

MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND ORIGEN

MARK J. EDWARDS

Abstract

This essay asks in what ways modern (i.e. twentieth-century) philosophy can either make use of Origen or inform our reading of him. It argues in the first section that the predominantly exegetic method of Origen makes it difficult for analytic philosophy to accommodate his reasoning. In the second section it examines the comparisons drawn by John Lyons between Origen and Teilhard de Chardin, which also suggest affinities with Henri Bergson, but concludes that the disparity between modern evolutionary thinking and Origen's timeless approach to the truth of scripture is not easily overcome. The rest of the article suggests that it would be more illuminating to note affinities between Origen and modern theorists who pursue their arguments in dialogue with canonical texts. In particular, Origen's ubiquitous search for Christ in the text of scripture, without clear evidence of authorial intent, might be more intelligible in modern eyes if Christ were seen as a Derridean pharmakos or Girardean scapegoat.

Introduction

What do we hope to achieve when we bring an ecclesiastical writer of antiquity into a modern philosophical conversation? To clarify his thoughts, perhaps, as Christopher Kirwan undertakes to clarify those of Augustine in his volume for the Routledge series entitled *The Arguments of the Philosophers*.¹ Unfortunately, few of the saint's beliefs survived the caustic analysis of the Oxford logician, and no study of any other doctor of the ancient church was commissioned by Routledge. We might suggest, with Frances Young in her recent Bampton Lectures,² that our current stock of arguments may be increased by reviving those that we have forgotten; modern debates, however, demand the subtlety of a Plotinus or an Aristotle, and if we can barely find this in Augustine we cannot look for it in such authors as Nemesius of Emesa. Today, as ever, a bold speculation may appear more legitimate

Mark J. Edwards
Christ Church, Oxford, OX1 1DP, UK
Email: mark.edwards@theology.ox.ac.uk

¹ Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989).

² Frances M. Young, *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

in the eyes of certain readers if some warrant can be found for it in Gregory of Nyssa or Athanasius; it is all too common, however, for such experiments to involve some forcing of the ancient text.³

It can be argued that we have more to learn from the incommensurability of ancient and modern thought than from any specious project of assimilation. Yet if the past cannot speak to us, we lose that essential part of being a Christian which is to feel that we share a faith with those who are separated from us by two millennia. This feeling may be augmented, but also rendered more mysterious, by the discovery that early Christian modes of speech that are strange to us even as Christians are not so strange to some of our contemporaries—and indeed that the readiest way to renew our familiarity with them may be to step outside the acknowledged domain of faith. In the first part of this essay, I shall briefly explain why philosophers who are also conservative Christians have taken little notice of Origen; the writers who occupy the following sections have no place in the analytical tradition, and do not accept its common-sense view that the question whether God exists can have only one true answer. In this respect they are equally far from Origen, but only because, not in spite of, a presupposition which they share with him—that the study of the real must commence with the study of the written, and that only our failure to apprehend the manifold reality of the written creates the illusion of a gap between the two.

Origen and the Analytical School

Analytical philosophers of religion in the last century made it a rule to cite no dogma or revelation, though many of them wrote with the aim of corroborating the tenets of “classical theism”, if not of Christianity in its fulness. Theologians, even when they have deprecated Barth’s assaults on natural theology,⁴ have been apt to protest that this enterprise, if successful, would be self-stultifying, for if we could reason our way to all that God reveals, where would be the necessity for a revelation? Origen says as much to Celsus,⁵ and those who style him a Platonist (or more politely, a philosophical theologian) seem to forget that his characteristic method, when he is not forced into wrangling with a philosopher, is to build his thoughts by collating and harmonizing scriptural verses rather than by *a priori* speculation.⁶ The same analytic philosophers who daily co-opt Augustine and Aquinas have either not read Origen or have read him and decided that they are not prepared to argue on his terms. Nevertheless, there is now a possibility of his being restored to

³ See, for example, the observations of Raphael Cadenhead on the co-option of Gregory of Nyssa for modern discussions of gender: “Spiritual Maturation and Gender in Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘Mystical Theology’”, in Louise Nelstrop and Simon D. Podmore (eds), *Exploring Lost Dimensions in Christian Mysticism: Opening to the Mystical* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 151–72.

⁴ See e.g. Karl Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, with the introduction by John Webster (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

⁵ Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.42, on which see below.

⁶ Of course the best works of this kind are by no means wanting in erudition and subtlety. See Charles H. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886); Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy and Christian Platonism: Rethinking the Christianisation of Hellenism”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009), 217–63.

the place among the “philosophers” that he held in the middle ages⁷—not only because he is not so often disparaged as a heretic, but also because the new discipline of analytical theology is willing to take its postulates from the New Testament and the Church Fathers, once their clarity and cohesion have been put to the test of propositional logic. Thus William Lane Craig in his monograph *God Over All*, which takes its title from Origen, introduces him as an exemplar of Platonizing Christianity which locates the primordial essences of all created things in the mind of God.⁸

Two passages, correctly though brusquely reviewed, suffice for Craig’s investigation. One affirms that the same Christ who, as Logos, brings all creatures into being is also, as Wisdom, the “beginning” in which they are said to have been created.⁹ The other (not found in all manuscripts, but commonly held to be authentic) surmises that all the genera and species (*genê kai eidê*) of natural creatures reside eternally in the mind of God, together perhaps with the form of every particular that he purposes to create.¹⁰ This passage raises many taxing questions for the philologist: are the *genê kai eidê* those of the *Categories* or of the *Cratylus*?¹¹ Is the speculation that the ideas or forms are thoughts of God implicit already in Aristotle or Plato? If instead it results from the fusion of the *Timaeus* with *Metaphysics Lambda*, was this hybrid the work of a Platonist or of a Peripatetic?¹² Has Origen anticipated the inconclusive musings of Plotinus on the forms of individuals,¹³ or is he merely echoing the Aristotelian usage of *eidos* to designate that which the mind apprehends when the eye perceives an object? Craig, himself, however, is detained by none of these questions, as his object is only to show that, while Plato affirmed the reality of the Forms, Origen deemed them “insubstantial”, if not “imaginary”.¹⁴ He goes on to make even less of an excerpt from Methodius (also attributed to Origen¹⁵) which denies that matter is any more capable than the ideal forms of circumscribing the omnipotence of God. More will be said of both passages below; for the present, it is enough to note that Origen serves Craig as a witness to the doctrine of the early church, but not as

⁷ See Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, edited by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 180–82, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 14, art. 8, ad. 1.

