greek word *gēs*, which can refer either to a specific country or to the material world in its entirety, Origen makes an analogy between God's call of Abraham out of Haran and his recipients' call to martyrdom. Heaven – where God's rule is present reality rather than a future hope – takes the place of Abraham's promised land, and Origen stresses that when God calls, he is to be obeyed.

⁵⁴ Origen, *Dial.* 25, in: *Origène: Entretien avec Héraclide*, ed. Jean Scherer (Sources chrétiennes, 67), Paris: Cerf, 1960.

⁵⁵ Crouzel, *Origène*, 304; cf. Lawrence R. Hennessey, "Origen of Alexandria: The Fate of the Soul and the Body after Death", *Second Century* 8.3 (1991), 163–78.

⁵⁶ Origen, *Mart.* 5: Τῶ μὲν οὖν Ἀβραάμ ποτε ὑπὸ θεοῦ εἰρητο· "ἔξελθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου," ἡμῖν δὲ τάχα μετ' ὀλίγον λεχθήσεται· ἐξέλθετε ἀπὸ τῆς ὅλης γῆς· ᾧ πειθεσθαὶ καλόν, ἵνα ἡμῖν ταχέως δείξῃ τοὺς οὐρανούς, ἐν οἷς ἐστὶν ἡ καλουμένη τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλεία.

In the argument that follows, Origen reminds his readers that while many people would strive for commonly praised virtues such as moderation (σωφροσύνη), wisdom (φρόνησις), and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), only the chosen people (τὸ ἐκλεκτὸν γένος) would ever deem their particular religious identity important enough to prefer dying with their identity as Jews or Christians intact rather than living without it.⁵⁷ For anyone intent on remaining within the Christian community, Origen argues, it is imperative to obey God's commands, even when they are in conflict with the values of society at large, including commands such as "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3) and "You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exod 20:4).⁵⁸

It would be possible, Origen admits, to see a distinction between "bowing down" (προσκυνέω) and "worshipping" (λατρεύω) other deities, so that the Christians who avoid persecution by giving the outward impression of paying the pagan gods the respect they are expected in Greco-Roman society, but secretly believe only in Christ, would be said to "bow down" to the gods, but not "worship" them. But Exod 20:3–4 prohibits both equally, he asserts,⁵⁹ and continues:

But if every evil word is an affront to the Lord your God, how great an affront must it not be in the evil of a word of denial, or the evil of a word publicly proclaiming another god, or the evil oath to people's genius – a concept entirely without substance?⁶⁰

Despite how it may appear, the principle on which Origen supports his reasoning here is not a biblical quotation. There are similarities to Matt 12:36, where the Matthean Jesus asserts that "every careless word" (πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν) shall be accounted for on the day of judgment, and with Prov 15:26, where "unjust reasoning" (λογισμὸς ἄδικος) is declared an affront (βδέλυγμα) to God, but the particular formula that "every evil word is an affront to the Lord" seems to be coined by Origen himself.

⁵⁷ Frend, *Martyrdom*, 31.

⁵⁸ Origen, *Mart.* 5.

⁵⁹ Origen, *Mart.* 6. Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 789–90.

⁶⁰ Origen, *Mart.* 7: Ἀλλὰ καὶ εἴπερ πᾶν ῥῆμα πονηρὸν βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐστὶ, πηλίκον βδέλυγμα νομιστέον εἶναι τὸ πονηρὸν τῆς ἀρνήσεως ῥῆμα καὶ τὸν πονηρὸν τῆς ἄλλου θεοῦ ἀναγορεύσεως λόγον καὶ τὸν πονηρὸν κατὰ τύχης ἀνθρώπων, πράγματος ἀνυποστάτου, ὄρκον;

Building on this principle, Origen decries three practices that were all commonly demanded of those accused of being Christians, to give them a chance of proving themselves to be respectable worshipers of the Greco-Roman gods:⁶¹ denying Christ, proclaiming a pagan deity, and taking an oath to the genius (τύχη) of the emperor.⁶² While offering sacrifices to the Greco-Roman gods seems to be the crucial point in the martyrdom accounts of Justin (ca. 100–165 CE) and Perpetua (ca. 182–203 CE), Polycarp (second century CE) is, in contrast, urged by the governor to curse Christ (λοιδορήσον τὸν Χριστόν) and swear by the emperor’s genius (ὁμοσον τὴν Καίσαρος τύχην).⁶³ Allowing for variations over the course of a century, these practices likely go back at least to the time of Pliny the Younger (ca. 61–113 CE), who declares that he has let accused Christians go free after they had called upon (*adpellarunt*) the

⁶¹ Laurence Vianès, “Man Cut in Two: Exegesis, Asceticism, Martyrdom in Origen”, in: G. Heidl & R. Somos (eds.), *Origeniana nona: Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time* (BETL, 228), Leuven: Peeters 2009, 477–91 (488), remarks that when Origen speaks of martyrdom, he never expresses resentment against the Roman authorities, courts, and judges. This is also true of this passage, where the practices demanded are declared evil, but those demanding them remain unmentioned.

⁶² Dio Cassius (ca. 150–235 CE) asserts that the Roman senate took a vote to introduce oaths to Caesar’s genius (τὴν τε τύχην αὐτοῦ ὀμνύναι) already in the lifetime of Julius Caesar, but may be reading the practices of his own time into his sources. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 44.6.1, in: *Dio Cassius: Roman History Books 41–45*, ed. & trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb Classical Library, 66), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916; cf. Rhona Beare, “The Imperial Oath under Julius Caesar”, *Latomus* 38.2 (1979), 469–73. An oath directly to Caesar Augustus, named alongside Zeus and all the gods and goddesses, is attested in an inscription from Neapolis, dated to Augustus’s lifetime. See Søren Lund Sørensen, “A Re-Examination of the Imperial Oath from Vezirköprü”, *Philia* 1 (2015), 14–32.

⁶³ *Acts of Justin and Companions* 5.4 (Recension B), *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 6.3, and *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9.3–10.1, all in: *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. & trans. Herbert Musurillo, Oxford: Clarendon 1972; cf. Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 135–36. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 57–76, points to a number of historically implausible details in Polycarp’s martyrdom account and concludes that the practice of swearing by the emperor’s τύχη likely belongs in the time of the author rather than that of Polycarp. Moss’s suggested dating of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* to the first half of the third century would make the account roughly contemporary to Origen’s *Exhortation*.

gods, offered (*supplicarent*) wine and incense before the emperor's image, and cursed (*male dicerent*) the name of Christ.⁶⁴

Origen thus argues that there is no way of defending an act of apostasy for Christians who like Ambrose and Protocletus are called to answer for their faith before the Roman authorities, since even insincerely going through the motions of worshipping pagan gods would be an act of idolatry that is unequivocally banned in the biblical tradition.⁶⁵ Once you have been brought to trial for being a Christian, the only ethically defensible way of proceeding is to become a martyr.⁶⁶

The Third Reason: Martyrdom is a Suitable *Officium* to God

A third major argument in Origen's *Exhortation* is that martyrdom offers a unique chance of presenting a gift to God that to some extent matches his gift of eternal salvation. This line of argument is supported by two quotations from Ps 116:12–13 (Ps 115:3–4 LXX), which in Origen's reading present martyrdom as a suitable reciprocal gift to offer to one's salvific patron.

Since the saint is generous and wants to reimburse God for benefits already given, he seeks something that he could do for the Lord on account of everything he has received from him, and finds nothing else that a rightly intentioned human can give to God that matches his powerful benefits than to die in martyrdom. For the following question is written in the 115th psalm: "What should I give in return to the Lord for everything he has provided me with? (Ps 116:12)" And the answer given to this, saying what he should give in return to the Lord for everything that has been

⁶⁴ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96, in: *Pliny: Letters, Books 8–10; Panegyricus*, ed. & trans. Betty Radice (Loeb Classical Library, 59), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969. Friend, *Martyrdom*, 218–20, dates Pliny's hearings to the fall of 112 CE, locates them to Amastris in the province of Bithynia and Pontus, and remarks that the emperor, in his response, agrees that Christians who repent by worshipping the pagan gods should be acquitted.

⁶⁵ Heine, *Origen*, 165; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 15–16. Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 798–99: "Nous apprenons que le reniement est un crime abominable, pareil au meurtre, et qui fait ressembler au diable celui qui le commet."

⁶⁶ The same point is expressed in Origen, *Mart.* 32, where Origen asserts that ὁ ἐχθρός ("the enemy") will empower those in power to force Christians to become either idolaters or martyrs. Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 809–10.

given from him, is stated as: “I will seize the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord (Ps 116:13).” The cup of salvation is a customary name for martyrdom, as we find it in the Gospel.⁶⁷

The situation to which Origen refers is that of a client’s relationship to his patron – a reciprocal personal relationship between unequals where the patron provided benefits (*beneficia*) to the client, who rendered services (*officia*) in return.⁶⁸

Typically, the client honored the patron by greeting him in his home in the morning and accompanying him on the streets in the afternoon,⁶⁹ and received legal protection, access to powerful people,⁷⁰ or a daily

⁶⁷ Origen, *Mart.* 28: Φιλότιμός τις ὁ ἅγιος ὦν καὶ ἀμείψασθαι θέλων τὰς φθασάσας εἰς αὐτὸν εὐεργεσίας ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζητεῖ, τί ἂν ποιῆσαι τῷ κυρίῳ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ εἴληφε· καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλο εὐρίσκει οἰονεὶ ἰσόρροπον ταῖς εὐεργεσίαις δυνάμενον ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπου εὐπροαιρέτου ἀποδοθῆναι θεῷ, ὡς τὴν ἐν μαρτυρίῳ τελευτήν. Γέγραπται γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἑκατοστῷ καὶ πέμπτῳ καὶ δεκάτῳ ψαλμῷ τὰ μὲν τῆς ἐπαπορήσεως οὕτως· “Τί ἀνταποδώσω τῷ κυρίῳ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἀνταπέδωκέ μοι;” τὰ δὲ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀπαντήσεως εἰπόντος· τί ἀνταποδώσει τῷ κυρίῳ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ εἴληφεν ὁ λέγων, οὕτως εἰρημένα· “Ποτήριον σωτηρίου λήψομαι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου ἐπικαλέσομαι.” Ποτήριον δὲ σωτηρίου ἔθος ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ μαρτύριον, ὡς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ εὔρομεν.

⁶⁸ Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982, 1–6, 15–21; Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (BZBW, 130), Berlin: de Gruyter 2004, 67–74; Carolyn Osiek, “The Politics of Patronage and the Politics of Kinship: The Meeting of the Ways”, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39.3 (2009), 143–52 (144); David Briones, “Mutual Brokers of Grace: A Study in 2 Corinthians 1.3–11”, *New Testament Studies* 56.4 (2010), 536–56 (539–41).

⁶⁹ Cf. how Juvenal (first–second centuries CE) describes how an adversary struts down the street with a massive entourage of clients (*cum populum gregibus comitum*) in Juvenal, *Satire* 1.46, in: *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. & trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Loeb Classical Library, 91), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, 134, or the more lively translation in *Ancient Rome: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. & trans. Christopher Francese & R. Scott Smith, Indianapolis: Hackett 2014, 129. See also Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 70–71.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.4–5, where Pliny asks his patron, the emperor Trajan (53–117 CE), to grant citizenship and senatorial rank to two of his clients.

dole of money in return.⁷¹ Patrons also assigned clients more specific duties such as voting in accordance with the patron's preferences or rendering assistance to other clients in need.⁷² A loyal and thankful client was always on the lookout for a suitable *officium* by which to express his gratitude and reduce his debt to his patron.⁷³

The client's relationship to his patron is used by several ancient authors as a metaphor for the worshiper's tie to his god. Seneca argues that the gods, who incessantly provide rain and wind to all people, are superior patrons to humans, who always look to their own gain.⁷⁴ Josephus lets Moses give a speech reminding the Israelites of God's great benefactions to them, and their corresponding duty of honoring him.⁷⁵ And the author of Second Clement repeatedly exhorts his readers to give a proper ἀντιμισθία ("payback" or "repayment") to God, who has created them, healed them, and saved them.⁷⁶

The same metaphor is here used by Origen to interpret Ps 116 (115 LXX), where the psalmist expressly asks what to give in return (ἀνταποδώσω) for what God has already given (ἀνταπέδωκέ) him.⁷⁷ The use of the Greek verb ἀνταποδίδωμι for both directions of this gift-giving suggests an ongoing reciprocal exchange, where each gift given implies that a new ἀντιμισθία is due. The original Hebrew תַּגְמוּלוֹתָי ("his benefits") is also a choice of words that suggests repayment to a benefactor. In this

⁷¹ See the more extensive lists of possible benefactions in Seneca, *On Benefits* 1.2.4, 1.5.3–6, 2.34.5, 2.35.3, 3.8.3, in: *Seneca: Moral Essays III*, ed. & trans. John W. Basore (Loeb Classical Library, 310), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935. Cf. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 69–70.

⁷² Paul's argument in his letter to Philemon builds on his duty and ability to help one of his clients, Onesimus, by demanding a favor from another client, Philemon, to whom Onesimus is enslaved. Osiek, "The Politics of Patronage and the Politics of Kinship", 147–48.

⁷³ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 15–17. In 2 Cor 6:13, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they owe him some ἀντιμισθία ("payback" or "repayment") for the patronal benefactions he has bestowed upon them. James A. Kelhoffer, "Reciprocity as Salvation: Christ as Salvific Patron and the Corresponding 'Payback' Expected of Christ's Earthly Clients According to the Second Letter of Clement", *New Testament Studies* 59.3 (2013), 433–56 (444–46).

⁷⁴ Seneca, *On Benefits* 7.31.4–5. Cf. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 76.

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.14.1/300–301, in: *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities I–III*, ed. & trans. H. ST. J. Thackeray (Loeb Classical Library, 242), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930, 464. Cf. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 82–85.

⁷⁶ 2 Clem. 1.3, 1.5, 9.7, 11.6, 15.2. Cf. Kelhoffer, "Reciprocity as Salvation", 440–44.

⁷⁷ Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 804–5.

context, the cup of salvation (ποτήριον σωτηρίου or כוס־ישׁוּעָה) could be interpreted as an outpouring of wine in honor of one's salvific patron.⁷⁸ Origen instead takes the expression as a direct metaphor for Christian martyrdom.⁷⁹ As proof, he points to two instances where Matthew uses ποτήριον ("cup") as a metaphor for Jesus's passion: Matt 20:22, where Jesus questions whether his disciples James and John will be able to drink the same cup as him, and Matt 26:39, where Jesus asks the Father to remove "this cup" (τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο) from him, if possible.⁸⁰

Origen also notes the recurrent biblical promise that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:21).⁸¹ In the original context of Ps 116, the calling on the Lord's name was likely intended as a thanksgiving, but in Origen's context, the same statement is equated with the Christian confession, which at a martyr's trial was expected to result in a death sentence.⁸² Hence, Origen finds Christian martyrdom to be the topic of both halves of Ps 116:13, and presented as a suitable gift to one's divine patron already in the book of Psalms.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that three of Origen's main arguments in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* are the following: (1) Being physically dead, and thus enjoying community with Christ without a restraining physical body to worry about, is for the Christian believer preferable to staying alive. (2) Once you are prosecuted for being a Christian, there is no ethically defensible way of avoiding a death sentence, as even insincere

⁷⁸ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150* (Word Biblical Commentary, 21), Waco: Word 1983, 154; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Hermeneia), trans. Linda M. Maloney, Fortress 2011, 218–19.

⁷⁹ Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 805; Bright, "Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom", 186.

⁸⁰ He could also have mentioned Joh 18:11, where Jesus refers to his imminent suffering as a ποτήριον ("cup"). Everett Ferguson, "The Cup of the Lord", in: J. W. Thompson & R. A. Wright (eds.), *Ethics in Contexts: Essays in Honor of Wendell Lee Willis*, Eugene: Pickwick 2019, 123–30 (128), notes that cups in noncanonical Christian literature commonly refer either to the Eucharist or to suffering.

⁸¹ Origen, *Mart.* 28. Cf. Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 150–51.

⁸² Cf. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12; *Acts of Justin and Companions* 3.3–4.9; 5.6–6.1; *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 6.3–6.

apostasy is an act of evil. (3) In the patronal relationship between God and believer, dying as a martyr is the only gift the believer can present to his heavenly patron that to some extent matches his benefits.

This short list in no way exhausts the points Origen makes in his *Exhortation*, but many of the other arguments are connected to these three as either supportive arguments or logical consequences. His claim that the human soul is more precious than the body (Origen, *Mart.* 12–13) is an additional argument for why it is preferable to lose one's bodily life than to compromise one's soul.⁸³ His way of reminding his readers of Elazar and the seven brothers in Second Maccabees who all suffered for God rather than submitting to the demands of their pagan tormentors (22–27; cf. 2 Macc 6:18–7:42) serves to strengthen his argument that dying for God is preferable to remaining alive.⁸⁴ His description of God as a jealous husband who would certainly not look kindly on a wife who is running after other men (9–11) supports his second main argument by explaining why apostasy is forbidden.⁸⁵ His insistence that the martyr's trial takes place on a cosmic arena, watched by angels and the whole creation (18–21), serves to clarify that secret apostasy is no solution.⁸⁶ And the formidable argument that martyrdom gives the imperfect Christian a second opportunity for the forgiveness of all sin, otherwise available only at baptism (30),⁸⁷ is presented as an additional *beneficium* that the heavenly patron gives in response to the ultimate *officium* of dying in martyrdom.

Future scholarship may map out Origen's argumentation in the *Exhortation* more fully, and discern whether all his points fit within an argumentative structure determined by these three main arguments, or if additional top-level arguments can be argued for. Such a study should

⁸³ Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 793–96.

⁸⁴ David A. deSilva, "An Example of How to Die Nobly For Religion: The Influence of 4 Maccabees on Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*", *J ECS* 17.3 (2009), 337–56; and van Henten, "Christianization", 337–51, both argue that Origen's rendering of these martyr stories depends on Fourth Maccabees.

⁸⁵ Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 790–91.

⁸⁶ Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 798–99; Greer, *Origen*, 20–22; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 16–17.

⁸⁷ Cf. Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 807–9; Bright, "Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom", 189–90; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 22–23.

consider to what extent Origen's reasoning proceeds according to common structural patterns of Greco-Roman rhetoric, or is determined by established methodology in ancient literary criticism, as well as how such patterns interact with his argumentative structure.⁸⁸ It could also prove valuable to study Origen's extant homilies from the same era, to see if issues of martyrdom and suffering are discussed using the same arguments as we see here, or if Origen perchance developed his thinking on martyrdom in response to reactions to the *Exhortation*.

But even on their own, these three arguments provide a logically consistent case for why Origen believes that early Christians should prefer to die a martyr's death rather than remaining alive after having betrayed their faith by publicly denouncing Christ and sacrificing to the pagan gods. Origen's formidable confidence in the matter may be mostly due to his teenage experiences of losing his own father while seeing other adult Christians flee to avoid martyrdom. But the present analysis has demonstrated that Origen's uncompromising affirmation of martyrdom was not only genuinely meant and deeply rooted in his life, but also supported by what was, to his mind, solid logical arguments.

⁸⁸ Cf. the literature referenced in notes 30–31 above, as well as the suggestions regarding the *Exhortation's* structure in Koetschau, *Martyrium*, xii–xiv; Hartmann, "Origène et la théologie du martyre", 782–83; Stritzky, *Aufforderung*, 27.

ORIGEN, VALENTINIANISM AND WOMEN'S ROLES

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Abstract:

This article analyses Origen of Alexandria's and Heracleon's exegeses of the Samaritan woman. It focuses on their allegorical interpretations of the woman and feminine elements (e.g. water jar) as theological and philosophical concepts. The first part of the article offers a brief overview of the scholarship on Origen and Valentinianism. The second part examines and confronts the exegetical methodology, the feminine allegories and the resulting theologies in the texts of the two authors. I will show that their different uses of the feminine as theological and philosophical categories give rise to opposing exegeses of the gospel passage and divergent views about women's role in society.

Key Words:

Origen, Valentinianism, Samaritan Woman, Biblical Exegesis, Women

Introduction

The debate about women's roles in early Christian communities has been livelier than ever in the last decades, as women are still struggling to find their place in many Christian churches and look to the past to understand their modern struggles. In recent years, scholarship on women's role has been polarized regarding the narrative of a dichotomy between heretic/orthodox Christian movements, with women holding leaderships roles in the former and relegated to subservient roles in the

latter.¹ Although there is clear evidence that some minority Christian movements of the first centuries had female leaders, the history of women's lives and the cultural representation of the female gender in early Christianity are much more nuanced and cannot be reduced to opposing poles. This article undertakes a nuanced examination of the exegesis of the Samaritan woman by both Origen of Alexandria and the Valentinian teacher Heracleon. The inquiry shows that the allegiance to either minority or mainstream Christian movements bears minimal correlation with the delineation of women's roles, whilst the theological representation of the female gender reveals many fundamental aspects of the author's theological analysis.

