

**The Wisdom of Origen: Sophia Concepts in the Work of
Origen of Alexandria**



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Abstract: Short

Origen ranked wisdom as the highest achievement of Christian existence. This virtue characterised the initial prelapsarian condition and final bliss of human existence, and so significantly influenced how Origen understood the world and the soul's place in it. However, while the Trinitarian and Christological significance of wisdom within his thought has received significant scholarly attention, Origen's understand of the virtue of wisdom and its role in Christian life has been overlooked. This thesis argues that this concept provides a crucial lens through which to understand Origen's theological project, one through which we will trace the connections between not only Trinitarian and Christological considerations, but also Origen's anthropology, epistemology, apologetics, eschatology, pedagogy, and so on. Above all, the ideal of wisdom will be demonstrated to order Origen's conception of Christian life, orienting Christianity in an intellectual and mystical direction while also conditioning the present and graduated nature of the Christian community and the incremental and progressive character of Christian revelation. By examining this topic which sits within a nexus of interrelated subjects, this thesis will contribute to a wider understanding of a number of interrelated aspects of Origen's thought and will demonstrate that the inspired Christian sage is a crucial figure in his account of the God's revelatory and redemptive economy.

Abstract: Long

Significance and Originality

This thesis offers a detailed examination of the concept of wisdom in the work of Origen of Alexandria. This concept is a multifaceted one containing many different dimensions and meanings, referring to both the Son of God and an epistemic and ethical condition attainable by the created soul. While there has been some scholarly attention upon Origen's understanding of wisdom, most has focussed on its role in his Trinitarian and Christological theorising. A full examination of the concept in its entirety, particularly with regards to the virtue of wisdom possessed by the Christian sage, has been lacking. Given the high regard Origen has for the virtue of wisdom and the position it is given in his theology as the *arche* and *telos* of rational creation, the subject merits further attention.

Despite the significance Origen places on the concept of wisdom, the scholarly interest on this subject has been quite one-sided. Most interest has been focussed upon Origen's usage of wisdom as a Christological title applied to the Son and its role in Origen's protology and cosmology. This is a consequence of the two facts: firstly, that it is in his discussion of the Johannine prologue that Origen most directly examines this topic; and secondly, that Origen's usage of Prov. 8.22 in this context was an important innovation that was taken up in different ways by both sides of the fourth century Nicene Christological controversy. As a result, however, the characterisation of the virtue of wisdom and its place in the life of the Christian soul has remained largely unexamined. The most significant treatment of this topic is found in short ten-page subchapter of Henri Crouzel's *Origène et la Connaissance Mystique*.¹ This thesis, therefore, is the first extended study to focus upon the virtue of wisdom within Origen's work.

The interest of this study is not primarily lexical; nor is it primarily interested in Origen's homiletic or pedagogical praxis. While these subjects will be addressed, my investigations will focus upon how Origen conceives of wisdom and not upon the usage of the term σοφία and its cognates nor upon how he sought to acquire for himself or inculcate this virtue in his audience in practice. License will be taken to examine passages in which wisdom is not referenced if it is conducive to the exegesis of the topic as a whole. While this concept reoccurs throughout Origen's work and is frequently treated as the highest attainment of Christian life, Origen only rarely treats the subject directly, outside of

¹ Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Connaissance Mystique* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1961), 451-460.

his examinations of the relation of Word to Wisdom in Book I of the *Commentary on John* and in Book I of *Peri Archon*. Therefore, in order to examine this subject, this study proceeds by way of reconstructing Origen's thought from the surviving references within his extant work. Key themes re-emerge across this literature, placing wisdom at the centre of a nexus of interrelated concepts.

The course of this study will trace Origen's conception of wisdom from before the beginning of creation through to the end of all things. Starting with usage of the term Wisdom as a title of the Son of God and its role in the creation of the cosmos, we will examine how this same Son becomes the principle of reasoning within the soul and the manner in which this rationality opens the possibility of knowledge to all human beings, including those outside the Church. Our study will then lead back from creation to God, examining how Origen understands the process of deification in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, how the virtue of wisdom partakes of the eschaton, and the role of the Christian sage in the economy of revelation that leads the entire rational cosmos towards this end.

Given the importance and multivalence of the concept of wisdom in Origen, a monograph upon this subject will cast new light on a number of topics within his work, including his Trinitarian theology, Christology, epistemology, ethics, pedagogy, and asceticism. The exploration of such topics will naturally illuminate Origen's thought within the contexts of Greek philosophical *paideia* and of the Hellenistic Jewish context, both sapiential and apocalyptic, in which wisdom flourished. Over the course of this examination, while the similarities between Origen's work and those of Greek philosophers will be outlined and explained, the fundamentally biblical orientation of Origen's understanding of wisdom will become apparent. Particularly important throughout this thesis is the subject of pedagogy and by examining the concept of wisdom I shall help to situate Origen's theological project within a schema of pedagogical revelation, both in his conception of God and his economy and in his understanding of the ideal of Christian life.

List of Chapters

Introduction

In my introduction, I will first outline the importance of wisdom within Origen's thought and lay out some of the taxonomic and methodological considerations that will be important to the approach of the thesis, as well as reviewing some of the previous scholarship on this issue and the questions left unresolved by these works, which this study seeks to redress.

Chapter One – The Trinitarian Foundation of Wisdom

At the outset of the thesis proper, I will examine the Christological aspect of Wisdom and the role that it plays in Origen's understanding of the two relationships of Son to Father and of creation to Creator. Firstly, I shall explore the basis for Origen's Wisdom Christology within the contexts of Jewish Wisdom speculation and anti-Valentinian and anti-Gnostic polemics, as the vexed question of divine essence, subordinationism, and Origen's relation to fourth century orthodoxy. Secondly, this chapter will examine how Origen utilises the concept of personified Wisdom to explain the origin of cosmic multiplicity out of divine simplicity. Within this latter section, it will be seen how personified Wisdom-Logos contains within it all the principles on which Origen's metaphysics and epistemology depend.

Chapter Two – The Anthropological Foundation of Wisdom

Following on from the heavenly perspective of Chapter One, this chapter will outline how the virtue of wisdom is made possible by the nature of the rational soul. As an image of the divine Logos, the reason of the soul is the basis of intellection and free will. The relationship of the soul to the body and spirit and to the sensible cosmos will be discussed, framing human freedom as a dilemma between the influences of the body and the world and the spirit and God. Wisdom is only achieved if one aligns one's free rational faculty with the spirit. This anthropology and its emphasis on free will is explained according to Origen's refutation of Heracleon's Valentinian determinism.

Chapter Three – The Wisdom of the World

Origen's adoption of the biblical contrast between divine and human wisdom and its comparison with similar Greek distinctions will form the first section of this chapter. His understanding of the role of Greek paideia and certain reasoning arts in the formulation, dissemination, and defence of Christianity will be outlined, showing Origen to have an ambiguous appraisal of pagan and secular thought. In the latter half of the chapter, the origins of Greek and other non-Christian philosophies will be examined, including a consideration of the capabilities of uninspired human rational faculties. Origen will be shown to hold a certain degree of optimism concerning uninspired reason, appealing to Paul's Epistle to the Romans and Philo's doctrine of natural law.

Chapter Four – Christian Pedagogy and the Path to Wisdom

Origen situated the virtue of wisdom at the pinnacle of Christian existence, the endpoint of a life (and afterlife) that he characterises as a process of ongoing education. This progressive development

reflects both the dualistic outlook of Origen's metaphysics as outlined in Chapter One and his characterisation of the Church community as one of varied degrees of virtue and understanding. After examining these issues, the outline of Origen's ideal process of education and how this process inculcates wisdom in its subject will be the focus of this chapter, concentrating particularly on the prologue of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and Gregory's testimony in the *Thanksgiving Oration*. Comparison will be made with the educational practices of Greek philosophical schools and the spiritual and mystical dimension of knowledge in Origen's work will be highlighted.

Chapter Five – The Eschatological Orientation of Wisdom

Picking up from the discussion of the mystical aspect of the Song of Songs within Origen's curriculum, the eschatological orientation of the virtue of wisdom will be explored in greater detail. Origen's intellectual ideal is seen in his proposed end for all creation, the *apokatastasis*. The close connection between this doctrine and Origen's concept of wisdom will be examined in detail. The fulfilment of the virtue of wisdom will, it will be seen, only be completed after the resurrection, once our sensible and fleshly condition has been transcended. The non-linguistic, non-propositional, and mystical nature of ideal knowledge will be demonstrated by an examination of this eschatological condition.

Chapter Six – The Christian Sage and the Cosmos

The eschatological orientation of the virtue of wisdom raises interesting questions of the nature of the sage in the present life. If wisdom is only fulfilled in the *apokatastasis*, when all creation will be returned to the love and contemplation of God, how is this ideal meant to govern a soul in the radically different situation in which it is currently found. This problem is situated within the contexts of Greek ideals of becoming godlike and those of Christian doctrines of deification and of Origen's asceticism. The latter was closely connected by what Origen considered the *telos* of humankind, the contemplation of God, as a means of partially prefiguring the world to come. I will argue that while there remained a certain ambiguity in the sage's relationship to the body, to the world, and to society, Origen was able to resolve this tension to a far greater degree than his Platonist counterparts on account of the outward looking love of his God and his *kenosis* for the sake of those beneath him. This will focus on his understanding of the role of the perfected Christian as a pedagogue who, through their teaching, acts out of love for the less advanced. In this examination, the crucial role of the Christian sage in the economy of revelation and salvation will become clear. The created wiseman acts through his understanding of Wisdom-Logos to draw others closer to that same Wisdom, thus drawing the cosmos closer to that end which resembles the beginning – that is, God's Wisdom.

Conclusions

In the final words of this thesis, I shall draw together the findings of this research, demonstrate the scope of its contributions to the field of Origenian studies, and consider possible avenues on which future research might fruitfully proceed.

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Abbreviations

1. Collected Series

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
GCS	<i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
PTS	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i>
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
SVF	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>

2. The Works of Origen

<i>C Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>Com.Cant.</i>	<i>Commentary on the Song of Songs</i>
<i>Com.Jn.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Com.Matt.</i>	<i>Commentary on Matthew</i>
<i>Com.Rom.</i>	<i>Commentary on Romans</i>
<i>De Orat.</i>	<i>On Prayer</i>
<i>Dial.Hera.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Heraclides</i>
<i>Ep.Greg.</i>	<i>Epistle to Gregory</i>
<i>Ex.Mart.</i>	<i>Exhortation to Martyrdom</i>
<i>Frag.Eph.</i>	<i>Fragments on Ephesians</i>
<i>Frag.Jn.</i>	<i>Fragments on John</i>
<i>Frag.Lam.</i>	<i>Fragments on Lamentations</i>
<i>Frag.Luke.</i>	<i>Fragments on Luke</i>
<i>Frag.Matt.</i>	<i>Fragments on Matthew</i>
<i>Frag.Prov.</i>	<i>Fragments on Proverbs</i>
<i>Frag.Rom.</i>	<i>Fragments on Romans</i>
<i>Frag.1Cor.</i>	<i>Fragments on 1 Corinthians</i>

<i>Hom.Cant.</i>	<i>Homilies on the Song of Songs</i>
<i>Hom.Exod.</i>	<i>Homilies on Exodus</i>
<i>Hom.Ezek.</i>	<i>Homilies on Ezekiel</i>
<i>Hom.Gen.</i>	<i>Homilies on Genesis</i>
<i>Hom.Jer.</i>	<i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i>
<i>Hom.Josh.</i>	<i>Homilies on Joshua</i>
<i>Hom.Jud.</i>	<i>Homilies on Judges</i>
<i>Hom.Lev.</i>	<i>Homilies on Leviticus</i>
<i>Hom.Luke.</i>	<i>Homilies on Luke</i>
<i>Hom.Num.</i>	<i>Homilies on Numbers</i>
<i>Hom.Ps.</i>	<i>Homilies on Psalms</i>
<i>P.A.</i>	<i>Peri Archon</i>
<i>Philoc.</i>	<i>Philocalia</i>
<i>Ser.Matt.</i>	<i>Series of Commentaries on Matthew</i>
<i>Ser.Rom.</i>	<i>Series of Commentaries on Romans</i>

3. Other Primary Literature

<i>Aprocryphon of John</i>	<i>Apoc.Jn.</i>
<i>Alcinous, The Handbook of Platonism</i>	<i>Didask.</i>
<i>Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics</i>	<i>N.E.</i>
<i>Athenagoras, Embassy for the Christians</i>	<i>Legatio</i>
<i>Clement of Alexandria, Pedagogue</i>	<i>Paed.</i>
– <i>Protrepticus</i>	<i>Protr.</i>
– <i>Stromateis</i>	<i>Strom.</i>
<i>Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>	<i>V. P.</i>
<i>Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion</i>	<i>Pan.</i>
<i>Eusebius of Caesarea, Histoire Ecclésiastique</i>	<i>H.E.</i>
– <i>Preparation for the Gospel</i>	<i>P.E.</i>
<i>Gregory Thaumaturgus, Thanksgiving Oration to Origen</i>	<i>Orat.Pan.</i>
<i>Hippolytus of Rome, Refutation of All Heresies</i>	<i>Ref.</i>
<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>	<i>Hyp.Arch.</i>

Irenaeus of Lyons, <i>Adversus Haereses</i>	<i>Adv. Haer.</i>
Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology for the Christians</i>	<i>1st Apol.</i>
– <i>Second Apology for the Christians</i>	<i>2nd Apol.</i>
– <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>	<i>Dial. Tryp.</i>
Philo of Alexandria, <i>Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis</i>	<i>Leg. All.</i>
– <i>Every Good Man is Free</i>	<i>Quod Omnes</i>
– <i>On Abraham</i>	<i>De Abr.</i>
– <i>On Flight and Finding</i>	<i>De Fuga</i>
– <i>On Mating with the Preliminary Studies</i>	<i>De Congr.</i>
– <i>On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses</i>	<i>De Opif.</i>
– <i>On the Change of Names</i>	<i>De Mut.</i>
– <i>On the Giants</i>	<i>De Gig.</i>
Plato, <i>Epistles</i>	<i>Ep.</i>
– <i>Phaedrus</i>	<i>Phaedr.</i>
– <i>Republic</i>	<i>Rep.</i>
– <i>Symposium</i>	<i>Symp.</i>
– <i>Theatetus</i>	<i>Theaet.</i>
– <i>Timaeus</i>	<i>Tim.</i>
Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i>	<i>Enn.</i>
Plutarch, <i>Isis and Osiris</i>	<i>De Iside</i>
Porphyry, <i>Life of Plotinus</i>	<i>Vit. Plot.</i>
Tatian, <i>Oration Against the Greeks</i>	<i>Orat. Graec.</i>
Tertullian, <i>Against the Valentinians</i>	<i>Adv. Val.</i>
Theophilus, <i>To Autolytus</i>	<i>Ad Auto.</i>
<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>	<i>Tri. Trac.</i>

Introduction

1. The Pre-eminence of Wisdom

Now there are varieties of gifts (Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων) but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom (λόγος σοφίας) and to another the word of knowledge (λόγος γνώσεως) according to the same Spirit; to another faith (πίστις) by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another the working of powerful deeds; to another prophecy; to another the discernment of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Cor. 12.4-10)

This passage of Paul's Corinthian correspondence demonstrated to Origen of Alexandria the preeminent place of wisdom within Christian life. Always attentive to the minutiae of the scriptural text, he saw no accident in the placement of the various gifts that Paul enumerates. The order represents a hierarchy of value, firstly between the intellectual gifts – wisdom, gnosis, and faith – and secondly between practical gifts such as healing, miracles, and prophecy. Within the former category, it is the gift of wisdom that is located at the pinnacle.² Despite identifying this threefold hierarchy on a number of occasions, it is an unfortunate state of affairs that there is nowhere in his extant corpus in which Origen pursues this consideration in greater detail. In the *Commentary on John*, he tantalisingly states 'But concerning the difference between the meaning of wisdom and gnosis which are listed alongside one another, this is not presently the time to speak on this.'³ If he did ever return to this topic, his writings on the matter have not made it down to us.

The gift of wisdom is deeply intertwined with another aspect of Origen's thinking: Wisdom as a title of the Son of God. While this subject will be given full consideration in Chapter One, for now it is necessary to note that Origen considered Wisdom to be the first among the countless 'aspects' (ἐπινοΐαι) of Christ and one of the few aspects that captures the Son's being as he exists without reference to creation. Thus, Crouzel states:

Le Livre I du *Commentaire sur Jean* ne s'exprime pas davantage sur la vertu humaine de sagesse, participation au Fils-Sagesse et objet d'un charisme éminent de l'Esprit Saint selon 1 Co 12, 8- 9. Comme la Sagesse qui est le Fils se trouve au sommet de ses épinoiai, la sagesse

² See *C Cels.* 3.46 (SC 136, 110); 6.13 (SC 147, 210); *Com.Jn.* 13.354 (SC 222, 228-230); *Frag.1Cor.* 48 (4, 31-32).

³ *Com.Jn.* 2.157 (SC 120, 310).

qui est dans l'homme est la plus haute des vertus: vertu mystique par excellence dans son plus haut degré, la "sagesse dont on parle parmi les parfaits" selon 1 Co 2, 6-7.⁴

Already, we are encountering something of the, to draw upon a phrase of the Apostle Paul, 'much-variegated' (πολυποίκιλος – see Eph. 3.10) character of wisdom. The term can refer to a characteristic of God, to the manner of God's governance and regulation of the world and of the arc of history, to an virtue attained by rational creatures, and, in the later Hellenistic Jewish and Christian thought, to the divine person of pre-existent Wisdom or Christ himself.⁵ In order to examine the topic of wisdom, it will be necessary to distinguish between these various concepts, even while recognising the manner in which they can all be deeply intertwined. Within broad strokes, it will be useful to distinguish between usages of wisdom terminology in which the term *sophia* is used to refer to the Son of God and those in which the virtue of wisdom is indicated. In order to apply some conceptual clarity in this thesis, where discussion focusses on the former, the terms 'hypostasised Wisdom,' 'Wisdom as hypostasis,' 'Christological Wisdom,' or 'Wisdom' will be used. In the latter, the phrases 'the virtue of wisdom,' 'wisdom as a virtue,' or 'aretological wisdom' will be used. Where the meaning is unclear, where there is purposeful ambiguity, or where I refer to usage of wisdom concepts *tout court*, the term 'wisdom' without capitalisation will be employed.

2. Wisdom terminology

The word referred to in the verse of 1 Corinthians above is σοφία. This is not the only Greek term that could be translated as 'wisdom.' Φρόνησις is another common term for wisdom and the concept of σοφία was closely intertwined with those of φιλόσοφια and σόφισμα.⁶ While Socrates and Plato used the terms σοφία and φρόνησις interchangeably, by Origen's time, the latter had become associated with the virtue of reasoning in matters of action and is therefore commonly translated as 'practical wisdom' or 'prudence.' Thus, in his eighth *Homily on Jeremiah*, Origen states:

⁴ Henri Crouzel, "Les Dénominations du Christ," in *Origeniana Secunda*, ed. Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli (Roma: Edizioni Dell-Ateneo, 1980), 134.

⁵ See Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1: 287-289.

⁶ Uusimaki notes the close relationship between the figures of σοφιστής, φιλόσοφος, and σοφός in ancient Greek thought, while Annas highlights that in ancient philosophical discussions terms such as 'ὁ σοφός' could be used interchangeably with 'ὁ ἀγαθός.' See Elisa Uusimaki, "The Rise of the Sage in Greek and Jewish Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49, no. 1 (Nov 2018): 3; Julia Annas, "The Sage in Ancient Philosophy," in *Anthropine Sophia: Studi di Filologia e Storiografia Filosofica in Memoria di Gabriele Giannantoni*, ed. Francesca Alesse et al (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2008). 11.

For all these things, insofar as they are of God, are Christ. He is the σοφία of God; he is the power of God; he is the righteousness of God; he is sanctification; he is redemption; and in this way, he is the φρόνησις of God. But the substance is one, though there are many names for the differences in the ἐπινοίαις. For you do not understand a single thing concerning Christ when you understand him as σοφία and when you understand him as righteousness. For as σοφία, you consider the knowledge of divine and human things (τὴν ἐπιστήμην λαμβάνεις τῶν θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων), but as righteousness, the power that distributes to everyone what they deserve, and as sanctification, that which secures those who believe in and are dedicated to God in becoming holy. Thus, therefore, you understand him as φρόνησιν when he is knowledge of the good, the evil, and what is neither (ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν καὶ οὐθετέρων).⁷

Both the definitions of *sophia* and of *phronesis* given by Origen are standard definitions drawn from Stoic philosophy.⁸ It is with the concept of σοφία that this study is principally interested. It is this term that is found in Paul's correspondence to the Corinthian church, and it is by this word that the Hebrew *hokmah* is translated in the Septuagint. Not only is σοφία and its cognate σοφός far more common than φρόνησις and φρόνιμος in both the New Testament and the Septuagint,⁹ but, as a consequence, it is far more evidenced in Origen's extant Greek works.¹⁰

However, this thesis will not be a strictly lexical investigation. Origen's writing does not exhibit a tendency to technical terminology. Studying his work, one is struck by the apparent lack of harmony between a number of his statements. One famous example concerns his hermeneutics: does Origen endorse a bifold or trifold division of the meanings of Scripture? Or, concerning his partitioning of the Church, ought it be divided into two groups, three groups, or more? Origen's answer appears to be all of the above. While it is fair to describe his theological project as systematic in character, the manner in which he articulates his ideas is far from scholastic, typically dependent upon the details of the biblical text before him, and open to multiple, seemingly contradictory, expressions. One

⁷ *Hom. Jer.* 8.2 (SC 232, 356-358).

⁸ On the Stoic origin of the definition of σοφία, see René Brouwer, *The Stoic Sage: The Early Stoics of Wisdom, Sagehood, and Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Brouwer argues that the three parts of this formula – knowledge, divine things, and human things – reflect the three parts of the Stoic curriculum: logic, physics, and ethics (see pp. 18-41). However, by Origen's day, this formula was widespread enough that it would be wrong to suggest any such inference in Origen's usage.

⁹ According to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, σοφία appears 256 times in the Septuagint and 51 times in the New Testament, while σοφός is found 200 and 20 times respectively. By comparison, φρόνησις is found 62 times in the Septuagint and twice in the New Testament, with φρόνιμος appearing 62 times and 4 times respectively.

¹⁰ According to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, in Origen's surviving Greek works, there are 1321 occurrences of σοφία to 93 of φρόνησις, and 704 uses of σοφός compared with 93 instances of the use of φρόνιμος.

might say that Origen had a fundamental philosophical system and recurring values and tendencies but was not overly concerned with the precise manner in which they were expressed, so long as it captured the spirit of Scripture and stayed within his perception of the Christian rule of faith. This does, however, cause difficulties when studying particular elements of his thought, since various seemingly contradictory meanings can be applied to the same term in difficult locations, while in others the same ideas appear under different terminology.

For instance, Origen identifies wisdom in the *Homily on Jeremiah* quoted above in strictly epistemic terms as a domain of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). However, in his fifth *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Six*, he expands the scope of wisdom as follows:

Therefore, if we are always speaking Christ, if we are always meditating on his words, if we are keeping his precepts in our mouth, our mouth will worthily meditate on wisdom. Since this is not the only meditation of wisdom, if someone is able to teach or to investigate at length matters in the Church and to refute those to contradict it, this too is a work of wisdom, but more so in some and less so in others. In one, that they believe in the Wisdom of God is itself counted as wisdom; in another, the fact that they acquiescence to the wise and love the words of the wise is called wisdom, while for some the fact that they ask about wisdom is counted as wisdom.¹¹

In this text, the title of wisdom is given to a wide range of epistemic states and not only to the most perfect, and even includes the states of desiring intellectual and epistemic improvement and of following the teachings of those that possess understanding. In the *Commentary on John*, Origen makes clear that terms such as ‘wisdom’ can be used in their proper sense (κυρίως) and in a loose manner (καταχρηστικῶς).¹² In a strict sense, there is no imperfection in the virtue of wisdom nor in any other virtue, but in a loose sense a wise person can progress from relative to greater wisdom.¹³ In fact, it is only in the latter sense that anyone but Christ can be declared wise in this life.¹⁴

The lexicological problem is further compounded by the state of the surviving Origenian corpus, since much of it survives only in the translations of Rufinus of Aquileia, composed in the fourth and early fifth centuries. His work as a translator does not display the scholarly standards expected of translations in the modern era. His work attempts to capture the essence and structure of Origen’s arguments but is imprecise in translating terminology and sentence structure. Scholarly opinion on

¹¹ *Hom.Ps.36* 5.1 (SC 411, 224-226).

¹² *Com.Jn.* 32.179 (SC 385, 264).

¹³ *Com.Jn.* 32.178 (SC 385, 262-264).

¹⁴ See, for instance, *Com.Jn.* 10.298-306 (SC 157, 566-570). The eschatological aspect of aretological wisdom is treated in Chapter Five.

Rufinus and his translations has warmed somewhat from the distrust demonstrated by Koetschau's edition of *Peri Archon*, and I follow in the more positive appraisal found in the works of Edwards, Ramelli, and others, who tend to view Rufinus as an inexact but rarely maliciously duplicitous translator.