⁸ William Lane Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016), 35–37.

⁹ *Commentary on John* 1.19.110–112 (198 in the edition of V. Limone (Milan: Bompiani, 2012)).

¹⁰ Origen, *First Principles* 1.4.5 (88–89 in the bilingual edition of John Behr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)). The Greek terms are verified by Justinian’s *Letter to Mennas*.

¹¹ One of the many questions overlooked by Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity: The Literary Agenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 192, as she also implies that the “pervasive presence of *methexis* in Origen’s writings” automatically entails a Platonic theory of Ideas. Cf. Mark J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2002), 65 for a discussion of Origen, *First Principles* 1.4.5; and Charlotte Köckert, “Räumliche Vorstellungen im Weltbild des Origenes und ihr Verhältnis zum zeitgenössischen astronomischen Weltbild”, in Christoph Marksches and Johannes Zachhuber (eds), *Die Welt als Bild: interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Visualität von Weltbildern* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 69–79, at 73 on *First Principles* 2.3.6.

¹² See now John Dillon, “The Ideas as Thoughts of God”, *Études Platoniciennes* 8 (2011), 31–42. It should be observed that Atticus, often cited as a proponent of the view that forms are thoughts in the mind of the demiurge, is credited by later Neoplatonists with the tenet that the demiurgic intellect is superior to the forms. See John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 254–56.

¹³ See *Enneads* 5.7, and for a recent discussion James Sikkema, “On the Necessity of Individual Forms in Plotinus”, *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 3, no. 2 (2009): 138–53.

¹⁴ Craig aptly cites *First Principles* 2.3.6 (170, Behr) but so long as Origen held that the Forms subsist in the mind of God, it is unlikely that he would have deemed them “imaginary”.

¹⁵ Craig, *God Over All*, 37: see further below.

the author of any argument that could be profitably reformulated, let alone revived.

My impression is that Craig has not turned to Origen as an exemplar of good analytical reasoning, but as a guarantor of the Christian pedigree of a hypothesis that Craig himself thinks worthy of exploration. This is a valid use of the tradition for any philosopher of religion who wants to be sure of being a Christian, and is illustrated at length in Frances Young's *God's Presence*. Using him in this manner, we could also cite him as the first Christian witness to an argument which has exercised a number of analytical philosophers, that if physical determinism were true we could not know it to be so, because our belief in it would also be physically determined.¹⁶ But if we are looking not so much for a precedent as for a philosophical interlocutor, comparable in acumen to Plato or Aristotle, we shall almost always be disappointed by Origen's habit of building up his proofs by exegesis rather than by deduction from first principles, so that he seems to assume precisely that which we would hold to be most in need of proof. John Lamont was certainly right to turn to Clement, rather than to Origen, for a concept of faith that is grounded in a refinement of Platonic and Aristotelian reflections on the role of logos in argument and life.¹⁷ In Origen, the term *logos* seldom functions independently of its biblical use as a designation of Christ; in the remainder of this essay I shall compare him first with a Roman Catholic thinker, for whom the identity of the *logos* and Christ is a datum of faith, and then with three exponents of a post-modern sensibility, who might not have found this tenet intelligible but subscribe to its presupposition that no human logos can offer us the plenitude of truth.

Apokatastasis and Evolution

Origen's identification of Christ with the creative Wisdom of God is the subject of a thoughtful monograph by James Lyons.¹⁸ Teilhard himself is not an acknowledged philosopher—for many indeed he is only a Jesuit dabbling, or rather drowning, in the sciences—but the influence of Henri Bergson and Maurice Blondel, the foremost defenders of teleological reasoning at the turn of the twentieth century, is easily discernible in his writings.¹⁹ The two men formed no school—Blondel was a Catholic, while Bergson was a Jew by nurture rather than conviction—but both denounced the positivistic model of the universe in which bodies are mere aggregations of atoms, time a mere series of instants and causation merely a name for the inexplicable succession of the motion of this atom at this instant to the motion of that atom at an instant that has now sunk into the past. Both remind us that the inertial body is not merely the seat of action but the depository of experience and the instrument of volition. Blondel's theory of action is undergirded by the Aristotelian principle that change is explained by final rather than efficient causes;²⁰ Bergson contends that if we consult our experience we shall find that duration is not the

¹⁶ *Philokalia* 23.2, echoing Epicurus, in *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 40. For a collection of modern essays on C. S. Lewis's handling of this question see *Journal of Inklings Studies* 1.2 (2011).

¹⁷ John Lamont, "A Conception of Faith in the Greek Fathers", in Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea (eds), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87–116.

¹⁸ James Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Lyons, *Cosmic Christ*, 159–68 (Blondel) and 171–72 (Bergson).

²⁰ Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For other works by Blondel see Lyons, above.

supersession of one instant by another but a suspension of what we call the past in what we call the present, which in its turn will be suspended in what we presently call the future.²¹ Thus the difficulty of explaining how the present can be affected by the past has been dissolved, and the universe is perceived to be a dynamic rather than a static system, as the empirical discoveries of cosmology and biology have already shown it to be.