Origen's relation to Valentinianism is a widely debated issue in scholarship on early Christianity. Scholars of the last seven decades devoted a significant effort to investigate it, reaching conflicting conclusions about the correlation between Origen's theology and Valentinian works.² Some claim that Origen utterly rejected Valentinian doctrines as heterodox;³ others picture him as deeply influenced by Valentinianism.⁴ Some scholars believe that Origen has – at the same time – absorbed and

¹ Karen L. King, (ed.), *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International 2000. For a more recent study on women's roles, see Joan E. Taylor & Ilaria L. E. Ramelli (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2021.

² Anna Van den Kerchove, "Origen and the 'Heterodox'. The Prologue of the Commentary on John within the Christian Alexandrian Context" in Daniel Herrmann et al. (eds.), *Alexandria: Hub of the Hellenistic World*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021, 487–501; Jean-Daniel Dubois, "Le 'Traité des principes' d'Origène et le 'Traité tripartite' valentinien: Une lecture comparée de leurs prologues" in Jean-Daniel Dubois & Bernard Roussel (eds.), *Entrée en matière: Les prologues*, Paris: Cerf 1998, 53–63; Antonio Orbe, *Cristología gnóstica: introducción a la soteriología de los siglos II y III*, Madrid: Editorial Católica 1976; Gilles Quispel, "Origen and the Valentinian Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974), 29–42; Manlio Simonetti, "Eracleone e Origene", *Vetera Christianorum* 4 (1967), 39–58; Manlio Simonetti, "Eracleone e Origene", *Vetera Christianorum* 3 (1966), 111–141; Jean Daniélou, *Origène*, Paris: La Table Ronde 1948.

³ Mark Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church*, Boca Raton: Routledge 2009, 79–103.

⁴ Gaetano Lettieri, "Il nous mistico. Il superamento origeniano dello Gnosticismo nel Comento a Giovanni" in Emanuela Prinzivalli (ed.), *Il Comento a Giovanni di Origene: il testo ed i suoi contesti*, Villa Verrucchio: Pazzini Editore 2005, 177–275.

rejected Valentinian doctrines to develop his own original theology.⁵ This article contributes to this long-standing debate by looking at the female framework of Origen's and Heracleon's exegesis, that is, their respective theological use of feminine allegories and their representation of women's role in their exegesis of the Samaritan woman.

The article is divided in two parts. The first part briefly summarizes the scholarly debate about the existence and forms of the Valentinian school, without pretending to exhaust such a complex argument, and investigates Origen's knowledge of Valentinianism and his own experience with Valentinians. The second part explores Origen's exegesis of the Samaritan woman by comparing it with Heracleon's interpretation. This gospel passage offers also the opportunity to see how women's sexuality, phrased in terms of her spousal status or lack thereof, becomes the exegetical key to unlock the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures.⁶ I argue that Origen's and Heracleon's different interpretations of the Samaritan woman are caused by a different understanding of women and the feminine as theological and philosophical categories, rather than a fundamental disagreement in exegetical methodologies. On the contrary, Heracleon and Origen share the same allegorical methodologies of interpreting Scripture, but they attribute extremely different allegorical meaning to the feminine gender. If Origen allegorically interprets women's sexuality as the embodiment of his theology of progress, Heracleon uses it to represent the faultiness of human nature. Although Origen is well aware of the Valentinian theological models of interpreting feminine images and allegories, he does not incorporate them in his own theology as they are, but rather transforms them into something utterly different. These two allegorical exegeses result in an opposite evaluation of women's social and cultural role, with Origen actually offering a more positive portrayal of women in Christian communities.

⁵ Carl J. Berglund, "Origen's Vacillating Stances toward His "Valentinian" Colleague Heracleon", *Vigiliae Christianae* 71:5 (2017), 541–569; Manlio Simonetti, "Eracleone e Origene Sulla Samaritana", *Vetera Christianorum* 53 (2016), 5–17.

⁶ Thanks go to Monnica Klöckener who has underlined the importance of the Samaritan woman for Origen's argument about the dignity of human beings: Monnica Klöckener, "The Samaritan Woman in Origen's Commentary on John Seen from a Modern Perspective of Human Dignity" in Alfons Fürst (ed.), *Perspectives on Origen and the History of his Reception*, Aschendorff: Münster 2021, 67–80.

Origen and Valentinianism

The existence of a Gnostic Valentinian school was questioned in the 1990s following Michael Williams' proposal to dismantle the category of Gnosticism.⁷ Following the dissemination of the Nag Hammadi codices and the uncertainties in defining the Gnostic multilayered religious phenomenon,⁸ the debate on Origen and Valentinianism reached a stalemate. Only few new studies on this topic have been conducted in the following years, most likely due to the unclear definition of Valentinianism.⁹ However, Einar Thomassen demonstrated with both textual and archeological evidence the existence of a Valentinian school.¹⁰ This school is known to us through Nag Hammadi treatises – mostly the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Tripartite Tractate* – and polemical accounts of the so-called heresiologists, and some pieces of archeological evidence.¹¹ Thomassen summarizes the core features of Valentinianism in three doctrines: 1. The historical appearance of the Saviour; 2. the protological speculation about the origin of plurality; 3. the ritually enacted redemption.¹²

As a matter of fact, the Valentinian doctrines presented by Thomassen corresponds for the large part to those beliefs which Origen identi-

⁷ See Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus*, New York: Columbia University Press 2008; Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996.

⁸ There are also studies on other identifiable Gnostic movements, such as Ophitism and Sethianism, see Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence*, Leiden: Brill 2009; John Turner, "The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the Timaeus and Parmenides", *Vigiliae Christianae* 60:1 (2006), 9–64.

⁹ Van den Kerchove, "Origen and the 'Heterodox'"; Berglund, "Origen's Vacillating Stances".

¹⁰ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"*, Leiden: Brill 2006.

¹¹ Gregory H. Snyder, "The Discovery and Interpretation of the Flavia Sophe Inscription: New Results", *Vigiliae Christianae* 68:1 (2014), 1–59; id., "A Second-Century Christian Inscription from the Via Latina", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19:2 (2011), 157–95.

¹² Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 2. For further studies on Valentinianism, see Christoph Marksches & Einar Thomassen (eds.), *Valentinianism: New Studies*, Leiden: Brill 2020; Christoph Marksches and Johannes van Oort (ed.), *Zugänge zur Gnosis. Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, Leuven/Walpole: Peeters 2013.

fied as Valentinian. Origen never quotes any of the Nag Hammadi Valentinian treatises known to us, but he alludes implicitly and explicitly to Valentinian doctrines throughout his entire corpus. It is likely that his knowledge of Valentinianism came from both firsthand experience with Valentinian communities and exposure to the works of other theologians who polemicized against Valentinians, particularly Clement of Alexandria.¹³ Origen mentions Valentinus explicitly several times (31, to be exact) and often refers to his followers in Greek as those *apo tou Oualentinou*.¹⁴ Thanks to recent discovery of the *Homilies on Psalms*, the Greek terms *Oualentinianos* and *Oualentinianoi* are also attested in the Origenian corpus.¹⁵ Besides mentioning the founder of the school and its followers, Origen discusses in details the doctrines of Valentinus' disciple Heracleon,¹⁶ whose *Commentary on the Gospel of John* was refuted in details by Origen in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Heracleon is the only Valentinian teacher whom Origen quotes directly, and Origen is also one of the two sources through which the books of Heracleon are known.¹⁷

Although Origen could not have met Heracleon personally, it is almost certain that Origen met several Valentinians given the existence of

¹³ Gilles Dorival & Alain Le Boulluec, *L'abeille et l'acier: Clément d'Alexandrie et Origène*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2019.

¹⁴ For instance, *Cels.* 2, 27–5, 61–6, 35 in Marcel Borret (ed.), *Origène: Contre Celse*, tome I–V (Sources chrétiennes 132, 136, 147, 150, 227), Paris: Cerf 1967–1976; *Hom. Luc.* 20, 2 in Henri Crouzel, François Fournier & Pierre Périchon (eds.), *Origène: Homélie sur saint Luc* (Sources chrétiennes 87), Paris: Cerf 1962.

¹⁵ The former is attested twice in *Hom. Ps.* 10,7 and 22,7, while the latter in *Hom. Ps.* 24,7, also twice. For the texts, see Lorenzo Perrone, Marina Molin Pradel, Emanuela Prinzivalli, & Antonio Cacciari (eds.) *Die neuen Psalmenhomilien: eine kritische Edition des Codex monacensis graecus 314*, (Origenes Werke, 13), Berlin: De Gruyter 2015.

¹⁶ *Comm. John* 2, 100 in Cécile Blanc (ed.), *Origène: Commentaire sur saint Jean*, tome I–V (Sources chrétiennes 120 bis, 222, 290, 385), Paris: Cerf 1996–1992. For the English translation, see Ronald E. Heine, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press 1993.

¹⁷ Ansgar Wucherpennig, *Heracleon Philologus: Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2002; Michael Kaler & Marie-Pierre Bussi eres, "Was Heracleon a Valentinian? A New Look at Old Sources", *Harvard Theological Review* 99:3 (2006), 275–279. For the other source on Heracleon's fragments, that is Clement of Alexandria, see Carl Johan Berglund, "References to Heracleon in Clement of Alexandria", *Early Christianity* 12 (2021), 228–247.

a strong and lively Valentinian community in third-century Alexandria, the city where he spent his youth and early adulthood and received his theological formation.¹⁸ If we are to believe Eusebius' biography, Origen's patroness, who helped him when he was only eighteen, was also sponsoring another young teacher named Paul, who was likely a member of the Valentinian school.¹⁹ In Origen's letters, whose authenticity is disputed, he himself admits that he was approached by philosophically trained Christian heretics and that he then took an interest in these heretical doctrines in order to refute them.²⁰ It seems likely that Origen is referring to Valentinianism, given that he often addresses Valentinianism openly as one of his main polemical targets. In addition, Valentinian teachers are certainly among the most learned Christian teachers of the third-century Alexandrian theological and philosophical landscape. Among members of Origen's intellectual circle, it is attested that his friend and patron Ambrose had been a Valentinian at some point in his life.²¹ As Origen's patron, Ambrose strongly encouraged him to carry on his refutation of Heracleon's *Commentary*, and Origen even complains that Ambrose forced him to write too many books.²² Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* was not composed all at once, but it was developed over the course of several years. Origen himself tells us that he wrote the first five books while he was in Alexandria, thus before 235 CE, and the following books in Caesarea. The thirty-second book, probably the last he had written, was composed around 245. Despite Origen's massive effort, the commentary was never completed, probably because Origen intensified his pastoral commitments in the last decade of his life.²³

It is unfortunately not clear how and when Origen came to read Heracleon's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Since Heracleon's commentary

¹⁸ Manlio Simonetti (ed.), *Testi gnostici in lingua greca e latina*, Milano: Mondadori 1999.

¹⁹ Eusebius, HE 6,2,13–15 in Eusèbe de Césarée, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, tome II Livres V–VII, Texte grec, traduction et notes par Gustave Bardy (Sources chrétiennes 41), Paris: Cerf 1995; Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen. Early Church Fathers*, London: Routledge 1998, 8.

²⁰ Eusebius, HE 6,18,2 and 6,19,12.

²¹ Eusebius, HE 6,18,1.

²² *Comm. John* 5, 1–2.

²³ Ronald E. Heine, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press 1996, 4–19.

was written prior to Origen's work, it is the first known exegetical commentary on a gospel, but it is not possible to identify a more precise date for its composition. Anna Van den Kerchove suggests convincingly that Origen read it in Alexandria, despite not quoting the book directly in the Alexandrian books of *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. She suggests that Origen did not need to make explicit reference to this work when he wrote in Alexandria as the local Christian community was already aware of Valentinian doctrines, and it is likely Origen did not want to encourage the rumors that slandered him about his connection to so-called heretics.²⁴ By contrast, the community in Caesarea had no direct knowledge of Valentinian teachings and Origen felt the need to warn them in details about the risks of what he believed an erroneous approach to Scripture.²⁵

It is indeed the exegetical approach to Scripture that represents the core of Origen's controversy with Heracleon, in particular, and Valentinian teachers in general. Both theologians are clearly well versed in hermeneutical techniques and master the Scriptures. Although Origen polemicizes vehemently against Heracleon's exegesis, they employ the same allegorical methodology when interpreting the Scripture. Manlio Simonetti noted that "Given the exceptional exegetical expertise of the two theologians, their comparison meant the mature application, in a Christian cultural environment, of the *ratio interpretandi* of the classic hermeneutics".²⁶ Thus, Origen sometimes resorts to an accusation of poor philological and exegetical accuracy in Heracleon's commentary, being unable to criticize his allegorical methodology.²⁷ Both Origen and Heracleon value mostly the allegorical meaning of the Scripture, often justifying their allegories by means of biblical associations, and by creating a meta-narrative which can be understood only by the more advanced readers. The main point of contrast between the two exegetical methods lies therefore in the different consideration of what is the correct allegorical meaning of the Scripture and who can achieve such an understanding. According to what Origen reports in his *Commentary*,

²⁴ Eusebius, *HE* 6,19,2–4.

²⁵ Heracleon is named only twice in the Alexandrian books, while his presence is much stronger in the Caesarean books with 46 mentions. See Van den Kerchove, "Origen and the 'Heterodox'", 492–493.

²⁶ Simonetti, "Eracleone e Origene Sulla Samaritana", 16.

²⁷ *Comm. John* 6, 306.

the answer to the question depends on the human natures for the Valentinian Heracleon. Only those who were protologically endowed with a spiritual nature will understand the spiritual and hidden meanings of the Scripture. The scholarly interpretation regarding Heracleon's theory of the fixity of natures is harshly contested by Wucherpennig as an Origenian slander, although there are no other sources to attest otherwise.²⁸ The problem of whether the three Valentinian natures (hylic, psychic and pneumatic) are to be considered deterministic or not is one of the major issues of Valentinian scholarship, and it cannot be addressed here.²⁹ For Origen, the correct allegorical meaning is a matter of spiritual progress, exegetical proficiency in reading the Scripture and operating a "movement 'from *lexis* to *logos*,' from the finite words of scripture to the infinite underlying capacity for wise speech they exhibit", to borrow the words of Mark James.³⁰ Origen's allegorical exegesis, far from being arbitrary, as it was claimed by several scholars,³¹ strives to understand the language of scripture in a way that takes into consideration all the possible meanings of the Scriptural words and sees it as a pedagogical path which leads to supreme Wisdom.

Origen and the Feminine

Within the context of the studies of Origen's relation to what he believed to be Valentinianism, an investigation of the use of feminine allegories in Origen's and Heracleon's understanding of the Gospel of John is particularly interesting because of the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures which these theologians were seeking. From the extant passages, it

²⁸ Wucherpennig, *Heracleon Philologus*.

²⁹ Jean-Daniel Dubois, "Once Again, the Valentinian Expression 'Saved by Nature'" in Marksches & Thomassen, *Valentinianism*, 193–204; Alexander Kocar, "The Ethics of Higher and Lower Levels of Salvation in the *Excerpt from Theodotus* and the *Tripartite Tractate*" in Marksches & Thomassen, *Valentinianism*, 205–238; Einar Thomassen, "Saved by Nature? The Question of Human Races and Soteriological Determinism in Valentinianism" in Marksches & van Oort, *Zugänge Zur Gnosis*, 129–150; Ismo Dunderberg, "Valentinian Theories on Classes of Humankind" in Marksches & van Oort, *Zugänge zur Gnosis*, 113–128; Francesco Berno, "Valentinus gnosticus. Note a Ref VI 36, 6–8", *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 82:1 (2016), 239–262.

³⁰ Mark R. James, *Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation*, Leiden: Brill 2021.

³¹ Robert P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2002.

seems that the episode of the Samaritan woman was as significant for Heracleon as it was for Origen. Possibly, it became significant for Origen since it was particularly significant for Heracleon.³² In their quests, both Heracleon and Origen make specific assumptions about the allegorical meaning of women and female everyday objects and used them to signify theological concepts. Having inherited a neat gendered metaphorical dichotomy from the Platonic and Philonic writings,³³ both authors understand the feminine to represent lower ontological perfection (that is, the human condition), while they employ masculine metaphors to signify the higher ontological perfection (that is, the divine condition). Most times, they both interpret the Samaritan woman as a type of the human soul.³⁴ But unlike previous traditions, both authors use feminine metaphors to express the dynamics of being, the subjection to passions and the need for redemption. Despite these similarities, the theological implications resulting from their use of feminine imagery could not be more different.³⁵ For these reasons, I believe that research on Origen and Valentinianism could greatly benefit by looking at feminine allegories more closely. In the following section, I bring several examples of how a similar allegorical exegesis of women and female-related everyday objects (e.g. water jar) can result in the affirmation of two opposing theological doctrines and two different views of the theological significance of the female gender.

³² This is particularly evident in Simonetti, "Eracleone e Origene Sulla Samaritana".

³³ Robert M. Berchman & John F. Finamore (eds.), *Women and the Female in Neoplatonism*, Leiden: Brill 2022; Kathrine Gillhuly, *The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009; Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female*, Leiden: Brill 1970.

³⁴ For the soul as female in Origen and its theological and philosophical implications, see Alfons Fürst & Holger Strutwolf (eds.), *Origenes, Die Homilien Und Fragmente Zum Hohelied*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2016, 24–29; Herrmann Vogt, "Die Witwe als Bild der Seele in der Exegese des Origenes", *Theologische Quartalschrift Tübingen* 165 (1985), 105–118. For the soul as female in Valentinianism, see Ulla Tervahauta, *A Story of the Soul's Journey in the Nag Hammadi Library: A Study of Authentikos Logos (NHC VI,3)*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 2015; Lettieri, "Il nous mistico", 245–274.

³⁵ For a survey of the different uses of Gnostic feminine imagery see Lavinia Cerioni, *Revealing Women. Feminine Imagery in Gnostic Christian Texts*, Turnhout: Brepols 2021.

The Exegesis of the Samaritan Woman

Although the episode of the Samaritan woman occupies the entire thirteenth book of Origen's *Commentary on John*, we have a partial interpretation of the episode since only Origen's commentary from Jn 4:13 onward is preserved. The encounter between Jesus and the woman was commented on in the twelfth book of the commentary, which is unfortunately lost.

Origen allegorizes the Samaritan woman as the type of the heterodox Christian believer: she has searched for God her whole life, she has had many husbands and, allegorically, she has been exposed to so many beliefs that she is not able to recognize a true prophet.³⁶ The encounter with Jesus at the well represents the turning point of her life, for she is allowed to drink the living waters of the eternal life. Because of this encounter, she is now free of her previous ignorance and is converted to the true faith and becomes an apostle.³⁷ As Monnica Klöckener stressed in her recent article, the Samaritan woman is a pivotal example of Origen's belief in human dignity.³⁸ The Samaritan woman represents the heterodox both literally and metaphorically: she is a Samaritan, therefore her religion was ill-considered by those belonging to Pharisaic Judaism,³⁹ and she has divorced five husbands, which allegorically represents the many literalist Christian movements of the earliest centuries. In line with Origen's theological pedagogy and in opposition to Valentinian doctrines on human natures, the woman's heterodoxy is not interpreted as a permanent status but as a momentary lapse in judgment. Her relationship with these men symbolizes the soul's search for God, and the opposition between licit and illicit sexual relationships for women is a driving feature of the Origenian theological framework in this passage. Associating women's sexual relationships with the search for God is a recurrent trait in Origen's writings, and the most explicit example is Origen's exegesis of the *Commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs*, where the bride becomes the type of every believer in search

³⁶ *Comm. John* 13,1,7; 13,8,48; 13,9,51–52.

³⁷ *Comm. John* 13,169.

³⁸ Klöckener "The Samaritan Woman", 68.

³⁹ *Comm. John* 13, 77–79.

for God.⁴⁰ From a literary perspective, there are two notable antecedents to Origen's sexual allegory: the Jewish tradition of Israel as a bride or a prostitute, and the Valentinian mythology of Sophia.⁴¹ There is, of course, a certain degree of interconnection between these three traditions, but Origen is openly polemizing against the bride/prostitute paradigm which drives Valentinian mythologies in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. In both Origen's texts and Valentinian mythologies, the sexual status of women becomes the key exegetical element for the allegorical interpretation of all female gospel figures. In Origen, promiscuity is interpreted as a literal and/or erroneous allegorical interpretation of Scripture, while Valentinianism uses the myths of Sophia's sexual desire to explain the origin of the physical and material world and, consequently, evil.⁴² For Origen, understanding the Samaritan woman's marital situation is important to such an extent that he dedicates a brief excursus to explaining the rules that regulate women's sexuality in the Jewish society. A woman is considered an adulterer if she lies with a man before her husband dies, but she is allowed to be with another man if her previous husband died.⁴³ According to Origen, the Samaritan woman's previous husbands are not dead, but she gave them *to apostasion*, a bill of divorce, which would put her in a very weak position, as the status of divorced women in the Jewish law was, at the very least, socially and economically challenging.⁴⁴ Origen writes: "The Samaritan woman's relationship with five husbands, and after them her association with a sixth who was not her legitimate husband, was everything that she had done."⁴⁵ Her having multiple partners has a double allegorical meaning. On the one hand, Origen identifies them with the five

⁴⁰ *Comm. Cant.* 1,3, 12–13; 1,4,7–10; 1,5,8–9; 2,4,11; 4,1,1–3 in Luc Brésard & Henri Crouzel (eds.), *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, tome I–II (Sources chrétiennes 375–376), Paris: Cerf 1991–1992.