Further problems arising out of Rufinus's self-confessed editorial methodology are more localised to issues of fourth century controversy. Defending his method of translations, Rufinus wrote:

We have demonstrated by clear proofs, I believe, that his books have been corrupted in many places by heretics and malicious people... Therefore, wherever we found something in his books against that which had been defined by him piously in another place concerning the Trinity, we have omitted it as adulterated and alien, or presented it according to that rule which we frequently find affirmed by him.¹⁵

While Rufinus states that his editorial activities only consisted of excising or revising Origen's words in accordance with his statements elsewhere, it is very possible, even when taken at his word, that Rufinus has done injury to the complexities of Origen's thought on matters in which his orthodoxy was questioned. Even admitting that for the most part Rufinus captures the spirit if not the precise letter of Origen's work, caution will therefore need to be taken when handling translated material particularly concerning Trinitarian matters, an area on which Origen's reputation suffered in the fourth century when subjected to later post-Nicene standards of orthodoxy. This is will important to consider when examining Origen's understanding of the relation of hypostasised Wisdom to the Father in Chapter One.

While considering sources, I also note the vast assemblages of Greek catenae attributed to Origen. The majority of those collected by Migne in the *Patrologia Graeca* series are of dubious provenance, and even those that are considered genuine are often little more reliable on Origen's precise thought and argumentation than Rufinus, as Heine demonstrates with regards to the catena fragments on John.¹⁶ Given sheer volume of these catenae and their, in the best case, imprecision, if not outright unreliability, I have used this form of evidence sparingly. While a fuller investigation of this source material would be a useful endeavour, for the sake of time, space, and simplicity, I have restricted my research to the firmer ground of Origen's extant Greek works and Rufinus's translations.

¹⁵ P.A. Ruf.pref. 3 (SC 252, 70-72). Also, see Rufinus, *Apology 7* (PL 21, 626-627); Rufinus, *On the Falsification of the Books of Origen 7-8* (SC 464, 296-306).

¹⁶ See Ronald Heine, "Can the Catena Fragments of Origen's Commentary on John be Trusted?", *Vigiliae Christianae* 40, no. 2 (1986): 118-134.

While led by Origen's usage of the terms σοφία and σοφός, translated *sapientia* and *sapiens* in the Latin translations of Rufinus and Jerome, as stated already, my interest in this study focussed upon the concepts expressed by these words and so shall not be bound solely to those passages in which they are found. Certain texts in which Origen treats the concept of wisdom directly, such as the first book of the *Commentary on John* and chapter three of the third book of *Peri Archon*, and the usage of certain scriptural passages concerning wisdom that exerted particular influence on his thought, such as Prov. 8, Wis. 7, and 1 Cor. 1-2, have received particular focus. However, the ideas that are found in these places and their interconnections have been pursued even where the concept of wisdom is not explicitly invoked by Origen.

The problems facing the study of this subject are not limited to Origen's terminology but also in the fluidity with which Origen utilises his taxonomical schemes. Having noted the variety of meanings contained within the concept of wisdom, it is important to bear in mind that these meanings are not clearly delineated from one another. Origen freely shifts between the different meanings of 'wisdom.'¹⁷ For instance, the passage from the *Homilies on Jeremiah* quoted above, Origen shifts without signal from discussing Christ as the Wisdom of God to the Stoic formulation of the nature of wisdom as a form of knowledge available to humankind.¹⁸ This naturally raises a problem when trying to analyse the usage of wisdom concepts in his work. Where one encounters a reference to wisdom in Origen's work, how are we to know to what it refers? The approach taken in this thesis has been largely contextual. In certain instances, the referent is clear. For instance, on occasions in which Origen is utilising scriptural passages that personify Wisdom, such as the usage of Prov. 8.22 in the *Commentary on John*, the meaning is Christological. Where he refers to the 'wisdom spoken among the perfect' (1 Cor. 2.6), the meaning is usually aretological. Wisdom language is interpreted according to the factors such as these. Does a certain reference appear in conjunction with other Christological titles, or is it attributed to Jesus, or is it utilised to interpret a passage with clearly Trinitarian or Christological concerns? Is the wisdom terminology found within a discussion of epistemic considerations or of virtues, or does it cite from scriptural passages which concern the possession of wisdom by human beings? Of course, the two meanings are deeply interconnected and naturally there is a certain degree of reciprocal implication which will be kept in mind throughout this thesis. A study of any virtue in Origen's work is also a study of Christ, the totality of all virtues.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Henri Crouzel, *Connaissance Mystique*, 452-453; Alistair H. B. Logan, "Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology," 124-125.

¹⁸ See also *C Cels.* 3.72 (SC 136, 162).

¹⁹ See Chapter One.

3. *Wisdom, the Contemplative Virtue*

What does it mean to call someone wise? Certainly, it involves knowledge and understanding of some kind. However, would we describe a scientist or engineer as wise? Perhaps – there are certainly wise scientists and engineers to be found – but not necessarily. In contemporary English parlance, ‘wisdom’ refers above all to experience and good judgement. It has a distinctively practical connotation. As Legaspi states: ‘wisdom as we commonly conceive it concerns action as well as belief. It is animated specifically by the notion that life’s meaning can be sought and (at least partially) discerned by humans who pursue it correctly. Once gained, wisdom functions as a guide for living well and preserving the good life over time.’²⁰

Similarly, in the ancient world, both Greek and Jewish, wisdom was understood to refer not only to a body of knowledge but also an intellectual perspective or, to utilise Pierre Hadot’s formula with regards to Ancient Greek philosophy, a way of life and a matter of ‘savoir-faire.’²¹ Jewish wisdom literature is replete with practical advice and evinces a worldview which James Crenshaw describes vis-à-vis the book of Proverbs as a ‘way of looking at things [that] begins with humans as the fundamental point of orientation. It asks what is good for men and women and it believes that all essential answers can be learned from experience.’²² Wisdom is an intellectual-ethical endeavour; a virtue in the truest sense of the word. While in ancient Greece and Israel there were competing visions of what truly made one a sage, there was no doubt that such a person would be an exemplar of proper conduct.

This was no less true of Origen. The pre-eminent sage in his thought, Jesus Christ, was understood not only as the prime example of every virtue but was considered to be those very virtues himself. Similarly, other biblical figures considered sages by Origen – Hebrew patriarchs, Moses, the prophets, the disciples, Paul, and so on – are models whose manners of action he urged his audience to emulate. While in our author’s mind neither could in the strictest sense exist without the other, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of practical and contemplative virtue. We have already noted the contrasting Stoic definitions of σοφία and φρόνησις. This distinction goes back to Aristotle, who commended σοφία as the summit of contemplative life and φρόνησις as the ideal virtue displayed in practical matters.²³ Origen routinely contrasts the two in his writing, even while

²⁰ Michael Legaspi, *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

²¹ Pierre Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 39.

²² James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 18.

²³ In *N.E.* 5.5.7 (*LCL* 73, 338), Aristotle defined φρόνησις as ‘rational a state of mind which has the truth, concerning action with regards to human goods,’ while in *Metaphysics* 982a5-982b27 (*LCL* 271, 8-14), he

affirming that the truly virtuous person cannot exist without either of the two. In his figurative exegesis of the Exodus from Egypt, Origen notes that the Israelites could not be led out of Egypt without the guidance of both Moses and Aaron. As the head of the priesthood and the man responsible for making sacrifices to God, Aaron represents works. Moses's knowledge of the law represents knowledge of the divine.²⁴ Both are required to achieve perfection. Similarly, Origen states that 'you can take Martha as action (τὴν πράξιν), while Mary represents contemplation (τὴν θεωρίαν). For the mystery of agape is removed from the active life, if the teaching and exhortation to action does not aim for contemplation; for neither action nor contemplation exist without the other.'²⁵

However, it will become clear throughout this study that Origen views contemplation as superior to virtuous practice. While 'neither action nor contemplation exist without the other,' it is the former that aims at the latter, rather than the other way around. Both are highly valued but one is at least in part valued as a means, the other as an end in itself. As the greatest spiritual gift, therefore, Origen conceives of wisdom in intellectual and contemplative rather than practical terms. In addition to his appeals to the Stoic definition,²⁶ wisdom is frequently characterised in conjunction with nouns such as ἀλήθεια, δόγμα, ἐπιστήμη, θεώρημα, and νόημα, all of which demonstrate the epistemic and contemplative character of the virtue of wisdom. In the *Commentary on John* he identifies wisdom as 'the structure of the contemplation and thoughts of all things' (τὴν σύστασιν τῆς περὶ τῶν ὅλων θεωρίας καὶ νοημάτων), as the 'system of thoughts' (συστήματος τῶν νοημάτων) which undergird creation, and as the 'furnishment and demonstration' (ἡ κατασκευὴ αὐτῆς καὶ ἡ ἀπόδειξις) of truth.²⁷ These statements and the Stoic definition highlight the totalising and systemic nature of the knowledge identified under the name of 'wisdom.' Human things, divine things, and their causes are noticeably broad categories capable of engulfing almost all phenomena. The virtue of wisdom in Origen's work is, therefore, understood above all in epistemic terms and so questions of epistemology and the development of reasoning skills will be central concerns of this thesis.

argues that σοφία deals primarily with knowledge of principles and first causes, and is contrasted with knowledge directed towards productive purposes.

²⁴ *Hom.Num.* 27.6 (SC 461, 296-298).

²⁵ *Frag.Luke* 171 (GCS 49, 298).

²⁶ For other occasions, see *C.Cels.* 3.72 (SC 136, 162); *Com.Matt.* 17.2 (GCS 40, 578); *Frag.Prov.* (PG 13, 17).

²⁷ *Com.Jn.* 1.111 (SC 120, 118-120); 1.113 (SC 120, 120); 2.40 (SC 120, 232).

4. *Wisdom in Origen Scholarship*

Despite the outstanding importance Origen places upon the gift of ‘the word of wisdom’, scholarly studies upon Origen’s understanding of wisdom have largely focussed upon the role Origen gave to hypostasised Wisdom within his Trinitarian theology and his doctrine of creation.²⁸ This is not entirely surprising, given its importance in these areas, Origen’s foregrounding of this Christological title in *Peri Archon* 1.2, and the centrality of Prov. 8.22 – a key verse in Book I of the *Commentary on John* – in the Christological controversies of the fourth century. The most substantial study on hypostasised Wisdom in recent years is found in Tzamalikos’s *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time and Anaxagoras, Origen, and Neoplatonism*. While he does touch upon the virtue of wisdom, this subject is examined passingly through the lens of Trinitarian and protological considerations.²⁹ Alistair Logan and Miyako Demura also both offer valuable contributions on Origen’s Christological usage of Wis. 7.25-26.³⁰

Comparatively little attention has been given to his understanding of the virtue of wisdom and its role in the life of the Christian soul and the Church. Often, the concept is referred to with little elaboration or simple affirmation that Origen esteemed wisdom highly as an intellectual virtue. The most extensive study on aretological wisdom is found in a brief section of Henri Crouzel’s *Origène et la Connaissance Mystique*.³¹ Here, he draws out the relations of the virtue of wisdom to *gnosis*, *episteme*, Scripture, and the Christian life. Antonio Cacciari also makes an excellent though brief examination of Origen’s usage of Wis. 7.17-21 concerning the structure of the cosmos and the various sciences that allow one to proceed from thence to understanding of divine matters. While important contributions, these short studies should serve only as an introduction to a subject which Origen characterised as especially valuable.

Finally, Michel Fédou’s *La Sagesse et le Monde* gives significant consideration of Origen’s understanding of wisdom.³² As a Christological study, its focus is not directly on the virtue of

²⁸ For two more recent examples, examined in Chapter One, see Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis,” *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no.3 (2012): 337-345 and Stephen E. Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 153-157.

²⁹ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 51-56; Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Anaxagoras, Origen, and Neoplatonism: The Legacy of Anaxagoras to Classical and Late Antiquity* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 837.

³⁰ Alistair H. B. Logan, “Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology,” in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Henri Crouzel and Richard P. C. Hanson (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 123-129; Miyako Demura, “Origen on Sophia in *Contra Celsum*: The Double Understandings of the *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:27,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 174-178.

³¹ Henri Crouzel, *Connaissance*, 451-460. The passages of the rest of this monograph also touch upon this topic in important ways but this is the only sustained treatment in the text which treats wisdom as its primary subject.

³² Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde: Essai sur la Christologie d’ Origène* (Paris: Desclée, 1995).

wisdom. However, Fédou broadens his consideration from the Trinitarian and protological aspects of hypostasised Wisdom and examines in detail the role of the Son within the economy of salvation and revelation. Consequently, he puts a greater emphasis than Tzamalikos upon humankind's reception of divine Wisdom and the relation of hypostasised Wisdom to Christian knowledge, understanding, and pedagogy. However, his focus is still firmly Christological in scope.

There is clearly a gap in the scholarship that this thesis seeks to fill. While there is some overlap between the considerations of Fédou's study and my own, this thesis offers a fresh perspective by focussing first and foremost on aretological wisdom and the process from creaturely ignorance or faith to wisdom, rather than the drama of the Word's Incarnation; a bottom-up and individually grounded perspective in comparison to Fedou's trans-historical, top-down analysis. In the course of this study, I shall locate the concept of wisdom within a nexus of interrelated concepts embracing Trinitarian theology, Christology, cosmology, epistemology, pedagogy, ascetics, and eschatology, demonstrating the importance of the virtue of wisdom within Origen's theological framework, as the start and *telos* of Christian existence.

Chapter One: The Trinitarian Foundation of Wisdom

In the Introduction, we have already noted the fluidity Origen exhibited in his utilisation of wisdom terminology, shifting without acknowledgement between its aretological and Christological senses. This fluidity reflects the relation of this virtue to the Son of God. Origen can move with such ease between the two because the virtue of wisdom depends upon the Son as hypostasised Wisdom and upon participation in this aspect of his being. As Origen states in Book I of the *Commentary on John*, ‘each of the wise, to the extent that they possess wisdom, by this much do they participate in Christ (τοσοῦτον μετέχει Χριστοῦ), since he is wisdom.’³³ All knowledge is sustained by hypostasised Wisdom since God made ‘all things in wisdom’ (Ps. 103.24 LXX).³⁴

That this virtue is ontologically grounded within the Godhead should come as no surprise. Origen, after all, brooked no possibility of another principle that existed parallel to God, and so ultimately all things that exist depend upon God for their existence and their nature.³⁵ His position was unlike other heterodox or heretical sects – most notably Marcionism and Manichaeism, and to a lesser extent certain Gnostic sects³⁶ such as Valentinianism – who did posit a second, opposing principle. In one sense, therefore, the virtue of wisdom is simply another example of the dependence of all things on God. However, the specificity of the dependency upon the particular Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, and on a particular aspect of the Son – that is, as divine Wisdom – defines how Origen envisions wisdom as a whole and its role in Christian life. It is worthwhile, therefore, at the beginning of this thesis, to examine how Origen understands the divine Son to ground ontologically the virtue with which we are concerned.

³³ *Com.Jn.* 1.246 (SC 120, 182).

³⁴ *Ibid.* 1.244 (SC 120, 180). The context of the passage makes quite clear that ‘wisdom’ in this case mean hypostasised Wisdom.

³⁵ Things that do not have true existence – privatives such as sin and evil –, however, do not find their ontological foundation within the Godhead. See *Com.Jn.* 2.91-96 (SC 120, 266-270); Mark Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24-25.

³⁶ The terminology of ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘Gnostic’ has received understandable critique in recent scholarship as a post-hoc category of later scholarship and one that fails to capture the subtleties of the various groups and tendencies placed under that umbrella. In spite of these well-grounded criticisms, perhaps out of habit and convenience as much as anything else, the term continues to find use. Bearing in mind these caveats and guided in part by Origen’s own vagueness in identifying the different groups which he contested, I have also continued to utilise the term. For the fullest argument against the use of this category, see Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). For alternative positions, see Birger A. Pearson, “Gnosticism as a Religion,” in *Was There a Gnostic Religion?*, ed. Antti Marjanen (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005), 81-101; Antti Marjanen, “Gnosticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203-220; Roelof van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7-12.

In order to do so, it will be necessary in this chapter to examine the relationship between the Father and the Son, and between these two divine persons and the cosmos and the act of creaturely intellection. As we shall see, Origen found in the Jewish Wisdom tradition's figure of personified Wisdom the scriptural material from which to construct his Trinitarian ontology and his doctrine of creation. Central to this examination is the question of the relationship between the one and the many and the problem of how a diverse and variegated cosmos could arise from a simple first principle, as well as the related question of the relationship of intellectual and spiritual matters to corporeal reality. Over the course of this discussion, the centrality of hypostasised Wisdom in the movement from unity to multiplicity and in the mediation of divinity to creation will become apparent. These problems also drew considerable attention within Middle-Platonist circles as well as within many of the 'Gnostic' schools that made up what John Dillon described as the 'underworld of Platonism.'³⁷ Origen's understanding of the relations of hypostasised Wisdom to the Father and to the cosmos will therefore be examined in conversation with these concurrent intellectual movements.

1. *Wisdom Christology*

Despite the freedom Origen feels to identify the virtue of wisdom with the second person of the Trinity, in the third century C.E. this identification was far from universal. 'Wisdom pneumatology' was at least as common in the first two centuries C.E.³⁸ Irenaeus, Theophilus, and Athenagoras all exhibit this tendency which found support in the close association between Wisdom and the Spirit in the Jewish wisdom tradition, especially in the Wisdom of Solomon.³⁹ This is not to say that the only tradition of interpreting the figure of Wisdom was pneumatological; Philo, Justin, and Clement of Alexandria all used 'Wisdom' as a title for the Word or the Son.⁴⁰ However, the association was far from predetermined in this period.

³⁷ John Dillon, *The Middle-Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 384.

³⁸ Michel René Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008): 178.

³⁹ See *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.3 (SC 100, 632); *Ad Auto.* 2.10 (PTS 40, 53); *Legatio* 10 (SC 379, 100-102). On the association of Wisdom and Spirit, see Wis. 1.6; 7.7; 7.22; Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 229-230; Chrysostome Larcher, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: J. Gabalsa, 1969), 361-376; Michel René Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," 177-178.

⁴⁰ On Philo's identification of the Logos with Sophia, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969), 23; Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1962), I

Despite this influential strain of Wisdom pneumatology, the personification of Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom tradition was understood in a thoroughly Christological manner throughout Origen's work. In doing so, in the words of Michel René Barnes, Origen made an important contribution to the development of Christian Trinitarian theology by developing a 'Wisdom' account of the Godhead and the generation of the Son from the Father.⁴¹ Origen found clear scriptural support in his Wisdom-Christology from 1 Cor. 1.24, 30.⁴² The particular reasons Origen followed one line of Wisdom theology rather than another can only be a matter of speculation. Origen never in his extant writing considers any other possible attribution for this biblical epithet. Michel René Barnes suggests that Origen's Christological interpretation was a corollary of his rejection of Wisdom pneumatology and its possible exaltation of the Spirit above the Son.⁴³ Stephen Waers, suggests that Origen foregrounded the importance of Wisdom Christology as part of an anti-monarchian polemic. The emphasis upon the Son as God's Wisdom could be used in order to undermine a certain form of Logos Christology utilised by Monarchian theologians to suggest that the divine Word was only an economic aspect of the Father's activity.⁴⁴ He does not suggest that this was the reason Origen ascribed this title to the Son over the Spirit in the first instance, only that it explains the emphasis given. Nonetheless, if accepted, his argument would certainly give further reason for his rejection of Wisdom pneumatology. In fact, Waers' argument could be strengthened by giving due attention to the difference in biblical sources available to our writer for these Christological identifications. To a far greater degree than those texts such as the Johannine prologue which utilise the title of Logos, Jewish Wisdom literature emphasises the unique personal aspect of Wisdom. The personification of Wisdom was not only unique to the Jewish canon but also unique within it. As Roland Murphy says, 'Justice and peace may kiss (Ps. lxxxv 11 [10]), and alcohol may be a rowdy (Prov. xx 1), but only wisdom is given a voice that resembles the Lord's (Prov. viii 35, 'whoever finds me finds life').'⁴⁵ This would doubtless be useful in emphasising the genuine subsistence of the Son against Monarchian theologies.

There is no doubt some truth in both these suggestions. However, I argue that Origen's identification – drawing upon the strand of Wisdom-Christology that was flourishing in second and third century

253-261. For Justin, see *Dial. Tryp.* 61.1-3 (PTS 47, 174-176). For Clement, see *Protr.* 1.5.4 (SC 2, 58); 8.80.3 (SC 2, 146); *Paed.* 1.6.2 (SC 70, 118); *Strom.* 1.88.8-1.90.1 (SC 30, 116); 1.169.4 (SC 30, 168); 7.7.4 (SC 428, 54).

⁴¹ Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 111.

⁴² See *P.A.* 1.2.1 (SC 252, 112); *Com.Jn.* 1.107 (SC 120, 116); 1.140 (SC 120, 132); 1.243 (SC 120, 180); and so on.

⁴³ Michel René Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," 183.

⁴⁴ Stephen E. Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen's Early Trinitarian Theology*, 153-157. See also, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23 n.33.

⁴⁵ Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," 222.

Alexandria⁴⁶ – and the eminence he gave to this aspect of the Son was motivated primarily by the utility that the figure of Wisdom as preserved in the Jewish tradition had for expressing the respective relationships between God, the Son, and creation and in explaining the development of multiplicity from the simple divine first principle. The Spirit could not have taken the same role given its role in Origen’s anthropology and doctrine of grace, mentioned in the next chapter, and also possibly because of the cosmological associations already applied to the term ‘pneuma’ within Stoic and Platonist cosmology.

Within the Jewish tradition, Murphy suggests, the literary device of personifying Wisdom was utilised to emphasise her divinity, giving her a voice equivalent to that of God himself.⁴⁷ This divinity is expressed in a number of ways, not least her pre-existence. Thus, Prov. 8.22-23 states:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

The divine representation of Wisdom reaches its apotheosis in the Wisdom of Solomon:

For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation (ἀπόρροια) of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
For she is an effulgence (ἀπαύγασμα) of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness (Wis. 7.25-26).

These texts provided a firm scriptural basis on which Origen builds his understanding of the Son’s generation from the Father. The Christological doctrine of *Peri Archon* I.2 is presented in large part as an explanation of this passage of Wis. 7 and the words of Heb 1.3 which this passage clearly influenced.

Origen, however, exceeds the scope of his source material by interpreting their statements in ontological terms. While texts such as Wis. 7 portray a relationship between Wisdom and God in

⁴⁶ Alistair H. B. Logan, “Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology,” 128-129.

⁴⁷ Roland E. Murphy, “The Personification of Wisdom,” 231-233.

terms that border on identity, the emphasis in these texts is not on ontology but on soteriology. The importance of Wisdom's divinity is that she expresses God's divine presence and activity in the world, in history, and to nation and person.⁴⁸ As Ilaria Ramelli notes, Origen frequently utilises Heb. 1.3 in conjunction with Wis. 7.25-26 to develop his understanding of the Son's hypostatic existence and generation from the Father.⁴⁹ As the image of the Father's goodness and as all the other descriptors that Wis. 7 and Heb. 1.3 apply to him, the Son exists only by derivation from the Father:

Truly, as we said earlier, we say that the Wisdom of God has her subsistence (*subsistentiam*) nowhere else than in him who is the beginning of all things, from whom she is also born (*ex quo et nata est*).⁵⁰

However, his Wisdom is the splendour of his light, not only according to its being light but also according to its being everlasting light, so that his Wisdom is eternal and an eternal splendour. If this is properly understood, it manifestly shows that the subsistence (*subsistentia*) of the Son derives from the Father himself (*ab ipso patre descendit*), but not temporally (*non temporaliter*) nor from any other beginning than, as we have said, from God himself.⁵¹

The language of *subsistentia*, Rufinus's translation of the Greek ὑπόστασις grounds the discussion firmly within an ontological context.

Wisdom is 'not something unsubstantial' (*insubstantium*) but 'subsists substantially' (*substantialiter subsistentem*) as a ὑπόστασις.⁵² Origen characterises Wisdom as the Father's own mind, containing within itself the thoughts, ideas, and plans of God. However, just as the Word of God is not a verbal expression of syllables, his Wisdom is not merely the assemblage of his mental images in a manner comparable to the thoughts in the human mind.⁵³ Rather, Wisdom is an 'incorporeal hypostasis'

⁴⁸ Larcher notes this in connection with the Wisdom of Solomon. The close association of Wisdom with Spirit is a way in which pseudo-Solomon denotes the activity of divine intelligence at work. C. Larcher, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969), 368.

⁴⁹ Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis," 337-345. Also, see Mark Edwards, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homoousios* to the Son?," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49, no. 2 (1998): 666-668. On Origen's interpretation of Wis.7 in *Peri Archon*, see Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 257-269.

⁵⁰ *P.A.* 1.2.5 (SC 252, 120).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 1.2.11 (SC 252, 138).

⁵² *Ibid.* 1.2.2 (SC 252, 112).

⁵³ *Com.Jn.* 1.151-152 (SC 120, 136-138); 1.243 (SC 120, 180). Stephen Waers suggests Origen's anti-monarchian intentions are discernible here: the concept that the Word was a verbal expression of the Father could be used to argue that the Son was only an epiphenomenal aspect of the Father. See Stephen Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen's Early Trinitarian Theology*, 146-152. Though, even here, Origen needs to caveat the term *sophia* to forestall any possible monarchian interpretation by distinguishing the generation of God's mental states from those of created beings.