The innovation of Teilhard, who was trained as a palaeontologist, was to reintroduce teleology into the theory of evolution at a time when most biologists held that a combination of genetic inheritance and environmental change would suffice to account for the emergence of new species.²² Protesting that such an aleatory process cannot explain the increasing complexity of life on our planet, Teilhard contends that from the beginning we discern an increasing propensity to the concentration of matter, and that this has given rise first to the biosphere, then to the zoosphere and most recently to the noosphere, each stage being marked by the evolution of a new level of consciousness. The human mind is at once the epiphenomenon of increasing complexity in the zoosphere and the precondition of both bodily and social organization in the noosphere. It does not act without a goal because the perfect form of humanity has already been revealed to us in Christ, who as our author and paradigm works within us to bring about the consummation of moral and intellectual endeavour, both collectively and socially, both through sacramental activity and through secular employment. The inseparability of spirit and matter is attested by the sacrifice of the mass, which is performed not only on behalf of the church but on behalf of all rational beings on this planet or any other.²³ Indeed, although Teilhard's speculations on this point are guarded, it would seem that Christ is the Omega point not only for humanity but for the entire material creation. If the fossil record has revealed to us the ubiquity of pain and suffering long before humanity brought sin into the world, the promise of Christ is that all that exists will be brought into his kingdom and laid at the feet of God the Father on the day when even death, the last enemy, shall be overcome (1 Cor. 15:26-28).²⁴

This was one of Origen's favourite passages,²⁵ and it is not for nothing that both he and Teilhard were greatly admired by Henri de Lubac, one of the fathers of the *nouvelle théologie*.²⁶ Had Teilhard been more familiar with Origen, he would surely have quoted the homily on Leviticus which declares that Christ is perpetually atoning for our sins at the heavenly altar.²⁷ De Lubac's translation of this text from Origen in *Catholicism* is followed some pages later by a short extract from Teilhard.²⁸ For all that, Teilhard, while he alludes to the formative role of Christ as Wisdom in Origen's cosmology,²⁹ refrains

²¹ See e.g. Henri Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire* (Paris: Alcan, 1912); "The Perception of Change" in *An Introduction to Metaphysics: The Creative Mind*, translated by Mabelle L. Andison (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield and Adams, 1965), 130-58.

²² See above all Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, translated by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper, 1965).

²³ See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mass on the World" in *The Hymn of the Universe*, translated by Simon Bartholomew (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1-32.

²⁴ Lyons, *Cosmic Christ*, 170.

²⁵ See e.g. *First Principles* 3.6.2-3, with Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen's Anti-Subordinationism and its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line", *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011): 21-49.

²⁶ See Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007); Jon Kirwan, *An Avant-Garde Theological Generation: The Nouvelle Théologie and the French Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 221-23.

²⁷ *Homilies on Leviticus 7* (*Homilien zum Hexateuch I*, ed. W.A. Baehrens (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1920), 370 ff).

²⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, translated from the fourth French edition by Lancelot C. Sheppard (London: Burns and Oates, 1950), 255 and 292.

²⁹ Lyons, *Cosmic Christ*, 79-87.

(perhaps in the misplaced hope of preserving his orthodoxy) from comparing his own eschatology with Origen's famous doctrine of *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things to God through Christ.³⁰ Lyons, who draws the comparison on his behalf, is also careful to point out that the universalism of Origen does not extend to anything below the noosphere. All *logikoi*, or rational beings, participate in the Logos, but the Father alone presides over the irrational.³¹ The task of every soul is to perfect the image and likeness of Christ, the perfect image of God;³² for most, however, this is accomplished only through a fiery ordeal which follows the soul's deliverance from the gross body.³³ The cosmos has both an origin and an end, but between these temporal extremes its constitution remains unaltered; evil will be vanquished inasmuch as the devil will cease to vex the saints, but only a lunatic will suppose that he can be saved.³⁴

Might Origen, had he lived today, have embraced some teleological form of the theory of evolution, extending the divine largesse to all creatures, and even to matter, in which (as we shall observe below) he hardly believed? The question is unanswerable, but we can at least point out that to align himself with Teilhard he would have to accept a great deal that cannot be proved from scripture. It has been common in modern times to allege that he did so habitually, smuggling in his own philosophical reveries under cover of exegesis. The gravamen of this charge is that he is least an exegete when he is most a philosopher; the dichotomy seems natural to those who have been trained to see exegesis as the interpretation of facts about books and philosophy as the interpretation of facts about the world. Compatriots of de Lubac, however, find it easy enough to pursue these disciplines concurrently: is there, then, some Gallic lucubration on the unity of discourse, or on its inevitable opacity, that might be invoked in Origen's defence?

The Late Death of the Author

For most of the twentieth century, Origen's ingenuity in the figurative reading of scripture afforded more embarrassment than pleasure to his admirers. His sedulous contradictions of the plain and natural sense could not be excused by appeal to the spirit of the age when the Antiochenes who were almost his contemporaries evinced a sound distaste for allegory and a scholarly interest in the historical setting of both psalms and prophecies.³⁵ Even the plea that a middle Platonist cannot escape his schooling was of little weight when serious study of the Platonic tradition revealed that Plato himself was hostile to allegory, and that even his admirers who adopted this device in the second century employed it far more sparingly than Origen.³⁶ The same is true of Philo, his

³⁰ For the most comprehensive presentation of this see Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³¹ *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes*, ed. Caroline Bammel, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 131.15.

³² *First Principles* 3.6.1 (440, Behr).

³³ See further Mark J. Edwards, "Origen's Two Resurrections", *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1995): 502-18.

³⁴ See further Mark J. Edwards, "The Fate of the Devil in Origen", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 86 (2010): 163-70.

³⁵ Against the crude opposition of Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis, see Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161-85.

³⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* 229d-e; Plutarch, *On Listening to the Poets* 31e. This is not to say that Origen drew no inspiration from the Platonic tradition: see Mark J. Edwards, "Precursors of Origen's Hermeneutic Theory", *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 232-37.