⁴¹ Cerioni, *Revealing Women*.

⁴² For the Valentinian protological mythology see *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI, 2); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,1–8; Hippolytus, *Elenchos* 6, 29–36.

⁴³ *Comm. John* 13, 43–46.

⁴⁴ Bernard Jackson, "The 'Institutions' of Marriage and Divorce in the Hebrew Bible", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56:2 (2011), 221–251.

⁴⁵ *Comm. John* 13, 181: Πάντα δὲ ἦν, ἃ ἐποίησεν ἡ γυνή, ἢ πρὸς τοὺς πέντε ἄνδρας κοινωνία καὶ μετ' ἐκείνους ἢ πρὸς τὸν ἕκτον οὐ γνήσιον ἄνδρα συγκατάβασις, ὄντινα

senses, through which humans experience the material world and make sense of it. On the other hand, they represent those who read the Scriptures literally and are not able to achieve a spiritual understanding. Her sixth partner, who is not even her husband as the previous ones, is interpreted as her beliefs in the wrong spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures. In other words, the sixth husband represents Heracleon's teaching, that is, those Christian teachers who believed in the existence of an allegorical and spiritual scriptural sense, but failed to achieve the correct meaning:

I think that every soul that is introduced to the Christian religion through the Scriptures and begins with sense-perceptible things called bodily things, has five husbands. There is a husband related to each of the senses. But after the soul has consorted with the matters perceived by the senses and later wishes to rise above them, urged on to things perceived by the spirit, she may then encounter unsound teaching based on allegorical and spiritual meanings. She then approaches another husband after the five husbands, having given a bill of divorce to the former five, as it were, and having decided to live with this sixth. And we will stay with that husband until Jesus comes and makes us aware of the character of such a husband. But after the Logos of the Lord has come and conversed with us, we deny that husband and say, "I have no husband."⁴⁶

ἀρνησαμένη καὶ τὴν ὑδρίαν καταλείπουσα εἰς ἕβδομον σεμνῶς ἀναπαύεται, προξενούσα τὴν ὠφέλειαν καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν προτέρων αὐτῆς δογμάτων οἰκοῦσι πόλιν τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τῶν οὐχ ὑγιῶν λόγων, τὴν αὐτὴν τῇ γυναικί·

⁴⁶ *Comm. John 13, 51–52:* Οἶμαι πᾶσαν τὴν εἰσαγομένην ψυχὴν εἰς τὴν διὰ τῶν γραφῶν ἐν Χριστῷ θεοσεβειαν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν καὶ σωματικῶν λεγομένων ἀρχομένην, τοὺς πέντε ἄνδρας καθ' ἑκάστην τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἀνδρὸς τινος γινομένου ἰσχειν· ἐπὶ δὲ μετὰ τὸ ὠμικηκεῖναι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἀνακυψαί τις θέλων καὶ προτραπεί εἰς τὰ νοητὰ περιτύχη λόγῳ προφάσει ἀλληγορίας καὶ πνευματικῶν οὐχ ὑγιαίνοντι, οὗτος μετὰ τοὺς πέντε ἄνδρας ἑτέρῳ προσέρχεται, δούς, ἴν' οὕτως εἶπω, τὸ ἀποστάσιον τοῖς προτέροις πέντε καὶ κρίνων συνοικεῖν τῷ ἑκτῷ. Καὶ ἕως ἂν γε ἐλθῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς συναίσθησιν ἡμᾶς ἀγάγῃ τοῦ τοιοῦτου ἀνδρὸς, ἐκεῖνῳ σύνεσμεν· ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ κυρίου λόγου καὶ διαλεχθέντος ἡμῖν, ἀρνούμενοι ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἄνδρα φαμέν· "Οὐκ ἔχω ἄνδρα."

The Samaritan woman is not only the type of every Christian who undergoes a conversion to Christ, but she is specifically the type of those who abandon the Valentinian teachings of Heracleon and embrace Origen's teachings. Here Origen begins a detailed explanation of Heracleon's exegetical method. Heracleon's first mistake is discrediting the texts from the Hebrew Bible by not reading them as the typological prefiguration of the new covenant.⁴⁷ Valentinians denied that the Jewish texts have been renewed by the arrival of Jesus, who validated the Law by giving it a new meaning.⁴⁸ They considered the Jewish Law as an archontic creation of an inferior and false deity.

Heracleon takes the well of Jakob as a symbol of the hylic world, which will be destroyed at the coming of the Saviour.⁴⁹ Origen's account of Heracleon's second mistake gives us clues about Origen's own view on women. Origen admits that he could have agreed with Heracleon's interpretation had he not taken away the woman's freedom of choice: "We too would agree, then, if he were admitting that she had free choice and not hinting that her nature was more excellent. But if he is referring the cause of her consent to her natural state, as something not present in all people, his argument must be refuted."⁵⁰ Heracleon is taking away the Samaritan's choice (προαίρεσις) by imputing her assertiveness to a protological and natural endowment of a pneumatic superior nature (φύσις). Whether Origen is polemically targeting a Valentinian doctrine or he is consciously misconstruing Heracleon's argument, it does not change the fact that Origen values free will above all else and believes firmly that women have and are invited to make use of it. Hence, Origen argues in favour of free will against Heracleon's alleged natural determinism. Contrariwise, he claims that Heracleon's exegesis is arbitrary and is grounded on Valentinian mythological rendition of John's prologue, rather than on Scriptural basis.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Comm. John* 13, 106–108.

⁴⁸ *Comm. John* 13, 23–25.

⁴⁹ *Comm. John* 13, 187–192.

⁵⁰ *Comm. John* 13, 64: Εἰ μὲν οὖν τὴν προαίρεσιν ἀπεδέχετο, μηδὲν περὶ φύσεως αἰνιττόμενος ὡς διαφοροῦσης, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἂν συγκατεθέμεθα· εἰ δὲ τῇ φυσικῇ κατασκευῇ ἀναφέρει τὴν τῆς συγκαταθέσεως αἰτίαν, ὡς οὐ πᾶσιν ταύτης παρούσης, ἀνατρεπτόν αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον.

⁵¹ For the Johannine dependency of Valentinian mythology see Lettieri, "Il nous mistico".

We know very little about the sources of Heracleon's exegesis, but what is deducible from his fragments as reported by Origen is extremely similar to the Valentinian mythology described by Irenaeus in *Against All Heresies* 1, 1–8. The mythological nature of Valentinian texts is addressed explicitly as a problem by Origen since it lacks clarity and does not constitute a solid base for allegorical exegesis.⁵² Origen explicitly mentions only one of Heracleon's sources, a work titled *The Preaching of Peter* but claims he does not have time to refute this book.⁵³ Unfortunately, we do not have any knowledge of a book by this title, and thus cannot compare it with Heracleon's fragments. Origen often refutes Heracleon's allegories by claiming that: "He seems to have invented these things at random without any plausible argument".⁵⁴ This is particularly visible in their disagreement on the allegorical meaning of the Samaritan woman's denial of having a husband. Heracleon interprets it as discovering her pneumatic nature and the consequent abandonment of her six hylic husbands,⁵⁵ whilst Origen associates it with her finding the true faith. Both theologians agree that she allegorically takes Jesus as her destined bridegroom and embraces the true faith by drinking the living waters.⁵⁶ How to interpret these waters is, once again, the object of a dispute. By using a complex and highly educated reference to Jacob's well in Genesis, Origen builds his interpretation of the Samaritan woman in comparison and complementary to Rebecca. As Origen points out, both women met their match at the well and both were asked for water. Jacob's well is a very important theological place in Origen's theology, and it often signifies the Scripture.⁵⁷ It is then even more relevant that this place becomes a feminine space in Origen's interpretation:

Rebecca herself too, however, a maiden beautiful to behold, went out with a water jar on her shoulders before Abraham's servant

⁵² *Comm. John* 13, 122.

⁵³ *Comm. John* 13, 104.

⁵⁴ *Comm. John* 13, 93: ἀλλ' ἔοικεν ταῦτα ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔσχεδιακῆναι χωρὶς πάσης πιθανότητος.

⁵⁵ *Comm. John* 13, 67–74.

⁵⁶ *Comm. John* 13, 3–7 and 13–19.

⁵⁷ Monnica Klöckener, *Die Frau am Jakobsbrunnen in altkirchlicher Johannesexegese*, Münster: Aschendorff 2021; Manlio Simonetti, *Origene Esegeta e la sua tradizione*, Brescia: Morcelliana 2004, 123–134.

finished speaking within himself. Since she was not drawing water like the Samaritan woman, she went down to the fountain (the well) and filled her water jar, and, when she came up, Abraham's servant ran to meet her and said, "Give me a little water to drink from your water jar." Because he was Abraham's servant, he was content to receive even a little water from Rebecca's water jar. "And Rebecca quickly let down the water jar upon her arm, and gave him a drink, until he stopped drinking." Because, then, Rebecca's water jar was worthy of praise, she did not leave it behind, but because that of the Samaritan woman was [not], it was left at the sixth hour.⁵⁸

Later on in the text, Rebecca embodies the Hebrew Bible because she kept her water jar and drank the well's water, thus not extinguishing her thirst. The Samaritan woman abandoned her jar and was utterly changed by the encounter with Jesus because his living water transformed her into an apostle.⁵⁹ Unlike Rebecca, the Samaritan woman asked Jesus to give her some water and it is this driving desire, which Origen considers a feminine trait, that made a difference. He associates the woman's desire with the bride's desire for the Logos and eternal life.⁶⁰ Origen connects all these female-centered episodes to disprove Heracleon's exegesis of the water jar, which he interpreted as the "disposition capable of receiving life, and the thought of the power that is from the Savior".⁶¹ For Heracleon, the Samaritan woman was destined

⁵⁸ *Comm John* 13, 177–178: Ρεβέκκα μέντοι καὶ αὐτὴ ὕδριαν ἔχουσα ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων, πρὶν συντελέσαι λαλοῦντα ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ τὸν παῖδα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, ἐξεπορεύετο καλὴ τῇ ὄψει παρθένος· ἣτις ἐπέπερ οὐχ ὁμοίως ἦντλει τῇ Σαμαρείτιδι, καταβαίνει ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν καὶ πληροῖ τὴν ὕδριαν, ἀναβάσῃ τε αὐτῇ ἐπιτρέχει εἰς συνάντησιν ὁ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ παῖς καὶ εἶπεν· "Πότισόν με μικρὸν ὕδωρ ἐκ τῆς ὕδριας σου." (178) Ἐπεὶ γὰρ παῖς ἦν τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, ἡγάπα κἄν μικροῦ ὕδατος ἀπὸ τῆς ὕδριας Ρεβέκκας λαβεῖν· "Καὶ ἔσπευσεν ἡ Ρεβέκκα, καὶ καθέειλεν τὴν ὕδριαν ἐπὶ τὸν βραχίονα αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπότισεν αὐτόν, ἕως ἐπαύσατο πίνων» ἐπέπερ οὖν ἦν ἐπαινετὴ ἢ τῆς Ρεβέκκας ἐπαύσατο πίνων· ἐπείπερ οὖν ἦν ἐπαινετὴ ἢ τῆς Ρεβέκκας ὕδρια, οὐ καταλείπεται ὑπ' αὐτῆς, ἢ δὲ τῆς Σαμαρείτιδος οὐκ οὕσα ὥρα ἔκτη ἀφίεται.

⁵⁹ On the value of eating and drinking in Origen's theology, see the thorough contribution of Fernando Soler, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales: El uso teológico de metáforas de comer y beber*, Paderborn: Brill 2021.

⁶⁰ *Comm. John* 13, 17–18.

⁶¹ *Comm. John* 13, 187: διάθεσιν καὶ ἔννοιαν τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος.

to marry her true Pleromatic husband and be reunited in the Pleroma, being a pneumatic nature herself. Origen refutes this interpretation on multiple levels. By interpreting the water jar as the Law, Origen explains why Rebecca was praiseworthy for keeping it and sharing her water with her husband's servant, while the Samaritan woman left it behind to evangelize Samaria. Christ came to overshadow the Law, therefore the Samaritan woman has no longer use for the water jar. Just as Rebecca kept the jar with her and was praiseworthy for it, so the Samaritan woman was laudable for leaving it behind. However, Origen takes his interpretation a step forward. If the encounter between the Samaritan woman and her true pneumatic partner is the apex of Heracleon's interpretation, Origen uses the woman as a prefiguration of each believer's spiritual progress. Once the woman encounters her true bridegroom, she assumes a new public role: "He also uses this woman as an apostle, as it were, to those in the city. His words inflamed the woman to such an extent that she left her water jar and went into the city."⁶² And also: "She disowned the latter man, left her water jar, and reverently rested [on] the Sabbath. She obtained benefit also for those who, on the basis of her former beliefs, dwelt in the same city with herself, that is, in the structure of unsound doctrines."⁶³ She is the woman who proclaims Christ to the Samaritans, and Origen's exegesis is meant to legitimize her apostolic mission. He also notes that women have a forefront place when it comes to receiving and sharing Jesus' message, and he associates the Samaritan woman with Mary Magdalene, who saw Jesus before all the other apostles.⁶⁴ By associating the Samaritan with Mary, Origen shows

⁶² *Comm. John* 13,169: Οἰονεὶ δὲ καὶ ἀποστόλω πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τῇ πόλει χρῆται τῇ γυναικὶ ταύτῃ, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἐξάψας αὐτὴν διὰ τῶν λόγων, ἕως ἀφείσα τὴν ὑδρίαν αὐτῆς ἢ γυνὴ ἀπελθοῦσα εἰς τὴν πόλιν εἶπη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· "Δεῦτε, ἴδετε ἄνθρωπον, ὃς εἶπέν μοι πάντα ἃ ἐποίησα· μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός;" ὅτε "ἐξῆλθον ἐκ τῆς πόλεως, καὶ ἤρχοντο πρὸς αὐτόν"· καὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ μὲν μὴ ὕστερον, τότε δὲ σαφέστατα ἐμφανίζει ἑαυτὸν ὁ λόγος, ὡς ἐλθόντας τοὺς μαθητὰς θαυμάζειν εἰ καὶ αὕτη ἠξιάσται θῆλύς τις καὶ εὐεξαπάτητος οὖσα, τυχεῖν τῆς ὀμιλίας πρὸς αὐτὴν τοῦ λόγου.

⁶³ *Comm. John* 13, 181: Πάντα δὲ ἦν, ἃ ἐποίησεν ἢ γυνὴ, ἢ πρὸς τοὺς πέντε ἄνδρας κοινωνία καὶ μετ' ἐκείνους ἢ πρὸς τὸν ἕκτον οὐ γνήσιον ἄνδρα συγκατάβασις, ὄντινα ἀρνησαμένη καὶ τὴν ὑδρίαν καταλείπουσα εἰς ἑβδομον σεμνῶς ἀναπαύεται, προξενούσα τὴν ὠφέλειαν καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν προτέρων αὐτῆς δογμάτων οἰκοῦσι πόλιν τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τῶν οὐχ ὑγιῶν λόγων, τὴν αὐτὴν τῇ γυναικί·

⁶⁴ *Comm. John* 13, 179.

acknowledgment, if not even appreciation, for women's leadership roles in the Christian community.

Conclusion

Origen and Heracleon are both masters of allegorical exegesis. Despite using similar hermeneutical criteria, they reach very different interpretations. Their exegetical criteria are fundamentally identical, regardless of what Origen claims, and both perceive the Gospel of John as a pivotal book in their personal Scriptural canon. Notwithstanding, this seems the closest their exegeses can go. Although Origen and Heracleon both make the woman's sexuality the center of their interpretation, their different theologies result in substantially different theological understandings of the Samaritan woman's journey and of women in society. Heracleon interprets the woman as the allegory of a lost spiritual soul who undergoes a journey of repentance until the arrival of her true Pneumatic husband who will restore her to her original divine condition, like Sophia was restored before her. In his interpretation, the woman remains anchored to the paradigm of licit/illicit sexual relationships, where she finds her truth by being in *syzygy* with her pneumatic partner. On the contrary, Origen's allegorical reading is centered on the Samaritan's sexuality in a way that surpasses the social and cultural Jewish norms of his time. Origen does not express a moral evaluation about the woman's situation, he rather gives her back control over her own life. She owns her free will and her encounter at well is the way for her to discover her freedom. When she decides to leave her latest partner and respond to Jesus' calling, she becomes an apostle in her own right, evangelizing the region of Samaria.

In its entirety, this article accentuates the dynamic contribution a female perspective can impart to entrenched theological dialogues, particularly within the realms of free will, progress, and the status of women, as evidenced in the works of Origen of Alexandria and Heracleon.

AN INTERPRETATION OF ADOLF VON HARNACK'S "SYSTEM OF ORIGEN": THE GENIUS, THE THEOLOGIAN, AND THE VALUE OF HUMAN BEINGS

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Abstract:

The objective of this article is to analyze Harnack's interpretation of Origen of Alexandria, by focusing specifically on three elements of his thought. First, I focus on Harnack's account of Origen in relation to his concept of "personality," drawn primarily from the historicist tradition. I then show that Harnack's definition of the theologian's task can provide additional insight into his assessment of Origen as a theologian. Finally, I argue that Harnack's positive anthropology plays a central role in substantiating his appreciation for the work of earlier theologians like Origen. Contrary to the prevailing interpretation that Harnack held a negative evaluation of Origen as a philosopher and a corrupter of Christianity, I argue that Harnack valued the contributions of the Alexandrian, portraying him as a personality pivotal to the development of Christian doctrine.

Key Words:

Adolf von Harnack, Origen of Alexandria, Individuality, German historicism, Historiography

Introduction

The juxtaposition of the names of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and Origen of Alexandria (ca. 180–253) elicits an immediate association with

Harnack's scholarly investigations into the works of Origen and its reception throughout the twentieth century. The section in *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1886) that Harnack dedicated to the Alexandrian, titled "Das System des Origenes,"¹ initiated a discourse that has influenced the ongoing debate on the person of Origen to the present day. Scholars of Origen debated especially on the possibility of defining Origen's thought in terms of a system.² Henri Crouzel, among scholars engaging with Harnack's legacy, criticized him for portraying Origen as a Greek philosopher and simplifying his thought into a collection of grand metaphysical ideas.³ Moreover, Harnack's thesis regarding the

¹ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th. edn., vol. I, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1964, 650. As for the first volume, the editions were issued in 1886, 1888, 1894, and 1909. The fourth edition was published in 1909 and was reprinted in 1964. English translation: Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. I, London: Williams & Norgate, 1894.

² "But what constantly provokes wonder, and sometimes a good deal of scholarly annoyance, is the wide divergence that exists between the two camps of Origen studies today: that of Völker, Daniélou, Crouzel, Harl, and Gruber on the one side, and that of Hal Koch, E. de Faye, von Campenhausen, and others on the other ... But his [Origen's] theological system, which so often runs the danger of falling into the very Neoplatonism which he decries, can, in von Campenhausen's view, only with difficulty be called truly Christian." Herbert Musurillo, "The Recent Revival of Origen Studies", *Theological Studies* 24:2 (1963), 250–63 (252).