(ἀσώματων ὑπόστασιν) and a 'living Wisdom' (ἔμψυχον σοφίαν).⁵⁴ It is in this sense that the Son 'comes to be, subsisting in its own properties,' a distinct entity from the Father.⁵⁵ As Ramelli argues, Origen was an innovator among Christians theologians in using the terminology of ὑπόστασις to refer to the individual substance of the persons of the Trinity, refuting those who would only draw conceptual distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ As Origen states in Book X of the *Commentary on John*:

They believe by these sayings that the Son does not differ from the Father in number but, being one not only in essence (οὐσίᾳ) but also in reality (ὑποκειμένῳ), that both are one, distinguished according to different aspects (ἐπινοίας) but not according to their subsistence (ὑπόστασιν).⁵⁷

Clearly, 'hypostasis' was not the sole term used to refer to the individual existence of the Son. We will see below that Origen locates these conceptual distinctions (ἐπινοίας) primarily within the hypostasis of the Son.⁵⁸

This second divine actor, genuinely and ontologically distinct from the Father, takes on an important demiurgic role in Origen's doctrine of creation. Thus, Origen could safeguard the transcendence of the Father. While happy to use the biblically mandated language of creation (κτίζω, κτίσμα, etc.) to describe the Son,⁵⁹ Origen draws upon the depiction of personified Wisdom in Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon to characterise Wisdom as the primary actor in the creation of the cosmos. Throughout the Jewish Wisdom tradition, personified Wisdom is closely associated with God's creative activity. There are two ways in which wisdom's role in creation is conceptualised. Personified Wisdom- is sometimes presented as the creative agent, while at other

⁵⁴ *Com.Jn.* 1.115 (SC 120, 122); 1.244 (SC 120, 180).

⁵⁵ *P.A.* 1.2.9 (SC 252, 130).

⁵⁶ Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis." In *Com.Jn.* 2.75 (SC 120, 258), Origen explicitly identifies the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three hypostases and thus ontologically and not merely conceptually distinguished from one another. Logan suggests a possible Gnostic influence behind this terminological development but the evidence is slim and the case uncertain. See Alistair H. B. Logan, "Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology," 128-129.

⁵⁷ *Com.Jn.* 10.246 (SC 157, 530). See Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen's Anti-Subordinationism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no.1 (2011): 27.

⁵⁸ See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 2002), 132 on the philosophical background of this distinction.

⁵⁹ See Prov. 8.22, in which personified Wisdom declares that God 'created' (ἔκτισέν) her as the beginning of his works. Furthermore, in this period, there was little distinction to be found between γέννησις and κτίσις. See Mark Edwards, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homoousios* to the Son?," 666.

times God's wisdom is the governing principle by which he creates.⁶⁰ The latter is evident in Prov. 3.19 and Sir. 1.9:

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens. (Prov. 3.19)

It is he who created her;
He saw her and took her measure;
He poured her out upon all his works. (Sir. 1.9)

God is the active party in these verses, while wisdom is 'poured out' upon all creation. Wisdom is seeded into creation: it is in the world, part of its plan and structure, though not identical with it.

Elsewhere, personified Wisdom is presented as the agent of the creative process. It is possible that this is first seen in Prov. 8 when Wisdom states that she 'was beside him as an *'mwn*, I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,' though it is unclear how best to interpret *'mwn*. Possible suggestions include 'artisan' or 'craftsman,' a 'nursling' or 'young child,' or a 'scribe' or 'confidant.'⁶¹ While no definitive argument has been provided concerning the meaning of the Hebrew term, the Septuagint's translation of the term – ἀρμόζουσα, denoting the act of fitting together, especially in terms of a joiner's work – suggests that the interpretation of Wisdom taking a creative role was current in late antiquity. Certainly, this is how the Wisdom of Solomon came to portray Wisdom, describing her as the 'begetter' (γενέτιν) of all good things (Wis. 7.12), as the 'the fashioner of all things' (ἡ πάντων τεχνίτις) (Wis. 7.22), and the 'fashioner of what exists' (αὐτῆς τῶν ὄντων τεχνίτις) (Wis. 8.6). Wisdom's creative agency could rationalise the meaning of her pre-existence. She is established before the creation of the cosmos in order to fulfil this demiurgic function. As we shall see in detail below, Origen placed a great deal of importance upon the creative role of the Son vis-à-vis his function as hypostasised Wisdom, demonstrating both aspects outlined above: Wisdom as the structure and regulatory principle of creation and Wisdom as the creative agent.

⁶⁰ Roland Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," 224; Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Creation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1) (1985), 6-9; Roland Murphy, "What and Where is Wisdom?," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4, no. 5 (1977): 283-287; Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. Mark Petering (Harrisburg, P.A.: Trinity Press International, 1972), 148-176.

⁶¹ See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? חָכְמָה and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8,22-31," *Biblica* 80, no. 3 (1999): 391-400; Michael V. Fox, "'Amon Again,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 4 (1996): 699-702.

2. The Generation of the Son and 'Subordinationism'

Having noted Origen's ontological reading of the Jewish Wisdom tradition and his subsistent generation from the Father, how Origen vouchsafed the Son's divinity in spite of the distinction in individual existence has long been a subject of dispute. His statement that 'that the subsistence of the Son derives from the Father himself' could be equally said of anything that exists. The Father is the first principle from which all derives, after all. The real question is how this derivation is understood. At the beginning of the fifth century, Jerome alleged that Origen in his *Dialogue with Candidus* not only rejected the term *homoousios* as inviting division and materiality into the Godhead but also held that the Son depends upon the will of the Father in the same manner as other creatures.⁶²

Jerome's accusation is only one example of how Origen's complex and nuanced Trinitarian theology has long been interpreted in the shadow of later developments at Nicaea and in its wake-. Though Origen was willing to describe the Son in the language of creation and creatureliness, there is no evidence that can convincingly substantiate the accusation that he did not distinguish the manner of the Son's dependence upon the Father's will from that of other creatures. There is no reason why Origen should have shrunk from this language, given that it found scriptural support and had not yet been problematised by Arius and those who supported him. In addition to Jerome, we can see the same post-Nicene criterium applied to Origen by Theophilus of Alexandria and Emperor Justinian in their denunciations of our subject. Both attributed to Origen the application of the term κτίσμα to the Son. There is some dispute over whether Origen did in fact use this term to describe the Son.⁶³ Given that he was certainly willing to use other similar terms to describe the status of the Son in terms of creation, it does not seem unlikely that he would have used the word κτίσμα. However, if he did so, he certainly would not have intended this term in the manner intimated by his accusers.⁶⁴ Theophilus reveals his frame of reference when he groups Origen together with Arius as two who teach the Son and Spirit are κτίσμα.⁶⁵ Justinian, moreover, charged that Origen held the Son to be κτίσμα και γενητός:

⁶² Jerome, *Apol. Ruf.* 2.19 (SC 303, 154).

⁶³ Charles Lowry provides a strong argument in favour of the position that this attribution is genuine. See Charles Lowry, "Did Origen Style the Son a KTISMA?," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 153 (1938): 39-42. Also see Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 141; and for the opposing view, see James A. Lyons, *The cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 113 n.76.

⁶⁴ See Crouzel and Simonetti's Introduction in SC 252, 42-43.

⁶⁵ Theophilus of Alexandria, *Nouveaux fragments de Theophile d'Alexandrie: à Mr Hermann Dörries pour son 80e Anniversaire*, ed. Richard Marcel and Hermann Dörries (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 62.

The Son is begotten from the will of the Father, since the creature of Wisdom (κτίσμα σοφία) is the image of the invisible God and the radiance of his glory and the impression of his being (ὑποστάσεως), the firstborn of all creation. For Wisdom herself says “God created me as the beginning of his ways for his works.”⁶⁶

The combination of these two terms again suggests that Justinian was viewing Origen’s work through the lens of later developments in which the term γενητός was distinguished from γεννητός, meaning ‘begotten’ as opposed to created. Such a distinction was not made in pre-Nicene writings. The references found in Justinian’s excerpt to Col. 1.15, Heb. 1.3, and, in particular, to Prov. 8.22 are all suggestive of Origen’s own manner of engaging with the question of Christology. The latter verse became a central battleground of doctrinal dispute during the Arian controversy,⁶⁷ and it seems that Origen’s use of this text and other Wisdom and Wisdom-influenced texts, including those cited in Justinian’s quotation, that drew accusations of Arianism from his detractors in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Despite the accusations made against Origen by late antique writers who would condemn him as the progenitor to Arius and his heresy, he has also been characterised by some modern scholars as an important forerunner of Athanasius and pro-Nicene factions including the Cappadocians. Of the proto-Nicene interpretation of Origen’s trinitarian thought, the most notable example in recent scholarship is found in the work of Ilaria Ramelli.⁶⁸ The two characterisations are not irreconcilable, and many scholars view Origen as an intellectual forefather of both sides of the controversy.⁶⁹ These approaches, however, clearly place Origen’s theology outside of its proper historical and intellectual context and impose upon his thought questions that were not present in his own period. Reading Origen’s statements in the *Commentary on John* and in *Peri Archon* (though the latter should be treated with greater suspicion given its indirect Rufinian derivation), his argumentation is clearly more concerned with the threats of Valentinianism and other ‘Gnostic’ theologies, Marcionism and dualistic tendencies, and those of Monarchian opponents. Though contemporary writers typically treat his writings with nuance and sensitivity to the historical and intellectual context of the third century, the fact that discussions of Origen’s sophiology are so limited to Trinitarian matters nonetheless still demonstrates in part the ongoing influence of fourth century debates concerning

⁶⁶ Justinian, *Epistle to Menas* (ACO 3, 209).

⁶⁷ See Maurice Dowling, “Proverbs 8:22-31 in the Christology of the Early Fathers,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 24 (2002): 99-117.

⁶⁸ Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism.”

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Richard P. C. Hanson, “The Influence of Origen on the Arian Controversy,” in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1987), 410–23; Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1993), 102–3; Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 149-157.

Prov. 8.22. The prominence of Wisdom within the Trinitarian-Christological discussions of Books I of the *Peri Archon* and of the *Commentary on John* cannot be dismissed, as this chapter itself attests, but Origen's doctrine of wisdom will be seen over the course of this thesis to be far more wide-ranging than this narrow focus suggests.

Of the proto-Nicene interpretation of Origen's trinitarian thought, the most notable example in recent scholarship is found in the work of Ilaria Ramelli. While she is correct in delineating the particular importance he gave to the concept of hypostasis to distinguish the members of the Trinity, she oversteps the mark in stating that Origen acted as a crucial pioneer of the pro-Nicene side of the fourth century Christological controversies. While Origen certainly did provide an important step in the development of the *ousia-hypostasis* conceptions of the post-Nicene theological debate, the distinction between the two is not clearly delineated and Origen is also happy to use these two terms seemingly synonymously. While Edwards has argued ingeniously for the reliability of Pamphilus's quotation – itself reported to us by Rufinus – from Origen's *Commentary on Hebrews* in which the term *homoousios* is attested, this language in this period did not have the settled meaning it acquired after Nicaea.⁷⁰ His usage is analogical rather than technical and we should not let the proceedings of Nicaea and the resulting disputes of the fourth century circumscribe our analysis of his work.

There are occasions in which Origen may appear to suggest a singular essence shared among these three hypostases. The best example is found in the passage from Book X of the *Commentary on John* quoted above. As the rejection of a merely conceptual distinction between Father and Son in that passage makes clear, Origen's primary concern in this case is once again his anti-monarchian argument. However, the specificity of Origen's words, saying that his opponents are mistaken in suggesting that Father and Son are one 'not only in essence but also in individual subsistence' (ἐν οὐ μόνον οὐσίᾳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑποκειμένῳ), could be understood to uphold a singular *ousia* shared between the two as distinct individuals. This is the best evidence available for a doctrine of a single essence of the Trinity in Origen's work – though Ramelli curiously does not give it much emphasis -, yet even its meaning is far from certain.⁷¹ Certainly, it is insufficient for the bold speculation that he may have

⁷⁰ Mark Edwards, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homoousios* to the Son?," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49, no. 2 (1998): 658-670. Edwards is responding to the position, outlined by Hanson, that this term was a Rufinian interpolation. See Richard P. C. Hanson, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homoousios* to the Son?," in *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 53-70. Also, see Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 132-137.

⁷¹ Williams argues that even this instance gives no true succour to this position, suggesting that the use of the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* was something of a tautology, reflecting Origen's indeterminate use of the two terms elsewhere in this commentary. See Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 132. Even if one argues that this statement does not need to be reconciled with Origen's usage elsewhere and that Origen does suggest some communion of nature in this passage in contradiction to his other statements, this one example alone is entirely sufficient

originated the Cappadocian aphorism, ‘μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις.’⁷² Ramelli’s other crucial evidence does not support her contention and in fact in some cases, when read closely, directly refutes the argument that Origen conceived of a unity of essence or of the Son’s generation from the Father’s essence.⁷³ For instance, the statement in Book II of the *Commentary on John* that ‘the Father is not separated from the Son in essence (τῆ οὐσίᾳ)’ is put into the mouths of those who have not accurately understood their relationship, as is the idea that the Holy Spirit has no distinctive *ousia* besides that of the Father and Son elsewhere, while in *Contra Celsum* 8.12 the statement that there was an *ousia* of truth before Christ’s manifestation appears to refer to the Son’s hypostasis and the unity between the two is expressed as their being ‘one in their unity of thought, in their harmony, and in the identity of their will.’⁷⁴

In fact, Origen explicitly rejects that the Son is generated from the Father’s *ousia*, understanding the idea to introduce division, diminution, and thus materiality into the Godhead:

Others, however, interpret the statement, “I proceeded from God,” as meaning the same as “I have been begotten from God,” from which they are consequently compelled to say that the Son has been begotten from the Father’s essence, as if God after having begotten his Son were diminished and left without that essence he previously had, as one might think is the case with those who are pregnant. They are also consequently compelled to say that the Father and the Son are corporeal and that the Father has been divided, which are doctrines of men who have not even dreamed of an invisible and incorporeal nature, which his essence (οὐσίαν) certainly is. It is clear that these people suggest the Father exists in a corporeal place, and that the Son has appeared by corporeally exchanging one place for another place, and not by exchanging one condition for another condition, as we have received.⁷⁵

Rufinus’s translation of *Peri Archon* appears to make a very similar argument:

One must be heedful, lest one fall into the absurd fables of those who paint for themselves certain emanations (*prolationes*), so as to name the divine nature in parts and divide God the Father as far as they can, since even to be suspected slightly of this concerning an incorporeal nature would not only be an extreme impiety but also ultimate foolishness, and

to support the Ramelli’s conclusions concerning the certainty and stability of Origen’s ‘anti-subordinationist’ Trinitarian theology.

⁷² See Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism,” 25.

⁷³ See Stephen Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 197-198.

⁷⁴ *Com.Jn.* 2.149 (SC 120, 304-306); 2.74 (SC 120, 254); *C Cels.* 8.12 (SC 150, 200).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 20.157-159 (SC 290, 232-234).

neither does it accord with intelligence to believe a substantial division of the incorporeal nature is possible.⁷⁶

Rather than being generated from the Father's essence, as later pro-Nicene writers would hold, Origen more commonly speaks of generation from his will.⁷⁷

For he is an image of the goodness and radiance not of God but of his glory and of his eternal light, and a vapour not of the Father but of his power, and a pure emanation of his almighty glory and a spotless mirror of his activity.⁷⁸

This formulation undergirds the transcendence of the Father and the Son's dependence upon his free self-expression for his existence. This forms part of Origen's wider inclination to hierarchise the members of the divine Trinity. The superiority of the Father is identified in the fact that he is the absolute first principle and the source from which all else, including the Son, derives, while the Son possesses his divinity derivatively. It is this derivation that entails that the Father transcends the Son, in keeping with Platonist ontological logic. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen distinguishes Father from Son by describing the former as first God (τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν) and the latter as second God (τὸν δεῦτερον θεὸν).⁷⁹ This language draws comparison with the doctrine of Numenius of Apamea, who presented a hierarchy between a first and second God. However, as we shall see, Origen's hierarchy is less clearly drawn than his Platonist counterparts, involving a degree of mutual interdependence.⁸⁰ Similarities will also be seen in the work of Origen's Christian predecessor Clement of Alexandria.⁸¹

⁷⁶ P.A. 1.2.6 (SC 252, 122).

⁷⁷ See Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 24, 27; Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 138-141; Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God*, 111-124. Though, as Edwards notes, when one gives heed to the particular non-technical usage of the term *homoousios* in Origen's work, the statement that they share an essence is not irreconcilable with his generation from the Father's will or power, as it would be in post-Nicene debates.

⁷⁸ *Com.Jn.* 13.153 (SC 222, 114).

⁷⁹ *C Cels.* 5.39 (SC 147, 118); 6.61 (SC 147, 330-332).

⁸⁰ See P.E. 11.18.1-10 (SC 292, 136-140). On the influence of Numenius on Origen's thought, see Robert Somos, "Origen and Numenius," *Adamantius* 6 (2000): 51-69. For more on Numenius, see Mark Edwards, "Numenius," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 52-66; Mark Edwards, "Numenius of Apamea," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 115-125. Numenius also refers to a third God, though the third God appears to be one with the second, differentiated in their relations to the cosmos. See Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110-114.

⁸¹ Clement was traditionally portrayed as Origen's master, based on Eusebius' report in *H.E.* 6.6 (SC 41, 94). However, Eusebius' account is notoriously unreliable on the question of the so-called catechetical school of Alexandria and Origen himself never refers directly to his Alexandrian predecessor. Given Origen's taciturn approach to his philosophical influences, direct influence is difficult to ascertain. For the most extensive argument for Origen's acquaintance with the works of Clement, see Annewies van den Hoek, "Origen and the Intellectual Heritage of Alexandria: Continuity Or Disjunction?" in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 40-50. Origen's production of a now lost *Stromateis* also suggests a debt to his forebear, though Plutarch did also write a work, also now lost, under the same title. Pierre Nautin, *Origène*, 293-294.

As first God, the Father is the ultimate source of divinity, from whom the Son and his divinity is generated. Origen sees scriptural foundation for this idea in a close reading of the use of definite articles in John 1.1, ‘the Word was with God and the Word was God (ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος).’ The Father is designated as ὁ θεός, while the definite article is omitted with regards to the Word.⁸² The Son is only God derivatively from the source of divinity, the Father, in a manner comparable to (but not the same as) the godhood of the deified saints.⁸³ Thus, the Father is the source of the Son’s being, being the true God to the Son’s God, the true wisdom and true logos to the Son’s Wisdom and Logos.⁸⁴

This, however, does not support Jerome’s accusation that he held the Son to be dependent upon the Father in the same manner as other creatures and nor does it make appropriate the application of the term ‘subordinationism’ to his thought.⁸⁵ While Origen believes the Son to be God by participation in the true God,⁸⁶ he distinguishes this from the manner in which creatures participate in God. Creatures participate in the Father only through participation in the Son:

We say that the Saviour and the Holy Spirit transcend all creatures, not by comparison but by their exceeding pre-eminence, being themselves transcended by the Father as much as or even more than he and the Holy Spirit transcend the rest, which are not ordinary things. For how great is the glorification of his who transcends thrones, dominions, rulers, powers, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is destined, to which one must also add the holy angels and spirits and righteous souls? But while he transcends such great and ancient beings in essence and dignity and power and divinity – for the Word is living – and wisdom, nevertheless, he is not comparable in any way with the Father.⁸⁷

The special status of the Son is not only evident in the fact that he stands in a relationship to the creation in the same manner that he himself stands to the Father (he vacillates on whether the Son transcends creation to a greater or lesser degree than he is himself transcended by the Father).⁸⁸

⁸² *Com.Jn.* 2.13-14 (SC 120, 214).

⁸³ *Ibid.* 2.17-30 (SC 120, 222-226).

⁸⁴ See *Com.Jn.* 6.38 (SC 157; 156); Micah M. Miller, “The Auto-X Attributes of the Father and the Son in Origen,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 73, no.1 (2022): 159.

⁸⁵ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 21-23; Stephen Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 177-178.

⁸⁶ *Com.Jn.* 2.17-18 (SC 120, 216-218). See Micah M. Miller, “The Auto-X Attributes,” 132-166; Stephen Waers, *Monarchianism and Origen’s Early Trinitarian Theology*, 198-204; David L. Balás, “The Idea of Participation in the Structure of Origen’s Thought. Christian Transposition of a Theme of the Platonic Tradition,” in *Origeniana Premier*, ed. Henri Crouzel, Gennaro Lomiento, and Josep Rius-Camps (Bari: Istituto di letteratura cristiana antica, Università di Bari, 1975), 262-263.

⁸⁷ *Com.Jn.* 13.151-152 (SC 222, 114).

⁸⁸ Compare *Ibid.* 13.151-152 (SC 222, 114) with *Com.Matt.* 15.10 (GCS 40, 375-376).

First of all, Origen sets the Trinity apart as entirely bodiless. Although many things appear incorporeal – angels, demons, and other spirits, for instance – Origen upholds that, as members of the variegated cosmos, they are all necessarily composed of both a soul and a material form. The Trinity, being uncreated, is the only thing that exists entirely intellectually and without a bodily consociate:

If someone thinks that in this end [the eschaton] material, that is bodily, nature will be destroyed, he cannot in any way oppose my position, how substances of such a great number and of such size are able to live and to subsist without bodies, since it is thought to be nature proper to God alone, that is, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to exist without material substance and apart from any partnership with a bodily addition.⁸⁹

Being transmitted to us only in Rufinus's translation, statements such as these in *Peri Archon* might rightly be viewed with some suspicion. However, the same reluctance to introduce corporeal existence into the Trinity is evident when he says the following of the Son's hypostasis:

I do not think our thought ought to wander beyond this to the suspicion that his very ὑπόστασις – that is, his subsistence (*subsistentia*) – might have anything bodily, since everything bodily is characterised by shape or colour or size. And who of sound mind has ever sought for shape or colour or measurable size in wisdom, inasmuch as it is wisdom?⁹⁰

Moreover, in the Greek of the *Commentary on John* already quoted above, Origen's concern is not only that the introduction of *ousia* might contaminate the Father's existence with corporeality.

They are also consequently compelled to say that the Father and the Son are corporeal and that the Father has been divided, which are doctrines of men who have not even dreamed of an invisible and incorporeal nature which essence (οὐσίαν) certainly is. It is clear that these people suggest the Father exists in a corporeal place, and that the Son has appeared by corporeally exchanging one place for another place, and not by exchanging one condition for another condition, as we have received.⁹¹

Clearly, he is also concerned lest the Son might also be understood in these terms. Even in his rejection of essential trinitarian unity, Origen still upholds a special ontological, and not merely qualitative, status for the Son and (by inference) the Spirit.

⁸⁹ *P.A.* 1.6.4 (SC 252, 206). Also, see *P.A.* 1.2.11 (SC 252, 138), 1.3.4 (SC 252, 152); 2.2.2 (SC 252, 246-248); 4.3.15 (SC 268, 396-398); 4.4.1 (SC 268, 402-404); *Com.Jn.* 2.131 (SC 120, 294).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 1.2.2 (SC 252, 112). Also, see *P.A.* 1.2.6 (SC 252, 122); 4.4.1 (SC 268, 400).

⁹¹ *Com.Jn.* 20.157-159 (SC 290, 232-234).

The super-eminence of the Son over created beings is also evident in the reciprocal entailment of Father and Son in Origen's thought. Although Origen does not seem to view the Son's divinity as essential, he nonetheless appears to view it as necessary. The God's very nature implies the existence of Wisdom, and the Father's that of the Son.

Moreover, how can someone who has learnt to understand and think about God faithfully think or believe, even for a single moment, that God the Father ever existed without generating his Wisdom? For they will either say that God was not able to generate Wisdom before he generated her, so that afterwards he generated into existence she who did not exist before, or else that he was able and did not want to generate her, which is impious even to say about God... On account of this, we have recognised that God is always Father of his only-begotten Son.⁹²

Though this testimony comes from the Latin translation of *Peri Archon*, its authenticity is confirmed by a Greek fragment preserved in Eusebius's *Contra Marcellum*:

For God did not begin to be a Father having been previously prevented, as men who become fathers have begun to be so by being unable to be a father beforehand. For if God is always perfect, and the power to be a Father is present in him, and it is good for him to be Father of such a Son, why does he put off and deprive himself of the good and, so to speak, of that by which he is able to be a Father? Indeed, this must also be said concerning the Holy Spirit.⁹³

There are, however, also suggestions that there is a similar mutual implication between creation and Creator. In *Peri Archon*, Rufinus reports Origen as stating:

This is the good God and beneficent Gather of all, the δύναμις both εὐεργετική and δημιουργική, that is the power that does well and that which creates and provides. It is both absurd and impious to suggest that these powers of God have been idle for even a single moment... Therefore, it is entirely impossible to consider a moment in which that beneficent power did not produce good. From this, it follows that there were always those for whom it produced good, which are evidently his works or creatures... On account of this, it is consequently demonstrated that at no time was God not creator, nor benefactor, nor provident.⁹⁴

⁹² P.A. 1.2.2 (SC 252, 112-114). Also, see P.A. 1.2.3 (SC 252, 116); *Com.Jn.* 10.246 (SC 157, 530).

⁹³ Eusebius, *Contra Marcellum* 1.4.22 (GCS 14, 22).

⁹⁴ P.A. 1.4.3 (SC 252, 168-170).

Williams suggests that this second sequence of logical necessity undermines the uniqueness of the Son's relationship to the Father.⁹⁵ The Son's generation in this case becomes just another expression of God's essential benevolence. However, Williams's case relies upon the assertion that Origen held a doctrine of the sempiternal pre-existence of souls, a position that has become a site of scholarly contestation since Williams wrote these words.⁹⁶ Origen himself says that the question of how God's creative activity could never have been inactive is difficult to conceptualise and formulates his response with respect to the Son's always being with the Father:

Consequently, in this Wisdom, which was always with the Father, creation was always arranged and formed, and there was never when there was not in Wisdom the prefiguration of those things, which would exist in future.⁹⁷

While reliant upon Rufinus's Latin text here, we shall see below that nothing ascribed to Origen in this translation cannot be supported by the Greek of Origen's Johannine commentary. God's essential creative activity, therefore, is expressed by his very generation of his Son who contains the prefiguration of created beings. Therefore, the way in which God's will or power is expressed in the Son (and Spirit) is categorically different from that by which created beings come into existence. The Father could not exist without the Son and never has, while created beings came into being, showing that the Father was not compelled to create them.