Jewish model,³⁷ and of Clement, his older contemporary who may also have been his teacher: neither, though they go well beyond the remedial *allegoresis* of the pagans, finds it necessary to probe, as Origen does, for an arcane sense when the surface is sufficiently edifying. In any case, while all three have been called Platonists, all three pledged their first allegiance to the scriptures, and were ready to differ from Plato when his tenets could not be reconciled with that authority. And it is surely a poor vindication of Origen, even if it is true, to point out that most of his heresies proceeded not from his figurative expositions of scripture but from a slavish fidelity to the literal sense.³⁸

No wonder then that his champions have been quick to take advantage of new trends in biblical studies that have challenged the ascendancy of the historico-critical method. It is argued for example that a text outlives its age by being drawn into a tradition of commentary and imitation, so that its meaning for posterity is that which tradition confers upon it rather than that which it had for its first audience—or, more subtly and more accurately in the case of the scriptures—a dialectic between the initial meaning and the many that it has subsequently acquired.³⁹ The obvious retort to this argument, when it is offered on Origen's behalf, is that his place in the tradition is debatable, that his readings of every text have been contested, and that if all purported readings of scripture were equally canonical, we should be left with little that we can call a canon. There are some indeed who are willing to live with dissonance and to grant parity to all appropriations of the Word, canonical and uncanonical, under the more indulgent rubric of reception. One often hears the slogan “death of the author” or the dictum that the “unity of a text lies not in its origin but in its destination”,⁴⁰ though seldom with any evidence in either case of a more prolonged acquaintance with the works of Roland Barthes.

For Barthes the text is a place of *jouissance*, in which (to preserve the sexual metaphor) the reader discovers and engenders meaning. The name that we associate above all with this epistemic freedom, this denial that the author or the philological critic has a right to dictate the import of a text, is that of Jacques, or Elijah,⁴¹ Derrida. In keeping with his own principles, Derrida is a versatile and elusive writer, programmatically unresponsive to all attempts to cast “what he really means” into an orderly array of propositions. The very notion of meaning is thrown into doubt by his infamous neologisms, “deconstruction” and “différance”, which have now passed into common use among theologians and literary theorists, to the deep perplexity and occasional merriment of philosophers who uphold the analytical tradition. And yet, as has been observed, he has much in common with that idol of the analytical school, the later (or rather posthumous) Wittgenstein, who not only substitutes “use” for “correspondence with fact” as a definition of meaning,⁴² but argues in conscious antiphony to “the author of the

³⁷ See further Ilaria Ramelli, “Philo as Origen's Declared Model: Allegorical and Historical Exegesis of Scripture”, *Christian-Jewish Relations* 7 (2012): 1–17.

³⁸ See citations from Charles Gore and Henri Crouzel in Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 89.

³⁹ Such arguments often appeal to the highly cogent and seminal writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989); and Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970).

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 142–48, the latter quotation at 148.

⁴¹ I allude to his Jewish name to suggest that the *pharmakos* in his own writing is the membership of a people for whom the Torah has been for two thousand years the surrogate of an absent God. See further Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴² Throughout *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

Tractatus”,⁴³ his only published work, in which he at once assumes and subverts the theory of correspondence. Derrida’s interrogations of his own previous works betoken (with obvious contradictions) a readiness to undergo the “death of the author” and to accept the inescapability of *différance*, the perpetual *deferral* of the elimination of that whereby the signified *differs* from the signifier.⁴⁴ If the problem of meaning arises from the fact that it is in the very nature of the sign to be other than that which it signifies, so that in signifying its object it also signifies the absence of that object, we cannot hope that the gap between the two will be closed by the mere exchange of one set of verbal symbols for another. The faculty which sets humans apart from animals is that of using words to represent things that have ceased to be, or are not yet, present; the penalty of this superiority, as Rousseau saw,⁴⁵ is that speech carries with it the scar of alienation, the consciousness of not possessing that which we remember or desire.

Behind both classical theism and Derrida stands Plato, in whose writings we encounter both forms of negation: the mere emptiness that characterises matter inasmuch as it can be characterised, and the freedom from time, contingency and change which enables the Forms to act as regulative principles to a world that is too labile to contain them. Form is grasped by intuition, matter by bastard reasoning;⁴⁶ between the two is the empire of the phenomenal, in which neither form nor matter can find a home, although discursive reasoning tells us that all the denizens of this realm would be homeless without them. The receptacle that harbours the embodied forms is described in the *Timaeus* as a *khôra* or place, a term that Derrida has transferred from cosmology to discourse.⁴⁷ He contrasts his own usage, however, with that of Plato, whom he regards as the architect of the western ontology that his own philosophy aims to deconstruct. For Plato words are seeds which, properly cultivated, awaken in the earthbound soul a recollection of justice, beauty or courage as it beheld them in the supercelestial heaven; Socratic interrogation sets the true philosopher free to pursue the Truth and Being which lie beyond all Forms, the precocious quest for which was the reason for the soul’s loss of its wings.⁴⁸ For Derrida there is no preconceived reality—no facts of which propositions could be pictures, as the young Wittgenstein imagined—and the space opened up by speech accommodates the nonsensical, the apophatic and the infinite privilege of interpretation which the author grants to the public when he presents it with a text.

Origen and the Post-Modern

It would certainly not be untrue to say that Origen’s exegesis parts the text from its author (if by author we mean the human instrument of composition), and even that he entrusts the right of interpretation not to those *among whom* but to those *for whom* the scriptural text is written. A disciple of Paul could not say otherwise, and if any Antiochene maintained that every text addresses only its own contemporaries, he could

⁴³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 22 etc.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 1–29, esp. 14.

⁴⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976/2016).

⁴⁶ Plato, *Timaeus* 52b.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Timaeus* 52b again; Derrida, “*Khôra*”, in J. Wolfreys (ed.), *The Derrida Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 231–62.