³ "Ainsi A. von Harnack dans son *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* expose sous le titre *Das System des Origenes* un condensé de ses idées sur l'Alexandrin. Il ne voit que le Peri Archon et les quelques allusions des autres oeuvres où il pense retrouver les théories de ce traité. On connaît le thème essentiel: Origène est un pur philosophe grec. Il est réduit à quelques grandes idées métaphysiques." Henri Crouzel, "Origène est-il un systématique?", in *Origène et la philosophie*, Aubier: Éditions Montaigne 1962, 180. The debate has evolved over the past decades; however, the topic still elicits interest today, as evidenced by Fernández's recently published article on the subject: "Was Origen a systematic theologian? Many outstanding scholars ... have given opposing answers to this question. Yet, their disagreement arises not only from different interpretations of Origen's theology, but also from the lack of a common definition of 'system' and 'systematic.' In fact, none of these scholars have explained in their works the meaning of the term 'system.' Henri Crouzel ... stressed that Origen was not a Greek philosopher but a Christian believer, and that his thought was not a concluded set of categorical definitions but an open and ongo-

Hellenization of Christianity left a long-lasting impact on the field, shaping the common perception of Harnack's attitude towards Origen.⁴

The *Origenes Werke* series, an important part of the *Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (1891–),⁵ represents the first collection of modern critical editions of Origen's texts. Scholars agree that the *Origenes Werke* marked the commencement of the successful recovery of Origen's literary heritage, and that its enduring influence laid the foundation for subsequent editorial initiatives, such as the *Sources chrétiennes* series.⁶

Despite Harnack's profound influence on patristic scholarship, the connection between his philosophical and theological perspectives and his interpretation of Origen has not been explored to a satisfactory extent in research.⁷ This article aims to explore this under-researched area

ing theological synthesis. It is difficult to disagree with this description of Origen's theology; however, it is possible to call into question the idea of 'system' presupposed by Cruzel ... I propose to examine whether Origen's theology aspires to offer a comprehensive and coherent presentation of Christian teaching." Samuel Fernández, "Origen's Theological System in *On First Principles*", *Modern Theology* 38:2 (2022), 220–45 (225).

⁴ On the negative impact of Harnack's interpretation, see Manlio Simonetti, "La teologia dei padri" in: Piero Coda & Giacomo Canobbio (ed.), *La teologia del XX secolo: un bilancio*, vol. 1, Roma: Città Nuova 2003, 359–89 (368–72).

⁵ The first two volumes of *Origenes Werke* appeared in 1899 and included the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and the treatises *Against Celsus* and the *On Prayer*. In 1913, Koetschau published *De Principiis*: Paul Koetschau, *De Principiis* (GCS 22, Origenes Werke 5), Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs 1913. For an overview on the different editions of *On First Principles*: Peter W. Martens, "The Modern Editions of *Peri Archon*", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28: 2 (2020), 303–31. Christoph Marksches, "The Reception and Transformation of Origen's Works in Modern Editions. Some Comparative Views on Editions in Britain, France, Italy and Germany", in: Anders-Christian Jacobsen (ed.), *Origeniana Undecima*, Leuven-Paris-Bristol: Peeters 2016, 165–89 (179).

⁶ Cf. Lorenzo Perrone, "Origen's Renaissance in the Twentieth Century and the Recovery of his Literary Heritage: New Finds and Philological Advancement," in: Patricia Ciner and Alyson Nunez (eds.), *The Discoveries of Manuscripts from Late Antiquity: Their Impact on Patristic Studies and the Contemporary World (Conference Proceedings 2nd International Conference on Patristic Studies)*, Turnhout: Brepols 2021, 91–109.

⁷ Ulrich Berner, in his comprehensive book, has presented various interpretations of Origen, including that of Harnack. Ulrich Berner, *Origenes*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1981. I have treated the topic of Harnack's interpretation of Origen more thoroughly in my PhD dissertation, which will be reworked for publication in the near future.

by investigating how Harnack's historical, philosophical, and theological views, along with his ecclesiastical concerns, shaped his understanding of Origen. I begin with the analysis of the concept of individuality, which Harnack drew from the German historicist tradition and defined as "personality."⁸ I then focus on how Harnack used the concept of "personality" in his portrayal of Origen. Finally, I present Harnack's views on the theologian's role in history and society, supporting it with a specific example from his own life.

The inquiry highlights Harnack's belief in the active role that theologians can play in shaping history, rooted in his historicist lineage that stresses the impact of individuals on historical narratives. This belief aligns with his optimistic anthropology, viewing human beings as equal in dignity and worth, unified as "Children of God." Consequently, in the present article, I argue that Harnack's positive evaluation of the theologian's mission and optimism about societal progress find their basis in his foundational understanding of human equality. Finally, attention is directed to a crucial passage in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, where Harnack's affirmative view of human nature is articulated. Despite Harnack's reservations about theological constructs like Origen's, he is shown to value their agency and societal contributions.

Harnack and the Historicist Tradition: The Influence of Individuals

Some scholars have observed that Harnack's ideas on history share many features with those of nineteenth-century historicist thinkers.⁹

⁸ The term "*Persönlichkeit*," translated here as "personality," has a long theological and philosophical tradition and was widely used in the nineteenth-century German philosophical milieu. In this article, I limit the explanation of the concept to Harnack's own work.

⁹ Studies that address the topic of Harnack and historicism: Wayne G. Glick, *The Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolf von Harnack as Historian and Theologian*, New York: Evanston and London: Harper & Row 1967; Johanna Jantsch, *Die Entstehung des Christentums bei Adolf von Harnack und Eduard Meyer*, Bonn: R. Habelt 1990; Kurt Nowak, "Bürgerliche Bildungsreligion? Zur Stellung Adolf von Harnacks in der protestantischen Frömmigkeitsgeschichte der Moderne", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 99 (1988), 326–53; 1996), Stefan

Nevertheless, as of the early 2000s, the state of research regarding Harnack's contribution to historical and methodological debates was perceived to be in its nascent stages.¹⁰ To the best of my knowledge, there have been no subsequent contributions to the discussion on the intersection of Harnack and historicism in recent decades.

The term "historicism" has often been characterized as a *Kampfbegriff*, reflecting the challenges scholars face in precisely defining its attributes.¹¹ Nevertheless, within the scholarly discourse on historicism, there is a prevailing consensus recognizing Wilhelm von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke, and Johann Gustav Bernhard Droysen as prominent historicist thinkers. The common thread unifying these thinkers is their extensive utilization of the intellectual categories of development (*Entwicklung*) and individuality (*Individualität*) for the analysis and interpretation of history.¹² Notably, Meinecke has underscored the paramount importance of the category of individuality for these thinkers.

Rebenich, *Theodor Mommsen und Adolf Harnack: Wissenschaft und Politik im Berlin des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts. Mit einem Anhang: Edition und Kommentierung des Briefwechsels*, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1997; Michael Basse, *Die dogmengeschichtlichen Konzeptionen Adolf von Harnacks und Reinhold Seebergs*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001; Kurt Nowak, "Theologie, Philologie und Geschichte: Adolf von Harnack Als Kirchenhistoriker", in Otto Gerhard Oexle and Kurt Nowak (eds.), *Adolf von Harnack: Theologe, Historiker, Wissenschaftspolitiker*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001; Stefan Rebenich "Orbis Romanus. Deutungen der römischen Geschichte im Zeitalter des Historismus", in O. G. Oexle, K. Nowak, T. Rendtorff, and K.-V. Selge (ed.), *Adolf von Harnack. Christentum, Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2003, 29–49.

¹⁰ See the works of: Christian Nottmeier, *Adolf von Harnack und die deutsche Politik 1890 bis 1930: eine biographische Studie zum Verhältnis von Protestantismus, Wissenschaft und Politik*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004; Claus-Dieter Osthövener, "Adolf von Harnack als Systematiker", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 99:3 (2002), 296–331.

¹¹ The expression is from the book: Walther Hofer, *Geschichtschreibung und Weltanschauung: Betrachtungen zum Werk Friedrich Meineckes, Geschichtschreibung und Weltanschauung*, Munich: De Gruyter 1950, 322. Several issues are associated with the term 'historicism': on the one hand, there is no manifesto for historicism; on the other hand, thinkers who would later be classified as historicists did not refer to themselves as such. Cf. Jacques Bos, "Individuality and Interpretation in Nineteenth-Century German Historicism", in Uljana Feest (ed.), *Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands 2010, 207–220 (2008).

¹² Cf. Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: eine Einführung*, München: C. H. Beck 1992, 1–3.

Meinecke's seminal work in 1936 on the historicist tradition highlights a distinctive emphasis on individuality, positioning it in stark contrast to more generalized approaches to the past.¹³ This perspective is particularly relevant when juxtaposed with the philosophy of history articulated by G. W. F. Hegel, a subject of frequent criticism. Hegel places the *Geist* as the determining factor in the historical process, proposing it as the overarching principle governing history. Implicit in this conception is the idea that, despite their central significance, individuals play a more passive role in influencing the course of historical events, functioning essentially as instruments of the *Weltgeist*.¹⁴

Contrary to this kind of philosophy of history, historicists developed a nuanced concept of individuality encompassing people, nations, and ideas, which assumed a central role in the analysis of historical events. For instance, Humboldt posited that history unfolds as the development of a diverse array of individual forms,¹⁵ assigning a distinct role to human beings, whom he deemed free to cultivate their peculiarity or distinctive characteristic (*Eigenthümlichkeit*).¹⁶ The notion of individuality concerning states, law, and society found elaboration in Ranke's writings.¹⁷ While Ranke did not preclude the possibility of discovering a general meaning in historical narratives, he diverged from Hegel's approach, rejecting the reduction of such meaning to a higher principle.¹⁸ By prioritizing the individual dimension of history, Ranke asserted the agency of individuality against what he perceived as an abstract concept imposed onto history.

¹³ Friedrich Meinecke, *Werke. Die Entstehung des Historismus*, 4th edn., vol. 3, München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag 1965.

¹⁴ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in: Moldenhauer E, Michel KM (eds.) *Werke*, vol 12. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main [1837] 1986, 29–54; Bos, "Individuality and Interpretation in Nineteenth-Century German Historicism", 209–210.

¹⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Betrachtungen über die Weltgeschichte*, in: Flitner A, Giel K (eds.) *Schriften zur anthropologie und geschichte. Werke in fünf Bänden*, vol 1., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft [1814] 1960, 567–577.

¹⁶ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen*, Breslau: Trewendt 1851, 9.

¹⁷ An example of this approach is Ranke's masterpiece: Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514*, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot 1885.

¹⁸ Leopold von Ranke, "Einleitung zu einer Vorlesung über Universalhistorie", in Eberhard Kessel (ed.), *Historische Zeitschrift* 178:2, (1954), 304–7.

Droysen, in his second supplement to *Grundriss der Historik*, titled “Natur und Geschichte”,¹⁹ critically reviewed Henry Thomas Buckle’s (1821–1862) *History of Civilization in England* (1843).²⁰ Buckle sought to uncover general laws of civilization, a proposition contested by Droysen, who argued for the freedom of unpredictability of human actions, precluding a more generalized explanation of history. Nevertheless, akin to other historicists, Droysen identified a guiding principle for the realization of human beings in the moral community (*in den sittlichen Gemeinsamkeiten*) of family, people, state, and religion.²¹ This shows that while historicists did not necessarily oppose Hegel’s thought, they frequently reinterpreted and reconstructed it. Hence, Hegel’s perspective on history continued to influence and inspire nineteenth-century thinkers that came after him.

Turning our attention to Harnack’s work, it becomes evident that he did not aim to directly confront philosophical theories through formal treatises. Nevertheless, he demonstrated a keen awareness of the ongoing philosophical debates surrounding the meaning of history and took a decisive stance on these issues. This is notably evident in his work *Das Christentum und die Geschichte* (1896), where he lauds Herder, Ranke, and Hegel for their contributions in reestablishing the significance of history. According to Harnack, they elevated history to a privileged dimension of religion, portraying it as a dynamic reality unfolding within the broader framework of human history. This was a response to the relativistic interpretations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²² Harnack stresses that the concepts of development and individuality lend vigor and coherence to any historical narrative.²³ He expounds on the notion of individuality, specifically framed as personality (*Persönlichkeit*), expressing a distinct preference for recognizing the active role of human beings in shaping historical events. Harnack regards the role

¹⁹ Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik*, Leipzig: Verlag von Veit 1882.

²⁰ Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, London: Frowde 1913.

²¹ Cf. Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik*, 11.

²² Cf. Adolf von Harnack, “Das Christentum und die Geschichte (1895)” in: Adolf von Harnack & Kurt Nowak (ed.), *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse: Reden und Schriften aus den Jahren des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik. Teil 1: Der Theologe und Historiker*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 1996, 880–899 (883).

²³ “Zwei Begriffe vornehmlich traten dabei mit steigender Klarheit in den Vordergrund; die Entwicklung und die Persönlichkeit”. Ibid.

of individuals as pivotal, asserting that nothing truly great can be achieved in history without the agency of an individual or a personality: "Allein ohne die Kraft und die Tat eines Einzelnen, einer Persönlichkeit, vermag sich nichts Großes und Förderndes durchzusetzen."²⁴

A few lines later, Harnack emphasizes that the "living Word," embodied by the person, constitutes the actual driving force in history, surpassing the influence of circumstances.²⁵ Drawing from historical events, he deduces that progress is inseparable from the will of individuals, encompassing a diverse range from artists and poets to prophets. In this analysis, Jesus holds a distinctive role due to the unprecedented impact of his actions.²⁶ While Jesus's personality takes precedence, Harnack extends the concept to include individuals who, in their own right, achieve remarkable feats, foster success, and inspire others through their actions.²⁷ This observation sets the stage for a more nuanced exploration of Harnack's reception of Origen.

Harnack's Origen: Genius of Summation and Theologian

The section of *Dogmengeschichte* dedicated to Origen of Alexandria commences with a series of definitions, wherein Harnack encapsulates his views on the Alexandrian scholar. Each definition within this section proves Harnack's recognition of Origen's personality, both as a prominent scholar and on account of his moral rectitude and psychological resilience. Harnack deliberately structures his depiction of Origen in this manner, aiming to underscore the Alexandrian's profound impact on the historical trajectory of Christianity. I contend that three overarching themes permeate these definitions: Origen's role as a foundational "father" of church dogmatics, his moral and psychological fortitude, and his unwavering commitment to scholarly inquiry. In the following discussion, I will endeavor to clarify this array of definitions by drawing upon both the historicist background and other relevant works of Harnack.

²⁴ Ibid., 886.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 888–890.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 883.

Harnack is renowned for designating Origen as the progenitor of ecclesiastical science, as he himself expressed: “Vater der kirchlichen Wissenschaft.”²⁸ He further acclaims Origen as the thinker who created the ecclesiastic dogmatics: “... hat die kirchliche Dogmatik geschaffen.”²⁹ Harnack ascribed this preeminent role to Origen on account of the latter’s exceptional ability to expound upon the material laid out by Jewish and earlier Christian sources during the initial two centuries of Christianity. Origen, in Harnack’s view, emerged as the most significant and influential theologian preceding Augustine. As articulated by Harnack, “Unter den Theologen des kirchlichen Alterthums ist Origenes vor Augustin der bedeutendste und einflussreichste gewesen...”³⁰

In the fourth edition of *Dogmengeschichte*, Harnack introduces an additional characterization of Origen. He portrays him as an exceptional scholar, capable of encompassing the entirety of Christian knowledge. Harnack referred to this concept with the expression “Genius der Summation.”³¹ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the concept of genius enjoyed popularity among German intellectuals, providing an alternative framework for explicating historical transformations that diverged from previous dogmatic interpretations of the past. Rather than explicating historical transformations through the lens of God’s will or providence, the concept of genius emphasized the pivotal role played by individuals in shaping events.³² Kant’s 1790 definition in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* serves as a paradigmatic illustration of this perspective. Kant characterized genius as the talent of imparting rule to art, attributing this quality to extraordinary individuals who, since birth, have been endowed with a distinctive spirit enabling them to articulate an original representation corresponding to an idea of reason.³³ While Harnack employed the term genius in a different context than Kant – specifically, within the sphere of Christian dogmatics – Kant’s elucidation

²⁸ Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 650.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 652.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 650.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 652.

³² Cf. Peter Hans Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism*, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1975, 65; Simon Schaffer, “Genius in Romantic Natural Philosophy”, in Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (eds.) *Romanticism and the Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, 82–98.

³³ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Leipzig: F. Meiner 1922, 160–1.

provides valuable insight into the uniqueness of this conceptual framework. Parallel to Kant's observations, Harnack views Origen as a genius endowed with a particular spirit. This inherent spirit bestows upon Origen the capacity to organize and structure the disparate ideas pertaining to the Christianity of his time. In other words, Harnack, in alignment with Kant's conceptualization, identifies in Origen's genius a creative force that not only comprehends but also imparts coherence and structure in the scattered ideas of Christianity of his time.

Harnack proceeds to delineate Origen's moral fortitude, asserting that Origen's character was defined by purity and his life by blamelessness, encapsulated in the phrase "Sein Charakter war lauter, sein Leben untadelig."³⁴ In his examination, Harnack comments on Origen's resilience in the face of perilous circumstances, both as a Christian and a philosopher. Notably, according to Harnack, Origen managed to maintain a robust spirit and adhered steadfastly to his own conception of truth, even in the midst of challenges: "Gefährlich war die Luft, die er als Christ und als Philosoph athmete; aber sein Geist blieb gesund, und selbst der Wahrheitssinn ist ihm fast immer treu geblieben."³⁵ Unfortunately, Harnack does not delve further into Origen's character. Nevertheless, this characterization carries considerable suggestiveness, hinting at Harnack's endeavor to repair Origen's reputation by reason of his moral and psychological resilience. This facet assumes significance within the historicist and idealistic tradition, as Harnack appears to have leaned on an idealized portrayal of Origen's personality to underscore the relevance and importance of the Alexandrian's contribution to the history of Christianity.

The third part of Harnack's section on Origen revolves around the assertion that Origen displayed a profound dedication to scholarly inquiry. Harnack depicts Origen as both restless and selfless in his endeavors, noting that only a selected few early Christian thinkers could leave such an impression as he did: "...in seiner Arbeit ist er nicht nur rastlos, sondern auch selbstlos gewesen. Es hat wenige Kirchenväter gegeben, deren Lebensbild einen so reinen Eindruck hinterlässt wie das des Origenes."³⁶ Furthermore, Harnack contends that Origen not only demonstrated diligence in his scholarly pursuits, but also emerged as a

³⁴ Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 651.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 651.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

figure capable of providing insightful solutions to the challenges Christianity faced during his time. Origen's intellectual acumen and capacity to interpret his contemporary historical and political milieu were instrumental in this regard.

This aspect is reiterated by Harnack in his treatise on the origins of the New Testament. Here, he emphasizes that the formation of the New Testament necessitated the cultivation of a critical and historical approach to canonical books. This approach served a defensive function by safeguarding Christianity against the myriad of interpretations proliferating within the church.³⁷ In this context, Harnack explicitly credits Origen with contributing to this undertaking and, consequently, to the consolidation of the church's authority.³⁸

Providing this characterization, Harnack underscores Origen's approach to research, as well as his analysis and comprehension of the historical milieu – a perspective that Harnack deems emblematic of the theologian's vocation. To illuminate this assertion, it is essential to delve into Harnack's broader conception of the theologian's role in society and history, a concept intricately linked to his renowned characterization of dogma as a cultural product.³⁹ In particular, Harnack emphasizes the interconnection between the formulation of dogma and the prevailing questions that dominated theological discourse in a specific historical age.⁴⁰ Consequently, he posited that theologians often respond to the inquiries arising from their historical context, crafting distinct theological theories and, consequently, dogma. According to Harnack, the theologian bears the responsibility of scrutinizing and comprehending the historical backdrop of a given historical era. This awareness is imperative for understanding the conditions that gave rise to a particular dogma:

Die Dogmen entstehen, entwickeln sich und werden neuen Absichten dienstbar gemacht; dies geschieht in allen Fällen durch die Theologie. Die Theologie aber ist abhängig von unzähligen

³⁷ Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments und die wichtigsten Folgen der neuen Schöpfung*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs 1914, 90–95. Cf. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 359–60.

³⁸ Cf. Harnack, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments*, 79–80.

³⁹ Cf. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 20.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 14.

Faktoren, vor allem von dem Geiste der Zeit; denn es liegt im Wesen der Theologie, dass sie ihr Objekt verständlich machen will. Die Dogmen sind das Erzeugnis der Theologie – allerdings einer Theologie, die dem Glauben der Zeit in der Regel entsprochen hat.⁴¹

When we apply this conceptual framework to Harnack's interpretation of Origen, as outlined in the preceding paragraph, it becomes evident that Harnack views Origen as a theologian. Origen, in Harnack's rendition, assumed the responsibilities intrinsic to the theologian's role – focusing his energies on the diligent exploration and comprehension of his historical own context. Furthermore, Harnack explicitly characterizes Origen as a distinguished theologian, attributing to him a pivotal role in the historical trajectory of Christianity. Origen's contribution, according to Harnack, was instrumental in advancing Christianity within the specific socio-historical context in which he was situated and with which he was actively engaged.

