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 Protoctetus, 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 Markschies, "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

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[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

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[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] Itis 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 Frend, *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. Frend, *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

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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:

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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 Protoctetus 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" (θλῖψις) 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]

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[36] Isa 28:9b–11a LXX *apud* Origen, *Mart.* 1: Οἱ ἀπογεγαλακτισμένοι ἀπὸ γάλακτος, οἱ ἀπεσπασμενοι ἀπὸ μαστοῦ, θλῖψιν ἐπὶ θλῖψιν προσδέχου, προσδέχου ἐλπίδα ἐπ᾽ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρὸν διὰ φαυλισμὸν χειλέων διὰ γλώσσης ἑτέρας. 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 Protoctetus 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]

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[40] Origen, *Mart.* 4: Εὐχόμην οὖν ὑμᾶς παρ' ὅλον τὸν ἐνεστηκότα ἀγῶνα μεμνημένους τοῦ ἀποκειμενου πολλοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς μισθοῦ τοῖς διωχθεῖσι καὶ ὀνειδισθεῖσιν ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου χαίρειν καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶν καὶ σκιρτᾶν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἐχάρησάν ποτε κατάξιωθέντες ὑπερ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἀτιμασθῆναι.

[41] Origen, *Mart.* 47: Τί τοίνυν ὀκνοῦμεν καὶ διστάζομεν ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ἐμποδίζον 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 οἰκείαν τῇ 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-

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[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 (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ 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

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[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: *Porphyre: Vie de Pythagore; Lettre à Marcella,* ed. Édouard des Places (Collection des universités de France), Paris: Belles lettres 1982. Cf. Helene Whittaker, "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.

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[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: Τῷ μὲν οὖν Ἀβραάμ ποτε ὑπὸ θεοῦ εἴρητο· "ἔξελθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου," ἡμῖν δὲ τάχα μετ' ὀλίγον λεχθήσεται· ἐξέλθετε ἀπὸ τῆς ὅλης γῆς· ᾧ πείθεσθαι καλὸν, ἵνα ἡμῖν ταχέως δείξῃ τοὺς οὐρανούς, ἐν οἷς ἐστιν 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.

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[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, ὅρκον;

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 (λοιδόρησον τὸν Χριστόν) and swear by the emperor's genius (ὄμοσον 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 (τήν 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 Protoctetus 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 defendable 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

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[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. Frend, *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 worshiping 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

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[67] Origen, *Mart.* 28: Φιλότιμός τις ὁ ἅγιος ὢν καὶ ἀμείψασθαι θέλων τὰς φθασάσας εἰς αὐτὸν εὐεργεσίας ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζητεῖ, τί ἂν ποιήσαι τῷ κυρίῳ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ εἴληφε· καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλο εὑρίσκει οἱονεὶ ἰσόῤῥοπον 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 εὕρομεν.

[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* (BZNW, 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 תַּגְמוּלוֹהִי ("his benefits") is also a choice of words that suggests repayment to a benefactor. In this

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[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 כּוֹס־יְשׁוּעוֹת) 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 defendable way of avoiding a death sentence, as even insincere

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[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

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[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*", *JECS* 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.