⁴⁸ *Phaedrus* 276b–e; 247c–248e.

hardly offer a candid exposition of Galatians 4:24 or 1 Corinthians 10:6.⁴⁹ Origen does not deny that each of the biblical books is a human artefact, and he comments shrewdly on the differing aims of the Evangelists;⁵⁰ at the same time, the ubiquitous working of the one Spirit promulgating the one Word to one communion of saints ensures that whatever is plainly written in one portion of the scriptures is deeply inscribed in every other.⁵¹ We need not doubt that such an author as Moses was fully conscious of the gospel which he presented under a veil to his ignorant people;⁵² even where he does not affirm this, Origen never permits us to discount a passage, in the Antiochene manner, as a mere ebullition of feeling, a temporisation with the original audience or a permanent concession to the frailty of the intellect.⁵³ There is no text that will not be found, by the studious commentator, to speak of Christ to those in Christ.

It ought to be clear that Origen would not have accepted any defence of allegory on the principle that meaning is imparted to the text by its human audience. The psychic and pneumatic layers of meaning that he seeks beneath the surface are in his view as surely foreseen by the Holy Spirit, and therefore as surely present in the text as the literal sense; when the author is Moses or a prophet, who can be credited with a proleptic vision of the incarnation, it is not even true to say that only the literal sense expressed his own intent. We may doubt whether even the typical post-modernist is so willing to inter himself in his text as not to claim the right to step out of it and contradict readers who misunderstand him. The later Derrida is indeed an exception, disavowing the privileged understanding of his own seminal works to which he would have a claim if he held the 'logocentric' principle that the word is merely an image of a thought. With the renunciation of the authority of authorship, we forfeit the right to say 'this is what I meant' or 'that is not what I meant at all'. Origen, for his part, never raises any doubt that it is possible to be right or wrong in the parsing of the text's three senses: even when he invites us to suggest an interpretation that has eluded him, this is not because he wishes to multiply voices, but because he hopes that another reader's opinion may be superior to his own. This hermeneutic diffidence is quite a different thing from the *jouissance* of Roland Barthes, and a rarer thing in any age.

For Origen the question is not so much what we make of the text as what the text makes of us. Read in this scholastic fashion, rather than in the rhetorical or psychagogic fashion of Antioch,⁵⁴ the written work assumes such a pre-eminent role in the education of Christians that no preaching or oral tradition can have any independent force. Both indeed are necessary, but only as means of teaching us how to retrieve what is hidden in the text. To explicate this notion of hiding, I shall return to Derrida, but this time in

⁴⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *In epistulas B. Pauli commentarii*, ed. H. B. Swete (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880), 79 defines allegory as a comparative exercise; Theodoret, *Commentarius in epistolas Sancti Pauli*, vol. 1, ed. C. Marriott (Oxford: Parker, 1852), 203 ignores the word *typos* at 1 Cor. 10:6.

⁵⁰ Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.4.21-26 (164-168, Limone).

⁵¹ Origen, *Philokalia* 2.4 and 5.4 (39 and 44-45 in the edition of J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893)).

⁵² Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 6.3 (364, Baehrens).

⁵³ See Mark J. Edwards, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* 8: *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 2, 7, 12, 21 etc. for instances of such criticism by John Chrysostom.

⁵⁴ See further Frances M. Young, "Rhetorical Schools and their Influence on Patristic Exegesis", in Rowan D. Williams (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 181-99; Janet Fairweather, "The Epistle to the Galatians and Classical Rhetoric", *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (May 1994): 1-38.

company with two other figures, Jean-François Lyotard and René Girard, the first of whom is the inventor of the term postmodernism, whereas the second is as resolute a proponent of the real against the illusory as Origen himself, and yet, like Origen himself, a mirror to the post-modern in its own despite.

On Scapegoats

In the Anglophone world post-modernism is apt to find its home in departments of literary theory, and it is easily forgotten that the post-modern discourse, or warfare by discourse against discourse, is capable of encompassing all political and social circumstances. The same is true of post-structuralism,⁵⁵ which goes beyond the structural analysis of a text or a society by returning our attention to those elements which this analysis has chosen to exclude. While Derrida holds that that which is excluded determines the import of a text as much as that which is said, Lyotard maintains that we cannot know how a society is ordered until we listen to those whom the order has rendered voiceless, and Girard alleges that every society from which Christ is absent maintains its cohesion by intermittent rituals of banishment and suppression.

Once again Derrida measures himself against Plato, who was suspicious of the book because it is severed from the author and denies the reader an answer when he asks “but what do you mean”? It is in fact a *pharmakon*, a drug of forgetfulness, counteracting the process of recollection which is fostered in the classroom by the refusal of tutor and pupil alike to take any answer as final until the last question has been put.⁵⁶ The true philosopher differs from the sophist in that his instrument of teaching is the *elenchus*, or examination, rather than the harangue. It is paradoxical that this case should be made in a written dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, which was regarded in antiquity as a masterpiece of both theory and execution in the art of rhetoric—and therefore not paradoxical but inevitable that Derrida should take this book (paying homage to its contents in the title of his own book, *Dissemination*⁵⁷) as a test-case for an early experiment in deconstruction. By this term he means the reintroduction into a text of any element that the author or his accredited interpreters have been at pains to exclude.⁵⁸ This might be the biography of an author who hides himself behind a textual persona or the metaphorical origin of a word that an analytical philosopher has employed without regard to its etymology;⁵⁹ in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, the element that is all the more present the more it is ostracised is writing itself, playfully represented in Derrida’s own text by the noun *pharmakos*, which is never employed by Plato but suggested to the reader by its aural and semantic affinity to *pharmakon*. The *pharmakos* is the butt of public recrimination in the hour of

⁵⁵ On its origins see Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (London: Collins, 1976). For the purpose of this essay, however, I shall consider only that variety of post-structuralism which we call deconstruction.