Nevertheless, Harnack's conception of the theologian appears to encompass an additional layer intricately linked to his understanding of the nature of Christianity. Harnack articulates the foundational premise of his religious and theological thought in his famous cycle of lectures *Das Wesen des Christentums*. According to Harnack, the original message of the gospel is encapsulated in three core principles, discernible through a careful reading of the Sermon on the Mount.⁴² Harnack posits that over the course of the church's existence, various exigencies – historical and political in nature – necessitated the incorporation of a dogmatic framework, giving rise to a complex and structured Christian doctrine. For Harnack, the contemporary mission of theology lies in the role of a discipline that "frees" Christianity from its own complex scientific structure. In doing so, theology seeks to unveil the authentic meaning of Jesus's message. As he aptly expressed, "Die Theologie muß heute die Wissenschaft sein, die die christliche Religion von der Wissenschaft befreit – aus der Paradoxie dieser Aufgabe entspringt der größte Teil

⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

⁴² Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums: sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Fakultäten im Wintersemester 1899/1900 an der Universität Berlin*, in: Adolf von Harnack & Claus-Dieter Osthövener (ed.), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012, 49.

der Schwierigkeiten, die sie belasten."⁴³ Consequently, the theologian, according to Harnack, shoulders the added responsibility of elucidating the profound truths almost concealed within the intricate system of Christian doctrine: "Der Theologe hat die Aufgabe, die tiefen Wahrheiten klar zu legen."⁴⁴ This dual role entails not only an analysis of historical and doctrinal layers but also an emancipation of Christianity from its own complicated theological ideas.

This theoretical foundation also elucidates Harnack's assessment of Origen as a figure of historical significance, whose actions were shaped by specific historical conditions. The emphasis on individual personality and its pivotal role in shaping historical events reveals the influence of Harnack's historicist background: "Wie allen Persönlichkeiten, die Epoche gemacht haben, sind auch ihm die Bedingungen, unter denen er gestanden hat, zu Statten gekommen, obgleich er schwere Anfeindungen zu ertragen hatte."⁴⁵ This assertion reflects the belief that, like all individuals who have made history, Origen benefited from the conditions in which he found himself, despite facing formidable opposition.

Since Harnack conceives the role of the theologian as involving an understanding of the ideas of other influential theologians, through an exploration of their cultural milieu and historical context, he argues that Origen's intellectual contribution to the history of Christianity was influenced by his historical and political environment. Harnack posits that once these contextual presuppositions are understood and considered, Origen emerges as a figure possessing critical prudence, foresight, versatile knowledge, and a discerning and constructive intellect of the highest calibre:

Dieser wahrhaft große Theologe braucht ja überhaupt nur von den wissenschaftlichen Voraussetzungen seines Zeitalters an die er selbstverständlich gebunden war, befreit zu werden, um in seiner eigenen kritischen Umsicht und universalen Weitsicht sowie

⁴³ Adolf von Harnack, "Über Wissenschaft und Religion", in *Reden und Aufsätze*, 2nd vol., 2nd edition, Giessen: J. Ricker'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung-Alfred Töpelmann 1906, 369–79 (374).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴⁵ Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 650.

in der Vielseitigkeit seiner Erkenntnisse als ein kritischer und konstruktiver Geist ersten Ranges zu erscheinen.⁴⁶

This analysis of Harnack's interpretation of Origen, drawing on Harnack's more general observations regarding the role of the theologian, facilitates a new preliminary assessment of Harnack's portrayal of the Alexandrian. Harnack's grounding in the historicist tradition, coupled with his emphasis on the pivotal concept of personality, leads him to recognize Origen as a central figure in the history of Christianity. Additionally, Harnack's precise definition of the theologian as a scholar engaged in understanding contemporary issues, coupled with his frequent characterization of Origen's acumen in addressing the challenges of his time, allows for a nuanced qualification of Harnack's characterization of Origen as a theologian. Moreover, Harnack emphasizes the importance of understanding theological systems 'regardless of' their cultural context. This underscores Harnack's specific interest in the personality of Origen and his profound esteem for the Alexandrian thinker.

The Apostolikumsstreit

Harnack's conceptualization of the nature of theology and the role of the theologian exerted a significant influence not only on his assessment of historical Christian scholars, including Origen, but also on his own intellectual endeavors within the context of Wilhelmine Germany. In this regard, Harnack's biographical details assume particular relevance, especially in connection with the famous episode known as the *Apostolikumsstreit*. This event in Harnack's life provides valuable insight into his stance regarding the responsibilities of the theologian and the nature of theology as a discipline.

The case involved a pastor, Christoph Schrempf, who, in 1892, declined to recite the Apostles' Creed in the capacity of his official duties, citing his individual conscience. The Apostles' Creed had a central significance in the ecclesiastical life of the Evangelical Church of Prussia. Officially mandated in 1829, the profession of the Apostles' Creed became obligatory during baptism and ordination ceremonies, in addition

⁴⁶ Harnack, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments*, 126, footnote.

to being an integral part of the liturgy in every church service.⁴⁷ The Creed served as a paramount expression of clergy members' affiliation with the church, and any omission or open refusal to recite it was deemed unacceptable.

Schrempf reported his actions to the Consistory in Württemberg, and the church leadership promptly dismissed him. The case then gained attention in Prussia, where young theology students engaged in a debate over the matter, drawing Harnack into the discussion. In the summer of 1892, Harnack's students asked him if he would advocate for the removal of the Apostles' Creed from ordination requirements, clergy obligations, and liturgical use. They also intended to present this request in a petition to the church council.

Harnack responded to their inquiry through nine points, which he presented in his lecture titled "Entstehung und Bedeutung der theologischen Richtungen der Gegenwart." This lecture was also published by Martin Rade in "Christlichen Welt" on August 18, 1892.⁴⁸ In this context, Harnack comments that the question of the value and use of the Apostles' Creed was a pressing issue of his time, and Schrempf's case provided an opportunity to initiate the discussion. Harnack believed that the General synod of the Evangelical church of Prussia had the crucial task of thoroughly examining this topic.

The noteworthy aspect of this situation lies in the tangible manifestation of Harnack's theoretical framework regarding the role of the theologian in society, particularly exemplified in the episode of the *Apostolikumsstreit*. As previously indicated, Harnack appears to offer two distinct definitions of the theologian. On the one hand, the theologian is an intellectual who comprehends the contemporary issues of their time and endeavors to formulate solutions, akin to the approach taken by scholars like Origen. On the other hand, the theologian is tasked with liberating Christianity from theological complexities, aiming to attain its purest form.

⁴⁷ Cf. Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, *Der Apostolikumsstreit des Jahres 1892 und seine Bedeutung für die Gegenwart*, Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlagsbuchhandlung 1950, 2.

⁴⁸ See Adolf von Harnack, "Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einer Einleitung und einem Nachwort," in Adolf von Harnack & Kurt Nowak (ed.), *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse: Reden und Schriften aus den Jahren des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik. Teil 1: Der Theologe und Historiker*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 1996, 501–544.

Harnack articulated his response to Schrenpf's case in a lecture. In this context, he employed two analytical tools: the assessment of the truthfulness of dogma and the evaluation of its reasonableness. Regarding the first one, Harnack advocated for an examination of the origins of the Apostles' Creed and its use throughout history.⁴⁹ Concerning the second one, Harnack contended that certain statements within the Creed were incorrect or contradicted human reason, potentially causing offense to a Christian educated in the understanding of the Gospel and church history.⁵⁰ Consequently, Harnack recommended a comprehensive study and understanding of the History of Dogma and the Symbol, aiming to grasp the original meaning of the confession and discern the changes that occurred over the centuries.⁵¹

In response to Schrenpf's rejection of the Apostles' Creed, Harnack publicly engaged with a pressing issue of his time, urging the General Synod of the Evangelical church of Prussia to adopt a critical and constructive position. Unfortunately, the outcome of this situation did not unfold favorably for Harnack. Many of his readers speciously interpreted his points, erroneously assuming he sought to dismiss the Creed as an antiquated document of early Christianity, neglecting its authority. The debate escalated, with the evangelical-ecclesial conference of Prussia reaffirming that the foundation of Christianity lies in the belief that the Son of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary – a stance that Harnack perceived as regressive into Catholicism.⁵²

The aftermath of the *Apostolikumsstreit* led Harnack, Martin Rade, and contributors to *Christliche Welt* to consolidate their group and issue a joint clarification. They emphasized that they did not advocate for the abolition of the Apostles' Creed but asserted the right to pursue scientific investigation within the church.⁵³ In response, the General Synod increased the prominence of the Apostles' Creed, including in priestly ordination. In 1894, Harnack participated in a petition to the Evangelical Supreme Church Council, advocating for the comprehensive revision of

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 507–510.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 502–3.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 506.

⁵² Cf. Zahn-Harnack, *Der Apostolikumsstreit*, 6.

⁵³ As reported in Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter 1951, 153.

the church service regulations. Subsequent to this episode, Harnack reduced his involvement as a critical theologian in society, refocusing his efforts on other pursuits, such as directing the Royal Library and contributing to the committee of the GCS.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, this episode serves as a compelling illustration of how Harnack's ideas regarding the role of the theologian in society, articulated across various segments of his works and over different years, mirror his own endeavors as an intellectual and a theologian critical of his contemporary society and religious milieu. The examination of historical circumstances influencing the development of dogma becomes a focal point in Harnack's analysis of the past, holding equal significance in his reflection on the contemporary relevance of the Apostles' Creed.

The Anthropological Perspective: The Value of the Human Soul

Harnack's conception of epoch-making personalities in history, such as Origen, is intricately linked to his role as a theologian – an identity he shared with these historical personalities, albeit in different historical contexts. Taking a further and definitive step, one can assert that Harnack's emphasis on historical personalities capable of comprehending the fundamental issues of their time and proposing innovative solutions, thus advancing the course of human history, finds its foundation in Harnack's optimistic anthropological viewpoint. This perspective is notably articulated in his renowned lecture series, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, where Harnack delineates the "infinite value of the human soul."⁵⁵

Harnack posited a distinctive understanding of the nature of Christianity, delineating it into three key facets: God as the Father; the human soul; and the commandment of love. He associated the concept of the infinite value of the human soul with the proposition that all human beings are children of God. Significantly, Harnack drew a comparison between Jesus's teachings and those of Plato. According to Harnack, Jesus has raised the human being's soul above heaven and earth, since all human beings are children of God, and he has done it in a different way

⁵⁴ Cf. Nottmeier, *Adolf von Harnack und die deutsche Politik*, 133–35.

⁵⁵ Cf. Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 43 ff. Harnack was quite critical of any metaphysical concept of theological and philosophical kind. Nevertheless, he used such concepts extensively.

from Plato's. Harnack notes that Plato had also raised the human soul, but he was mainly addressing the wise, while Jesus extended his call to every "poor" soul – that is, to every human being – in virtue of their shared identity as children of the living God.⁵⁶

Harnack contends that the true greatness of a human being lies in enhancing the worth of all humanity. Consequently, the paramount significance of exceptional individuals is their progressive contribution to realizing human value. In Harnack's view, the revelation of this value was pioneered by Jesus, and the impact of his actions is irreversible; no one can negate the transformative influence he exerted on people's life.

In der That, das ist die höchste Bedeutung großer Männer, sie haben den Wert der Menschheit – jener Menschheit, die aus dem dumpfen Grunde der Natur aufgestiegen ist – gesteigert, d. h. fortschreitend in Kraft gesetzt. Aber erst durch Jesus Christus ist der Wert jeder einzelnen Menschenseele in die Erscheinung getreten, und das kann Niemand mehr ungeschehen machen. Man mag zu ihm selbst stehen, wie man will, die Anerkennung, daß er in der Geschichte die Menschheit auf diese Höhe gestellt hat, kann ihm Niemand versagen.⁵⁷

Given that every human being is regarded as a child of God, there exists an inherent equality before God, underscoring the equal value of each individual soul. This inherent equality suggests that every person has the potential to achieve greatness in the course of history. This conceptual framework elucidates Harnack's viewpoint, namely that he allowed for the possibility of theologians and Christians to reassess even fundamental assertions within the Apostles' Creed. In this regard, Harnack contends that these articles of faith, or dogmatic statements, were formulated by individuals within specific cultural and historical contexts.

Furthermore, this framework illuminates Harnack's profound appreciation for the intellectual contributions of theologians from the past, such as Origen. In Harnack's perspective, as every human being possess

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

an inherent worth bestowed by God, even a theologian whose interpretation of Christianity deviates significantly from Harnack's deserved recognition and commendation.

Conclusion

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Harnack's assessment of Origen has commonly been understood in negative terms, often attributed to his depiction of the Hellenization of Christianity as a form of corruption. This article aims to contribute nuanced elements to the understanding of Harnack's reception of the Alexandrian.

In this context, I sought to establish connections between Harnack's acknowledged but not sufficiently explored historicist background and his specific thesis for his interpretation of history, which are then exemplified in the case of Origen. I contended that to Harnack, Origen falls within the category of significant personalities who not only interpreted their historical age but actively shaped it. Consequently, I propose interpreting Harnack's view of Origen not as the "corrupter" of Christianity, but within the framework of Harnack's broader perspective on the pivotal role of human beings in history. This perspective is deeply rooted in Harnack's general belief in the equality of all human beings as children of God, entrusted with the task of enhancing the value of humanity. Finally, the case of the *Apostolikumsstreit* demonstrates Harnack's perception of the authority of the church and theologians as dynamic and subject to challenge.

In conclusion, existing scholarship on Harnack and Origen frequently labels Harnack's characterization of Origen as a philosopher. With the present study I endeavored to provide a more precise analysis of Harnack's definition of Origen as a theologian, which becomes evident from specific passages in Harnack's writings. Building on this distinction, I argued that Harnack positioned Origen primarily as a theologian and viewed theologians as significant historical personalities, employing the term in the historicist sense. According to Harnack, these personalities played a pivotal role in advancing the progress and development of humanity as a whole.

The objective of this research thus far has not been to assert that Harnack embraced a positive understanding of the Hellenization of Christianity. Harnack regarded the Christian message as a distinct entity separate from the historical realm, viewing the interaction between the two

as highly problematic. Nevertheless, Harnack believed that a reinterpretation of Jesus's message in the context of specific historical circumstances was unavoidable. This required the theologian's intervention, involving a critical examination of the church's statements. Importantly, this perspective does not diminish the value of the theologian's meticulous and devoted research. On the contrary, Harnack held the task of the theologian in high esteem – a sentiment directed towards earlier theologians and extended to his own work.

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM'S RECEPTION OF ORIGEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN FREEDOM

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Abstract:

This article explores Erasmus of Rotterdam's reception of Origen of Alexandria's understanding of human freedom. While Erasmus is often associated with his debate with Martin Luther on the topic of free will, this article focuses on his incorporation of Origen's ideas into his own works. Origen's belief that human beings' rationality and free will are a result of their participation in the divine Logos, or rationality itself, greatly influenced Erasmus' understanding of human freedom. This article provides references to Origen's works, including *De principiis*, and examines how Erasmus used and adapted these ideas in his own treatise on free will.

Key Words:

Origen, Erasmus, human freedom, reception, biblical interpretation

In northern Europe, Erasmus of Rotterdam's understanding of the free will of the human being is most often connected to the harsh debate between him and Martin Luther concerning this theme. There are good reasons for this since Erasmus wrote his treatise on free will as a critical remark to Luther's and the Lutherans' understanding of sin and grace which, according to Erasmus, left no place for human beings' free will

and free choice.¹ However, the theme of this article is Erasmus' reception of Origen of Alexandria's understanding of the free will of the human being. This is inspired by the research project *The History of Human Freedom and Dignity in Western Civilization* which ended in 2021. This project studied several cases of reception of Origen's ideas about human freedom and dignity throughout history.²

Erasmus is so broadly influenced by Origen that it can be appropriately claimed that Origen is one of his most important sources of inspiration.³ Erasmus expresses this by saying that he learns more from reading one page from Origen than ten pages from Augustine.⁴ He published an edition of Origen's works and introduced this with a biography

¹ The title of Erasmus' treatise is *De libero arbitrio ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ sive collatio*. The treatise was published in September 1524. Luther answered with his treatise *De seruo arbitrio* in 1525. Erasmus answered to Luther's treatise in 1527 with a treatise in two parts which was entitled *Hyperaspistes diatribae aduersus seruum arbitrium Martini Lutheri*. The Latin text with a German translation of Erasmus' treatises is available in *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Ausgewählte Schriften*, Bd. 4, Winfried Lesowsky (introduction and translation), Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969. Luther's *De seruo Arbitrio* is available in *Weimar Ausgabe* 18, 600–787. Both texts are available in English translation in E. Gordon Rupp / Philip S. Watson (eds.), *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 1969, and Ernst F. Winter, *Erasmus and Luther. Discourse on Free Will*, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company 2002. Concerning the debate between Erasmus and Luther about the will, see for example Aku Visala, Olli-Pekka Vainio, "Erasmus versus Luther: A Contemporary Analysis of the Debate on Free Will", *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62:3 (2020), 311–335.

² See <https://itn-humanfreedom.eu/>.

³ André Godin, *Érasme, lecteur d'Origène*. Genève: Droz 1982. Godin's monograph is the most authoritative work on Erasmus' reception of Origen. See further, Jan den Boeft, "Erasmus and the Church Fathers", in: Irena Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill 1997, 537–572 (on Origen pp. 567–570); Christian Hengstermann, "Die Seele zwischen Tier und Gott. Die origeneische Freiheitsanthropologie bei Erasmus von Rotterdam", in: Alfons Fürst / Christian Hengstermann (eds.), *Autonomie und Menschenwürde. Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*, Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2012, 139–167.

⁴ Erasmus wrote this in a letter to Johannes Eck in 1518 (ep. 844), *Desiderius Erasmus, Epistola 844*, R.A.B. Mynors, D.F.S Thomson, P.G. Bietenholz (eds.), *The Correspondence of Erasmus. Letters 842–992, Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 6, University of Toronto Press: Toronto 1982.

of Origen.⁵ References to Origen can be found scattered throughout many of Erasmus' works. Erasmus' dependence on Origen is most clearly and directly expressed in his *Commentary on the Romans* and in his treatise on free will. Erasmus' reception and use of Origen in his treatise on the free will is the theme of this article. Even though Erasmus' understanding of human beings' will is a well-known theme in studies on Erasmus,⁶ his reliance on Origen in his treatise on the free will has only been the theme of a few studies.⁷ In the following I will briefly present Origen's ideas about human freedom and thereafter go more into depth with Erasmus' reception of these ideas in his treatise *De libero arbitrio*.

Origen's Understanding of Human Freedom⁸

Alfons Fürst, who has studied Origen's ideas about human freedom intensively, claims that Origen introduces a new understanding of human freedom which transforms classical philosophical concepts of human freedom. Briefly explained, the long classical tradition (mainly Platonism and Stoicism) before Origen considered to varying degrees human beings to have a free choice as an element of their rationality. Origen agrees with that, but he develops the idea by claiming that human beings' rationality, and therefore their possibility of making free decisions, was a result of them being created in the image of God, who is freedom itself. Freedom is thus according to Origen a consequence of human beings' participation in the divine. Fürst defines this as a metaphysics of

⁵ Erasmus, *Origenis Adamantii Eximii Scripturarum Interpretis Opera*, Basel: Froben 1536. This edition included a biography of Origen. An English translation of the life of Origen is available in: Thomas P. Scheck, *Erasmus's Life of Origen* (translation and commentary), Washington: Catholic University Press 2016.

⁶ Christian Houth Vrangbæk, "Erasmus and the Will between Salvation and Education", in: *Paths in Free Will: Theology, Philosophy and Literature from the Late Middle Ages to the Reformation*, Lorenzo Geri, Pasquale Terracciano, and Christian Houth Vrangbæk, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 2020, 125–136.

⁷ Godin 1982, 449–489, also finds that Erasmus is strongly dependent on Origen in his treatise on the free will.

⁸ Regarding this part of the article, see Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Freedom and Providence in Origen's Theology", *Church Studies* 4 (2008), 65–77.

freedom.⁹ I agree with this interpretation of Origen's understanding of human freedom. This idea about a metaphysics of freedom is for example expressed in the following quote from *De princ.* 1.3,8:

God the Father bestows on all the gift of existence; and a participation in Christ, in virtue of his being the word or reason, makes them rational. From this it follows that they are worthy of praise or blame, because they are capable alike of virtue and of wickedness.¹⁰

Christ the Logos is, according to Origen, the image of God the Father. Human beings are created according to that image.¹¹ Thus, human beings participate in what characterizes the Christ Logos. This idea that human freedom is a consequence of participation in Logos' rationality means that freedom is an inherent part of human nature, of human beings, since the divine Logos, in whom human beings participate, is rationality or logos itself.

The long discussion on human freedom in *De princ.* 3.1 is the most important text on human freedom in Origen's works. As we shall see later, Erasmus reused this text intensively in his own treatise on human beings' freedom.¹²

⁹ Alfons Fürst, *Wege zur Freiheit. Menschliche Selbstbestimmung von Homer bis Origenes*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2022.