The Son's relationship to the Father is, therefore, characterised by its eternity or timelessness. The generation of the Son is distinguished by the fact that it takes place entirely outside the bounds of temporal existence.⁹⁸ The Son does not only precede the creation of the cosmos, as suggested by Proverbs' personified Wisdom who is established 'before the beginning of the earth,' but stands outside of temporal relations entirely. In a phrase that would become crucial in the later Arian controversy, Origen affirms that 'There is no 'when' when he was not' (*Non est autem quando non fuerit*), since there would then have been a time when Father was not Father and in which the Almighty existed with nothing upon which to exercise his might.⁹⁹ Origen states in the *Commentary*

⁹⁵ Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 138, 147.

⁹⁶ See below for more on this topic.

⁹⁷ *P.A.* 1.4.4 (SC 252, 170).

⁹⁸ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 21-38. However, it is also worth noting those cases where Origen appears to take a differing conception of God's relationship to temporality. See Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, 186-7, 251; Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 187. Tzamalikos's position that the inconsistencies result entirely from Rufinus's misunderstanding of the complexities of Origen's thought does not particularly convince, an attempt to harmonise overly the broad literary output found in his work.

⁹⁹ *P.A.* 1.2.9-10 (SC 252, 130-132); 4.4.1 (SC 268, 400). On this expression, a Latin translation of the statement οὐκ ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, see Ilaria Ramelli, "Alexander of Aphrodisias: A Source of Origen's Philosophy?," *Philosophie Antique* 14 (2014): 247-253.

on John that the Son 'always remains God, not having it of himself except by being with God, and not remaining God, except by enduring in unceasing contemplation of the depths of the Father.'¹⁰⁰ This language of participation upholds the distinction between participant and partaken and the eminence of the Father in the Godhead. However, Origen seems to view the possibility of the Son's ceasing to contemplate the Father and participate in his divinity as only conceptual. In reality, there could never be an occasion in which the Son were not so. Existing outside of time, he cannot change from his current condition of participation to another. Here, we see the Platonist concept of participation being stretched to its limits in order to account for the particularities of Christian Trinitarian ontology. Though the Son may not possess the Father's qualities essentially, he does so on the basis of necessity, both in the sense that he possesses his participatory traits atemporally and thus in a manner that cannot change and in that of being the logically necessary expression of the Father's own nature. Therefore, in a manner which will be explored more below, the Son partakes, in the words of Tzamalikos, in the 'atemporal being' or 'atemporal life' of God, even while Origen distinguishes between the manner in which they exhibit this life.¹⁰¹

3. Jewish Wisdom and Valentinian Sophia

Before proceeding to examine how Origen conceptualised the Son's creative role and the manner in which he bridges the divide between the Father and creation, it is necessary to note that the Jewish tradition of personified Wisdom was not solely the inheritance of the orthodox Christian Church. No less than among the orthodox movement, personified Wisdom was an important touchstone among those sects grouped under the umbrella of 'Gnosticism.' It was among such heterodox groups as these – Valentinians, Basilideans, Sethites, Barbeloites, and so on – that the Jewish depiction of personified Wisdom attained its most lively and imaginative adherents in the early Christian movement.

In what follows, I shall focus on Valentinian versions of the protological myth of Sophia. It is important to note that term 'Valentinians', however, was one invented by the group's opponents and not one used as a term of self-identification. As Tertullian states, 'Thus we are well acquainted with their origins and we know why we call them "Valentinians," although they do not seem to be

¹⁰⁰ *Com.Jn.* 2.18 (SC 120, 218).

¹⁰¹ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 57, 59. Also, see Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 143-144. Williams characterises this element of Origen's Trinitarian thought as having anticipated 'developed fourth-century orthodoxy in this at least, that he comes close to saying the Father-Son relationship is intrinsic to the divine life as such – and in that he has some notion of this relation as existing for its own sake, not as a means for connecting the One and the Many.'

so.¹⁰² Those within the ‘Valentinian’ church would have identified as Christians or as a subset of the larger Christian community. This school seems to have been prevalent in the second and third centuries C.E and survived with significant enough strength well into fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁰³ In particular, Alexandria appears to have been fertile ground for this sect. Epiphanius reports a story he had heard that Valentinus was born in Egypt and educated in Alexandria, and attests to their ongoing dynamic presence in the region during his own time.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Heracleon is identified by Origen as someone ‘who is said to be a follower of Valentinus (τὸν Οὐαλεντίνου λεγόμενον εἶναι γνώριμον).’¹⁰⁵ The refutation of his exegesis of the Johannine Gospel was a principal motivation in Origen’s composition of his own commentary on the text.¹⁰⁶ More than any other such sect, therefore, it is worth examining Origen’s relationship to the Sophia mythology of the Valentinians.

The Valentinian narrative provides a mythological explanation of the process of protology and redemption. In the first instance – much like Origen’s Wisdom Christology –, it is an explanation of the development of multiplicity and corporeal existence from an original simple divine principle in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Middle- and Neo-Platonist and Neopythagorean philosophical doctrines.¹⁰⁷ This is closely related to questions of theodicy. The Valentinian narrative of Sophia is also a means of mythologically explaining both the presence of evil within the cosmos and the Church’s experience of grace and election.¹⁰⁸ There was not, however, one single account of *the*

¹⁰² *Adv. Val.* 4.1 (SC 280, 86).

¹⁰³ On the prevalence of this school, see Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, trans. Anthony Alcock (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 166-171; Alan B. Scott, “Opposition and Concession: Origen’s Relationship to Valentinianism,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 79. On the proliferation of heterodox movements among the early Alexandrian Church, see C Wilfred Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 29-78; Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. and trans. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Mifflintown, P.A.: Sigler Press, 1996), 48-60. On the documentation of the doctrines of Valentinians, see Christoph Marksches and Einar Thomassen, “Introduction,” in *Valentinianism: New Studies*, ed. Christoph Marksches and Einar Thomassen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ *Pan.* 31.2.3 (GCS 40 n.f. 10.1, 384); 31.7.1 (GCS 40 n.f. 10.21, 395). While this rumour concerning Valentinus’s provenance is uncertain, Thomassen notes that there is nothing unbelievable in this rumour. See Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (Leiden, Brill: 2006), 418.

¹⁰⁵ *Com. Jn.* 2.100 (SC 120, 270). Michael Kaler and Marie-Pierre Bussièrès suggest that Origen’s use of *legomenon* demonstrates that he did not mean to say that Heracleon upheld the same doctrines and teachings as Valentinus, only that Origen had heard from others that Heracleon had studied under his tutelage. However, their argument is unconvincing: the universal affiliation of Heracleon with Valentinus very strongly suggests that he was an adherent of Valentinus’ teaching, though clearly in some modified form, and the positions with which Origen associates Heracleon are those he most closely associates with Valentinus. See Michael Kaler and Marie-Pierre Bussièrès, “Was Heracleon a Valentinian? A New Look at Old Sources,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 3 (2006): 275-289; Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 5; Einar Thomassen, “Heracleon,” in *Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 173-4.

¹⁰⁶ See *Com. Jn.* 5.8 (SC 120, 388-390).

¹⁰⁷ Einar Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 269-314.

¹⁰⁸ See Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), 91, 120-122.

Valentinian myth of Sophia. Among the reports of heresiologists such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus and the texts of the Nag Hammadi library, a wide variety of formulations of the protology-redemption myth are manifested. In fact, compared with early orthodox writers, there appears to have been a greater liberalism with regards to doctrinal matters among Valentinian groups.¹⁰⁹ As Thomassen states, ‘a canonical version of the system never existed; rather, individual teachers seem to have considered themselves authorised to produce their own versions of the system, introducing modifications and innovations as they themselves saw fit.’¹¹⁰ In this vein, several sources attest to a division between an Italian and an Eastern school of Valentinus’s followers.¹¹¹ Heracleon himself is identified by Hippolytus as one of the main proponents of the western school of Valentinianism and Tertullian associates him with Ptolemy, the principal originator of that school besides Valentinus.¹¹² Nonetheless, in almost all extant accounts, Sophia plays a vital role in the process of cosmogony and redemption. There are a few exceptions to this in which the figure of Sophia is referred to by the title of Logos. The *Tripartite Tractate* and the extant fragments of Heracleon’s work are examples of this. The narrative of the former hews closely to that of other accounts. The fragments of Heracleon’s work, however, do not present a complete mythological account of his theological system.¹¹³ The only vestiges of his writings are exegetical comments upon the Gospels, primarily that of John. Nonetheless, everything that does survive of his work is entirely consistent with the Valentinian protology-redemption mythology, whether the primary figure is known under the moniker of ‘Sophia’ or that of ‘Logos.’

It would be impossible to recount all the different forms of the Valentinian protology-redemption myth. Einar Thomassen’s *Spiritual Seed* does an excellent job of just this.¹¹⁴ In the retelling that follows, therefore, we will focus upon the account of the *Tripartite Tractate*, a text with which

¹⁰⁹ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 20-22.

¹¹⁰ Einar Thomassen, “The Relative Chronology of the Valentinian Systems,” in *Valentinianism: New Studies*, ed. Christoph Marksches and Einar Thomassen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 17.

¹¹¹ *Adv. Val.* 4.2 (SC 280, 86); 11.2 (SC 280, 104); Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.35.5-7 (PTS 25, 249-250); Clement, *Excerpts from Theodotus* (SC 23, 52).

¹¹² *Ref.* 6.35.6 (PTS 25, 249); *Adv. Val.* 4.2 (SC 280, 86). This is not to say that he should be pigeonholed into a singular strain of thought. As Thomassen notes, in a number of ways, what we can recover of Heracleon’s reflects the thought of the Eastern school more than the Italian school. See Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 103-118.

¹¹³ Heracleon’s work preserved in Origen’s commentary is often considered the first commentary written on the New Testament. However, the label Origen gives to the work, ὑπομνήματα, suggests that it was not a commentary in the sense in which we would understand it today. It is more likely to have been a series of comments or lecture notes and may not have been focused exclusively on the Gospel of John. See Pier Franco Beatrice, “Greek Philosophy and Gnostic Soteriology in Heracleon’s ‘Hypomnemata’,” *Early Christianity* 3, no. 2 (2012): 188-214; Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 5; Einar Thomassen, “Heracleon,” 173-4.

¹¹⁴ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 46-80.

Heracleon's surviving work appears to share a great deal,¹¹⁵ and the report from Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* I.1-8 which derives from the Italian school,¹¹⁶ noting some of the important divergences between them. For the most part, the protological and cosmogonic sections of these myths follow along the same lines with only minor divergences. Significant differences between the two emerge primarily with regards to the Incarnation and the notions of redemption. This initial section of the narrative covers the generation of the Pleroma – that is, the numerous aeons that proceed from the first principle, the divine Father, or from the first syzygy of divine principles – up until the fall of Sophia. The *Tripartite Tractate*, therefore, begins by recounting the development of the aeons of the Pleroma from the Father.¹¹⁷ The last and youngest of the aeons, more usually called Sophia but named 'the Logos' in this text, accidentally initiates a fall from the pantheon of divine emanations that originate from the Father. Exhibiting a greater optimism than other Valentinian sources, this text describes the Logos's mistake as motivated by a blameless abundance of love.¹¹⁸ Seeking to grasp the incomprehensibility of the Father in order to glorify him, he only introduced doubt, division, and disharmony into reality.¹¹⁹ Having fallen out of the Pleroma, the Logos experiences three successive emotions: irrational passion arising from said doubt and division, repentance on witnessing the defective creation he had brought forth, and joy after another aeon, the Saviour, is sent from the Pleroma to redeem him from this fallen condition.¹²⁰ These crystallise to become the material, psychic, and spiritual substances. The spiritual substance that arises from the Logos's joy becomes the spiritual Church that exists alongside the Logos in the intermediate place between the Pleroma and the cosmos. Each member of this spiritual seed is an image of one of the aeons of the Pleroma.¹²¹

In the wake of the Logos's redemption, he turns his attention to ordering the substances that had arisen out of his emotions. Utilising the Demiurge – a psychic being that rules the psychic-material cosmos - as an instrument of his creative will, the Logos orders these substrata into the cosmos in

¹¹⁵ See Gilles Quispel, "The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic," in *From 'Poimandres' to Jacob Böhme : Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Cis Heertum and Roel B. van den Broek (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 258-262; Gilles Quispel, "From Mythos to Logos," in *Gnostic Studies*, ed. Gilles Quispel (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1974), vol. 1, 160. Einar Thomassen offers an opposing position. See Einar Thomassen, *Le Traite Tripartite (NH 1,5)* (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Universite Laval, 1989), 11-17.

¹¹⁶ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 45, 59-61, 81-82.

¹¹⁷ *Tri.Trac.* 51.1-74.18 (60-71).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 76.20 (72).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 77.11-36 (73). Also, see *Adv.Haer.* 1.2.2 (*SC* 264, 38). Elsewhere, the cause of Sophia's fall is attributed to her desire to create without her consort. See *Ref.* 6.30.6-7 (*PTS* 25, 240); *Adv.Haer.* 1.29.4 (*SC* 264, 362) (on Barbeliotes); *Apoc.Jn.* 9-10 (p. 110); *Hyp.Arch.* 94 (p. 167).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 77.22 (73); 81.24-82.24 (75); 90.14-91.10 (79-80).

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 90.31 (80); 93.20-29 (81).

which we currently exist.¹²² A similar portrayal of the Logos's creative endeavours is found in Heracleon's work. In what Origen correctly notes is an unusual and forced interpretation, Heracleon understands John 1.3, 'All things came into being through him,' to mean that the Word utilised the Demiurge as an instrument of his creative act.¹²³ Origen also recounts that Heracleon suggests that πάντα refers only to every part of material creation.¹²⁴ What is above material creation is therefore not included in the Logos and Demiurge's act of creation.

In other accounts, the Demiurge is portrayed with a greater degree of agency over his creative activity, while Sophia prompts this creation in certain directions without his awareness. He is Old Testament creator God, saying 'I am God and there is none besides me.'¹²⁵ Having at best a hazy perception of the Pleroma, the Demiurge orders the cosmos out of the psychic and material substances, unwittingly guided by the hand of his mother, Sophia.¹²⁶

After the creation of the cosmos, the Demiurge and his powers attempt to create humankind. In the Irenaean account, it is he who creates the psychic element, the hylic powers the material element, and, unbeknownst to either, the Sophia or Logos inserts a spiritual element.¹²⁷ In the *Tripartite Tractate*, however, the Demiurge has little more than an instrumental role, carrying out the creative agency of the Logos.¹²⁸ All three substances are present in the first man, though the human race as a whole is divided into these three categories: the spiritual; the psychic; and the material.¹²⁹ This is not to say that the *pneumatikoi* do not also possess souls and bodies but that they also possess the spiritual element that the others lack.

Clearly, the Jewish figure of personified Wisdom has undergone a significant transformation in the hands of Valentinian thinkers. Sophia does not emerge pristine from the narrative, a far cry from the express image of the Father's goodness or his handmaiden in the act of creation as in the Jewish Wisdom tradition. Nonetheless, the presentation of Sophia in this mythological narrative is a complex one. She clearly takes on the central role of Jewish personified Wisdom in the creation of the cosmos. However, reflecting the Valentinians' at best conflicted appraisal of the material world, her creative activity is the abortive result of her mistaken fall from the Pleroma. While the *Tripartite*

¹²² *Ibid.* 95.38-104.3 (83-87), esp. 100.32-35 (85): 'The Logos uses him [the Demiurge] as a hand, to beautify and work on the things below and he uses him as a mouth to say the things which will be prophesied.' See Einar Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 167-168.

¹²³ *Com.Jn.* 2.102 (SC 120,272-274).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 2.100-101 (SC 120, 270-272).

¹²⁵ *Adv.Haer.* 1.5.4 (SC 264, 84); *Ref.* 6.33.1 (PTS 25, 245). See also, *Adv.Haer.* 1.29.4 (SC 264, 364) (on Barbeliotes); *Apoc.Jn.* 12-13 (p. 112); *Hyp.Arch.* 86 (p. 162); 94 (p. 167).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 1.5.2-3 (SC 264, 78-84); 1.5.6 (SC 264, 88); *Ref.* 6.33.1 (PTS 25, 245); 6.34.4-8 (PTS 25, 247-248).

¹²⁷ *Tri.Trac.* 105.29-106.5 (88).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 95:17-104:3 (82-87). See Einar Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 168.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 106.18-106.31 (88).

Tractate views this mistake in a more positive light, suggesting that the fall as a whole was part of the divine economy, it is nonetheless still a mistake. Even when the Logos turns his attention to the ordering of the cosmos, he is not himself the τεχνίτης, keeping his hands clean of materiality. Logos-Sophia remains transcendent of this cosmos, residing in an intermediate location between the Pleroma and the cosmos, and Logos-Sophia does not control or govern this cosmos.¹³⁰ As we shall see below, in Heracleon's work as well, the psychic-material cosmos is governed by material powers who oppress the Logos's spiritual seed. This element is not entirely without precedent in Jewish literature, reflecting an element of the apocalyptic worldview that sees God's divine providence less in the governance of the earthly world and its concerns and more in the soon to be revealed heavenly realm. As presented in 1 Enoch 42.1-2:

Wisdom found no place where she might dwell;
Then a dwelling-place was assigned her in the heavens.
Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men,
And found no dwelling-place:
Wisdom returned to her place,
And took her seat among the angels.

However, despite her role in the fall, Sophia is also a vital actor in the story of salvation and restoration. Crucially, it is her insemination of the spiritual seed into the psychic-material human being that makes possible the redemption of the Valentinian Church and, in Irenaeus's account in *Adversus Haereses*, it is her who leads the *pneumatikoi* to the Pleroma.¹³¹ Without her doing, gnosis would remain impossible for those outside the Pleroma.

4. Origen and Valentinian Mythology

How familiar was Origen with these myths and to what extent did they exert influence on his own thought? Many scholars have located Origen's work squarely within the intellectual milieu of heterodox 'Gnosis' traditions.¹³² Within the cosmopolitan atmosphere of third century Alexandria, it is argued, the boundaries between orthodox and hetero-gnostic groups would naturally be blurred. In particular, the centrality of Origen's doctrine of free will and his steadfast conviction of the

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 103.13-104.3 (86-87).

¹³¹ *Adv. Haer.* 1.5.6 (SC 264, 88); 1.7.1 (SC 264, 100-102).

¹³² Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), 332-380; Eugène de Faye, *Origène: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pensée* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1923), 1-7; Gilles Quispel, "Origen and the Valentinian Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28, no. 1 (1974): 29-42; Gilles Quispel, "From Mythos to Logos," 158-169.

singularity of the Old Testament and New Testament messages have been interpreted as a reaction to 'Gnostic' theologies.¹³³

Clearly, Origen knew of Heracleon and his work which survives primarily thanks to Origen's commentary.¹³⁴ Moreover, Origen does not approach the Valentinian's work in the manner of a polemicist. As Carl Johan Berglund argues, far from vilifying Heracleon as a heretic, Origen takes seriously the weight of his opponent's arguments and the soundness of his interpretations, judging them on their literary and philosophical merit.¹³⁵ He demonstrates some openness to intellectual exchange and accepts a number of Heracleon's interpretations (although mostly with some caveats). However, the figure of Sophia is absent from Heracleon's surviving work. In fact, Origen only introduces Heracleon midway through Book II of the commentary, after his main exposition of hypostasised Wisdom has been completed. Nonetheless, Origen certainly reads Heracleon's words through the lens of Valentinian mythology. Many of its major elements are found in Origen's citations and interpretations: the existence of a Pleroma of divine aeons¹³⁶; the division between the Pleroma and the material cosmos¹³⁷; the Logos's guidance of the Demiurge's acts of creation¹³⁸; the division of humankind into distinct natures¹³⁹; and so on. Despite seemingly only writing exegetical works and there existing no particular version of the Valentinian myth ascribed to Heracleon or his followers, Origen understands his thought within this mythological system:

But since those who follow his beliefs and compose myths do not present anything that I can understand clearly concerning the lost spiritual nature, teaching us nothing clear concerning

¹³³ See, for example, Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. by A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 210-211; Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. by Mitchell Walter (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1955), 203-204, 210-215; Mark Scott; *Journey Back to God*, 37-40; Mark Scott, "Cosmic Theodicy: Origen's Treatment of the Problem of Evil," in *The Oxford Handbook of Origen*, ed. Ronald E. Heine and Karen Jo Torjesen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 396-398; Peter Martens, "Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity," 608-613; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy," 247; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation," *Harvard Theological Review* 102, no.2 (2009): 154-155.

¹³⁴ *Com.Jn.* 6.92 (SC 157, 196).

¹³⁵ Carl Johan Berglund, "Origen's Vacillating Stances toward his "Valentinian" Colleague Heracleon," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (2017): 541-569.

¹³⁶ See *Com.Jn.* 2.100 (SC 120, 270-272); 2.155 (SC 120, 308); 10.211 (SC 157, 510); 13.67-68 (SC 222, 66); 13.114-116 (SC 222, 92); 13.122 (SC 222, 94) for Heracleon's use of the terms aeons (αἰών) and Pleroma (πληρώμα). Elaine Pagels states that 'Reference to the pleroma or to the mythic drama of Sophia is virtually absent from the extant fragments of Heracleon's exegesis.' Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 47. With regards to the figure of Sophia, this is no doubt true. However, there are certainly references to the Pleroma and its aeons, although perhaps fewer than one might expect of a disciple of Valentinus.

¹³⁷ *Com.Jn.* 2.100 (SC 120, 270-272); 6.199 (SC 157, 278); 10.48 (SC 157, 414-416); 10.261 (SC 157, 538-540); 13.97 (SC 222, 82); 13.117 (SC 222, 92); etc.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 2.100-104 (SC 120, 270-274).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 2.137 (SC 120, 130); 10.210-211 (SC 157, 508-510); 13.63 (SC 222, 64); 13.92 (SC 222, 78-80); 13.148 (SC 222, 110); 13.294 (SC 222, 190); 13.341 (SC 222, 222); 20.54 (SC 290, 184); 20.170 (SC 290, 240); etc.

the times or aeons before its loss – for they are not able to explain their own doctrine – because of this, we will willingly overlook them, having raised such a great problem.¹⁴⁰

Origen identifies this ‘myth-making’ (μυθοποιΐας) as the source of his mistaken beliefs and interpretations.¹⁴¹ Origen makes the same accusation against ‘the heterodox’ who divide God from the Demiurge, a position that was not unique to the Valentinians or the Sophia myth.¹⁴² We have already seen how, in *Peri Archon* 1.2, Origen warns about interpreting the emanation of Wisdom from the Father according to the ‘absurd fables of those who describe for themselves certain emanations, in order to name the divine nature in different parts.’¹⁴³ His rejection of shared divine *ousia* was by all accounts in part a reaction to these kinds of myths. Since the predominant variant of the Valentinian mythology of cosmogony and redemption was the Sophia rather than the Logos myth, it is likely that Origen understood Heracleon’s work through this lens.

Origen also certainly knew of Valentinus and his school of thought, referring to Valentinus by name and Valentinians as a group on a number of occasions in his work. There are numerous other instances in which statements of Origen’s can be interpreted as responding to Valentinian doctrines. It would indeed be very surprising if a Christian teacher of Origen’s calibre could have lived in third century Alexandria and not been familiar with the systems and teachings of Valentinian and other ‘Gnostic’ teachers. This is especially true on account of Origen’s role as Church censor, entrusted with refuting heterodox and heretical views and upholding orthodoxy within the Church.¹⁴⁴ Pamphilus includes among ‘those heresies that were assailing the Church at that time’ of Origen’s work the doctrines of Valentinianism and of docetic and adoptionist Christologies.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Eusebius and Jerome describe an incident in which Origen travelled to Athens due to the heresies tearing apart the churches of Achaëa.¹⁴⁶ It was here that Origen debated a Valentinian teacher named Candidus concerning the nature of the devil and free will.¹⁴⁷ Jerome’s summary of the now lost *Dialogue with Candidus*, suggests the text was concerned with the emanation (*probole*) of the Son from the Father and whether or not the devil is evil by nature.¹⁴⁸ Origen’s experience in

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 13.122 (SC 222, 94). On similar accusations concerning heterodox groups, see *Hom.Ps.77* 2.3 (GCS n.f. 19, 370-371): ‘For from their own minds they invent myths, aeons and syzygies, or different gods – one of the Law, and another of the Gospel – and abortions, and metempsychosis, and different denials, and whatever else they invent.’ It is likely Origen had Valentinian groups in mind here.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 13.74 (SC 222, 68).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 2.171 (SC 120, 144).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.171 (SC 120, 144); *P.A.* 1.2.6 (SC 252, 122).

¹⁴⁴ See Origen’s role in *Dial.Hera.* and *H.E.* 6.33.1-4 (SC 41, 135-136).

¹⁴⁵ Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 16 (SC 464, 54); 87 (SC 464, 154-158).

¹⁴⁶ *H.E.* 6.23.4 (SC 41, 124); Jerome. *De Vir. Ill.* 54.3 (152).

¹⁴⁷ See Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 20-22. See Jerome, *Apol. Ruf.* 2.18 (SC 303, 148-150).