⁵⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* 274c-275b. All just readers of this essay will admit that it at least restores due prominence to a passage that was all but ignored by the classicist E.A. Havelock when he argued in *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) that Plato’s aim was that writing should supersede oral transmission as the vehicle of education.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy”, in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 61-72.

⁵⁸ See further Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982/2007).

⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press 1981), 196-231; Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*, translated by Timothy Attanucci and Maureen Chun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

crisis, the one on whom it heaps its sins and maladies—"by his stripes we were healed"—as though this very act were not proof of his indispensability, and hence of the futility of driving him away.

Lyotard defines post-modernism as a turning of attention from the object to the means of representation.⁶⁰ This thesis (sometimes popularly epitomized in the maxim that all writing is about writing) prohibits any discourse of the transcendent but does not entail that all immanent discourses are equally valid. In his masterpiece, *The Differend*, the voice of the oppressed is irrecoverable, but their silence is an unanswerable rebuke to the oppressor. This Latinate term is not derived from Plato or the Bible and is not related explicitly to Derrida's *différance*. Lyotard defines it as "the unstable state and instant of language wherein that which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be".⁶¹ This could almost be the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, but it is used by Lyotard here with reference not to the future but the recent past, to the predicament of the survivors of the holocaust who are left to speak of horrors which they alone have witnessed, though even they, not being dead, have never experienced them. The truth that cannot be spoken is the truth that has shaped all subsequent discourse and it becomes clear in the course of Lyotard's essay that the dead are only one of the voiceless classes in society and the holocaust only the most malign of the numerous expedients of repression.

In modern times the means of exorcism are often silent, and may be the reason, as Girard opines, for our failure to perceive in the ancient sacrifice of animals a relic of a more public means of silencing the weak. Mythology, in his view, is the child of history,⁶² and we learn from it that the victims of the earliest immolations were men and women on whom society chose to deposit its sins. Thus the purpose of sacrifice is to rid a community of its abnormal or non-conforming members who imperil its unity by their failure to act as others act.⁶³ According to Girard the basis of culture is enforced mimesis, or imitation of that which is held up as normative—a thesis that is at least as old as Plato. The *bouc émissaire*⁶⁴ in his concept of religion is the equivalent of the *pharmakos* in Derrida's concept of language, with the caveat that one religion escapes Girard's indictment because the voluntary submission of Christ to his cross is no true sacrifice and the Logos that he embodies creates no scapegoats, being the one discourse that does not set the majority against the marginal.⁶⁵ Those scholars who depict sacrifice as the eating of the god, and hence a benign act of communion, have applied a Christian anodyne to the violence of antiquity, in which it is always the god who demands the sacrifice but another who is consumed.⁶⁶

It might be alleged that Origen is guilty of this solecism every time he turns the page of scripture, for is he not always finding Christ where the historico-critical method sees only a vestige of some primitive human rite—for example, the offering of Isaac as

⁶⁰ Jean François Lyotard, *Le post-modernisme expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilee, 1988).

⁶¹ Jean François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 13.

⁶² See above all René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁶³ René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (1972), was translated by Patrick Gregory as *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

⁶⁴ The French title of *The Scapegoat*.

⁶⁵ In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 180-262, Girard contends (notwithstanding 1 Cor. 5:7) that only the Epistle to the Hebrews promotes a reading of Christ's death as a sacrifice.

⁶⁶ See Girard's discussion of the *Bacchae* of Euripides in *Violence and the Sacred*, 134-50.

Abraham's firstborn⁶⁷—or the saga of some half-fictitious hero, be it Jacob descending to Egypt or Jeremiah in the potter's shop?⁶⁸ Origen's reply would be that modern scholarship, not excepting Girard, has underestimated both the prescience of the Holy Spirit and the breadth of the divine mercy. Christ is indeed, as Girard perceives,⁶⁹ the logos who overcomes the fissiparous action of the political and philosophical logos, reuniting the high with the low, the rich with the poor, as only God himself could do in his voluntary descent from the pinnacle to the nadir of creation.⁷⁰ As the embodiment of the divine proclamation that encompasses our creation and redemption, he is the one Word that we read when we read the scriptures. Origen's hermeneutic theory is logocentric indeed, but in a sense that both surpasses and vindicates Derrida's practice of looking in the text for what is hidden. The Word who dissembled his glory in the incarnation has not quite left us orphans, but is present in the text under various forms of occultation,⁷¹ the most deceptive of which is his carnal appearance in the gospels as a man if we do not look beyond this to his divinity. Once we perceive him as God incarnate in body, soul and spirit,⁷² we shall have the means of discerning the soul and spirit of the Old Testament, which are provisionally concealed by the literal sense.

Christ on earth took the place of the *bouc émissaire* whose death is a judgment on the slayer; Christ in scriptures is the elusive *pharmakos* whose very invisibility is the sign of his omnipresence. Lyotard describes post-modernism as the turning of attention from the object of representation to the means of representation: Origen does not turn from means to object but declares them to be identical in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, where the fathoming of the deepest sense is envisaged as a meeting between the reader, in his role of Bride, with the Logos who is at once the author, the subject and the substance of the poem.⁷³ As Vlad Nicolescu has demonstrated in *The Spell of the Logos*, Origen seems to have arrived at the position of Barthes and Derrida that the text is not a mere conduit for an antecedent thought; at the same time, he also clearly affirms what they deny, the presence of a transcendent Other, whose existence does not depend upon the text or upon our exegesis of it, although it is his reality that gives meaning to the exegesis.⁷⁴ The climax of hermeneutic illumination is an experience that none can grasp unless they have undergone it;⁷⁵ the unsayable, for Origen in contrast to Lyotard, is the

⁶⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 8.9 (*Homilien zum Hexateuch*, vol. 1, ed. W. F. Baehrens (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899), 84).

⁶⁸ Origen, *Jeremiah homilies*, ed. E. Klostermann (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901), 151 (*Hom.* 18); *Homilies on Genesis* 15.5 (131–33, Baehrens).