¹⁰ *De princ.* 1.3,8. English quotes from *De princ.*, follow Origen, *On first principles*, (ed.) George William Butterworth, Eugene Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2012. *Deus pater omnibus praestat ut sint, participatio vero Christi secundum id, quod verbum vel ratio est, facit ea esse rationabilia. Ex quo consequens est ea vel laude digna esse vel culpa, quia et virtutis et malitiae sunt capacia.* The Latin and Greek texts of *De princ.* is from GCS, *Origenes Werke* Bd 5, ed. P. Koetschau, J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1913. See also Origen, *Com. in Joh.* 2.2–3, *Origenes Werke* Bd. 4, ed. E. Preuschen, Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1903.

¹¹ Anders-Christian Jacobsen, *Christ – the Teacher of Salvation. A Study on Origen's Christology and Soteriology*, Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2015, 124.

¹² This presentation of Origen's understanding of human freedom and free choice is based on the Greek text of *De princ.* 3.1, which is handed down in Greek in the *Philokalia*, a collection of Origen's text made by Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great; cf. Origen, *Philocalie*, 1–20: *Sur les Ecritures; et la Lettres a Africanus sur l'Histoire de Suzanne, Source Chretiennes* 302, edited by Marguerite Harl and Nicolas de Lange (Paris: Editions du Cerf

In *De princ.* 3.1,2–5, Origen defines free will (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) in the following way: Creation, he says, can be divided into four groups, each according to how they move. First one must distinguish between the things which cannot move by themselves but can only be moved by another power and the things which are able to move themselves. Things such as stones and wood (either firewood or timber – not living trees) belong to the first group. The other group of things which can move themselves includes plants, animals, and everything else that grows and has a soul. One could also say that the first group consists of dead things and the second group consists of living things. It is the second group that is of interest in this context. This group must be divided further to understand which creatures can be said to have free will. First we must among the living creatures distinguish between those which possess a soul (τὰ ἔμψυχα) and those which have no soul (τὰ ἄψυχα). Origen says that the creatures without a soul move *out of* themselves (ἐξ ἑαυτῶν), but those with souls move by themselves (ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν). Beings with a soul move themselves because ideas arise in them upon which they act. Furthermore, we must also make distinctions within the group of the beings with souls, specifically between the beings with souls which are equipped with reason (λόγος),¹³ and those that are not. Creatures with souls that are not endowed with reason act instinctively upon the ideas which arise in them. When the idea of a honeycomb arises in a bee it instinctively builds a honeycomb without thinking about, whether it is reasonable or not. By contrast there are those beings with a soul that are also endowed with reason. They use reason to assess the ideas that occur to them. Based on this assessment they decide how they will act in response to the ideas they have. Free will is, according to Origen, the abil-

1983). The *Philokalia* is the best version of Origen's text. However, the *Philokalia* was probably not known to Erasmus since the first Greek editions of Origen were published in the 17th century. The *Philokalia* was published in 1618; cf. Alfons Fürst, "Das Freiheitsdenken des Origenes in der Neuzeit", in: A. Fürst & C. Hengstermann (eds.), *Autonomie und Menschenwürde* [Adamantiana 2], Münster 2012, 25. At the time of the free will controversy, Erasmus probably mainly used the Latin Merlin edition of Origen's works (Paris 1519, reprint of the first edition 1512).

¹³ I translate τὰ λογικά as rational beings. According to Origen, this group includes not only humans but also angels, heavenly beings, and demons; see for example *Com. in Joh.* 2.23; 10.45.

ity to select between various possible choices in a given situation. Rational beings use free will to choose between the possibilities given in a concrete situation.¹⁴

There are two specific aspects of this definition of the rational beings' free will that need to be examined more closely. The first aspect is the role that reason or rationality – *logos* – plays. The other is the fact that free will, according to Origen's understanding of it, is expressed in concrete religious and ethical choices. Both aspects are, as we shall see, also important for Erasmus. People must choose between a life lived in virtue or one lived lustfully. *De princ.* 3.1,2–5 explicitly states that people use free will in connection with concrete religious and ethical decisions. Origen himself uses an example in *De princ.* 3.1,4 as a clear expression of this. The example concerns a pious man who has decided to forswear sexual relations. However, he is not able to carry out this intention because he meets an attractive woman. Origen's point is that it is in one way the woman, with whom the man has sexual relations, which caused the man to abandon his vow of chastity. But it is not the woman's fault that the man was compelled to give up on his intentions to stay chaste. The woman simply placed the man in a position where he was free to choose to keep his vow or to break it. Rational beings, through the use of reason, have been given the ability in such situations to distinguish between the good (τὸ καλόν) and the bad (τὸ αἰσχρόν).¹⁵ People who select the good earn praise. Those who chose the bad or lustful earn blame (*De princ.* 3.1,3). In this way freedom of choice becomes the foundation of judgment. Free will is, according to Origen, a necessary condition for judgment because it only makes sense to talk about judgment in connection with acts which are freely performed. Judgment is meaningless in relation to predetermined actions.

In the passage from *De princ.* 3.1,4 referenced above, Origen says that while the man discussed there gave up his vow of chastity when he met the woman, another man who finds himself in a similar situation may decide to act differently, because he has attained more knowledge and

¹⁴ Regarding this definition of *free will*, see also Origen, *De oratione (De orat.)* 6.1–5, ed. P. Koetschau, Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1899, and further H.S. Benjamins, *Eingeordnete Freiheit. Freiheit und Vorsehung bei Origenes*, Leiden: Brill 1994, 58–70.

¹⁵ This example shows that bodies limit freedom, see Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Body and Freedom in Origen", in: Alfons Fürst (ed.), *Perspectives on Origen and the History of his Reception*, Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2021, 31–47.

understanding. According to Origen, free will is thus an ability, given through reason, to choose between different possible responses to a particular situation. This emphasis on reason as the basis for free choice corresponds quite well with the general impression of Origen's theology as a logos-centered theology. How then can people, according to Origen, prepare themselves to meet such challenges? The ability to choose the good can be trained. It is a matter of instruction and discipline, says Origen. The reason (λόγος) can be strengthened by exercise and confirmed by the right teaching. The ability to use the free choice to do good is thus not a stable condition, which one has or does not have. It is a capacity which must be trained and developed. Origen stresses the importance of education. The reason why training is necessary to be able to use one's freedom and free will is because human beings are distanced from God the Father and Logos which are their sources for life and rationality. This distance from God is a result of misuse of the free will. This is Origen's understanding of sin (*De princ.* 2.9).

Origen's strong defense of human freedom is a reaction against determinism. Gnostics from the Valentinian tradition and Marcionites disputed the idea that humanity has free will and consequently the freedom to choose between good and bad, right and wrong.¹⁶ Origen disagrees with this viewpoint because he finds that it contradicts Christian ideas of judgment. Origen has undoubtedly developed his understanding of humanity's free will in opposition to these forms of determinism. In *De princ.* 3.1 Origen does not explicitly identify whom he is arguing with, although it is directly stated in the text that it is written as a guide in the struggle against the thinking of others. There are, however, such specific references to those being opposed that it is possible to identify the opposition as the Valentinian Gnostics and the Marcionites. This identification of the opposition is further supported by other texts in which Origen more directly indicates the identity of his opposition. That is, for example, the case in *De princ.* 2.9,5 where he discusses the cause for differences within creation. There, he mentions those who claim that these differences are due to different and fixed natures of

¹⁶ Origen's claim that the Valentinians rejected the idea that human beings had freedom to choose is disputed in modern research on Gnosticism, cf. Carl Johan Berglund, *Origen's References to Heracleon: A Quotation-Analytical Study of the Earliest Known Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 450, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020.

souls. According to Origen, the advocates of this viewpoint are the followers of the schools of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides. This way of thinking necessarily excludes human beings from exercising free will. Origen argues for human freedom and free will to avoid a determinist view of salvation.

Origen had developed a theology of human beings' salvation which was based on their freedom and free will. Erasmus was familiar with Origen's theology. Thus, when Erasmus found himself in a similar situation, experiencing that major parts of reformation theology developed deterministic concepts of salvation, Origen's thought was useful.

Erasmus' Reception of Origen's Ideas about Human Freedom and Free Will

In the following, I will present Erasmus' reception of Origen's ideas about human beings' free will or free choice by help of his reception or use of Origen's long text about human free choice in *De princ.* 3.1. We find Erasmus' reception of Origen's text in his *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,1–3.a,17. Erasmus presents this part of his text as an interpretation of biblical passages which seems to exclude human free will. Erasmus intends, of course, to show that these texts and the Bible in general do not exclude human freedom and free will.

The First Example: The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

One of the most important biblical texts in this respect is Ex. 9:12–16 concerning God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Paul refers to this passage in Rom. 9:14–18. At first sight, Erasmus' text represents a reception and interpretation of Paul's understanding of God's temporary rejection of the Jewish people (Rom. 9–11). This is obvious, but for our purpose it is important to understand that Erasmus follows Origen in his interpretation of Paul and The Old Testament. Erasmus realizes that Origen has done all the work for him in his long treatise on human freedom in *De princ.* 3.1 where he defends human free will and free choice using the same biblical texts as Erasmus. Or it is probably the other way around: Erasmus uses the same biblical texts as Origen did. Thus, Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,1–3.a,17 is not only a reception of the Old Testament and Paul, but also and even more so of Origen. As often is the case, we are dealing with a long chain of reception and interpretation.

In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,2 Erasmus refers explicitly to Origen's interpretation of the story about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart:

Since it is obviously contradictory that God, who is not only just, but also merciful, should have hardened the heart of a man, in order to show his might by the former's evilness, Origen resolves the difficulty in the third book of his *Commentary on St. John* as follows: God permitted an occasion of induration, but the guilt is Pharaoh's. His malice caused him to become more obstinate, rather than penitential.¹⁷

Erasmus is thus not hiding his reception and reuse of Origen's exegesis. The English translation, which I quote here, has a mistake since it refers to Origen's *Commentary on John*. The Latin text correctly says "Origenes libero περὶ ἀρχῶν tertio".

De libero arbitrio 3.a,2 references closely *De princ.* 3.1,10–11. According to Erasmus, God provides the situation which leads to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, but God's intention was to lead Pharaoh to conversion. Pharaoh did not convert but hardened his heart even more. This means that Pharaoh was himself responsible for the hardening of his heart. He chooses freely his reaction. Erasmus illustrates this with three parables: The first parable is about how different types of soil react to rain: Cultivated soil absorbs the rain and produces good fruit. Uncultivated soil absorbs the rain and produces thorns and thistles. The second parable is about how different types of material react to sunshine: When the sun shines it melts the wax but hardens the mud. The third parable is about a father or master who says to his son or slave that he destroyed him, because he did not punish him immediately when the son or slave

¹⁷ This and the following quotations from Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio* is from Ernst F. Winter, *Erasmus and Luther. Discourse on Free Will*, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company 2002. This translation uses a different division of the text than the standard edition. I therefore refer to the section numbers in the translation (Winter, section 30): *Quoniam autem absurdum videtur, ut deus, qui non solum iustus est, verum etiam bonus, indurasse dicatur cor hominis, ut per illius malitiam suam illustraret potentiam, Origenes libro περὶ ἀρχῶν tertio sic explicat nodum, ut fateatur occasionem indurationis datam a deo, culpam tamen in Pharaonem reiciat, qui sua militia factus sit obstinatio per haec, per quae debebat ad paenitentiam adduci.* The Latin text with a German translation of Erasmus' treatises is available in *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Ausgewählte Schriften*, Bd. 4, Winfried Lesowsky (introduction and translation), Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969.

deviated from the right way. The first two parables intend to show that human beings react differently to the same conditions. It is therefore not God that hardens Pharaoh's heart and makes him unfree, but it is Pharaoh's reaction to the condition given by God which makes him unfree. The same is of course the case with all other human beings. The third parable legitimates that punishment is used at all. If fathers, masters, or God avoid punishing out of their love for sons and slaves, this will worsen the condition of humans. Erasmus reproduces Origen's argument precisely and he uses the same three parables in exactly the same sequence and with the same meaning as Origen. However, Erasmus' text is shorter than Origen's.

In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,3, Erasmus references *De princ.* 3.1,12–13. The theme is the same as in *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,2: why does God not immediately correct human beings who deviate from God's will, but lets them advance in obstinacy? The answer is that it is necessary for humans to find the right way themselves. God would prevent them from this if he corrected them too quickly. To fail is also part of human freedom and progress. Erasmus' reception of Origen is also evident in this paragraph. This can for example be seen from his use of biblical texts. Erasmus refers to Jes. 63:17; Ps. 89:33; and Jer. 20:7, while Origen refers to Jes. 63:17–18; Jer. 20:7; Susanna 42; Wisd. 16:18; Luk. 14:11; 18:14; and 10:21. There is thus a clear, but not a full, overlap between the biblical quotations used by Origen and by Erasmus. Furthermore, Erasmus mentions that Jerome (*Comm. in Esaiam* 17.43) interprets Jes. 63:17–18 in the same way as Origen. Thus, Erasmus explicitly states that he uses Origen and Jerome's reception of Origen. It is important for Erasmus also to be in agreement with Jerome, because Erasmus considers Jerome to be one of the most important figures among the Fathers. It does not seem to be a problem for Erasmus, that Jerome became a harsh critic of Origen. The direct reception of Origen in *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,3 is also clear from Erasmus' use of Jer. 20:7 which reads:

Thou hast deceived me, O Lord, and I am deceived: thou hast been stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed.¹⁸

In accordance with what I have already mentioned, Erasmus interprets this as meaning that God did not immediately call the sinner back from

¹⁸ *Seduxisti me, domine, et seductus sum, fortior me fuisti et invaluablei.*

error or sin. Further, he interprets this quotation from Jeremiah, using Origen's image from *De princ.* 3.1,13 of a surgeon who avoids letting a wound heal too quickly but keeps the wound open to drain it. A too quick healing would leave the inflammation in the body.¹⁹ Erasmus follows Origen closely and openly.

In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,4, Erasmus explains how God turns Pharaoh's evil deeds into something good for his people. Erasmus' point of view is that human beings' free will is not overruled by God when he uses human decisions to reach other and better goals than those planned and decided by human beings. He concludes like this:

Just as he guides the intentions of the villains to benefit the pious, so the intentions of the latter miss their goal if God's grace does not assist them. This is what Paul means when he says: "So then there is question not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy" (Romans 9,16). God's mercy recedes our will, accompanies it, and gives it fruitfulness. Nevertheless it remains that we wish, run and attain, except that all this we must ascribe to God, to whom we belong with everything we are.²⁰

In this paragraph, Erasmus quotes Rom. 9:16. In *De princ.* 3.1,18–19, Origen also quotes Rom. 9:16 in the context of the story of the Pharaoh. He writes:

Now the objectors say: If it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy, then salvation does not come from what lies in our power but from the constitution we

¹⁹ Cf. Origen, *Comm. in Rom.* 7.16, ed. C.P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbriefskommentar des Origenes. Kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins, Buch 7–10*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg 1998.

²⁰ Winter, section 32: *Quemadmodum igitur malorum conatus vertit in bonum piorum, ita bonorum conatus non assequuntur, quod expetunt, nisi adiuti gratuito dei favore. Nimirum hoc est, quod subicit Paulus: "Igitur non volentis neque currentis, sed miserentis est dei". Praevenit dei misericordia voluntatem nostrum, comitatur eandem in conando, dat felicem eventum. Et tamen interim volumus, currimus, assequimur, sic tamen, ut hoc ipsum, quod nostrum est, ascribamus deo, cuius sumus toti.*

have received from him who constituted us what we are or from the will of him who has mercy when he pleases.²¹

Origen's answer to this objection is the same as Erasmus': Human beings' free will works together with the power of God. Without the power and help of God, human beings cannot do what they will. Origen adds two images: the farmer and the captain of a ship. Their expertise leads to a good result of their work, but without God's goodness and help they could not reach their goal. The farmer cannot make the crops grow without God sending rain, sunlight etc., and the captain of a ship cannot make the ship sail without God sending wind. Erasmus does not use these images, and he does not refer directly to Origen. He also connects the Pauline quote closer to the Pharaoh story than Origen does, but their conclusion is the same: God gives the power which helps human beings act positively and freely.

The Second Example: Esau and Jacob

In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,11–12, Erasmus reuses Origen's *De princ.* 3.1,22. In this paragraph, Erasmus comments on the second Old Testament story that seems to contradict the idea of human beings' free will and free choice. This is the story from Gen. 25:3 and Mal. 1:2 about Esau and Jacob. According to Mal. 1:2, God says that he loved Jacob and hated Esau. Erasmus includes both Old Testament texts in his argument, while Origen only mentions Mal. 1:2–3. Origen mentions only briefly Esau and Jacob in *De princ.* 3.1,22, because he refers to *De princ.* 2.9,7 where he wrote about the soul. His viewpoint in *De princ.* 2.9,7 is that God hated Esau and loved Jacob because of what they did before they were born into this world. In Origen's case, this is an argument for his idea about the so-called pre-existence of the souls.²²

Erasmus (3.a,11–12) writes a longer text including two interpretations: a) God's hate toward Esau is only temporary and not eternal. b) Following Paul (Rom. 9:13), he interprets Esau and Jacob as images of

²¹ *De princ.* 3.1,18: οἱ γὰρ ἐπιλαμβανόμενοι φασιν· εἰ μὴ τοῦ θέλοντος μηδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεούντος εοῦ', οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ ἐφ' ἡμῖν τὸ σώζεσθαι, ἀλλ' ἐκ κατασκευῆς τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ τοιοῦσδε κατασκευάσαντος γεγεννημένης ἢ ἐκ προαιρέσεως τοῦ ὅτε βούλεται ἐλεοῦντος.

²² Peter Martens, "Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis", *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 16 (2013), 516–549.

Jews and Christians. He underlines that the Christians were included because of their belief in Christ, and the Jews were excluded because of their unbelief. Both were responsible for their own situation, which could be changed. In this paragraph, Erasmus follows Paul closer than Origen.

Third Example: The Potter and the Clay

Erasmus uses the image of the potter and the clay in *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,13–14, and Origen uses it in *De princ.* 3.1,21. It is thus clear that Erasmus also reuses Origen in this part of his treatise about the free will.

We find the metaphor of the potter and the clay in Jer. 18:6 and Rom. 9:18–23. Thus, we also have a clear example of internal reception in the Bible. In Jeremiah 18:6, God asks whether he can do to Israel what the potter does to the clay, and he concludes that he can: Israel is like clay in God's hands. In Rom. 9:18–23, which is part of the long pericope on the relation between the Jews and the heathens, Paul argues that God shows mercy towards whom he wills and hardens whom he wills. Paul expects that this will lead to the objection that God then cannot blame anybody since he himself decides their destiny. To answer this objection Paul refers to Jer. 18:6 about the clay and the potter and concludes that what is formed is not allowed to ask the one who formed it about the reason why he formed it as he did. Paul makes clear that God shows mercy towards whom he wills and hardens whom he wills (Rom. 9:18). But he also suggests in Rom. 9: 22–23 that this has a pedagogical aim: God acts as he does to show patience with those under his wrath and glory to those under his mercy. Using this passage from Rom. in *De princ.* 3.1,21, Origen refers to his adversaries' (Gnostics / Marcionites) point of view:

Now someone will say, if, just as the potter from the same lump makes some vessels for honour and some for dishonour, so God makes some creatures for salvation and some for destruction. The salvation or destruction does not rest with us nor are we possessed of free will.²³

²³ ἐρεῖ γάρ τις· εἰ ὡς ὁ κεραμεὺς ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος ποιεῖ ἅ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν ἅ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν σκεύη, οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἅ μὲν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἅ δὲ εἰς ἀπώλειαν, οὐ παρ' ἡμᾶς τὸ σώζεσθαι ἢ ἀπόλλυσθαι γίνεται, οὐδέ ἐσμεν αὐτεξούσιοι.

Origen answers that if this were true, God would contradict himself. He points to several exhortations to conversion and improved behavior which means that it is possible for human beings to change. When God creates some to honor and others to dishonor it is, according to Origen, not because of his foreknowledge of what they will do in this life, but because of what they already did in a previous existence. Again, Origen's argument is based on his idea about the preexistence of the souls. Further, God's wrath is, according to Origen, not eternal, but will be changed in the end after a process of education where Logos cooperates with those who are temporarily under God's wrath. In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,13, Erasmus writes:

In both quotations the prophets rebuke the people murmuring against the Lord, while afflicted for their own betterment, just as Paul rejects their godless talk by exclaiming, "O man who art thou to reply to God?" (Romans 9,20). In this case we are obliged to submit to God, like moist clay to the potter's hands. Truly, our free will is thereby not completely cancelled out, because it is not impossible for our will to work together with the divine will for our eternal salvation. Thus follows in Jeremiah soon the exhortation to do penance. We have already quoted this passage. It would be a useless exhortation if everything happened of necessity.²⁴

According to Erasmus, Paul does not totally reject free will in Rom. 9:19–23 which follows from the exhortation to conversion in Jer. 18:8. He thus argues along the same lines as Origen, and he uses the same biblical texts to do so. Erasmus obviously relies on Origen. However, Erasmus does not buy into Origen's argument of the idea of the pre-existence of souls.