¹⁴⁸ Jerome, *Apol. Ruf.* 2.19 (SC 303, 154).

combatting Valentinian doctrine might also be evident in the conversion of his very patron, Ambrose, whose patronage enabled him to undertake his great literary output. Eusebius reports that Ambrose had been a Valentinian before being converted to the true faith by Origen.¹⁴⁹ This contextual evidence, in addition to certain references to ‘Gnostic’ protological systems, therefore, gives us good reason to believe that Origen would have been familiar with the narrative of Sophia among such groups.

However, despite what we can infer must have been at least a working familiarity with Valentinian thought, with the exception of Heracleon, the portrayals of Valentinian and other ‘Gnostic’ sects, their doctrines, and their interpretations found in Origen’s extant work are painted with the broadest of brushstrokes. This is not out of character for Origen, who aims for a certain self-effacing timelessness in his work that the particularities of his influences and interlocutors would ruin. He is equally taciturn concerning his positive influences as he is of his doctrinal opponents. Heracleon is one of the two major exceptions to this rule, the other being the Platonist philosopher Celsus. In both cases, Origen’s specificity resulted from the purpose of these two texts. The apologetic nature of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* is clear.¹⁵⁰ With regards to the *Commentary on John*, Origen’s aim in writing this text is laid out in Book V, where he notes that ‘the heterodox’ (οἱ ἑτεροδόξοι) who pursue ‘gnosis falsely so-called’ (1 Tim. 6.20) have produced many books interpreting the New Testament Gospels and the epistles.¹⁵¹ This forms part of Origen’s defence of his own prolific rate of publication in the face of the injunction of Eccl. 12.12. His commentaries are necessary, he argues, to defend the true Christian faith and the proper interpretation of its texts against the distorted interpretations published by the heterodox.¹⁵² Outside of this text, however, Origen tends to present the thought of various heterodox and heretical groups in monolithic terms, with their nuances and diversity ironed out. This is evident in the manner in which Origen presents the three heresiarchs

¹⁴⁹ *H.E.* 6.18.1-2 (*SC* 41, 112). Alternatively, Jerome suggests that Ambrose was converted from Marcionism, while Epiphanius describes him as either a Marcionite or a Sabellenian. See Jerome, *De Vir. Ill.* 56.1 (158), 61.3 (164); Epiphanius, *Pan.* 64.3 (*GCS* 31, 503). There is little external evidence to elevate one claim above the other and so the priority of Eusebius, on whose work Jerome was clearly dependent, suggests his account is the most likely to be accurate.

¹⁵⁰ See Michael Frede, “Origen’s Treatise *Against Celsus*,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, ed. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131-155.

¹⁵¹ *Com.Jn.* 5.8 (*SC* 120, 388).

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 5.8 (*SC* 120, 388-390). See Cécile Blanc’s introduction in *SC* 120.10; and Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM Press), 149. This would be particularly pressing if one were to accept the position that the Johannine Gospel held a particularly esteemed position within the ‘Gnostic’ canon. However, without denying its usage, the evidence for this position is surprisingly minimal. See Charles Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. 205-293; PHEME PERKINS, “Valentinians and the Christian Canon,” in *Valentinianism: New Studies*, ed. by Einar Thomassen and Christoph Marksches (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 379-381.

Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion together as a three-headed fount of false teaching, three channels of a single opposing tendency.¹⁵³ As Le Boulluec argues, Origen's characterisation of Gnostic ideas is one that has been distorted by traditional orthodox polemics: 'Du gnostique lui-même il ne reste plus qu'une image stéréotypée.'¹⁵⁴ They do not represent genuine, living, nuanced systems of thought but a negative ideal against which the orthodox Christian must judge their own ideas and exegesis.¹⁵⁵

Of course, as a negative norm, the stereotyped figures of these sects could nonetheless exert influence on Origen's understanding of the relations between Father, Son, the cosmos, and the specific role of Wisdom in those relationships. If Origen had been influenced by heresiological accounts of Valentinian and other Gnostic sects, it is difficult to imagine that he would have been unfamiliar with the role of Sophia in their mythological narratives. I suggest that the influence that Valentinian Sophia had on Origen is best understood as indirect, manifested in the manner in which he tests the orthodoxy of his own interpretations of hypostasised Wisdom against the yardstick of their (stereotyped) heterodoxy. As will be demonstrated in the rest of this chapter, Origen's understanding of hypostasised Wisdom and its role in the cosmos places him firmly against these accounts.

5. *The Hypostasis of Wisdom and the Noetic Cosmos*

Origen incorporated the portrayal of Wisdom from the Jewish tradition into the Middle-Platonist doctrine concerning the origination of the material cosmos from an original divine principle. Though he shared this in common with Valentinian thinkers, the manner in which he did so differed significantly. Above all, Origen sought to preserve the unity of the Creator and Saviour God and to absolve God from any liability for the fallen condition of creation. This argument would not have been relevant only to the beliefs of Valentinian Christians; it was characteristic of other 'Gnostic' groups and the teaching of Marcion and his followers. Origen refers to 'the heterodox' who make

¹⁵³ For Origen's attacks on Valentinus by name, see *C Cels.* 2.27 (SC 132, 356); *Com.Jn.* 2.100 (SC 120, 270-272); *Hom.Jer.* 10.5 (SC 232, 406-408); *Hom.Luke* 20.2 (SC 87, 280); *Frag.Luke*, 78 (GCS 49, 259); 166 (GCS 49, 294-295); 242 (GCS 49, 330); *Com.Matt.* 12.12 (GCS 40, 92); 12.23 (GCS 40, 122); *Frag.Eph.* 17 (2, 413). See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 63-4.

¹⁵⁴ Alain Le Boulluec, "La Place de la Polémique Antignostique dans le *Peri Archon*," in *Origeniana Premier*, ed. Henri Crouzel, Gennaro Lomiento, and Josep Rius-Camps (Bari: Istituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, Università di Bari, 1975), 61. See also Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 49.

¹⁵⁵ Alain Le Boulluec, "La Place de la Polémique Antignostique dans le *Peri Archon*," 55-57. Also, see Alain Le Boulluec, "Y a-t-il des Traces de la Polémique Antignostique d'Irénée dans le *Péri Archôn* d'Origène?," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers Read at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1975*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 138-147.

this same division, demonstrating it was commonplace among diverse groups.¹⁵⁶ No critique of Sophia mythology could be made without addressing this central feature, however. In Origen's work, hypostasised Wisdom plays a vital role in his cosmogony but does not do so on account of some mistake that distances her from the Father. His conception of the Son's relationship to the Father is conceived in terms far closer to the portrayal of Wisdom in the Jewish tradition.

It is no surprise, given the hierarchical relationship Origen outlines between Father and Son, to find him emphasising the true transcendence of the Father, in keeping with the presentations of the first God of Numenius.¹⁵⁷ Much like Numenius's first God, the Father stands aloof from the act of creation:

However, it is not right for the first God to work with his hands and, if you understand the words 'to work with one's hands' in the proper sense, neither is it right for the second God, nor any other of the more divine things.¹⁵⁸

In places, Origen goes so far as to suggest, in a manner comparable to the Plotinian One, that the Father stands beyond being and intellect.¹⁵⁹ These statements, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. They indicate the emphases Origen places on the roles of the Father and Son, but given God's self-definition in Exod. 3.14, 'ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν,' he could never truly place the Father outside the realm of being. Thus, the Father is not beyond being, but true being, not beyond wisdom but true wisdom, and not beyond reason but true reason.¹⁶⁰ This ambiguity and lack of conceptual clarity concerning the relationship of the first principle to being was typical of Platonic thought up until Plotinus.¹⁶¹ However, far more than his Platonist peers, Origen emphasises the personal and active character of the first principle on account of the Jewish and Christian traditions from which he drew.

The work of creation falls primarily to the metaphorical hands of the Son, whether or not the Father is being or beyond being. As we shall see, this is expressed primarily through the Christological titles of Wisdom and Word, the two Christological titles most closely connected in his work.¹⁶² While the

¹⁵⁶ See *Com.Jn* 1.82 (SC 120, 100); 2.171 (SC 120, 322); 2.199 (SC 120, 344); 19.12 (SC 290, 52).

¹⁵⁷ *P.E.* 11.18.3 (SC 292, 138); 11.18.6 (SC 292, 138).

¹⁵⁸ *C Cels.* 6.61 (SC 147, 332).

¹⁵⁹ See *Ibid.* 6.64 (SC 147, 338-340); 7.38 (SC 150, 100); *De Orat.* 24.2 (GCS 3, 353-354); *Com.Jn.* 19.37 (SC 290, 68).

¹⁶⁰ Although the latter, as already stated, are primarily ascribed to the Son who is described as *autosophia* and *autologos*, even though he is so by participation in the Father, the *autotheos*. See Micah M. Miller, "The Auto-X Attributes."

¹⁶¹ Matthias Baltes, "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic* Beyond Being?", in *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition*, ed. Mark Joyal (London: Routledge, 2017), 12-16; John Whittaker, "Ἐπεκεινα Νου και Ουσιας," *Vigiliae Christianae* 23, no. 2 (1969): 91-104; Alexandra Michalewski, "Le Premier de Numénios et l'Un de Plotin," *Archives de Philosophie* 75, no.1 (2012): 29-48.

¹⁶² Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 241.

Father stands transcendent, the Son expresses the divinity of God through his role as mediator of the divine to creation. This mediation has both cosmogonic and epistemic aspects. The Son is the agent through which the Father creates the world. He is also the principle by which the Father becomes knowable to created beings. Middle-Platonists such as Numenius and Clement had distinguished the incomprehensible first God from the second who is the principle by which knowledge is made possible.¹⁶³ In Clement's words:

Therefore, God, being indemonstrable, is not the object of knowledge (οὐν θεὸς ἀναπόδεικτος ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιστημονικός), but the Son is Wisdom (σοφία), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), and truth (ἀλήθεια), and everything of this kind, and therefore is demonstrable and expressible (ἀπόδειξιν ἔχει καὶ διέξοδον).¹⁶⁴

For Origen, while the Father is invisible, the Son is his image and thus available to us (see Wis. 7.26).

Therefore, our Saviour is the image of the invisible God the Father. With regards to the Father himself, he is the truth, while with regards to us, to whom he reveals the Father, he is the image, through which we come to know the Father. And he reveals him by being himself understood. For to the one who has understood the Son himself, the Father is also understood, according to his own words, "He that has seen me, has seen the Father also" (John 14.9).¹⁶⁵

Origen expands upon this epistemic aspect by a metaphor of a statue of such magnitude that it cannot be seen. The Son, as the figure of his subsistence, is to the Father as a smaller statue otherwise alike in all respects to this first statue.¹⁶⁶ In this passage, Origen focusses upon the Son's Incarnation, comparing the smaller statue to 'the very small form of the human body,' but he does not limit this aspect to Christ's earthly sojourn. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen repudiates those who would refer the words of John 14.9 only to Jesus's bodily stay:

Regarding these things, no one who has any intellect would say that Jesus referred these words only to his sensible body which was seen by men, when he said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father who sent me." For according to this interpretation, all those saying 'Crucify him, crucify him' will have seen God the Father, and also Pilate who received power

¹⁶³ Numenius, *Fr.* 12.2 = *P.E.* 11.18.22-23 (SC 292, 144); *Fr.* 11.11-16 = *P.E.* 11.18.3-5 (SC 292, 138); *Fr.* 16.14-17 = *P.E.* 11.22.3-5 (SC 292, 158); *Strom.* 4.25.156-157 (SC 463, 318-320). Ramelli also draws parallels to the work of Bardaisan. See Ilaria Ramelli, "Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria," in *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 178-182.

¹⁶⁴ *Strom.* 4.25.156-157 (SC 463, 318-320).

¹⁶⁵ *P.A.* 1.2.6 (SC 252, 120-124). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 1.277 (SC 120, 198); 13.153 (SC 222, 114); 19.34-39 (SC 290, 66-70); 32.359 (SC 385, 342); *C Cels.* 7.43-44 (SC 150, 114-120).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 1.2.8 (SC 120, 126-128).

over his humanity, which is absurd... Therefore, anyone who has understood how it is necessary to think about the only-begotten God, the Son of God, the firstborn of all creation, and that the Word became flesh, will see how, looking at the image of the invisible God, one will come to know the Father and Maker of all things.¹⁶⁷

As demonstrated below in Chapters Four and Six, the Son's *kenosis* is not limited by Origen to the Incarnation. It is an ongoing activity by which the Son mediates knowledge and understanding to rational creation.

The Son is able to express the transcendent God because, while the Father is a simple unity, the Son exhibits a unity in multiplicity:

Therefore, God is entirely one and simple. Our Saviour, however, on account of the many things, since God set him forth as a propitiation (Rom. 3.25) and as first fruits of all creation, becomes many things or perhaps all things, inasmuch as all creation which can be made free needs him.¹⁶⁸

As second God, he is 'the virtue including all virtues and the Logos including every logos whatsoever of the things which have been created according to nature.'¹⁶⁹ It is this multiplicity that makes the Son capable of comprehension. Here, we see one of the key means by which Origen understood the diverse cosmos to derive from the singular divine principle. Origen conceptualises the multifaceted nature of the Son in two ways: firstly, in the distinction between the different *epinoiai* of the Son; secondly, in the presence within hypostasised Wisdom of the divine thoughts and of the principles of creation.

Origen's conceptualisation of the different *epinoiai* of the Son is one of the most notable features of his Christology.¹⁷⁰ Explaining the many titles and epithets given to Christ throughout the Scriptures,

¹⁶⁷ *C Cels.* 7.43 (SC 150, 114-116).

¹⁶⁸ *Com.Jn.* 1.119-120 (SC 120, 122-124). Also, see *P.A.* 1.2.1-2 (SC 252, 110-114); *C Cels.* 5.39 (SC 147, 116-120). On Clement's possible influence on Origen's understanding of the Son as a unity in multiplicity, see Ilaria Ramelli, "Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria," 181.

¹⁶⁹ *C Cels.* 5.39 (SC 147, 118).

¹⁷⁰ On Origen's doctrine of the Christ's *epinoiai*, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 189-190; Henri Crouzel, "Les Dénominations du Christ," 131-150; Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice du Verbe Incarné* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958) 290-92; Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 234-241; Ronald Heine, "Epinoiai," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John A. McGuckin (Louisville, K.Y.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 93-95; Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 52-62; John A. McGuckin, "The Changing Forms of Jesus According to Origen," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987) 215-222; Matthew Kuhner, "The 'Aspects of Christ' (*Epinoiai Christou*) in Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*," *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 2 (2017): 195-216.

Origen explains that each denotes a certain aspect of Christ.¹⁷¹ Since the distinctions are conceptual, they do not dissolve the unity of the Son's hypostasis.¹⁷² The conceptual distinctions accorded to the hypostasis, furthermore, maintain the substantive difference between Father and Son. Since the fullness of his riches are beyond human comprehension, no single conception can fully encompass Christ's being or work. As an object will necessarily appear differently to different observers who each observe it from a different viewpoint, likewise what is perceived of Christ differs in each scriptural author according to their own particularities.¹⁷³ Origen loosely hierarchises these *epinoiai* according to the level of Christ's condescension they represent. Thus, the *epinoiai* of 'Lord' and 'Teacher' are necessary for the beginner but to those who have advanced in the Christian faith, Christ manifests himself as a 'friend.'¹⁷⁴ The *epinoiai* of Christ thus become steps by which one ascends in their spiritual progress.¹⁷⁵

At the pinnacle of this ascent through the *epinoiai* is that of Wisdom, the first aspect of Christ. The first book of Origen's *Commentary on John* is devoted to explaining what it means for the Word to be 'in the beginning' (Ἐν ἀρχῇ – John 1.1). Origen argues that the ἀρχή in which the Word 'was' is Wisdom, since the book of Proverbs describes how God created Wisdom as the 'beginning of his ways for his works' (ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ – Prov. 8.22).¹⁷⁶ As the beginning, Wisdom is the first aspect of Christ, in which the second *epinoia*, the Word, was. 'Someone might say boldly that wisdom is older than all the concepts in the names of the firstborn of all creation'¹⁷⁷ Since, as noted already, Origen places the Trinity beyond the realms of temporal extension, the priority of the *epinoia* of Wisdom over that of Word is only conceptual, rather than temporal – much like the priority of the Father over the Son and Spirit.

Origen differentiates between these two *epinoiai* and those that come into being afterwards. The crucial reason is because while these two 'were' (εἶναι), the others 'came into being' (γενέσθαι). As the Fourth Evangelist outlines in his prologue:

¹⁷¹ For instance, see *Com.Jn.* 1.151-288 (SC 120, 136-204); *P.A.* 1.2.1-13 (SC 252, 110-142); *Hom.Jer.* 8.2 (SC 232, 356-358); *C Cels.* 2.64 (SC 132, 434-436); 3.81 (SC 136, 182).

¹⁷² *Com.Jn.* 1.200 (SC 120, 158); *P.A.* 1.2.1 (SC 252, 110-112). Compare with *Strom.* 4.25.156-157 (SC 463, 318-320).

¹⁷³ *C Cels.* 2.64-65 (SC 132, 434-440); 4.16 (SC 136, 220-222); 6.68 (SC 147, 348-350); 6.75-77 (SC 147, 366-374); *Hom.Gen.* 14.1 (SC 7, 334-336). John McGuckin, "The Changing Forms of Jesus."

¹⁷⁴ *Com.Jn.* 1.201-203 (SC 120, 158-160).

¹⁷⁵ See Ronald Heine, "Epinoiai," 94; Matthew Kuhner, "The 'Aspects of Christ'", 201-202.

¹⁷⁶ *Com.Jn.* 1.111-118 (SC 120, 118-122), 1.289 (SC 120, 204-206).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 1.118 (SC 120, 122).

In the beginning *was* (ἦν) the Word, and the Word *was* (ἦν) with God and the Word *was* (ἦν) God... *What has come into being* (ὃ γέγονεν) in Him was life.¹⁷⁸

Subsequent *epinoiai*, such as Life, Light, Truth, come into being because they refer to some element of the Son's relationship to the created world.¹⁷⁹ There is an element of temporality involved in these *epinoiai*, therefore. Given that these economic *epinoiai* are countless,¹⁸⁰ the special status Origen gives to the titles of Wisdom and Word should not be underestimated.¹⁸¹ These two non-economic *epinoiai* of Christ, therefore, reflect aspects of the Son's existence besides his relationship to creation. Unlike those *epinoiai* which are 'for others' (ἄ μὲν τινα ἑτέροις), these aspects exist 'for himself' (τινὰ δὲ τάχα που αὐτῷ) and perhaps a few others, presumably the Father, Spirit and perhaps the perfected rational soul.¹⁸² God could never be without his Wisdom: it is essential to divine being. Neither could He be without his Word, since rationality is also an essential characteristic of God. They designate the Son's being in relation to himself and the rest of the Trinity and, in doing so, reflect the inner divinity of the Son.

The second way in which Origen expresses the multiplicity of the Son is specific to the *epinoia* of Wisdom. As the divine mind, Wisdom contains as its thoughts the principles of everything that will come into being in the cosmos.¹⁸³ The doctrine that the Platonic Ideas exist as thoughts of God was a commonplace in Middle-Platonic discourse; the result of the harmonisation of the somewhat limited and sterile Peripatetic νόησις νοήσεως with the Platonic world of the Forms.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, in the *Commentary on John*, Origen describes Wisdom as 'an incorporeal hypostasis of manifold concepts (θεωρημάτων) which embrace the principles (λόγους) of the whole world'¹⁸⁵ and in *Peri Archon* states that 'in the subsistence of wisdom itself there was every power and figure of the future

¹⁷⁸ John 1.1-1.4. Emphasis my own,

¹⁷⁹ *Com.Jn.* 2.130-131 (SC 120, 292-294). See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 60, 62.

¹⁸⁰ In *Ibid.* 1.136 (SC 120, 130), Origen states that it would be possible to collect 10000 times the number of titles applied to Christ as he has just enumerated in the preceding passages.

¹⁸¹ Origen does, however, suggest that Truth or Life could be included among the non-economic *epinoiai*. See *Ibid.* 1.123 (SC 120, 124).

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 1.128 (SC 120, 292).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 1.114 (SC 120, 120); *P.A.* 1.2.2-3 (SC 252, 112-116).

¹⁸⁴ Audrey Rich, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Mnemosyne* 7, no.1 (1954): 132; Arthur H. Armstrong, "The Philosophical Background of the Doctrine that the Intelligibles are not outside the Intellect," *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique* 5 (1960): 402-406; John Dillon, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," *Études Platoniciennes* 1 (2011): 31-42; Mark Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic; Or, On the Corporeality of Man," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (1992): 34-36. For the presence of this doctrine in Philo, see *De Opif* 17-20 (LCL 226, 14-18); *On the Cherubim* 49 (LCL 227, 38); in Clement, see *Strom.* 4.25.155 (SC 463, 316-318), 5.3.16 (SC 279, 48-50); and in Numenius, see *Fr.* 16.14-17 = *P.E.* 11.22.3-5 (SC 292, 158), *Fr.* 12.2 = *P.E.* 11.18.22-23 (SC 292, 144).

¹⁸⁵ *Com.Jn.* 1.244 (SC 120,180).

creation which came into being, both those which exist primarily or those which happen consequently of them, prefigured and arranged by the power of foreknowledge.¹⁸⁶

The contents of hypostasised Wisdom - θεωρημάτα; θεωρία; λόγοι; *species*, and *genera* – are one and the same as the contents of aretological wisdom. We will see these terms reappear throughout this thesis's examination of the virtue of wisdom. In particular, Origen frequently characterises the virtue of wisdom in terms of *theoremata*.¹⁸⁷ As θεωρία was a common term in Platonist circles referring to the highest stage of contemplation, θεωρημάτα refers to the objects of this contemplation. The process of growing in wisdom is understood, therefore, in terms of the increasing reception of *theoremata*.¹⁸⁸ It is by the Spirit of Wisdom that *theoremata* of wisdom are imparted to the soul.¹⁸⁹ Thus, these *theoremata* are reserved for the intellectually and spiritually mature.¹⁹⁰ In Book I of the *Commentary on John*, Origen distinguishes ethical teaching (ἠθικὰ μαθήματα) from the esoteric and mystical contemplation (ἀπόρρητα καὶ μυστικά θεωρήματα) reserved for the spiritual Christian.¹⁹¹ Elsewhere, *theoria* represents the esoteric and divine truths that sustain the angels and deified.¹⁹² In this manner, the inner nature of the Son determines the intellectual character and bounds of the virtue of wisdom.

It is, it appears, this doctrine of prefiguration that led to the accusation made against Origen that he believed in a Church of disembodied souls that pre-existed material creation.¹⁹³ He himself admits that the question of the origin and creation of human souls is a problem not easily grasped by the created mind.¹⁹⁴ How could God have been idle, not creating? Yet also, if creation is without

¹⁸⁶ P.A. 1.2.2 (SC 252, 115). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 2.126 (SC 120, 290). Origen does also speak similarly of the Word in *Com.Jn.* 5.5 (SC 120, 380): 'For the one Word consists of many concepts, of which each concept is a part of the whole Word.'

¹⁸⁷ *De Orat.* 25.2 (GCS 3, 358); *Hom.Ps.* 36 1.4 (GCS n.f. 19, 123); *Frag.Eph.* 32 (3, 570).

¹⁸⁸ *Com.Jn.* 32.172 (SC 385, 260); 32.181 (SC 385, 264).

¹⁸⁹ *Frag.Eph.* 9 (2, 399).

¹⁹⁰ *Com.Jn.* 6.1-5 (SC 157, 128-130); *C Cels.* 4.9 (SC 136, 206).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 1.208 (SC 120, 162).

¹⁹² *Ibid.* 13.203ff. (SC 222, 144ff.); *De Orat.* 27.10 (GCS 3, 369-370).

¹⁹³ For the most forceful defence of the traditional interpretation of Origen's pre-existent cosmos, see Peter Martens, "Origen's Doctrine of Pre-existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 16 (3), 2012, 516-549; Peter Martens, "Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity," "Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity: The Descent of the Soul in Plato and Origen," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 4 (2015): 594-620; Peter Martens, "Response to Edwards," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 23, no. 2 (2019): 186-200. For the argument against the pre-existence of disembodied souls, see Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 87-122; Mark Edwards, "Origen in Paradise: A Response to Peter Martens," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 23, no. 2 (2019): 163-185; Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 41-49; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 245-266.

¹⁹⁴ P.A. 1.4.4 (SC 252, 170).

beginning, how does one uphold the Creator-creation distinction?¹⁹⁵ Origen's solution to this conundrum was to argue that creatures were not coeternal with God but were pre-figured and pre-formed in Wisdom. As Origen makes clear in both the *Commentary on John* and in *Peri Archon*, this prefiguration involves no substantial existence: Wisdom contains their 'conformation and forms (τὴν πλάσιν καὶ τὰ εἶδη)' but not their essences (τὰς οὐσίας).¹⁹⁶ These are clearly not the Ideas of Platonist philosophy.¹⁹⁷ They exist within Wisdom as potentialities rather than fully realised entities. Mark Edwards has noted the similarity between Origen's treatment of natures and Aristotle's conception of εἶδη.¹⁹⁸ While conceptually distinguishable from their instantiations, they have no distinct existence outside of those things in which they inhere. The principles that will become subsistent entities when seeded into material creation exist only as principles in the mind of Wisdom before the act of creation. It is in this sense that the creation that was to come into being was 'prefigured' (προτρανωθέντας) in hypostasised Wisdom. It is on this account that Wisdom might be said to be created, in accordance with Prov. 8.22, since what is contained in Wisdom becomes the basis for creation.¹⁹⁹ However, the *logoi* themselves are uncreated: they are the thoughts of God, without which he could never exist.²⁰⁰ Here, we see how the fourth century debate surrounding the language of *ktisis* and *ktisma* are ill-fitting lenses for examining Origen's own usage. Clearly, then, what was 'created' in the beginning could not be any instantiated individuals (οἱ λογικοί), but the

¹⁹⁵ As noted above, Origen's conception of God's relation to temporality here is presented differently from elsewhere. The question of how God could exist at any point without created presupposes God's existence within time.