⁶⁹ See especially René Girard, *Job, the Victim of his People*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

⁷⁰ See Origen's retort to the charge that only the basest members of society followed Jesus: *Against Celsus* 3.10 and 3.44–49.

⁷¹ *Against Celsus* 2.16–17 on the humility of Christ; on the text as a continuing incarnation see *Against Celsus* 4.15 and *Homilies on Leviticus* 5.10 (351–53, Baehrens).

⁷² Origen, *First Principles* 4.2.4 (496, Behr), with Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 137–38. On Origen's use of the verb *somatopoiein*, see Michael Frede, "Origen's Treatise against Celsus", in Mark J. Edwards, Martin D. Goodman and Simon R. F. Price (eds), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 131–55.

⁷³ See Mark J. Edwards, *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 100–5.

⁷⁴ Mihai Vlad Nicolescu, *The Spell of the Logos: Origen's Exegetic Pedagogy in the current Debate regarding Logocentrism* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (39.17–23 in the edition of W. Baehrens (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1952)).

transcendent which becomes sayable when it embraces the condition of the abject.⁷⁶ On the one hand, then, the perusal of sacred texts is not for Origen the circumscribed and circumscriptive discipline that it is, or has been, for exponents of the historico-critical method. On the other hand, he is clearly no post-modernist, since for one thing he limits his pluriform exegesis to the scriptures, and for another this pluriformity arises not from the free play of the reader with the text but with unconditional submission to the Word who is present, corporeally, psychically and spiritually, in each of its many words.

Creativity and the Cosmos

In the previous section of this essay I have asked whether Origen's use of *allegoresis*, so incomprehensible to proponents of the historico-critical method in philology and of the analytical method in theology, might be better appreciated in modern times as an early foreshadowing of the post-modern sensibility, which has entered the study of literature in the English-speaking world under the name of deconstruction. I have argued that if we understand deconstruction as the principle of restoring what has been hidden or extruded by conventional modes of reading, we can find at least the beginning of an apology for the allegoretic method in Jacques Derrida's conjuration of the *pharmakos* or scapegoat from the *Phaedrus*. At the same time, we have seen that Origen stands with Plato and against Derrida on the side of logocentrism, except that he means by *logos* not only the underlying rationale of speech but God himself made flesh in history and in the literal sense of scripture. The return of the hidden means the restoration of truth—a notion foreign perhaps to literary theory but not to Jean-François Lyotard's meditations on the silencing of the victim by the discourse of the oppressor, and not to René Girard's exposure of sacrifice as the violence of the many against the few.

Girard, in contrast to Derrida, does not assume that a *logos* which purports to be true is *ipso facto* divisive and coercive. Because he equates the true *logos* with Christ, he does not maintain, as one might infer from Lyotard, that every discourse has its victim. Yet he differs from Origen too, and from the dominant tradition in Christianity, in refusing to see the death of Christ as the 'end' of sacrifice in the double sense of ambition and consummation. In Girard, no less than in the pioneers of deconstruction and post-modernism, a suspicion of ideology is accompanied by a suspicion of teleology. By contrast, as we have seen in our comparison of Origen to Teilhard, teleology is an indispensable presupposition of his theory of knowledge, his moral exhortation and his scriptural exegesis. So long as the soul is fallen and the image of Christ obscured, it can have only a partial understanding of its own nature, of its place in the scheme of providence or of the end which the gospel reveals to us in the measure of our present understanding. It is therefore not quite true for him that the written or spoken word is merely a copy of some truth in the mind of its author, for it will not be true unless the author is God, whose thoughts are far above our own. The best exegesis of scripture is no more than an adumbration of the unsayable, of that which is unknowable only because we are not yet capable of knowledge.

⁷⁶ See his reply to Celsus on the humiliation of Christ at *Against Celsus* 2.16-17. His willing abjection is the complement to his ineffability, which has not been grasped by philosophers who imagine that he can be discovered without his own revelation: see *Against Celsus* 7.38-42.

An eschatology implies a cosmogony, and all European cosmogony stems from Plato and the Book of Genesis. Commentators on the *Timaeus* have held at least two views of the identity of the *khôra*, or place, which is said to be a prerequisite for the fashioning of the sensible world in imitation of the eternal forms. Many Platonists in the ancient world endorsed the Aristotelian view that the *khôra* is prime matter, a universal substrate that has no properties of its own and can therefore act as a receptacle to all properties, thus providing a bedrock of permanence as one form comes to be in this world and another passes away. The more prevalent opinion in modern times has been that *khôra* is space, or perhaps an early presentiment of the space-time manifold that has now replaced Newton's picture of a void populated by material objects. Derrida, who has no views on the origin of the cosmos, adopts the noun *khôra* to signify the inchoateness, the unrealed possibility, that precedes the creation of meaning by the user of language, whether this user is an auditor or author. Virginia Burrus, noting that Origen demonstrates his acquaintance with competing exegeses of the *Timaeus* in his answer to Celsus, correctly argues that his own position is one that affirms the absolute freedom of the logos in creation.⁷⁷ We may say, to complete the parallel, that just as the one who sows his words in the Derridean *khôra* speaks as rationally or irrationally as his fancy dictates,⁷⁸ so Origen's Creator requires no antecedent substrate and was not constrained by any external paradigm.