²⁴ Winter, section 39: *Uterque locus prophetae obiurgat populum obmurmurantem domino, quod affigeretur ad emendationem. Horum impias voces retundit propheta, quemadmodum Paulus retudit hanc impiam responsionem: "O homo, tu qui es?" In his autem non aliter debemus submittere deo, quam figuli minibus obtemperatutum udum. Verum hos non adimit in totum liberum arbitrium nec excludit voluntatem nostrum voluntati divinae cooperantem ad salutem aeternam. Etenim apud Hieremiam mox sequitur cohortatio ad penitentiam, quem locum ante retulimus. Ea frustra fit, si ex necessitate fiunt omnia.*

Fourth Example: The Heart of Stone, Ez. 11:19–20

Ez. 11:19 is a divine promise to give the people a new and undivided heart of flesh in exchange for their stone hearts. In *De princ.* 3.1,15, Origen quotes Ez. 11:19 and interprets it as saying that a teacher can educate the uneducated (stone heart) if the uneducated contacts the teacher asking to be educated:

We, however, shall reply that these words must be understood in the following manner. It is as when a man who suffers from ignorance and want of education and becomes conscious of his personal defects either from the exhortation of his teacher or from his own reflection, entrust himself to one whom he believes to be capable of leading him on to education and virtue. When he so entrusts himself, his instructor promises to take away his lack of education and to implant in him education, not as if it counted for nothing in regard to his being educated and escaping from his ignorance that he should have brought himself to be cured, but because the instructor promises to improve one who desires improvement. So the divine word promises to take away the wickedness which it calls a 'stony heart', from those who come to it, not if they are unwilling, but if they submit themselves to the physician of the sick; just as in the gospels the sick are found coming to the Saviour and asking to obtain healing and being healed.²⁵

²⁵ *De princ.* 3.1,15: Ταῦτα μὲν ἐρεῖ ὁ ἀπὸ τῶν ψιλῶν ῥητῶν τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἀναιρῶν. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀποκρινόμεθα τούτων οὕτως ἀκούειν δεῖν λέγοντες ὅτι, ὥσπερ ὁ ἐν ἀμαθίᾳ καὶ ἀπαιδευσίᾳ τυγχάνων, αισθανόμενος τῶν ἰδίων κακῶν ἦτοι ἐκ προτροπῆς τοῦ διδάσκοντος ἢ ἄλλως ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ, ἐπιδίδωσιν ἑαυτὸν ᾧ νομίζει δύνασθαι αὐτὸν χειραγωγῆσαι ἐπὶ παιδευσιν καὶ ἀρετῇ, ἐπιδιδόντος δὲ τούτου ὁ παιδεύων ἐπαγγέλλεται ἐξελεῖν τὴν ἀπαιδευσίαν καὶ ἐνθήσειν παιδείαν, οὐχ ὡς οὐδενὸς ὄντος εἰς τὸ παιδευθῆναι καὶ φυγεῖν τὴν ἀπαιδευσίαν ἐπὶ τῷ ἑαυτὸν προσαγοχῶτι θεραπευθόμενον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐπαγγελλόμενος βελτιώσιν τὸν βουλόμενον· οὕτως ὁ θεῖος λόγος ἐπαγγέλλεται τῶν προσιόντων τὴν κακίαν ἐξαιρεῖν, ἣν ὠνόμασε "λιθίνην καρδίαν", οὐχὶ ἐκείνων οὐ βουλομένων, ἀλλ' ἑαυτοὺς τῷ ἱατρῷ τῶν καμνόντων παρεσχηκότων· ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς εὐαγγελίοις εὐρίσκονται οἱ κάμνοντες προσερχόμενοι τῷ σωτῆρι καὶ ἀξιούντες ἰάσεως τυχεῖν καὶ θεραπευόμενοι.

To underline the free decision of the one who seeks education, Origen puts most weight on the action of the one who turns to the teacher. The teacher cannot educate unless the pupil willingly turns to the teacher. As soon as one turns to the teacher the teacher is ready to educate.

In *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,16–17, Erasmus refers directly to Origen's interpretation of Ez. 11:19–20 in *De princ.* 3.1,15. Erasmus uses the same example as Origen does: the grammar teacher. The grammar teacher (God) can remove the barbarian tongue from the pupil (the sinner) and insert a Roman tongue, says Erasmus. The pupil must be diligent, and the teacher must do his work. Erasmus underlines that both must contribute to the "exchange of tongue". It is common to both Origen and Erasmus to understand salvation as education. They are both great educators and they both consider spiritual education to be central to Christianity.²⁶

Thus, we also at this point have a direct reception of Origen in Erasmus. It is furthermore important to notice that Paul does not refer to Ez. 11:19–20 in Rom. 9–11. This means that we here have a direct line of reception from Erasmus back to Origen. Erasmus follows Origen even when Origen does not include Paul.

Erasmus' conclusion to this long passage in *De libero arbitrio* 3.a,1–17 is found in paragraph 3.a,17:

If man could effect nothing, why do they admonish us to work?
If man can effect something, why say that God alone works all things in all? By utilizing and distorting one set of passages, man appears impotent. By emphasizing in partiality the other set, man will be doing everything. Now, if man could do nothing, there would be no room for merit and guilt; consequently also none for punishment and reward. If on the other hand man were to do all, there would be no room for grace, which is very often mentioned and emphasized by Paul. The Holy Spirit can not contradict himself. The canonical books of Holy Scripture originated under his

²⁶ Vrangbæk, "Erasmus and the Will", 134–136.

inspiration. Their inviolable sublimity is acknowledged and affirmed by both parties in the dispute. Therefore one must find an interpretation which resolves this seeming contradiction.²⁷

Erasmus argues for a solution to the question whether human beings have a free will and free choice or not by appealing to a middle way between the two extremes. It is the concept of synergy which Erasmus clearly outlines in his conclusion. In this he rightly believes to be in line with Origen's point of view.

Conclusion

What can we then conclude about Erasmus' reception and reuse of Origen's ideas about human beings' freedom and free will? We can conclude that Erasmus reuses longer arguments from Origen in a very direct way. This is possible for Erasmus because he shares very basic theological convictions with Origen. Theologically they share the belief that human beings' situation in this world is not determined by God. God has not determined some to salvation and others to damnation. Erasmus and Origen develop their theologies in different historical contexts, but they are both confronted with a strong theological determinism which they consider to be a threat to their understanding of human beings and their salvation. They both believe that salvation is a process to which both God and human beings contribute. Human beings' free will and God's grace cooperate. Human beings can contribute to this process because they are created in the image of God – Christ – and thus participate in Logos' rationality. This capacity is not totally lost because of sin. Further, they share the belief that salvation is a pedagogical and educational process which must be inspired by the Bible. Thus, they have a common understanding of the Bible and its use. When Erasmus reads Origen, he immediately recognizes a familiarity in their theologies. This is why he can reuse Origen very directly.

²⁷ Winter, section 41: *Si nihil operatur homo, cur dicit: "Operamini"? Si quid agit homo, cur dicit: "Deus operator omnia in omnibus"? Quorum altera, si quis ad suam causam urgeat, totum facit homo. Quid si nihil agit homo, nullus est locus meritis. Ubi non est locus meritis, ibi nec supplicii nec praemiis locus est. Si totum agit homo, non est locus gratiae, cuius mentionem toties inculcate Paulus. Non secum pugnat spiritus sanctus, cuius afflatus proditae sunt canonicae litera. Utraque pars amplectitur et agnoscit inviolabilem scripturae maiestatem. Sed interpretationem quaerenda, quae nodum explicet.*

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Abate Gobena, *Sanctity and Environment in Ethiopian Hagiography: The Case of Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, Dissertationes Theologicae Holmienses 4 (Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm 2023). 229 pp. ISBN: 9789188906229.

This dissertation asks whether we might understand a correlation between the distinctively curated landscapes of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church enclaves, and the Ethiopic Tewahido spiritual tradition as expressed notably in the late medieval *Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, that is the Acts (or hagiography) of St. Gebre Menfes Qiddus.

The starting point in Chapter One is a striking fact of the present Ethiopian ecosystem: the presence of sacred forests surrounding the churches and monasteries of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. These sacred forests are ancient, thickly grown, filled with wildlife, adorned with the ringing call of the roof sistras on church buildings, and visibly striking in a landscape otherwise generally desiccated and bleak: “a landscape marked by deforestation” (p. 19). These forests have been studied largely for their scientific importance and their socio-political roles in the present history of Ethiopia. By contrast, Fr. Abate turns the spotlight directly to their theological significance, an aspect not taken into serious account in these other studies. The forests have continued and thrived, Fr. Abate argues, due to their centuries-long cultivation by clergy, monks, and devoted laity – but not by happenstance nor environmental strategy. Rather, these forests are the product of a particular, distinctive theological orientation and sensibility, profoundly instilled within Ethiopic Tewahido spirituality, and disseminated over centuries

through the invocations, prayers, readings, homilies, responses, supplications, and hymns that comprise collective liturgical teachings and practices, as well as individual devotions.

Fr. Abate presents Gebre Menfes Qiddus as an outstanding example of a saint whose story illustrates this unique vision as well as its manner of diffusion across vast reaches of time and space. Among the most cherished saints in the Ethiopian Tewahido Church, clergy and monks read his hagiography aloud in liturgical and other church gatherings often and with full ritual solemnity. The faithful, in turn, receive it with reverence and serious attention. Icons of the saint and his life are commonly displayed; printed books with his story are easily and widely available. He is a continual and revered presence in the living tradition of Ethiopic Tewahido Orthodox. What, then, Fr. Abate asks, do we find in the hagiography of Gebre Menfes Qiddus that speaks to the distinctive richness of ecological vision displayed by the sacred forests of the Ethiopic Tewahido Church? How does this saint's life serve to inculcate or instill this vision deep into the hearts of the faithful, to such an extent that the forests are preserved and cultivated still?

Chapter Two of the dissertation presents the reasons for choosing this saint's story and the methodologies Fr. Abate engages in his study. In addition to a basic orientation to hagiography as a literary genre, Fr. Abate outlines the major sources of influence underlying this text: the Egyptian and Syriac desert traditions and the Bible itself. Fr. Abate presents a reader-oriented form of literary analysis as especially instructive for his study, because of his conviction that the liturgical reading/recitation and listening practices of church communities are of fundamental importance for the reception of theological instruction – not just reception of theological teaching (as a cognitive act), but the deep internalization of a theological orientation or *habitus* in one's approach to the environment.

Who was this saint? Gebre Menfes Qiddus was raised in a monastery from the age of three. But his story is one of solitary devotion in extreme isolation from other people. Over years – indeed, over centuries, according to the hagiography – the saint prayed without ceasing in forests, mountains, lakes, and wilderness. He did not eat or drink; he did not wear clothes. He lived among wild animals, in full harmony with the natural world. He prayed with angels. He wandered; he remained stationary. Through his person, the disordered life of the fallen cosmos was

restored to the harmony of life in Eden before the Fall. His story offers a glorious vision of humanity and cosmos redeemed.

Fr. Abate considers the saint and his story through four primary themes that pervade the hagiography. To each theme he devotes a full chapter. Here is a brief sketch for each:

Chapter 3: *Ascetic estrangement*. The saint is depicted as set apart from before birth. His conception was miraculous, in the manner of many biblical stories. "His mother did not cuddle him and he did not suckle [his mother's] breast"; his parents and relatives admired his solitude, and he stayed apart from them. Rather than family, the saint belonged to a sacred family, with God as his father and mother, the Virgin Mary caring for him, prophets and apostles as siblings, and angels as his friends. Taken by angels, the saint entered an (unnamed) monastery, where "there were many monks", but only the abbot is mentioned. The saint remained separate, studying the Bible, and turned to his solitary practice, wandering for years or remaining stationary for years, through forest, mountains, and desert. Through centuries of devotion, the saint was attended constantly not by human companions, but by angels, saints, prophets, and apostles. Estranged from human sociality, the saint flourished instead among and within plants, animals, birds, and trees.

Chapter 4: *Co-existence with non-human creation*. And indeed, the saint flourished and more. At first, relations were difficult; ravens pecked at his eyes; grace protected him. But soon divine protection was replaced by intimacy. Wild animals leapt for joy at his presence. Herds of lions and leopards surrounded and cared for him; animals slept in his embrace. Soon, the saint's body became like theirs: his hair grew thick and long, "like a lion's fur" or "like a hawk's feathers", covering his nakedness. Unclothed, he neither ate nor drank. The wilderness, whether forest or desert, became his intimate shelter until he began to resemble this, too: his stature became that of a palm tree, his skin "like bark", the fragrance of his body like spikenard or myrrh or pomegranates, the fragrance of saints. For years, he lived in a lake, praying in the water. In turn, the natural world became a sanctuary enclosing him as in the Holy of Holies. The animals stood round in prayer.

Chapter 5: *Identification with angels*. Ethiopic tradition is rich in its depiction and theology of angels. In this case, the saint not only lived the angelic life; he also lived among them. Like them, he had no need for food or drink; like them and with them, he prayed without ceasing. Without need for sustenance himself, the dust beneath his feet became

the food required for the lions and leopards who attended him. Angels surrounded him, served him, and held an umbrella of light over him just as servants over their masters (imaged in the Ethiopic liturgical processions in which the deacons carry brightly colored silk umbrellas to protect priests and bishops). Just as he grew to resemble the animal and natural forms of creation, so too did he grow to resemble and surpass the angels in his perfection.

Chapter 6: *Reconciliation of opposites within the saint's own person, with, by, and through his bodily askesis.* Finally, this fourth theme considers how the saint's extraordinary efforts resulted in a reconciliation of opposites to the point of transforming and sanctifying all of creation, on earth and in heaven. Wandering and standing became mirrored images of perfect prayer; non-human life became the saint's own life; material and immaterial bodies became indistinguishable; the world where the saint was – in mountains, forests, desert, lakes – became a Paradise, as Eden before the Fall. But in the story of the life and struggles of this saint, a transformed real world also emerged. The places of his wanderings or standings became sacred places in which bloomed monasteries, churches, and pilgrimages of devotion. His abstinence became imitated by the fasting and askesis of monastics and faithful laity, who in their visits separate themselves from others and from the cities. His prayers became voiced by theirs. His story was and continues to be told, sung, recited, and learned. And reverence for the saint became care and attention for creation: the natural world blooming in the sacred forests of the Ethiopic Tewahido Church.

Following analysis of these four main themes – undertaken with copious comparisons with other hagiographies (including Egyptian and Syrian), and with biblical examples and quotations from liturgical prayers and hymns – Fr. Abate presents Chapter 7, on the use and impact of the *Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, that is, of the hagiography itself. Arguing that this text has been, and continues to be, one of the most widely distributed, widely read, and widely heard hagiographic texts in Ethiopia, Fr. Abate contends that it can and must become deeply incised into the heart of every faithful listener: monastic, clergy, or laity. Its constant repetition, read almost daily in liturgical services and elsewhere; its constant visual reminder in lively icons and devotional objects (happily included in the thesis book!); its memory fostered also in the Midre Kebed Monastery statues of lions and leopards guarding the main church building – all are vehicles for ensuring that the saint and his model are

always present, and always inspiring the faithful in how they relate to the forests, the natural world more fully, non-human creatures, and indeed creation as a whole. While Fr. Abate admits one cannot claim a direct link of causation between this text to the tradition of the sacred forests of Ethiopia, yet he sees profound and abiding resonance between collective and private devotional attention to this saint and his story, and the remarkable cultivation of the sacred forests.

Chapter 8 offers a summary conclusion of the thesis and its distinctive theological contributions to the study of Ethiopian ecology and biodiversity, and (I myself would argue) to its Christian history.

A number of helpful tools complete the study: a glossary of key Ethiopic (Ge'ez) terms; a list of uncatalogued copies of the hagiography; a list of the copies in the digitized manuscript collections of the British Library; a translation of one of the fourteen miracles attributed to the saint; a striking public sign at Lake Ziqwala (where the saint prayed) with stern directions for how visitors should conduct themselves on the holy grounds. Finally, there is an extensive bibliography of works consulted. This is a thoughtful and thought-provoking study that merits the attention of theologians concerned with the ecological questions of our times.

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Sverre Elgvin Lied, *Participation in Heavenly Worship: From Apocalyptic Mysticism to the Eucharistic Sanctus*. *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 50. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. 238 pp. ISBN: 9782503599281.

This book is a revised version of a doctoral thesis that was originally submitted for public defense at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway, in 2016. Its aim is to investigate how the idea of the celebration of the Eucharist as part of the heavenly worship took root in the Christian church. This motif is a well-known one from the 4th century on, but here we learn how this is expressed in texts from before the Council of Nicaea.

The author finds the background of the motif in what he identifies as Jewish apocalyptic mysticism in texts from the Second Temple period.

In his view, apocalypticism and eschatology are more important elements of this tradition than a Platonic idea of earthly participation in the divine, although in practice the boundaries here can be difficult to draw. He is also aware that there is some change in this respect during the period he is investigating.

The texts Lied highlights are texts by Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. In addition, he has investigated the *Apostolic Church Order*, which is an anonymous group of texts which so far has been more or less overlooked by scholars. Ignatius understands the church as God's temple and sees the worship service as the church's participation in Christ's eternal, Eucharistic sacrifice, but he has little regard for the service as part of the heavenly service. The same applies to the texts of the *Apostolic Church Order*. Irenaeus's understanding of salvation as deification allows for a somewhat greater emphasis on this perspective, but it is still the Eucharist as anticipation of the eschatological union of God and human beings that is the main focus. This motif is also found in Gnostic sources, but in Irenaeus this is more clearly understood to mean that God raises all of creation into fellowship with Him.

In Clement, there is a distinct union of apocalyptic and Platonic motifs in his understanding of the soul's ascension to God and participation in angelic worship. It is primarily related to the spiritual growth and worship of the individual, but also has implications for the understanding of communal worship. This is generally understood by Clement as ascension to and communion with heavenly worship, although it is probably the one who has adopted this perspective for his or her own part who understands it best.

Origen is less concerned with interpreting and expounding the liturgy than he is with giving an exposition of the Scriptures that focuses on the spiritual significance of the texts. Nevertheless, he clearly understands that through prayer we unite with the fellowship of angels and saints. The understanding of worship as a fellowship between those on earth and those in heaven is therefore evident in Origen. But he is more concerned with the descent of the angels than with the ascension of the earthly church; it is therefore more correct, according to Lied, to say that we have in Origen an understanding of the participation of angels in earthly worship than vice versa. In a concluding summary, Lied empha-

sizes that it is primarily with Clement and Origen that we find the community worship service as something that takes place in a union with the worship of the angels and saints.

One difference between Jewish and Christian worship is that in a Jewish context one does not speak of sacrifice in connection with the heavenly service, while the relation to Christ's sacrificial death means that this motif naturally arises in a Christian context. Here, then, one imagines that through the celebration of the Eucharist one takes part in Christ's presentation of himself as a sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. The inclusion of the worship of Isaiah 6:3 as part of the liturgy occurs primarily in the fourth century, but there are, according to Lied, precursors from the late third century from Syria and Egypt.

In a concluding chapter, Lied comments briefly on what happened in the fourth century when the church's situation changed from that of an oppressed minority to a socially accepted faith community, and more people than before came to its worship services. The liturgy then became both richer and more unified, and the Sanctus of Isaiah 6:3 became a permanent element. Thus, the shared praise of the earthly and heavenly communities became a regular part of the liturgy. This is also unfolded in homiletic literature from this period, and Lied gives examples of this from Theodor of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostomos and Ambrose. This is thus common for both Greek (Antiochene and Alexandrian) and Latin traditions.

Through this book, Lied presents himself as a credible guide through this landscape. He knows both the primary sources and the main scholarly works, and when he has to take a position on researchers' different interpretations, he does so in a balanced and well-argued way. He is not himself a supporter of the bold hypotheses; he never goes further in his conclusions than he is certain that his sources allow. One may as a reader sometimes long for some more boldness in the conclusions, but compared to those who may be too liberal in this respect, one is grateful for Lied's careful and balanced approach. He has in this book given us a trustworthy discussion of some of the central motifs in the liturgical history of the early church.

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Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch, *Negative Theology: A Short Introduction*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022. 118 s. ISBN: 9781666742176.

Den negativa teologin har som bärande idé att när det kommer till beskrivningar av Gud är språket otillräckligt och av den anledningen bör de teologiska utsagorna formuleras negativt. Gud är o-ändlig, o-begränsad, icke-kroppslig och så vidare. Oavsett om man arbetar historiskt eller systematiskt är denna metod och tradition värd att fördjupa sig i och söka förstå. Utan tvekan kan man konstatera att den negativa teologin genom århundradena har spelat en stor roll för den kristna kyrkans teologiska tänkande och att den också i dag fyller en viktig funktion.

Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch har i *Negative Theology – A Short Introduction* skrivit en kärnfull och tankeväckande genomgång av den negativa teologins historia. Boken spårar den negativa teologins historia från och med Bibelns texter och framåt genom historien. I tre kapitel presenteras utvecklingen i den antika världen, medeltiden och slutligen i den moderna tiden från senmedeltiden via reformationen fram till och med idag.

I genomgången i det första kapitlet följs de teologer som ofta brukar uppfattas som den östliga teologins huvudgestalter. Från Klemens av Alexandria dras linjen till Gregorios av Nyssa. Mellan dessa båda ställs den nyplatoniska filosofen Plotinos som pekas ut som särskilt betydande. Beskrivningen av den historiska utvecklingen och urvalet av tänkare blir ett slags argument i sig själv, även om läsaren inte helt får det förklarat för sig. I sammanfattningen av första kapitlet ges dock en förklaring till varför urvalet ser ut som det gör: "Rather than seeing early Christian theology as a passive recipient of novel philosophical ideas flowing in from the outside, it is probably more correct to see it as actively engaged in a more complex conversation with Jewish and Platonic thought, where Christian thinkers may even have influenced the pagan peers." (34)

Just detta, att den negativa teologin vuxit fram i konversation mellan olika traditioner, är kanske själva grundargumentet i hela det första kapitlet. Jag undrar dock om det inte hade varit möjligt att gå längre i att visa hur denna konversation mellan huvudsakligen nyplatonisk filosofi och kristen teologi sett ut. På ett par ställen i kapitlet antyds det att den inre logiken i de olika traditionerna fungerar på olika sätt. Men i stället

för att enbart konstatera att det nog finns skillnader vill skulle jag vilja förstå mer hur dessa skillnader ser ut – filosofiskt, analytiskt, systematiskt. Olika idékomplex glider in i varandra i de olika traditionerna och mellan de olika tänkarna. Men i allt detta finns skillnader i betoningar, metoder och därför också i slutsatser. Jag hade önskat ännu mer av klargöranden kring dessa bitar. På ett ställe skriver Aakjær Steenbuch att Gregorios av Nyssas apofatiska teologi går djupare än andras eftersom han betonar Guds oändlighet snarare än Guds enhet. Ett verkligt intressant påstående som borde kunna följas upp mer och som, om det stämmer, rimligen borde ha stora teologiska konsekvenser.

En sak jag uppskattar särskilt i det andra kapitlet om medeltiden är det visar på kontinuiteten mellan vitt skilda tänkare, och på så sätt går emot vissa standardbeskrivningar av kyrkans medeltid. Det visas att den negativa teologins grundantaganden finns som en gemensam utgångspunkt såväl för de teologer som karakteriseras som mystiker som för skolastikerna. Här blir texten tesdrivande och det är i det här fallet bra. I avsnittet om Anselm drivs tesen att hans välkända gudsbevis bör läsas och balanseras utifrån den negativa teologins ramverk. Om Thomas av Aquino, som ofta porträtterats som en utpräglad rationalist står det: "As with Anselm, Thomas's proofs are not so much attempts at confining God to a convenient box in our theological system as they are attempts, so to speak, at opening up cracks so that the light can shine in." (52)

Här ser vi att det även i detta kapitel finns en ambition att korrigera felaktiga och förenklade idéer om den historiska teologin. I detta har det andra kapitlet i mitt tycke sin främsta förtjänst. Betoningen på kontinuitet ger en stark och bred bild av hur etablerad den negativa teologins är och blir därmed ett argument för en fördjupning i negativ teologi.

I bokens sista del beskrivs ett känt historiskt narrativ med stor klarhet och kraft. Från iakttagelsen att den negativa teologin någon gång i gränsen mellan medeltidens slut och den tidigmoderna tidens början upphör att beröra filosofi och metafysik och i stället förflyttas till spiritualitetens och poesins områden, rör sig den historiska genomgången först bakåt till senmedeltiden och sedan framåt genom moderniteten. Duns Scotus pekas ut som källan till den moderna teologins problem. Hans uppfattning om varabegreppet som univokt (det vill säga att det betyder samma sak att Gud *är* som att allt annat *är*) tillsammans med hans starka betoning på Guds viljas frihet görs tillsammans med den efterkommande Ockhams nominalism till som ett slags grundproblem

som sedan hänger kvar i senare teologi och filosofi. Formulerad på enklast tänkbara vis kan tesen sägas vara att det i den moderna tiden finns en godtycklighet eller irrationalitet i gudsförståelsen, en godtycklighet som kanske liknar vad man antar om Gud i tidigare negativ teologi men som i själva verket är något helt annat. Detta nya sätt att tänka om Gud och Guds relation till världen tar sig sedan uttryck på olika sätt i reformationens teologi, i den tyska idealismen, hos tänkare som Søren Kierkegaard och Karl Barth och i det sena 1900-talets poststrukturalism.

Även om den historiska genomgången knappast är ny utan känns igen framför allt från den engelska, teologiska skolbildningen *Radical Orthodoxy*, blir den väldigt tydlig och bitvis mycket övertygande. Den idéhistoriska utveckling som beskrivs är dock väldigt komplex och jag frågar mig vid ett par tillfällen: "Skulle det inte kunna vara precis tvärtom?" Att man genom läsningen tvingas till fördjupad reflektion om själva kärnan i dessa frågeställningar ser jag dock som något mycket positivt.

Sammanfattningsvis är *Negative Theology* ett imponerande litet verk som lyckas täcka mycket utan att för den sakens skull göra det på ett ytligt sätt. Med tanke på att boken bara är ca 100 sidor lång är det givet att det går att hitta perspektiv som skulle kunna fördjupas ytterligare. Men för den som söker efter en bok om negativ teologi som är tillgänglig och ger historisk överblick samtidigt som den erbjuder teologisk fördjupning så kan det knappast finnas ett bättre val än *Negative Theology – A Short Introduction*.

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Éric Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts Nor Forgeries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 189 pp. ISBN: 9780812252606.

On the strength of his collection of martyrs' narratives for OUP (2017), Éric Rebillard has produced this short theoretical book. It comprises a mere 87 pp. of main text (divided into four chapters with a short introduction and even shorter conclusion), two appended works in Latin with facing translation (pp. 90–91; 92–123: the latter being the same short text repeated 6 times), notes (pp. 125–154), a bibliography (pp. 155–177)

and a general index (pp. 179–187). The apparatus of the book thus occupies more than half the total number of pages. Rebillard's ambition is to "successfully argue the case that martyrdom narratives should not be studied with traditional criteria applied in favour of or against their authenticity"; moreover, while the title clearly spells out what these texts are not (neither authentic accounts nor forgeries), Rebillard claims that "the question of what kind of texts we are studying is here addressed more satisfactorily than it has been thus far" (p. 6). From these two books one presumes that this scholar is set on establishing his voice in the field in a continuing manner, but the acknowledgements at p. 189 declare that this will be his last book consecrated to such study. Rebillard will not be another Delehayé.

The two books are connected by a thread considering criteria for collection of martyrs' texts through history. Here, too, Rebillard proposes his selection of a handful of pre-300 CE narratives on the basis of external attestation of characters or narratives, without recourse to internal criteria. Rebillard's aim is to go beyond the current scholarly debate (with a noble ecclesiastical ancestry) about the historical authenticity of these texts. Rather than enter the conversation – read heated polemic – concerning the truth-value of these texts that erupted in American academia, Rebillard effectively sidesteps the issue mainly because he considers that the intended audiences were already convinced about the historical value of these narratives, while at the same time being conscious that the versions they were presented with were necessarily literary rewritings of original stories. (A modern parallel would be that of films about the holocaust: while the narrative details need not be of exact stories that happened, the general framework makes sense to viewers as historical. Their point is to interpret, rather than to recount, history by using stories.) This claim is certainly interesting, but the author fails to develop this point. In these few, dense pages, many valuable leads are left equally underdeveloped, so that the impression is that the author is somewhat reticent in his exposition, and certainly ungenerous to the reader who might need to be guided more pedagogically to both ideas and texts. Compression leads to some obscurity, and the level the book is at presupposes a very good knowledge of the contents, issues, and manuscript transmission of these texts.

The negations of the title are a direct answer to Candida Moss and Bart Ehrman respectively, but one does not find any detailed rebuttal of their arguments. On the other hand, for his positive appraisal, Rebillard

relies on definitions formulated by other scholars in different contexts, such as the “stories without authors and without texts” studied by Christine Thomas for apocryphal narratives (p. 43) and the ‘open texts’ applied to ancient novels by David Konstan (p. 44). Rebillard expands these concepts with the idea of “living texts” as providing the necessary paradigm shift for martyrs’ narratives (p. 46). This definition relates to a New Philology approach concerning changing versions. Rebillard considers each version as metaphorically representing an independent “performance” of the work, even though by p. 52 the word performance has lost its inverted commas. At the same time, he applies to them the very complicated FRBR taxonomy devised for printed texts, distinguishing the Work from its Expressions, Manifestations, and Iterations, which he exemplifies with six versions of the *Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs* (Appendix II). But what is the point of complex comparisons if the direction of evolution of a text can no longer be legitimately deduced, even as a hypothesis? Moreover, some editorial choices, such as keeping phonetic peculiarities of the scribe of MS Vallicellianus Tomus X (if this is the correct shelfmark) who wrote *causa* (cavs?) for *capsa* (pp. 100–101) and translating this spelling variant as ‘cause’ in English, are clearly misguided. It is not clear whether it is the literary methodology that steers the categorizations, or the textual criticism that imposes the use of fluid categories where variants (and even errors) come into their own. In the first case, I do not see how this analysis differs substantially from Moss’s approach in pointing to the dynamics of fiction; in the second, I cannot see any special novelty between martyrs’ narratives and other fluid texts that have been the object of study of New Philology.

Though rightly advocating more nuanced literary understandings of these narratives, Rebillard stops short of pushing their definition beyond the written textual domain. His point remains a philological one that appeals to New Philology but begs the question of how legitimately to treat these texts within a scholarly discourse (if at all). Could there be some mileage in dropping the idea of these texts as written (even though the versions we work from are of course in manuscripts) and considering them rather as oral-performative canvasses that took different shapes in different local contexts? Were they, in some sense and at some point in their formation, plays about martyrs rather than texts for single-voiced liturgical reading? Rebillard’s remarks on the literary taste for staging trials according to reports of interrogations, acquired long after

the martyrdoms, would gain in depth by considering the dialogical format of such scenes as part of performances, a specific shape for a “living text”. Rebillard argues that the use of court procedures in dialogue form cannot be used to ascertain the historical or the early nature of the Passiones. This point is convincing, and the later, fourth-century fashion for introducing these procedural questionings attests more to the creation of a believable setting (perhaps enacted as an official interrogation scene?) than it does to the historical immediacy of the story of a particular saint.

In the end, Rebillard fails to clearly situate the resulting accounts in the realm of the “as if true” which he defines as the *tertium quid* beside the true/false dichotomy and which includes a significant parallel with comedy and mime (p. 63). Reticence to develop the association of martyrs’ narratives with performative phenomena seems to me to weaken the full-bodied argument against the true/false dichotomy. After all, the audience that is several times invoked does not materialize concretely in this book. Augustine’s letter to Paulinus, translated as Appendix I, is quite candidly declaring that the great theologian was just not capable of writing in such a genre. Avowedly, Rebillard’s literary claims for these narratives are intended to discourage historians from using them as sources of factual information. The legitimacy of this use, however, is not more radically questioned.

In the course of proving his points, Rebillard dedicates fairly detailed attention to some narratives, so that students of these texts (specifically, the Martyrdoms of Polycarp, Pionius, the Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne, the Life and Passion of Cyprian, the Passions of Perpetua, of Lucius and Montanus and of Marian and James) will benefit from consulting the book’s remarks on dating, structure, and take advantage of some pointed remarks on their relations (esp. between Perpetua and Cyprian). There is no doubt that a corrective and appeasing book was needed to calm the polemic around martyrs’ texts, and that Éric Rebillard had the authority and expertise to be its author. Certainly, this short book has made an important contribution in this sense. Above all, the obsession with reducing everything to either truth or falsity springs from our contemporary world of uncertainties which has become detached from meaningful debate about the human condition. Martyrs’ texts had a voice in this definition of reality, which need not be reduced to a simple moral lesson.

It is a pity, then, that the author does not articulate his point of view more fully and share his knowledge more expansively for the less expert reader. A result of Rebillard's reticent and synthetic approach is that this book, though doubtlessly important, will remain accessible only to a select audience of experts. Even the direct dialogue partners in the polemic about martyrs' texts make the briefest of appearances, giving the impression that their writings only deserved a wry and curt reply.

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Stavroula Constantinou and Aspasia Skouroumouni-Stavrinou, *Breastfeeding and Mothering in Antiquity and Early Byzantium*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2024. 272 s. ISBN: 9781032208756

Before facing her death in the gladiatorial arena, Perpetua wrote her last words in her diary: 'But concerning the outcome of that contest, let whoever wishes to write about it, do so'. Therein, perhaps, lies the martyr's prophetic vision. In offering up her story to be written by others, Perpetua handed over the last word to posterity. For the better part of two millennia, her diary has been parsed by storytellers, theologians, and historians. The latest in this storied line is *Breastfeeding and Mothering in In Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, edited by Stavroula Constantinou and Aspasia Skouroumouni-Stavrinou.

The publication is well-timed. As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, motherhood became a nexus of public discourse. The dull glow of zoom screens shed new light on the institution of motherhood, as homeschooling made *invisible work* more visible, and underscored the value of *emotional labor*. These terms became important facets of contemporary gender politics and a flourishing of motherhood memoirs and narrative non-fiction followed. Though the field of motherhood studies had been steadily developing for decades, the pandemic highlighted the need for motherhood to become a topic of academic study across many disciplines. Against this backdrop, MotherBreast, an interdisciplinary project based out of Cyprus, held workshops and a conference throughout 2020 and 2021. Most of the book's chapters were developed from

papers delivered during these events. This book thus gives voice to Byzantium sources in an ongoing and important conversation about the value and work of motherhood.

The book is structured into three parts: society and ideology, medicine and practice, and art and literature. In the opening chapter, the editors demonstrate the value of these lenses by holding them up to the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (PPF). The PPF is an account of imprisonment and martyrdom set in Roman Carthage in 203 AD, written mainly in the first person by a narrator identified as 'Perpetua'. Though the text is well-studied, this chapter yields new insight into the narrative. In society and ideology, the editors identify a tension between the binaries of good and bad motherhood that structure the text. Though other binaries – such as reality and dreams, male and female – have been an important facet of PPF scholarship, the editors correctly assert that categories of good and bad motherhood have not previously been emphasized. As such, the editors outline how the text “continues a tradition established in Augustan Rome, whose art and literature incorporate tensions and paradoxes between good and bad mothering to regulate actual Roman mothers” (p. 17). Similar insight is wrought from medicine and practice, where an intertextual reading of the PPF alongside Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Soranos demonstrates that Perpetua used medical vocabulary in her writing, demonstrating an awareness of contemporary medical discourse. Finally, the prism of literature and art casts a different light on the genre of the PPF. Though the genre of Perpetua’s narrative has been the subject of scholarly debate for many decades, the editors propose that there is an inter-relationship between gender and genre in Christian martyr’s autobiographical writings and that Perpetua’s writing can be read specifically as a “motherhood diary” (p. 40). Each of these three perspectives offers new insight into the ancient text and illustrates the relevance of the book’s three thematic strands to scholarship.

In the contemporary conversation on motherhood and domestic labor, Patristics scholars are in a unique position to say something meaningful about sacrifice, martyrdom, and the body. For church historians in particular, this book offers an entry into issues of motherhood and lactation.

The book is interdisciplinary by nature, the contributors come from a variety of different fields and thus draw from a diverse array of primary sources. These include philosophical texts, medical treatises, legal

documents, advertisements for wet nurses, and letters written between women offering each other mothering advice. Throughout the chapters, these are often read together with biblical texts, apocrypha, hagiography, and magical papyri. The visual evidence here is likewise varied, from a collection of church frescos depicting striking images of female figures whose breasts are bitten by serpents, to a Roman coin portraying the 'secular figure' of Empress Fausta, nursing a child. The diversity of sources reminds us that, when there are so few extant sources that speak to the experience of Byzantine women, particularly mothers, an interdisciplinary approach is imperative. Though Perpetua's diary remains, as the editors claim, the "premodern source par excellence of the lactating women" (p. 8), the singularity of her story speaks to the dearth of women's writing that remains with us. This lack necessitates that church historians cast a wide net to find evidence of mothering in Late Antiquity. This book represents a shore from which to do so – a starting point for anyone interested in examining, or re-examining, motherhood in the early church.

The editors likewise see the value of this book as a starting point. As the MotherBreast project was based in Cyprus, the sources examined here are mainly written in Greek, which leaves an opening for scholars to apply a similar approach to Latin, Syriac, and other texts. Likewise, the scope of the book, covering the first seven centuries AD, opens up questions of how these mothering practices changed and developed over time. As the editors themselves write, "the volume does – and could – not offer an exhaustive analysis of the examined period's lactating woman and her work of mothering, yet we believe that it will lead to more investigations enhancing our understanding of mothering practices, both in the period under discussion and in later times." (p. 47) This call for more research on the topic of breastfeeding and mothering thus echoes Perpetua's last words: 'Let whoever wishes to write about it, do so.'

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Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen, *Romanos: Nattens sange. Fire kristne hymner*. Aarhus: Atlanten, 2023. 112 s. ISBN: 9788797288122.

Det er sjelden jeg får i oppgave å anmelde en bok som jeg simpelthen synes er uforlignelig bra. Dette er en sånn anledning. Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksens bok er et praktverk utført av ualminnelig kyndige hender.

Romanos Meloden (+ ca. 560) regnes gjerne som den senantikke periodens største salmedikter. Med sine lange, strofiske sanger dramatiserte han det kristne fortellerstoffet for Konstantinopels kirkegjengere. Dialoger, kontraster og djerv billedbruk skapte en nesten kinematisk spenning.

Eriksen har valgt ut fire av Romanos' sanger eller *kontakier* og oversatt dem til dansk. Det dreier seg om én gammeltestamentlig sang («Josef»), om helten fra 1. Mosebok som blir egyptisk slave, én nytestamentlig («Peters fornægtelse»), om apostelens svik i forkant av korsfestelsen, og to hymner som skaper selvstendige fortellinger eller dramaer mot bakgrunn av nytestamentlige beretninger: «Jul i Helvede» handler om hvorledes Marias vuggesang til den nyfødte vekker Eva og Adam fra søvnen i Hades; «Korsets triumf» iscenesetter en underjordisk dialog mellom Djevelen og det glupske monstret Hades i forbindelse med korsfestelsen. Eriksen har et utsøkt blikk for ironien, dramatikken og det groteske i denne poesien, og oversettelsene balanserer fint mellom en relativ nærhet til den greske teksten og en (så vidt denne anmelderen kan bedømme) levende og stilistisk bevisst dansk. I motsetning til Hjalmar Gullbergs svenske gjendiktning av Romanos består Eriksens av frie vers uten rim og metrikk. Hverken «Josef» eller «Peters fornægtelse» har tidligere vært oversatt til noe skandinavisk språk.

Elof Westergaard, biskopen av Ribe, åpner boka med et forord som blant annet handler om Romanos' innflydelse på den moderne greske poeten Odysseus Elytis.

Eriksen har selv skrevet innledningskapittelet, en atten sider lang presentasjon av Romanos' liv og verk. Som Romanos-forsker er han velinformert om den nyeste forskningen på feltet og formidler kunnskapen på en forbilledlig pedagogisk og engasjerende måte.

Verket er rikt illustrert av den danske kunstneren Peter Brandes. Skjønt – «illustrert» er egentlig ikke rett ord. Boka lar tekst og farvebilder tale med hverandre som to mer eller mindre jevnbyrdige størrelser; den emosjonelle ekspresjonismen i bildene går i dialog med sangene.

Ironisk nok slår de moderne bildene meg som mer tradisjonelle i motivvalg enn de senantikke tekstene, som altså kan feire oppstandelsen med en dugelig monsterdialog. Jeg savner uansett en liste over bildene, som gjerne kunne inneholde billedtitler. En alminnelig innholdsfortegnelse mangler også i boka.

Sammen med Brandes har Eriksen skapt en nydelig bok som uten å simplificere formidler spensten og livaktigheten i disse senantikke sangene og viser nye veier inn i gamle fortellinger.

Thomas Arentzen
Sankt Ignatios/ EHS

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