¹⁹⁶ *Com.Jn.* 1.115 (SC 120, 122); *P.A.* 1.4.5 (SC 252, 172). See Ilaria Ramelli, "Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria," 193.

¹⁹⁷ In contrast to his Alexandrian predecessor, Origen steers clear of using the terminology of 'Ideas.' What are contained within hypostasised Wisdom are 'objects of contemplation' (τὰ θεωρήματα) and 'principles' (οἱ λόγοι); the 'species' (*species*) and 'reasons' (*rationes*); or the 'species' and 'genera.' See *Com.Jn.* 1.244 (SC 120, 180); *P.A.* 1.2.3 (SC 252, 114-116); 1.4.5 (SC 252, 172). Origen rejects the doctrine of Ideas as Greek flights of fancy that must not be accepted within the Christian faith, though this objection is primarily to the possibility of asomatic entities that exist only in the 'realm of thoughts.' Nonetheless, Origen's terminological choice may result from a wish to distinguish his doctrine from that of Platonic philosophers. See *P. A.* 2.3.6 (SC 252, 266); Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 64-65, 96.

¹⁹⁸ Mark Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic"; Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 65.

¹⁹⁹ *Com.Jn.* 1.244 (SC 120, 180).

²⁰⁰ *Contra* Panayiotis Tzamalikos, who distinguishes the hypostasis of Wisdom and the *logoi* which are constitutive of the mind of God on more than a simply conceptual level, arguing that while the hypostasis of Wisdom is uncreated, the *logoi* are creations and as a totality form a 'created wisdom' that is placed into and adorns hypostatic Wisdom. The placement of these created *logoi* in the Son includes them in the divine life of the Son, thus bestowing the Son's own incorporeality and atemporality upon them. However, what kind of creator-creation distinction could exist between atemporal transcendent entities is difficult to comprehend. Tzamalikos's interpretation seems to militate against the obvious reading of Origen's text, the wider context of the doctrine of Ideas as divine thoughts, and Origen's expressed belief that true incorporeality is the sole preserve of God.

forms, species, and principles (τὰ λογικὰ) that will come to be instantiated in creation.²⁰¹ The question of the origins and nature of the soul will be examined in greater detail below.

Wisdom, therefore, is the model on which the material cosmos was created. Origen describes this model as a 'noetic cosmos,'²⁰² a term utilised by Philo before him to describe the 'world of Ideas' God used as a paradigm in creating the material world.²⁰³ These principles 'prefigure' the demiurgic creation of the material cosmos as an architects' plans prefigure the building of a house or a shipbuilder's plans do a ship. The ἀρχή of the house is the plans and thoughts of the craftsman (τοὺς ἐν τῷ τεχνίτη τύπους καὶ λόγους).²⁰⁴ The imagery used by Origen brings to mind a similar analogy made by his predecessor Philo. In *De Opificio Mundi* 15, Philo draws comparison between God and an architect who plans to build a new town.²⁰⁵ Just as an architect holds within his mind ideas which form the model on which the town is patterned, fashioning the city in his mind before bringing it into material existence, before creation God has in his Wisdom and Word the 'world of ideas' (ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν κόσμος) on which material reality is patterned.²⁰⁶ The simile only holds in part, however. The Son of God, in his different aspects, is in fact both the model and the architect, the noetic cosmos and the divine demiurge. As hypostasised Wisdom, the Son is the system of noetic objects that prefigure the cosmos; as the divine Word, the Son is the creative agent who fashions the cosmos according to this model. Just as within the Trinity, the Father stands aloof from the Son's activity in creating the cosmos, within the hypostasis of the Son, the *epinoia* of Wisdom is that aspect of the Son that most expresses his transcendence, while the Word expresses that transcendent aspect to created beings.

6. The Second Epinoia

So far, we have focussed on the noetic cosmos that prefigures and determines the shape of the material creation to come. The *epinoia* of Wisdom alone, however, is insufficient in explaining the order of creation and the existence of intellect in rational creatures. This also requires a movement from God into the cosmos; it requires the Word of God. As the *epinoia* of Wisdom reflects the Son's

²⁰¹ Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 96.

²⁰² Though, as Mark Edwards notes, this is a rare usage of this term by Origen and the only time it is used in this sense in his extant literature. See Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 96.

²⁰³ *Com.Jn.* 19.146-147 (SC 290, 134-136); *De Opif.* 16 (LCL 226, 14), 19 (LCL 226, 16), 25 (LCL 226, 21). Tzamalikos also uses the term 'providential creation.' While this term does capture the character of Origen's thought, derived as it is from *Expositio in Proverbia* 8 (PG 17, 185), it is not reliably authentic to Origen. See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 39.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 1.114 (SC 120, 120).

²⁰⁵ *De Opif.* 15 (LCL 226, 14). Also, see *Didask.* 9.163.11-9.164.6 (20-22).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 20 (LCL 226, 16).

inner character as related to the Father, the *epinoia* of the Word captures the outward expression of this inner character.²⁰⁷ Just as our speech is the projection of our inner mental lives outward into the world, the Word is the aspect of the Son that conveys the divinity of God and the principles contained within his Wisdom. The Word is Wisdom as communicated to creation; it is Wisdom in her relation to the world.²⁰⁸

This is chiefly demonstrated in his creative role. While the *epinoia* of Wisdom represents the Son as he contains the principles and plan of the creation to come, that of the Logos expresses his agency in utilising those plans and principles to create the physical cosmos. Taking up again the example of the architect or the shipbuilder towards the end of Book I of the *Commentary on John*, Origen states that ‘if we may say that a house has come into being by the word of the architect and the ship by the word of the shipbuilder, thus the heavens come into being by the Word of God.’²⁰⁹ The paradigm by which the house or ship is built is contained within the mind of the architect or shipbuilder, but the actual fashioning is effected by their word. This does not undermine the non-economic nature of the *epinoia* of the Word, since the Word must pre-exist creation in order to effect it. Comparison can be made with the respective roles of the Forms and the Demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeus*, a text that also clearly had an influence upon Valentinian Sophia mythology.²¹⁰ However, the manner in which Origen understands the relationship between the Wisdom and the Demiurge is very different to that envisioned by Valentinian thinkers. This question is the central concern of the first excerpt of Heracleon’s work to which Origen refers in the *Commentary on John*. Discussing John 1.3, Origen takes umbrage at the contrived manner in which Heracleon interprets the terms πάντα and διὰ.²¹¹ Heracleon doesn’t include all things within the definition of πάντα and in fact, Origen argues, only includes the things that are less true and less real – the material – within its scope.²¹² Heracleon’s interpretation of διὰ is no less laboured in Origen’s estimation. As Origen argues, Heracleon’s interpretation plainly perverts the obvious meaning of the text. If the Evangelist had intended what Heracleon suggests, he would surely have said that all things, or rather all material things, were made ‘by’ (ὑπο) the Logos ‘through’ (διὰ) the Demiurge.²¹³ Heracleon has failed to pay due attention to the prepositions used. Instead, the Gospel states that God created through the Logos, with the Logos himself directly involved in the act of material creation.

²⁰⁷ *Com.Jn.* 1.289 (SC 120, 204-206); 2.40 (SC 120, 232).

²⁰⁸ See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 165.

²⁰⁹ *Com.Jn.* 1.288 (SC 120, 204).

²¹⁰ See Carl Séan O’Brien, *The Demiurge in Ancient Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 205-243.

²¹¹ *Com.Jn.* 2.100-102 (SC 120, 270-272).

²¹² *Ibid.* 2.101 (SC 120, 272).

²¹³ *Ibid.* 2.102 (SC 120, 272-274).

Origen foregrounds the unity of God and the demiurge. While the Son is the agent of creation, he is the perfect expression of the Father's will. The same unity does not exist between Heracleon's Logos and Demiurge. In contrast to the Valentinian myth of a rupture in the divine Pleroma and the fall of one of its aeons, Origen locates the fall within the created realm. Creation itself is entirely guided by God's providential care. This is part of what it means for the world to have its origin in the seeds that are contained within hypostasised Wisdom. Much like the words of Prov. 3.19 or Sir. 1.9 referenced above, the entirety of creation is made and sustained according to God's plan. As we shall see below, this results in significantly differing evaluations of the material cosmos between Origen and his Valentinian opponents. The fact that all of creation is governed by God's Wisdom determines both the contents wisdom and the medium of its revelation. As will be covered in greater detail in Chapter Four, cosmological matters are by necessity included within the epistemic scope of aretological wisdom, and the cosmos itself is a physical medium through which noetic *theoremata* are discernible.

This providential care also entails that the Word's creative role is not an isolated historical action. While Origen tends to emphasise the Son's role as the noetic archetype and demiurgic architect of the material cosmos to a greater degree, he also understands the Son to immanently sustain creation. As the 'flawless mirror of the working of God,' Wisdom possesses the same power 'by which the Father operates, either when he creates, or acts providentially, or judges, or when he dispenses and administers individual things, each in their own time.'²¹⁴ Wisdom had been characterised in the Wisdom of Solomon in a manner very similar to the Platonic interpretation of the World Soul.²¹⁵ Origen suggests similarly when he argues that the statement 'all things were made through him and without him nothing was made' (Jn. 1.3) could only always be true if the Word 'has permeated all creation' (Col. 1.16-17).²¹⁶ As the passage from *Peri Archon* quoted above suggests, the *epinoia* of Power (δύναμις) becomes especially relevant in this matter. While the *epinoiai* of Wisdom and Word are not entirely absent,²¹⁷ the Son's immanent permeation and sustenance of creation is primarily expressed under the aspect of Power. The Word and the Power of God are closely linked, the Word having 'filled the world, that is, the heavens and the earth and the

²¹⁴ P.A. 1.2.12 (SC 252, 138).

²¹⁵ Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 65-67, 74-76; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 22-24; Gregory E. Sterling, "The Love of Wisdom: Middle Platonism and Stoicism in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy, 100BCE-100CE*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 207-210.

²¹⁶ *Com.Jn.* 6.188 (SC 157, 268); 6.195 (SC 157, 274-276). See Alan B. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 126; Alistair H. B. Logan, "Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology," 124.

²¹⁷ See *Ibid.* 6.202-203 (SC 157, 280-282); P.A. 2.1.3 (SC 252, 238-240).

lower regions' by the 'power of the Lord.'²¹⁸ God's skill and power are evident throughout the cosmos,²¹⁹ and the power of God is that 'by which he establishes, continues, and governs all things visible and invisible, by which he is sufficient for all things, for which he governs providence and with whom he is present, as if united with all things.'²²⁰ Power, unlike Wisdom or Word, is a wholly economic *epinoia* and so better suited for immanent existence in the world.²²¹ Thus, the transcendence of the divine Word is upheld, in keeping with the pseudo-Aristotelian context highlighted by Ramelli.²²² It is nevertheless, the Word, as bridge between Wisdom and the cosmos, that works through this all-permeating Power.²²³

The *epinoia* of the Word is not limited in its role to the creation and maintenance of the cosmos. The Word also expresses the *epinoia* of hypostasised Wisdom in the mediation of the virtue of wisdom to rational beings. Through the Word, rational creatures have 'secrets of wisdom and the mysteries of knowledge' opened up to them.²²⁴

Wisdom is considered according to the structure of the contemplation and thoughts of all things (τὴν σύστασιν τῆς περὶ τῶν ὄλων θεωρίας καὶ νοημάτων), whereas the Word is received according to the communion with the rational things of what is contemplated (τὴν πρὸς τὰ λογικὰ κοινωνίαν τῶν τεθεωρημένων).²²⁵

By the communicative work of the Word, one is able to participate in the contemplation of the *logoi* and *logika*, of which Wisdom is the unitive system. The Word expresses the *logika* contained within Wisdom to the *logikoi*, the rational souls in the material cosmos, so that they may be made wise.

Intellection, therefore, is an act of participation in the divine Logos.²²⁶ In *Peri Archon* 1.3.6-8, Origen identifies the respective roles of the hypostases of the Trinity: the Father's influence extends to the being of all things; the Son's to the rationality of all rational creatures; while that of the Holy Spirit

²¹⁸ *Hom. Luke* 6.10 (SC 87, 150). Also, see *De Orat.* 23.1 (GCS 3, 349-250).

²¹⁹ *P.A.* 4.1.7 (SC 268, 284-292); *Philoc.* 2.4 (SC 302, 246).

²²⁰ *Ibid.* 1.2.9 (SC 252, 130).

²²¹ See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 167. Tzamalikos suggests this is a defence of the transcendence of the divine Word.

²²² See *Ibid.* 167; Ilaria Ramelli, "Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria," 191. In the words of Pseudo-Aristotle 'It is nobler and worthier of the divinity to dwell in the highest place, while its power permeates the whole of the cosmos (τὴν δὲ δύναμιν διὰ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου διήκουσαν)'. Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 398 b 7-9 (85).

²²³ Similar language concerning the immanence of the Son using of the same proof texts (*Col.* 1.16-17; *Wis.* 7.24; 8.1) is used of the relationship of the Word and Wisdom to the Church of believers. See *Com. Matt.* 16.3 (GCS 40, 470-1); *Hom. Ps.* 38 2.1 (SC 411, 370).

²²⁴ *P.A.* 1.2.7 (SC 252, 124).

²²⁵ *Com. Jn.* 1.111 (SC 120, 112).

²²⁶ See David L. Balás, "The Idea of Participation in the Structure of Origen's Thought."

extends only to the saints.²²⁷ The characterisation of the Father's sphere of influence further demonstrates that suggestions elsewhere that he might exist beyond being do not reflect a settled position in Origen's work. As Origen states in his fourteenth *Homily on Jeremiah*: 'Whoever is rational (λογικός), he partakes in the true light. But every human is rational. Therefore, while all men partake of the Word, in some the strength of the Word increases, but in others it wanes.'²²⁸ All rational beings depend for their rationality and reasoning skills on the rationality of the divine Word. In humans, this is expressed in the concept of the *imago dei*: as Origen notes, properly speaking the image of God is the Son or Word; humankind is made 'according to the image' (κατ' εικόνα) or in the image of the Image.²²⁹ The image of the Word in humanity is the basis of their rational capacity; a reflection of the Word's innate rationality and this rational capacity is the means by which wisdom is made possible:

All who are rational are partakers in the Word of God – that is, reason – and through this they carry, as it were, certain seeds, inserted into them, of wisdom and righteousness, which is Christ.²³⁰

Two of the crucial epistemic conditions which will, over the course of this thesis, be found to be crucial for Christian salvation – wisdom and reason – are, therefore, closely bound up with the nature and character of the Son of God as he exists 'for himself.' Wisdom, we have seen, is understood as the pinnacle of human life because Wisdom as a hypostasis is the most fundamental and profound aspect of the Son of God – that aspect of God that both captures the Son as he exists *qua* the Father and as the noetic and intellectual basis that undergirds all of creation. The nature and contents of aretological wisdom are reflective of the nature and contents of this hypostasis. The virtue of Wisdom is theoretical because Wisdom is that aspect of the Son which has not direct involvement in the world of being. As the very mind of God, it is a purely noetic aspect of the Son. Furthermore, this hypostasis's contents - *theoremata, theoria, noeta, logoi*, and so on - are the objects of the contemplative action concerning which the contemplative virtue of wisdom is exercised. As we have seen, this is expressed in the world, both in creative and epistemic forms, through the work of the second aspect of the Son, the Logos. Throughout this thesis, it will be seen that the relationship between Wisdom and the Word is reflected in the relation between the virtue of wisdom and reason within the life of the created rational soul. As the Word is the outward

²²⁷ P.A. 1.3.8 (SC 252, 162). See John Dillon, "Origen's Doctrine of the Trinity and Some Later Neoplatonic Theories," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 19-23.

²²⁸ *Hom.Jer.* 14.10 (SC 238, 84-86). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 2.15 (SC 120, 216); 2.20 (SC 120, 220).

²²⁹ *Com.Jn.* 2.20 (SC 120, 220).

²³⁰ P.A. 1.3.6 (SC 252, 154). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 2.15 (SC 120, 216).

expression of the divine Wisdom, created reason is the means of grasping the virtue of wisdom which exists under the veil of materiality. The relation of the virtue of wisdom and the noetic world to material matters will be examined in further detail in the next chapter by examining the subjective position of rational beings within the material cosmos.

Chapter Two: The Anthropological Foundation of Wisdom

So far, in outlining the ontology that Origen understands to underpin the virtue of wisdom, we have focussed for the most part upon the objective aspect of intellection: the noetic objects of mental activity; the *theoremata* and *logoi* that make up hypostasised Wisdom. The subjective aspect of intellection has also been noted – that is, how rational creatures are able to partake of mental activity through participation in the divine intellect. For this subjective aspect of intellection to be manifested in the cosmos, there must be a participant as well as the divine intellect in which it participates. With regards to rationality and the virtue of wisdom, participation in the divine Word and Wisdom requires a certain kind of created being; one endowed with rational faculties through which it is able to contemplate the noetic objects of aretological wisdom.

Therefore, it is also necessary to examine the nature of the human being and how it partakes of the Logos and how this participation enables its acquisition of wisdom. Given Origen's tripartite anthropology, this requires a further examination of the spiritual-material distinction and its inner working within Origen's thought. This will naturally once again require conversation with Valentinian anthropological beliefs. As we shall see, Origen does not dichotomise the spiritual and material in the manner of certain Gnostic and Marcionite sects and of some Platonist thinkers. Rather, we shall find that, though Origen does distinguish ontologically between the noetic and the material – between the *eidei* and *logoi* and the things in which they are substantiated – the two do not in themselves present opposing moral principles. The ethical distinction between spiritual and worldly or material matters is in fact a dynamic and subjective relation of the soul to the world around it. In this chapter, the soul's rational faculty – its participation in the divine Logos – will be demonstrated to be central both to Origen's understanding of the distinction between the worldly and the spiritual and to his response to Valentinian anthropology and what he perceives as their pre-deterministic worldview. In opposition to their strict dualism, Origen's opposition between the worldly and the spiritual is understood to be a corollary of the free rational capacity for choice and value determinations. On account of this rational free determination, the ability to develop spiritually, to attain the virtue of wisdom, lies within the power of the soul (at least when conjoined with divine power and grace).

1. Origen and Valentinian Anthropology

For both Origen and his ‘Gnostic’ opponents, anthropology and cosmology were intimately tied to one another. Origen made no secret of his anthropocentric worldview.²³¹ It is, therefore, no surprise to find that his understanding of the cosmos is mirrored closely in his understanding of each individual rational creature. It was a common feature of Greek philosophy in antiquity to present the human being as a microcosm of the universe and Origen portrayed humankind in just this manner. Nowhere is this clearer than in his homily on the first book of Genesis, wherein he allegorises the entire creation narrative to map onto the spiritual and psychic typology of the human being.²³² Adopting what Crouzel describes as the ‘symbolic Platonist view of the world,’²³³ both Origen and his heterodox ‘Gnostic’ and Valentinian opponents understood the cosmos to exist according to a ‘twofold mode of arrangement’.²³⁴ The material world we perceive with our senses and experience by means of our bodies is an image of the true, noetic, divine reality. Reality is therefore experienced according to two contrary tendencies: the spiritual and the material.

However, the manner in which this distinction is conceptualised is very different for Origen and for his adversaries. Valentinians such as Heracleon understood the material cosmos to be antithetical to the gnosis that originates in the divine realm of the Pleroma. For him, the manner in which one experiences the Saviour and the cosmos is a matter of the category of substance to which each person belongs. As stated above, humanity is divided into three distinct classes: the πνευματικοί, the ψυχικοί, and the χοϊκοί or ὑλικοί. These categories refer to the Valentinian Church, members of the wider Christian community, and non-Christians respectively. The soteriological significance of the taxonomy of humankind becomes clear in the manner of their reactions to the appearance of the Saviour. As stated in the *Tripartite Tractate*:

Each of the three essential types is known by its fruit. And they were not known at first but only at the coming of the Savior, who shone upon the saints and revealed what each was. The spiritual race, being like light from light and like spirit from spirit, when its head appeared, it ran toward him immediately. It immediately became a body of its head. It suddenly received

²³¹ See Book IV of *Contra Celsum*, especially. *C Cels.* 4.74-99 (SC 136, 366-434). On Celsus’s anti-anthropocentric doctrine of creation, to which Origen was responding, see David Sedley, “Celsus as Platonist Philosopher,” in *Celsus in his World: Philosophy, Polemic, and Religion in the Second Century*, ed. James Carleton Paget (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021), 109-116.

²³² *Hom.Gen.* 1 (SC 7, 26-76). See especially *Hom.Gen.* 1.12 (SC 7, 54-56): ‘all these things which are seen came into existence by the command of God through his Word and that immense visible world was prepared (but at the same time also the allegorical figure showed what those things were which could adorn the lesser world, that is, man).’ See Gerald Bostock, “Origen’s Philosophy of Creation,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 260-262.

²³³ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 139.

²³⁴ *P.A.* 2.11.6 (SC 252, 406).

knowledge in the revelation. The psychic race is like light from a fire, since it hesitated to accept knowledge of him who appeared to it. (It hesitated) even more to run toward him in faith. Rather, through a voice it was instructed and this was sufficient, since it is not far from the hope according to the promise, since it received, so to speak as a pledge, the assurance of things which were to be. The material race, however, is alien in every way; since it is dark, it shuns the shining of the light because its appearance destroys it. And since it has not received its unity, it is something excessive and hateful toward the Lord at his revelation.²³⁵

While the *pneumatikoi* instantly recognise the Saviour and achieve gnosis on this account, the *psychikoi* can come to some degree of recognition of him but this is not guaranteed and is the result of a didactic process. The *choikoi* exist completely outside the possibility of salvation. How the Saviour enacted these two processes of salvation is conceptualised differently in the Italian and Eastern schools of Valentinianism.²³⁶ The former prioritised the salvation of the *psychikoi* in their accounts of the Incarnation, while the latter centred their accounts on the redemption of the *pneumatikoi*. Nonetheless, both understood there to be two processes of salvation, with two unequal degrees of redemption.²³⁷

As Kovacs highlights, this two-tiered system of salvation arose from Valentinian interpretations of the Pauline distinction between grace and works.²³⁸ Irenaeus's account of a follower of Ptolemy demonstrates this most clearly:

The consummation will take place when all that is spiritual (τὸ πνευματικὸν) is formed and perfected through gnosis, that is the spiritual humans who have perfect knowledge concerning God and have been initiated in the mysteries of Achamoth (οἱ τὴν τελείαν γνῶσιν ἔχοντες περὶ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἀχαμῶθ· μεμνημένους δὲ μυστήρια).²³⁹ The psychic humans, however, who are established through works and through mere faith (οἱ δι' ἔργων καὶ πίστεως ψιλῆς βεβαιούμενοι), and who lack perfect knowledge, have received an education in soulish things (Ἐπαιδεύθησαν γὰρ τὰ ψυχικὰ, also see 1 Cor. 2.14). These, they say, are we who are of the church. For this reason they assert that good conduct is necessary for us

²³⁵ *Tri. Trac.* 118.21-119.16 (p.94-95).

²³⁶ See Einar Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 81-82.

²³⁷ For instance, Thomassen identifies the soteriology of Heracleon and the *Tripartite Tractate* as characteristic of the Eastern school, yet, as we shall see, both demonstrate a belief in some form of redemption for the *psychikoi*. See Einar Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 46-58, 103-118.

²³⁸ See Judith L. Kovacs, "Grace and Works: Clement of Alexandria's Response to Valentinian Exegesis of Paul," in *Ancient Perspectives on Paul*, ed. Tobias Nicklas, Andreas Merkt, and Joseph Verheyden (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 191-210.

²³⁹ Achamoth is a name given to the lower form of Sophia in this version of the Valentinian mythology in which Sophia is divided into a higher and lower form, one returning to the Pleroma, the other remaining in the intermediate place between the Pleroma and the cosmos.