Origen is indeed one of the first proponents of creation out of nothing. The corpus of works ascribed to him contains the two earliest passages in the history of Western thought which entertain the possibility that there is no such thing as matter. In the *First Principles*, commenting on Aristotle's understanding of matter as a substrate for properties which it does not possess as a logical subject, he notes that this absence of properties has led some to maintain that the very notion of matter is incoherent (*First Principles* 4.4.7-8). This thesis is argued under the form of a Socratic dialogue in the compilation of extracts from his work which bears the title *Philokalia*.⁷⁹ Since it is also attributed to an otherwise unknown Maximus, it is probable that the latter was its true author, and that Origen was credited with its authorship because he was the first Christian of note who had favoured its conclusion.⁸⁰ Whatever we make of the attribution, we cannot deny that Origen posits a void before creation, at least in the logical sense of the word 'before'. It does not, however, follow for him that creation is a wholly unconditioned process, even for God, since according to his cosmogony the world is created not only 'out of' nothing but 'in' a beginning, and this beginning is none other than Christ the Logos.⁸¹ While we are not God's puppets, we cannot act unless he permits us to do so, and the result will be congruent both with his foreknowledge and with his will. If this is true of

⁷⁷ Virginia Burrus, *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics: Cosmologies, Saints, Things* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press 2019).

⁷⁸ Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999), 94.

⁷⁹ On *Philokalia* 24 see Mark J. Edwards, "Christians against Matter: A Bouquet for Bishop Berkeley", in Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus (eds), *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John Turner* (Leiden: Brill 2013), 569-80.

⁸⁰ For further discussion see T. D. Barnes, "Methodius, Maximus and Valentinus", *Journal of Theological Studies* 30, no. 1 (April 1979): 47-55. For Maximus the friend of Numenius (possibly but not probably, Maximus of Tyre) see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 17.

⁸¹ Origen, *First Principles* 1.2.1-3 etc., with P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 31-35.

all agents, it is true all the more of the prophet, the evangelist and the exegete, none of whom is worthy of trust unless he speaks in Christ.

Conclusion

Derrida's *pharmakos* is not Girard's scapegoat: one stands only for what has been excluded from the text by its interpreter, while the other represents that which has been more permanently excluded from society by contempt, vituperation and in the worst case, death without appeal. And since Girard purports to offer a true hermeneutic of history, he could hardly plead innocent to the charge of logocentrism. Nevertheless it would not be absurd to say that the textual *pharmakos* meets the social scapegoat in Origen's exegesis, the axiom of which is that the archetypal scapegoat, the Jesus of history, is also the invisible Word who at once informs, subverts and supersedes the specious reading of the biblical text. He discerns a false logocentrism in the Jews, who are so beholden to the letter of the Mosaic Law that they cannot grasp its spiritual intention,⁸² even when it is publicly embodied in the life and teaching of their own Messiah:

Was it impious to turn them away from corporeal circumcision, corporeal sabbaths, corporeal feasts, corporeal observance of the new moon and distinction between the clean and the unclean, and to turn the mind to the worthy, the true, the spiritual law of God?⁸³

Origen is replying here to the charge, which Celsus puts into the mouth of a Jew, that Christians have evaded the obligations of the Mosaic law by the artificial use of allegory (*Against Celsus* 2.4). We cannot suppose that Celsus or his mouthpiece would have been satisfied with the rejoinder that Paul had sanctioned the use of allegory at Galatians 4:24;⁸⁴ in his *First Principles*, however, Origen adds that the text of scripture is purposely sown with *skandala* or stumbling-blocks which forbid us to suppose that every law is to be applied, or every historical testimony believed, in its superficial sense.⁸⁵ Where but in Christ shall we find a calf without blemish?⁸⁶ Who will believe that God, with his own hands, fashioned coats of skin for Adam and Eve?⁸⁷ Once again the stone that the builders rejected becomes the cornerstone: the text that the typical reader passes over in haste is a clue to the deeper import of the Law.

Celsus himself, as a typical Greek, misses no chance to perpetuate the tyranny of mimesis, denouncing Christ as a charlatan and a coward, and failing to see (as he credits only his sufferings, not his miracles) that it was through his willing submission to his inferiors that he vanquished death and evil. The taking of sin upon him who knew no sin is at once a judgment on the proud and a corrective to the carnal understanding of the Law.⁸⁸

⁸² On the hidden intent of Moses see Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 6.3 (W. Baehrens (ed.), *Origenes Werke* VI (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1920), 364).

⁸³ *Against Celsus* 2.7 (P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke* 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 133.15-17).

⁸⁴ *Against Celsus* 2.7 (P. Koetschau (ed.), 130.4-5).

⁸⁵ Origen, *First Principles* 4.2.15 (P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke* V (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899), 321.5).

⁸⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.2 (284-85, Baehrens).

⁸⁷ For Origen's known pronouncements on Genesis 3.21 see Anders Lund Jacobsen, "Genesis 1-3 as a Source for the Anthropology of Origen", *Vigiliae Christianae* 62, no. 3 (January 2008): 213-32, at 223-29.

⁸⁸ Caroline P. Bammel (ed.), *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes, Buch 4-6* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1997), 383.

Therefore there came Jesus Christ the Son of God, and inasmuch as the *Law was made weak through the flesh, God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and out of sin condemned sin in the flesh* (Romans 8:3); indeed he *reconciled the world to God* (2 Cor. 5:19] in his flesh, destroying *the principalities and powers* of the tyrant as he *triumphed* over him in his own person. (Col. 2:14)

It is the wretched of the earth who will judge the earth, the inscription on the malefactor's cross that annuls his condemnation and ours. At the same time, we must not, in reading Origen through Girard, make a Girard of Origen. Of course the Christ of Origen is not always the afflicted and humiliated outlaw: he is also the Second Person of the Trinity, the creator of the world, the teacher and light of reason to both the redeemed and the unredeemed. To Derrida it is the essence of all discourse that can never become identical with its object, whereas for Origen the identity of the sign with the signified guarantees that the threefold sense of scripture corresponds to a threefold truth.⁸⁹ And the same Incarnation which entails, against Derrida, that the text is never parted from its object also permits the Logos, despite the protests of Girard, to enter the economy of mimesis as a victim and thereby overthrow it from within.

⁸⁹ It would be an interesting study to compare Origen with Hegel, or for that matter with Derrida's teacher Levinas. For a reading of Hegel in the light of a cognate tradition, see Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).