(otherwise we cannot be saved), but they hold that they will most certainly be saved, not because of their conduct, but because they are by nature spiritual (αὐτοὺς δὲ μὴ διὰ πράξεως, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ φύσει πνευματικούς εἶναι, πάντη τε καὶ πάντως σωθήσεσθαι δογματίζουσιν).²⁴⁰

Irenaeus and Tertullian argued that, on this basis, the Valentinians give themselves up to libertine lifestyles, supposedly safe in the knowledge that their salvation is guaranteed by their spiritual natures.²⁴¹ This is probably a polemical untruth and the distinction between gnosis and works concerned the Pauline conception of divine grace rather than practical morality.²⁴²

Heracleon mirrors this passage from Irenaeus in his interpretations of the Samaritan woman and the son of the royal official in John 4. He interprets these two figures as symbols of the *pneumatikoi* and *psychikoi* respectively. Origen recounts the manner in which Heracleon characterised the former as possessing a nature that was essentially divine:

*For those who are of the same nature as the Father (αὐτοὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως ὄντες τῷ πατρὶ) are also spirit, who worship according to truth and not in error... Let us consider, however, if it is not extremely godless to say that those who worship God in the spirit, whom Heracleon said not long before had fallen away when he said that the Samaritan woman who has a spiritual nature (πνευματικῆς φύσεως) had committed fornication, are of the same substance as his unbegotten and entirely blessed nature (ὁμοουσίους τῇ ἀγεννήτῳ φύσει καὶ παμμακαρίᾳ).*²⁴³

As a representation of the *pneumatikoi*, the Samaritan woman immediately and intuitively recognises the truth of the Saviour:

*But he also approves the Samaritan woman as having demonstrated a faith that was unhesitating and appropriate to her nature, not doubting what he said to her.*²⁴⁴

Not every person possessing a spiritual nature possesses gnosis but their nature grants them an intuitive recognition of its truth upon contact with the Saviour's spiritual teaching. Having been mired in the material world, the spiritual aspect of the *pneumatikoi* lies dormant before being reawakened by the coming of the Saviour who descends from the Pleroma. In Heracleon's words,

²⁴⁰ *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.1-4 (SC 264, 92-94). On the Pauline influence on this passage and for similar accounts of the Valentinian distinction between the gnosis of the Valentinians and the faith of the broader Church, see Judith Kovacs, "Grace and Works," 198-200.

²⁴¹ *Adv. Val.* 30 (SC 281, 140-142); *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.3 (SC 264, 94-96).

²⁴² See Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 136-140; Judith Kovacs, "Grace and Works," 199.

²⁴³ *Com. Jn.* 13.148-149 (SC 222, 110-112).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 13.63 (SC 222, 64). See Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, 87, 90.

when a person naturally predisposed to gnosis receives a little prick (βραχέα διανυθηῖσα), they will gush forth with the spiritual and living water of gnosis.²⁴⁵ After having received this gnosis, the Samaritan woman, therefore, rejects her previous association with the material cosmos.²⁴⁶

The son of the royal official is interpreted as the psychic class of human being on account of the Demiurge's sovereignty over the cosmos.²⁴⁷ His sickness represents his ignorance and sin.²⁴⁸ However, unlike the Samaritan woman, he does not experience an instant recognition of the Saviour. Heracleon interprets Jesus's words, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (John 4.48), to mean that the psychic person 'is persuaded by sense perception, and does not believe the word (δι' αἰσθήσεως πείθεσθαι καὶ οὐχὶ λόγῳ πιστεύειν).'²⁴⁹ Irenaeus's account resembles this, saying that 'the psychic needed perceptible means of instruction.'²⁵⁰ Such people are not guaranteed to accept Jesus and require ongoing persuasion by sensible means to work towards their salvation. The salvation of the *psychikoi* is 'determined by works.'²⁵¹ The *pneumatikoi* play an important role in the salvation of the psychic Christian Church:

The spiritual has been sent forth in order that, having been joined with the psychic, the latter might be formed and educated by communion with it. This is said to be the salt and light of the world.²⁵²

Receiving perfect gnosis according to their spiritual nature, the *pneumatikoi* act as pedagogues to the *psychikoi*, converting their direct and instantaneous recognition into perceptible teachings and temporally extended instruction. Heracleon interprets the Samaritan woman's return from her meeting with Jesus to the city in much the same terms:

Heracleon, however, supposes *the water jar to be the capability of receiving life, and that the conception of the power is from the Saviour, which was left behind, he says, with him; that is, having such a vessel with the Saviour with which she had come to receive the living water, she returned to the cosmos announcing the coming of Christ to the elect. For the soul is lead to the Saviour through the Spirit and by the Spirit.*²⁵³

²⁴⁵ *Com.Jn.* 13.62-65 (SC 222, 64).

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 13.65 (SC 222, 64); 13.191 (SC 222, 136).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 13.416 (SC 222, 262).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 13.416 (SC 222, 262).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 13.419 (SC 222, 264).

²⁵⁰ *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.1 (SC 264, 90).

²⁵¹ *Com.Jn.* 13.419 (SC 222, 264).

²⁵² *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.1 (SC 264, 90-91).

²⁵³ *Com.Jn.* 13.187 (SC 222, 134-136). Also see *Com.Jn.* 13.62 (SC 222, 64),

The similarities of Origen's own understanding of the spiritual Christian's pedagogy will be considered in Chapter Six.

There are, therefore, two distinct anthropological principles of salvation in the Valentinian system as instantiated by Heracleon. For the *pneumatikoi*, the anthropological principle that grounds their potential acquisition of gnosis is their spiritual nature, their consubstantiality with Logos-Sophia. For the *psychikoi*, on the other hand, it was their free will that allowed them to choose between the psychic-material cosmos and the teaching of the pleromic Saviour. Hence, their recognition is not instantaneous but requires ongoing training and instruction.

In a manner of open philosophical engagement, Origen finds a fair amount in Heracleon's interpretations with which to agree. Origen could agree with Heracleon that the water from Jacob's well represents a form of life that is 'impotent, transient, and deficient, for it was worldly' and that his interpretation of the 'leaping water' was made 'not unconvincingly' (οὐκ ἀπιθάνως).²⁵⁴ The manner in which he interprets the Samaritan woman's husbands is also not dissimilar to Heracleon. Both understand her husbands to represent the falseness that arises from the material, sensible cosmos. For Heracleon, her six husbands represent all material evil to which the spiritual Church was condemned before being freed from its ignorance by the coming of the Saviour.²⁵⁵ Origen, on the other hand, as he so often does when encountering multiples of five in the Scriptures, interprets her five previous husbands to represent the five senses.²⁵⁶

However, even in these cases where Origen utilises similar interpretative frames of reference to Heracleon, the doctrines he draws place him squarely at odds with his Valentinian adversary. While he acknowledges the positive aspects of Heracleon's interpretation of the Samaritan woman episode, he rejects any notion that her knowledge was the consequence of her fixed nature or that material creation was inherently antithetical to the Saviour's message. While Heracleon suggests that the physical nature of the sensible cosmos and of the Hebrew Scriptures places them essentially against the spiritual nature of gnosis, Origen constructs an anagogic hierarchy. The deficiency of the material sphere represented by Jacob's well is understood to be the imperfect manner in which knowledge is mediated through the material world; it is the deficiency of the letter when compared to the spirit of Scripture; or the present knowledge mediated through images compared to the

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 13.57-58 (SC 222, 62); 13.62-64 (SC 222, 64).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 13.71-72 (SC 222, 68).

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 13.51 (SC 222, 58-60). Origen accused Heracleon of having corrupted the text of John 4.18 to refer to six rather than five husbands. It is possible that Heracleon possessed a different redaction of the Gospel or that Heracleon simply added the woman's current husband to her previous five. See Yvonne Janssens, "Héracléon: Commentaire sur l'Evangile selon St. Jean," *Le Muséon* 72 (1959): 135 n. 43; Bart Ehrmann, "Heracleon, Origen, and the Text of the Fourth Gospel," *Vigiliae Christianae* 47, no. 2 (1993): 112.

perfect knowledge attained in the eschaton.²⁵⁷ The living water, on the other hand, was the truth considered in an angelic, superhuman manner, revealed directly by the Son as Word and Wisdom.²⁵⁸ Origen is thus in agreement with Heracleon that the woman's transition from Jacob's well to the living water represents the development of wisdom in the life of the Christian soul. However, unlike his opponent, Origen understands the former to act as a propaedeutic to this later wisdom. Similarly, with regards to her husbands, the same anagogic hierarchy is evident. The senses which are represented by the initial five are not antithetical to spiritual knowledge but, if utilised correctly, become the first step on a ladder leading to perfect, spiritual knowledge.²⁵⁹ The first is an important precondition for the second, rather than an alternative, secondary means of salvation. While Origen accepts a two-tiered view of the cosmos, the noetic is discerned within the material as its ruling governing principle. As noted in the previous chapter, the *eidei* and *logoi* of the noetic realm do not exist in their own right but only receive existence when seeded into materiality, in the manner of Aristotelian forms. Thus, the material is not in itself another principle in competition with or separable from the noetic (except conceptually), but the medium through which they are expressed and instantiated outside the Godhead.

Origen's conception of progressive revelation, in which the lower level acts as a propaedeutic to the higher spiritual level of understanding, militates against the deterministic anthropology that he identifies with Heracleon and other heterodox thinkers who 'introduce natures' according to which humanity is divided. This is not to say that Origen himself does not introduce divisions within the Christian Church. Most famously, in *Peri Archon*, he differentiates three means of reading the Christian Scriptures according to three groups of readers: the body of the text is intended for simple believer; the soul of the text for those who have made some progress; and the spirit of the text for the perfect Christian.²⁶⁰ Despite surface similarities with the 'Gnostic' taxonomies of souls, such comparisons are misleading. Origen's intellectualism is not characterised by fixed divisions but by a universalism that invites every rational creature to develop from lesser to greater levels of understanding, virtue, and sanctity.²⁶¹

Origen is insistent that the Samaritan woman was not possessed of a special nature denied to other human beings. In contrast to the instantaneous recognition that characterises Heracleon's spiritual Samaritan, Origen understands the Christian's wisdom to be the result of a long process available to

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 13.58 (SC 222, 62).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 13.41 (SC 222, 54).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 13.51 (SC 222, 58-60).

²⁶⁰ *P.A.* 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310-312). Also, see *Hom.Num.* 9.7 [SC 415, 252-256].

²⁶¹ This subject will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Four in relation to the progressive nature of revelation and pedagogy,

all. The Samaritan woman's thirst is evidence of her repeated trips to draw from Jacob's fountain. Only after one has diligently come again and again to these sensible Scriptures is one able to receive living water from Jesus:

It is not possible, however, for someone who has not attended carefully in coming to draw water from that source due of their thirst for the water which is given by the Word, which is different from that drawn from Jacob's fountain. Thus, in this manner, most do not devote much time to exercising themselves in drawing water from the fountain of Jacob.²⁶²

The Samaritan woman's understanding is the result of her application of her own free will towards good ends.

The importance of this freedom is seen in Origen's approach to a second passage that became a focus of anthropological debate between himself and Heracleon, Jesus's statements on the ancestry of his Jewish opponents in John 8. Statements such as 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here... You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires' (John 8.42-44) were grist to the mill for those who proposed predestination by nature.²⁶³ It is easy to see how this passage could lead to such naturalising interpretations. The ability to hear Jesus' words, according to Heracleon, was determined by whether one was a child of the devil or of God. 'You are of your father the devil' means nothing other than that you are 'of the same essence as the devil (ὁμοουσίους τινὰς τῷ διαβόλῳ).'²⁶⁴ Heracleon distinguishes between this group, the children of Abraham, and the children of God, representing the *hylikoi*, *psychikoi*, and *pneumatikoi* respectively.²⁶⁵ Origen's navigation of this potentially hazardous passage relies on demonstrating that one's spiritual paternity was not fixed but liable to change. The first part of Origen's strategy is to gather instances of biblical figures who have changed from non-belief to faith in God. Paul's Damascene conversion provides a striking example. No Christian would deny that Paul ought to be considered a child of God. Yet, according to the words of Scripture, Paul persecuted God himself (Acts 9.4).²⁶⁶ If this is so, there was a time when Paul did not love God and was not his child, but he later became so. As Jeffrey Trumbower notes, the fact that some souls become children of God having not previously been so does not demonstrate the free will of the soul, since the soul's

²⁶² *Com.Jn.* 13.42 (SC 222, 54).

²⁶³ See *Ibid.* 20.168-170 (SC 290, 238-240); 20.211-218 (SC 290, 260-264); 20.252-254 (SC 290, 280-282); 20.287-288 (SC 290, 296-298). For more on Origen's discussion of this passage, see Jeffrey Trumbower, "Origen's Exegesis of John 8:19-53: The Struggle with Heracleon over the Idea of Fixed Natures," *Vigiliae Christianae* 43, no. 2 (1989): 138-154.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 20.170 (SC 290, 240).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 20.168 (SC 290, 238-240).

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 20.135-139 (SC 290, 224-226).

condition could be subject to change purely through the work of divine election.²⁶⁷ However, quoting Matt. 5.44-45, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become children of your Father in heaven,' Origen highlights the difference between being and becoming, as he had done in Christological contexts. He notes that Jesus' audience are not said to be children of the Father in heaven, but to *become* so if they follow God's commandments.²⁶⁸ This places the soul's spiritual paternity squarely within the determination of their own free decision making.

2. Reason and the Intermediate Soul

Other potentially troublesome passages for Origen's conception of free will are addressed in book III of *Peri Archon*. Chief among these is God's statement in Exod. 4.21 and 7.3 that he would harden the Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the Israelites go. As Origen recounts, 'some of the heterodox (τῶν ἡτεροδόξων τινές) use these, all but destroying free will (αὐτεξούσιον) by introducing natures which are lost (διὰ τὸ φύσεις εἰσάγειν ἀπολλυμένας), incapable of being saved, and others which are saved, unable to be lost, and they say that the Pharaoh, being of a lost nature (φύσεως ὄντα ἀπολλυμένης), on account of this is hardened by God who has mercy on the spiritual but hardens the earthly (τοὺς χοϊκῆς).'²⁶⁹ Origen's solution to this challenge was to argue that a singular act on God's part has different effects on different people according to their freely made response. Just as the rain produces fruit in some soil and thorns in others depending upon its condition of the soil, despite the shared nature of earth, God's activity hardens some hearts and redeems others according to the freely made disposition of their souls.²⁷⁰ God wishes and works for all soul's to be saved, but the variance of human free decisions allow some to be saved and to attain wisdom, while others reject this in favour of falsity, sin, and folly.

Despite the importance Origen places upon the material, sensible world as a propaedeutic for knowledge of spiritual matters, it is also a potential source of moral hazard. As much as the Samaritan woman's five husbands can prepare her for Jesus's message, they can equally lead her to her sixth husband. Her sixth husband represents heterodox doctrines to which a soul turns, after learning elementary things, mistakenly seeking to uncover deeper spiritual truths without the help of the Son.²⁷¹ Indeed, as Alviar outlines, there is an 'intriguing tension' in Origen's attitude to the

²⁶⁷ Jeffrey Trumbower, "Origen's Exegesis of John 8:19-53," 147-8.

²⁶⁸ *Com.Jn.* 20.140-143 (SC 290, 226).

²⁶⁹ *P.A.* 3.1.8 (SC 268, 48).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 3.1.10-11 (SC 268, 56-68).

²⁷¹ *Com.Jn.* 13.51 (SC 222, 58-60).

world.²⁷² On the one hand, he understands all of creation to reflect the inherent goodness of its creator and all to be governed by the divine providence of the Word. On the other, it is an imperfect and inexact medium through which God's divinity is expressed, one which is also associated with sin and with the hazard of material attractions.²⁷³ Frequently in Origen's work, the world is presented as the demesne of Satan and his hostile powers, something that the Christian soul must escape to achieve salvation. The incongruity between these characterisations is explicable in part by the different perspectives with which creation can be viewed. To the omniscient and all-benevolent God, creation is good, but to the fallible rational creature who does not always know how to esteem things appropriately, it can equally be a source of moral jeopardy. Thus, the role of the Incarnation is understood in part as a mission to re-orient the perspective of rational creatures:

Perhaps, as well, the white fields ready for harvest to those lifting up their eyes are all the sensible things, even up to heaven itself and the things in it, clearly referring to those who, by understand the reason of each thing (τοῦ περὶ ἐκάστου λόγου) and by being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, were like the eyes which have seen how each thing was created good. For the fact that the words "God saw that it was good" is said concerning each creation shows that God observed the reason of each thing (τοῖς λόγοις ἐκάστου) and saw how each created thing is good according to its creation... the Word who is present with the disciples urges his listeners to lift up their eyes to both the fields of Scripture and the fields of the reason in each thing which exists, in order that one might contemplate the whiteness and the brightness of the omnipresent light of truth.²⁷⁴

Though Origen often presents a sharp and seemingly ontological dualism between spiritual and corporeal things, in his more considered and philosophical texts such as this commentary and *Peri Archon*, this dualism is seen to be more ethical and ontological. Corporeal things can be reconciled to the spirit, but fleshly ways of life cannot. As this passage suggests, true wisdom will not be unconcerned with the material cosmos but will understand it in the context of divine wisdom and providence.

The relation of free will to this moral dualism can be seen if we consider how Origen conceptualises the tripartite constitution of the human being. Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5.23 are fundamental to Origen's anthropology throughout his works, though he utilises them in a very different manner

²⁷² José Alviar, *Klesis: The Theology of the Christian Vocation According to Origen* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1993), 143.

²⁷³ See Manuel Ruiz Jurado, "Le Concept de 'Monde' chez Origène," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 75 (1974): 3-24; José Alviar, *Klesis*, 133-144.

²⁷⁴ *Com.Jn.* 13.280-284 (SC 222, 180-184).

to his Valentinian opponents, applying the Pauline distinction to each person, rather than to categories of people. Every human being is made up of body, soul, and spirit (σῶμα, ψυχή, and πνεῦμα), each with their own function. The spirit is the point of divine contact for the human being by which grace and illumination are granted to the person. While each part of the human being ultimately depends on God's gracious gift of life and being, and the soul depends upon the Word's rationality, the body and soul exist in humankind in an essential manner. The spirit, however, is only operative through the work of the Holy Spirit and only in those worthy of divine illumination. Unlike the body or soul, if not attended to in a spiritual manner, the spirit can cease to function in an otherwise living human.²⁷⁵ The role of the spirit is a complex one, acting as the soul's conscience, as its means of divine illumination, and as a locus of divine presence within the human being.²⁷⁶ As its pedagogue and conscience, the spirit guides the soul in its pursuit of God, of the heavenly realm, and of virtue. Perhaps a comparison can be made to the role that the *pneumatikoi* have vis-à-vis the *psychikoi* within the Italian Valentinian tradition. What is conceptualised in terms of a collective taxonomy of humankind in that tradition is individualised to each human being in Origen's work.

On the other side, the body is the mechanism through which the soul interacts with the sensible world, and thus puts before the soul certain sensory images and makes certain demands for sustenance.²⁷⁷ The body occupies the same ambiguous position in Origen's thought as the world. No less than anything else is it included in the goodness of God's creation and even in its current form, the body is a testament to God guiding providence, having been fashioned in response to the fallen condition of creation as part of the long arc of salvation history.²⁷⁸ On the other hand, it has also become a site of temptation and sin. In *Peri Archon* 3.4, Origen goes so far as to suggest that one possible explanation of the inner moral turmoil that each person experiences is that it is the result of the soul's conjunction with the body.²⁷⁹ This is very clearly a platonically influenced conception of the relation of soul to body. This suggestion should not, however, be seen as Origen's conclusive position of the matter. It is offered only as one of three philosophical solutions to the problem of the origin of human temptations.²⁸⁰ For Origen, the body is not the result of a fall, as among his Platonist contemporaries, but is a concomitant of all created beings that allows for differentiated beings to

²⁷⁵ *Frag.Eph.* 26 (3, 563).

²⁷⁶ See Jacques Dupuis, *"L'Esprit de l'Homme": Étude sur l'Anthropologie Religieuse d'Origène* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1967).

²⁷⁷ *P.A.* 3.1.3 (SC 268, 22-24).

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 2.1.2-4 (SC 252, 236-244); 3.6.4 (SC 268, 244).

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 3.4.1 (SC 268, 200); 3.4.4-5 (SC 268, 210-216).

²⁸⁰ Benjamin Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 56.

exist.²⁸¹ It is in part for this very reason that Origen demonstrates a suspicion of applying terminology of *homoousios* to the Divine; because it might suggest bodily existence of that which alone exists incorporeally. Though the body itself is not the result of the Fall, the current condition of our corruptible bodies is. As Origen states,

corporeal nature accepts diverse and various permutations, such that it can be transformed from everything to everything... Therefore, we understand matter as that which underlies bodies, that is, from which bodies subsist (*subsistunt*) when qualities have been included and inserted... Nevertheless, although this matter, as we have said above, is according to its own proper definition without qualities, it is never found to subsist without qualities (*numquam tamen subsistere extra qualitates invenitur*).²⁸²

The body, therefore, is characterised predominantly by its pliability, being capable of significant adaptation according to the activity of the soul.²⁸³

Sitting at the reins between these two is the soul. It is this element that contains the image of the divine Logos and so it is this part that is the seat of reason within the human trichotomy. In Book II of *Peri Archon*, Origen offers the definition of the term 'soul' as 'a substance rationally capable of perception and movement' (*substantia rationally sensibilibus et mobilis*).²⁸⁴ This capacity for 'movement' is a reference to the rational soul's capacity for free decision making. Through this means, they can procure contingently what God possesses essentially (for the Father) or necessarily (for the Son and Spirit): 'For the Creator granted intellects made by him voluntary and free movement (*voluntarios enim et liberos motus*), by which the good in them might be their own, it being preserved by their own volition (*voluntate propria*).'²⁸⁵ In keeping with Greek philosophical tradition, Origen understood reason to encompass the capacities of both cognition and of desire and determination.²⁸⁶ Referred to using the Stoic terminology as the ἡγεμονικόν, the rational soul is

²⁸¹ See Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 56-64; Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 104-105, 109-110.

²⁸² *P.A.* 2.1.4 (SC 252, 240-242).

²⁸³ Nowhere is this clearer than in the miraculous body of Jesus Christ. See John A. McGuckin, "The Changing Forms of Jesus."

²⁸⁴ *P.A.* 2.8.2 (SC 252, 340).

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 2.9.2 (SC 252, 354). See David E. Hahm, "A Neglected Stoic Argument for Human Responsibility," *Illinois Classical Studies* 17, no. 1 (1992): 23-48; Hendrik S. Benjamins, *Eingeordnete Freiheit: Freiheit und Vorsehung bei Origenes* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 59-66.

²⁸⁶ See John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, NJ: 1999), 118-126; Richard Sorabji, "Freedom and Will: Graeco-Roman Origins," in *Selfhood and the Soul: Essays on Ancient Thought and Literature in Honour of Christopher Gill*, ed. Richard Seaford, John Wilkins, and Matthew Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 55-56; Paul Crittenden, *Reason, Will and Emotion: Defending the Greek Tradition Against Triune Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 117-140.

understood to be the deliberative self in the human being.²⁸⁷ It is here, therefore, that the autonomous decision-making capacity is located within the tripartite human being. Their freedom of moral agency is the principal manner in which Origen expresses the role of rationality in human life.²⁸⁸ Without this capacity, creatures could not be held morally responsible for their actions.²⁸⁹ Therefore, it is here in the soul that Origen locates the anthropological principle which enables the creature to attain the virtue of wisdom. Of course, the created spirit is an important secondary principle. Wisdom can only be acquired through the divine grace of the Holy Spirit, which is received through the creature's own spirit. Nonetheless, as noted above, this secondary principle only becomes actualised according to the rational faculty's orientation towards it. Otherwise, it lies dormant. The outward movement of the Son from Wisdom to the cosmos through the *epinoia* of the Logos, therefore, is mirrored in the reciprocal movement of the created soul by means of their human logos towards the inner reality of the Son as Wisdom.

3. *The Soul, the Nous, and the Spirit*

It is, therefore, the soul, as the locus of intellection and rationality, that is the engine by which humankind can achieve the virtue of wisdom. It is the rationality of the soul that enables to one to pursue and, if properly pursued and if graced by God, ultimately attain the virtue of wisdom. The Stoic influence on Origen's discussions of volition has been widely noted in the scholarship on this matter.²⁹⁰ For Stoics such as Epictetus, human freedom consists in the ability to assent or otherwise to the impressions one receives that arise in the course of one's existence.²⁹¹ Origen's discussion of human free will in *Peri Archon* 3.1 closely reflects this understanding. However, the Stoic doctrine of volition was founded on a monistic conception of the soul's operations, which consciously opposed the Platonic and Aristotelian tripartite and bipartite divisions of the soul.²⁹² However, Origen himself

²⁸⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'Homme*, 34.

²⁸⁸ *P.A.* pref. 5 (SC 252, 82); 3.1.2-4 (SC 268, 22-28); *Orat.* 6.2(GCS 3, 312).

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 1.3.6 (SC 252, 154-156).

²⁹⁰ See Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2011), 111-113, 119-122; Kathleen Gibbons, "Human Autonomy and Its Limits Thought of Origen of Alexandria," *The Classical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2017): 675-680; Richard Sorabji, "Freedom and Will," 64-65.

²⁹¹ Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 278-290, 330-344; Susanne Bobzien, "Stoic Conceptions of Freedom and their Relation to Ethics," in *Determinism, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Susanne Bobzien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) 194-216. Frede also characterises the moral agency of most human beings in this manner, although he also, mistakenly in my opinion and those of Bobzien and Sorabji, argues that the sage manages to transcend this compatibilist responsibility for our assent or otherwise and enjoys a genuinely free will capable of choice. See Michael Frede, *A Free Will*, 66-88.

²⁹² See *SVF* III.377 (92), 378 (92), 386 (94). See Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Actions in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 27-40; 1-143; Michael Frede, *A Free Will*, 31-34.

on a several occasions appears to introduce these divisions into his conception of the soul. On a few occasions, Origen proposes the Platonic tripartite distinction between the rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν), the appetitive part (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν), and the irascible part (τὸ θυμικόν).²⁹³ Such cases are rare, however, and he far more frequently appeals to the Peripatetic distinction between the rational and passionate elements of the soul. Drawing from Pauline language, these are understood to be the inner and outer human being. The former represents man as he was created in the beginning, in the image of God, while the latter is appended to this image as a consequence of the Fall. This lower, passionate, part of the soul is required for the soul to pilot the heavier, fallen body that results from its fall from its original condition.

Properly speaking, the soul in its initial condition should be called the intellect ('mens' in Rufinus' Latin translation). This term, a translation of the Greek νοῦς, is used seemingly interchangeably with that of *anima* in *Peri Archon*.²⁹⁴ Tzamalikos correctly cautions us that nowhere in the extant Greek of *Peri Archon* is the term νοῦς used to refer to the human mind: where it occurs the term νοῦς refers to the meaning of the text and is typically translated as 'sensus.'²⁹⁵ However, in the section of *Peri Archon* in which Origen introduces the distinction between the soul and the intellect, he does so by appealing to 1 Cor. 14.15: 'I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the intellect also (in Greek: προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι, προσεύξομαι δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῦ).'²⁹⁶ The appeal to this verse confirms that in *Peri Archon* 2.8 Rufinus was indeed translating the term νοῦς. This fourth anthropological category was introduced to make sense of the tension between the trichotomy of 1 Thessalonians and the dichotomy Paul adopts in his correspondence to the Corinthian church between the spiritual (πνευματικός) and the psychic (ψυχικός) man.²⁹⁷ In this text, the psychic condition refers to what Paul elsewhere describes as 'fleshly' (σαρκινός). If the free will of the soul is the driving principle that enables the acquisition of wisdom, how can it be that 'The psychic man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2.14)? Origen's response is to identify the soul as the condition of the intellect in its fallen state. Appealing to an etymology also found in Plato, Aristotle, and Philo, which held that the word ψυχή was derived from ψύχειν, meaning 'to cool,' Origen suggests that the condition of soul is only attained once the intellect's love and affection for God, who is called 'fire,'

²⁹³ *Hom. Ezek.* 1.16 (SC 352, 94); *Frag. Luke* 187 (GCS 49, 307).

²⁹⁴ See *P.A.* 1.1.5 (SC 252, 98); 1.1.7 (SC 252, 104); 1.1.9 (SC 252, 108-110); 1.3.1 (SC 252, 144); 2.1.1 (SC 252, 236-238); 2.1.2 (SC 252, 236); 2.9.6 (SC 252, 366); 2.11.3 (SC 252, 398); 2.11.4 (SC 252, 400); and so on.

²⁹⁵ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 273-4. Also, see Jacques Dupuis, "L'Esprit de l'Homme", 31-32.

²⁹⁶ *P.A.* 2.8.2 (SC 252, 342).

²⁹⁷ On the variety of Paul's anthropological schemas and terminology, see Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

has cooled and in so doing fallen from a more divine condition.²⁹⁸ The condition of ‘soul,’ therefore, is an inherently imperfect state.²⁹⁹

Origen also interprets the imperfection of the human condition as the inherent limitation of createdness, rather than resulting from the Fall. Paying close attention to the words of Gen. 1.26-27, Origen notes that while God states his intention to make man ‘according to our image and likeness’ (κατ’ εικόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν – v.26), the text only affirms that ‘God created human beings in the image of God’ (ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ - v.27).

Therefore, that it said ‘in the image of God he made him’ but was silent concerning the likeness indicates nothing other than he secured the dignity of the image in his first condition, but the perfection of the likeness was preserved for him at the consummation, so that he might obtain it for himself by his own industrious pursuit in the imitation of God.³⁰⁰

This differentiation cannot be harmonised with the division within the soul or *nous* between the higher and lower parts, since Origen locates the image of God within the perfected *nous* elsewhere in *Peri Archon* when discussing the eschatological perfection of the soul.³⁰¹ Humankind is created oriented towards the end of likeness to God, which involves an intensification of the participation in the Word that humanity possesses essentially inasmuch as it is a rational species. This involves a growth from essential rationality to perfect rationality, which is also wisdom and virtue. Origen highlights two senses of ‘reason’: that which is common in all human adults and that which is present ‘in the perfect alone.’³⁰² Thus, while in one sense all humans are rational, in another sense, Origen can say that only the saints, only those who truly follow the Word, are ‘rational.’³⁰³ The end for which humankind is created, therefore, and to which the image of God – the essential rationality of human beings – is oriented is the true rationality and wisdom that characterises the likeness to God.

It is the cooling of the intellect into the condition of soul that introduces division into the rational faculty. According to Rufinus’s translation, onto the ‘more perfect part’ (*perfectioris partis*) or ‘better part’ (*pars melior*) of the soul - that is, the intellect – is affixed a lower part which did not exist in the original creation of, or original intention for, human beings and which will be destroyed in the

²⁹⁸ P.A. 2.8.3 (SC 252, 344). See Aristotle, *De Anima* 1.2.405b (73); Philo, *On Dreams* 1.31 (LCL 275, 310).

²⁹⁹ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 273-274.

³⁰⁰ P.A. 3.6.1 (SC 268, 236). See also *Com.Jn.* 20.183 (SC 290, 248); *Hom.Exod.* 6.5 (SC 321, 182-184); *Hom.Ezek.* 13.2 (SC 352, 414-418). José Alviar provides an excellent analysis of Origen’s conceptualisation of the image and likeness of God. See José Alviar, *Klesis*, 17-39.

³⁰¹ P.A. 2.10.7 (SC 252, 392-394); 2.11.3 (SC 252, 298-400).

³⁰² *Com.Jn.* 1.273 (SC 120, 196). Also, see P.A. 1.3.6 (SC 252, 154).

³⁰³ *Ibid.* 2.114 (SC 120, 284).

resurrection.³⁰⁴ Blosser suggests that Rufinus's term *pars* here most likely stands in place of the Greek μέρος.³⁰⁵ Origen does occasionally use this terminology to refer to the divisions of the fallen soul.³⁰⁶ However, such instances are rare and in a fragment on Luke, Origen says that biblical language referring to parts of the body (τοῖς σωματικοῖς μέρεσι) is used to refer figuratively to powers of the soul (δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς), suggesting that he considered the language of parts ill-suited to the discussion of the soul.³⁰⁷ These two elements of the soul, as Blosser argues, should not be considered in an ontological manner but a spiritual one; Origen's division is not strictly speaking between two parts of the soul but between two 'tendencies.'³⁰⁸ The manner in which the soul orients itself, either towards the spirit or towards the flesh, comes to define the character of the soul itself; it takes on either the divine image or the earthly image. Hence, in *Peri Archon* 3.4.2, Origen states:

It is plain that the choice (*uoluntas*) of the soul is something intermediate between flesh and spirit, without a doubt serving and obeying one of the two, whichever it has chosen to obey. When it makes itself subservient to the delights of the flesh, human beings become fleshly, but when it joins itself to the spirit, it causes human beings to be in the spirit and on account of this to be called spiritual.³⁰⁹

A singular rational faculty has the capacity to become either spiritual or fleshly depending upon how it exercises its free will. The soul, therefore, exhibits a certain pliability similar to the body. Origen's ontology is, therefore, characterised by a deep-seated and dynamic spirituality, both with regards to his anthropology and his cosmology. On the one hand, the intellect is the tendency of the rational faculty that orients it towards and lives in harmony with the spirit. The close affinity of the intellect and the spirit – visible, for instance, in Origen's exegesis of 1 Cor. 14.15 – has led scholars in the past to treat the two as virtually synonymous.³¹⁰ The two are nonetheless distinct. In the words of Henri Crouzel, perhaps the foremost scholar on Origen's anthropology of the last century, the spirit represents the active element of divine grace in a human being, while the intellect is the receptive element, 'clearly distinct but also inseparable one from the other' in our post-lapsarian life.³¹¹ On the other hand, the lower element of the intellect-soul is the tendency of the rational faculty which is

³⁰⁴ *P.A.* 2.8.3 (SC 252, 342); 2.10.7 (SC 252, 390-392).

³⁰⁵ Benjamin Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 32.

³⁰⁶ See *Com.Jn.* 1.161 (SC 120, 140); *C Cels.* 5.47 (SC 147, 136); *Frag.Luke* 187 (GCS 49, 307).

³⁰⁷ *Frag.Luke* 186 (GCS 49, 306).

³⁰⁸ Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 33-35.

³⁰⁹ *P.A.* 3.4.2 (SC 268, 206).

³¹⁰ For a more recent example, see George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 200. On the importance of distinguishing the two concepts, see Jacques Dupuis, "L'Esprit de l'Homme," 9-13.

³¹¹ Henri Crouzel, "Origène," 938.

manifested when it applies itself towards the body and, through it, towards the material cosmos as an end in itself.

The importance of the third hypostasis of the Trinity for the acquisition of aretological wisdom can be discerned in these passages of *Peri Archon*. As already mentioned, this aspect of Origen's understanding of wisdom has been underexplored in this thesis on account of the constraints of time and space. Nonetheless, Origen associates the Holy Spirit with sanctification which is possessed only by the saints. This sanctification is required for the attainment of the virtue of wisdom. Thus, the rational soul only achieves its true likeness to God and comes to proper contemplation of his Wisdom once it has been united with its spirit through participation in the Spirit. Taking the example of Christ's own soul, Origen suggests that it is the work of the Spirit of Wisdom that united his created nature to the eternal divine Word.³¹² Given that Christ's soul is the example which all other human souls should follow, the same would true of perfected Christians.

As Paul stated in 1 Cor. 12.8, the gift of wisdom is given through the Spirit. Origen draws upon the words of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians – an important in Origen's discussion of the virtue of wisdom – when discussing its role in the acquisition of knowledge:

However, just as no one “among men knows another's man's thoughts except the spirit of that man which is in him, thus also no one knows those of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2.11). If no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God, it is impossible for a man to know the thoughts of God. However, consider this – how it becomes possible: “But we,” he says, “have received not the spirit of this world but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we may know the gifts given to us by God, which we also speak not in the words taught by human wisdom but in the those taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2.12-13).³¹³

Consequently, the work of the Spirit is required to understand the spiritual sense of Scripture which, as we shall see below, is closely associated with the virtue of wisdom.

And grasping our need of the chosen Spirit of wisdom to understand such great things in a holy manner, let us try to delineate as shortly as we can our understanding of this passage.³¹⁴

³¹² *Hom.Ps.15* 2.2 (GCS n.f. 19, 92-93); *Hom.Ps.77* 2.2 (GCS n.f. 19, 368-369).

³¹³ *De Orat.* 1.1 (GCS 3, 297).

³¹⁴ *Com.Jn.* 10.266 (SC 157, 546). Also, see *Com.Matt.* 12.10 (GCS 40, 85); 14.6 (GCS 40, 288-289).

The Jews' failure to understand the deeper senses of Scripture is attributed to their failure to follow this spirit in favour of their own human doctrines.³¹⁵

The Spirit of Wisdom is the means by which the Son's qualities are instantiated within the created soul. In the eighth *Homily on Jeremiah*, Origen figuratively interprets Jer. 10.13, 'He makes lightning for the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses,' as follows:

These spirits are in the treasuries. What are the treasuries? In whom are the treasures of wisdom and gnosis hidden? These treasuries are in Christ. Therefore, from these the winds – the spirits – come, in order that one might be wise; another might be faithful; another might possess gnosis; and another might receive a gift from God. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, but another is given the word of gnosis according to this same Spirit, and another faith by the same spirit.³¹⁶

The function of the Spirit is to internalise the aspects of the Son, including Wisdom, in the soul, so that they are 'not external to us.'³¹⁷ The wise Christian is, therefore, thoroughly spiritual in nature, living in accordance with the highest functions of their own created being and in accordance with all three Persons of the Trinity.

Fundamentally, however, the spiritual Christian is spiritual because they choose to accept the presence of the Spirit. The virtue of wisdom is not simply a gift provided by God to the created soul nor, as in the common heresiological characterisation of the Gnostic doctrine, are the wise saved by nature. Certainly, Origen does not dismiss the importance of divine grace, and we shall examine in the next chapter the limits of human rationality when operating without this grace, but his approach is thoroughly dialectical. Divine grace and human freedom and rationality are reciprocal aspects in the development of created virtue. The soul, as we have seen, provides the corresponding point to the Son in ontologically grounding this dialectic. As the image of the divine Logos in the tripartite human being, it is the site of wisdom acquisition or of the created beings failure to do so. Its self-determination is a vital driving force that enables the acquisition of virtue, including the virtue of wisdom, and understanding, including the understanding of theoretical and noetic matters. It is also its free pursuit of whatever it desires that undergirds Origen's moral dualism. This will have important impacts on Origen's understanding of wisdom and the eschaton, as will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. The *telos* of rational creation will not be incorporeal because

³¹⁵ *Com.Matt.* 11.11 (GCS 40, 52).

³¹⁶ *Hom.Jer.* 8.5 (SC 232, 368).

³¹⁷ *Frag.Eph.* 8 (1, 243).

corporeality is not *per se* antithetical to human beatitude, but is only an obstacle when pursued for its own ends.

The nature of this freedom, combined with his understanding of the noetic-material distinction, affects Origen's conception of the nature of Christian life and educational development. In rejecting the instantaneous and natural reception that Heracleon identifies with the spiritual person, Origen proposed a life of ongoing spiritual progress. Reason and will can turn to greater or lesser degrees towards or away from the two poles of human life – the spiritual and the earthly – and so the return to God must pass through gradations of increasing virtue and understanding. That wisdom requires application of reason is closely linked in Origen's thought to the gradation of knowledge from material and simple things to spiritual and profound things and so subsequently to the progressive nature of divine dispensation and revelation. We will pick up this subject shortly, after a consideration of Origen's epistemology with regards to non-revelatory forms of knowledge.

Chapter Three: The Wisdom of the World

Reason in Origen's philosophical worldview is not a static entity. It allows for increase or diminution according to the spiritual orientation of the *logikos* soul. This reflects his position – one common among philosophers of his time but somewhat foreign to our post-Enlightenment intellectual milieu – that reason was not a disinterested or dispassionate faculty. True reason is expressed only in specific activities and beliefs, in the orientation to true reality. For Origen, this was the divine Logos. However, while true rationality is demonstrated in likeness of God, human beings (at least after growing to maturity and excluding certain cognitive disabilities) still have an essential baseline of rationality exhibited in the capacity to cogitate, deliberate between choices, and determine what to value and to pursue.

Before examining the true rationality of Christian wisdom, how it is obtained, and the role it plays in Christian life, it is important to explore how Origen conceives of the potential efficacy and results of this essential human rationality. Drawing upon biblical language, Origen understood the knowledge of secular crafts and skills, the beliefs of non-Christian philosophical sects, and even some pagan religious beliefs and practices to be certain kinds of wisdom. Clearly, these forms of wisdom are quite different to that wisdom which is the pinnacle of created life but the application of the term to these things places them firmly within the scope of this investigation. In this chapter, we shall explore from where Origen considered this knowledge to originate, the limits he thought to be placed upon uninspired rational capacities, and the potential roles that he considered non-Christian knowledge and secular skills could play within the Christian Church. As we shall see, despite his intellectualism and the importance Origen placed upon rationality, he had a rather low opinion of the capabilities of uninspired human reason. The main role it played within his thought was theodical in nature; as a means of defending divine justice from pleas of human ignorance.

1. Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom

The language of wisdom was not always given the particular and praiseworthy status noted in the Introduction and discussed up until now. While Origen believed all intellectual activity to derive from the divine Wisdom and Logos of God, not all intellectual activity and even not all wisdom is presented equally. Appealing principally to the language of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, Origen distinguishes between human wisdom and divine wisdom. In 1 Cor. 2.1-10, Paul states:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the testimony of God to you with superior speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except

Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως), so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature³¹⁸ we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are being destroyed (δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων). But we speak God's wisdom, a hidden mystery (θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ), which God decreed before the ages for our glory and which none of the rulers of this age understood, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him (Isa. 64.4)” —

God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

As the citations of Isa. 29.14, 29.14, Ps. 94.11, and Job. 5.13 make clear, Paul was not innovating by distinguishing between these two forms of wisdom. The origin of this distinction can be traced to the ancient usage of wisdom terminology, both in Greek and in Hebrew (σοφία and *ḥokmah*), to refer to mundane skills. In ancient Greek culture, the term σοφός could refer to any person possessing a particular skill or craft, whether it was theoretical knowledge of the natural sciences, political skill, poetic ability, or that of an artisan.³¹⁹ Of the famed Seven Sages of Ancient Greece, perhaps only Thales displayed the temperament of a philosopher; the others were famed for the political and legislative expertise. As Diogenes Laertius reports:

³¹⁸ The Greek reads ‘ἐν τοῖς τελείοις,’ which can also be translated as ‘among the perfect.’ Provided one keeps in mind the distinction between strict and loose senses of the word, Origen was happy to speak of perfect Christians among the Church.

³¹⁹ See Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 83-84; George B. Kerford, “The Sage in Hellenistic Philosophical Literature (399 B.C.E. – 199 C.E.),” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 319; Elisa Uusimaki, “The Rise of the Sage in Greek and Jewish Antiquity,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49, no. 1 (Nov 2018): 2-4.

Anaximenes says that they all applied themselves to poetry, while Dichearchus says that they were neither sages (σοφούς) nor philosophers (φιλοσόφους) but were intelligent (συνετούς) and skilled in legislation (νομοθετικούς).³²⁰

A similarly broad definition is found in the usage of חכמה (*hokmah*) in the Hebrew Bible. This term could denote the skill of the artisan, whether in housebuilding, or metal-working (Prov. 24.3; Exod. 31.3-4; 1 Kings 7.14; Jer. 10.9), or in esoteric arts such as magic, divination, and dream interpretation (Gen. 41.8, 33, 39; Dan. 1-2).³²¹ The concept of wisdom in Old Testament Hebrew could even extend to devious thinking or acts of cunning (2 Sam. 13.3; 14), or to the wiles of animals (Prov. 30.24-38). Roland Murphy correctly summarises the various usages of wisdom, saying ‘The heart of this usage is that wisdom designates the “know-how,” whatever be the particular area.’³²²

These older usages of wisdom terminology were transformed by intellectual innovations that conceptualised wisdom in more specific and more exceptional terms. In the Greek world, the intellectual revolution heralded by Socrates and Plato refined the concept of wisdom to refer to a ‘rationally worked out account of reality.’³²³ In parallel, the Jewish Wisdom tradition applied the language of wisdom to refer to ‘a method of enquiry, a use of particular forms of teaching, and a desire to compare and co-ordinate phenomena,’ founded on a certain natural and moral regularity in the world.³²⁴ Within this framework, most evident in the Old Testament books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, wisdom is associated with a form of secular virtue and reverence for God as the providential governor of the cosmos, largely disinterested in his activity within Israel’s salvation history. However, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the Jewish conception of wisdom underwent a radical transformation, which John Gammie summarises under the concepts of eschatologization, torahization, and prophetization which brought the concept more in alignment with prophetic and apocalyptic interests.³²⁵

³²⁰ V. P. 1.40 (LCL 184, 40-42).

³²¹ See Roger N. Whybray, “The Sage in the Israelite Royal Court,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 135; Roger N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 6-14; Roland E. Murphy, “What and Where is Wisdom?”, 283; James L. Crenshaw, “The Sage in Proverbs,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 210.

³²² Roland Murphy, “What and Where is Wisdom?”, 283.

³²³ John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), 30.

³²⁴ Ronald E. Clements, “Wisdom and Old Testament Theology,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 280-284. Also, see Leo Perdue, “Cosmology and Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 458-459.

³²⁵ John G. Gammie, “From Prudentialism to Apocalypticism,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 497.

The importance of this etymological history of wisdom terminology lies in the fact that traces of this original meaning are clearly manifested across the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. No Jew or Christian could deny firstly that many of the crafts referred to as wisdom within the Hebrew Scriptures were mundane, and secondly that they could be found among the various cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East. In addition to these crafts, the evidence of the philosophical understanding of the Greeks or the astrological knowledge of the Mesopotamian cultures, for instance, would have been clear to any intelligent observer. The Scriptures refer explicitly to the 'wisdom of the Egyptians' in which Moses was educated (Acts 7.22) and to the education Daniel received from his Babylonian masters (Dan. 1.3-6, 16-20) such that he exceeded the wisdom and understanding of the king's sages.³²⁶ This raised a distinct problem. While there was scriptural compulsion to interpret the knowledge of non-Christian peoples as forms of wisdom, New Testament references to wisdom distinguish sharply between God's wisdom and the beliefs falsely called wisdom by the intellectuals lionised by the pagan and secular world, as well as those utilised within the synagogues. Except for the verse of Acts to which I have just referred, in those instances where wisdom terminology refers to intellectual traditions that stand outside the economy of revelation, it is used disparagingly. Christian writers, therefore, had to reconcile their own claims to a special revelatory dispensation with the scriptural evidence of wisdom among the Gentiles. Naturally, engagement with these issues frequently takes the form of apologetics and is often framed within the competing polemics of Greek pagans and Jewish and Christian writers.

We see Origen grappling with this problem in his discussion of Balaam in his *Homilies on Numbers*. Faced with this enigmatic figure, Origen asked how this self-professed sinner (Num. 22.34) who stood against the Israelites and assisted idolators could be said to 'know the knowledge of the Most High' (Num.24.16)? After all, this honour was not even afforded to the prophets or apostles.³²⁷ Origen's response foregrounds the fact that all knowledge of the truth, even that which is quotidian or secular, derives from God. The testimony of Sir. 1.1, 'All wisdom is from God,' is levied in support of this position and Origen highlights all the crafts that are referred to as forms of wisdom in the Scriptures: the wisdoms of embroidery, sculpture, metalwork, and masonry.³²⁸ If these can be classified as wisdoms, he argues, so too can the disciplines of geometry, music, and medicine be added to this category.³²⁹

³²⁶ Origen appeals to both these examples in *C Cels.* 6.14 (SC 147, 212).

³²⁷ *Hom.Num.* 18.3 (SC 442, 320).

³²⁸ See Job. 38.36; Exod. 31.1-6; 35.30-35; 36.1.

³²⁹ *Hom.Num.* 18.3 (SC 442, 322-324).

The sense seems to me to be that every skill, either those held necessary for human use in a craft or the knowledge of anything, is called a wisdom given by God.³³⁰

Origen here affirms that God is the beginning of all forms of knowledge, including those outside the revelatory economy. Reconciling this argument with Sir. 19.22, 'instruction of evil is not wisdom,' Origen takes the example of the wisdom of medicine, arguing that while knowledge itself is a good and therefore has its provenance from God, a physician trained in medicine can use his knowledge thereof to poison people. A good coming from God deviates from his intended purpose when utilised by creatures for evil ends.³³¹ Returning to the problem of Balaam, Origen affirms that even his knowledge 'has its beginning and origin from the Most High' since his knowledge of the nature of animals and the nature of birds derives from God.³³² Thus, the negative evaluation given to the wisdom of the Gentiles in the New Testament is not inherent to those sciences but due to the immoral and idolatrous ends to which they are put. While in this text, Origen frames the origin of all forms of wisdom in terms of divine provenance, saying they are 'given by God,' he nonetheless does not view all forms of divine provenance as equal. He still maintained a special status for God's disclosure through the media of Israel's history, of Christ's earthly mission, and of the Church and its activities. For this reason, he more frequently conceptualised the relation of these disciplines to God in terms of participation or as having a more indirect provenance from God.

Distinctions between divine and human wisdoms are also found in the Greek philosophical tradition, as Celsus pointed out in his anti-Christian polemic.³³³ In Book VI of *Contra Celsum*, Origen responds to Celsus' accusation that the Paul's statement that 'the wisdom possessed by men is foolishness with God' was in fact 'taken from the wisemen among the Greeks who said that human wisdom and divine wisdom are different things.'³³⁴ In defence of his argument, Celsus cites two quotations of Heraclitus and one from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. Although he ripostes that it was in fact the scriptural authors who had been plagiarised, Origen concurs that the distinction was indeed ancient, adding to Celsus's citations evidence from Plato's *Sixth Letter*, as well as quotations from 1 Corinthians, the Wisdom of Solomon, and David's words in Psalm 48.³³⁵

³³⁰ *Hom.Num.* 18.3 (SC 442, 320-322).

³³¹ *Ibid.* 18.3 (SC 442, 324-326).

³³² *Ibid.* 18.3 (SC 442, 324).

³³³ *C Cels.* 6.12 (SC 147, 208).

³³⁴ *Ibid.* 6.12 (SC 147, 208).

³³⁵ *Ibid.* 6.12-13 (SC 147, 208-210).

However, these various passages represent diverse positions on the topic of human wisdom. The particular outlier is Socrates's position in the *Apology*.³³⁶ Unlike the other passages adduced by either party, Socrates is resolute in holding that divine wisdom is impossible for humankind to acquire. The most to which Socrates can aspire is 'human wisdom.'³³⁷ While it is said that 'human wisdom is of little worth or even none,'³³⁸ this must be taken in a relative sense in comparison with divine wisdom. Human wisdom, when compared to that possessed by the gods, is of little worth, but it is nonetheless the highest ideal to which humankind can aspire.

On the other hand, Plato's *Sixth Letter*, likely pseudonymous,³³⁹ suggests that human wisdom is useful but of secondary value to divine wisdom. Supposedly writing to Hermeias, the tyrant of Atarneus, to urge him to maintain a friendship with Erastus and Coriscus, Plato differentiates between Hermeias' military expertise and Erastus and Coriscus' knowledge of Ideas. Hermeias' knowledge of warfare is described as 'human wisdom' (σοφία ἀνθρωπίνης), suggesting his friends have some degree of divine wisdom.³⁴⁰ Therefore, unlike in the *Apology*, divine wisdom is not beyond the grasp of humankind. Human wisdom is also, therefore, no longer the highest ideal of human life, useful though it still is.

Clearly, this is not the position Paul takes in 1 Corinthians, where he condemns it as useless since 'in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe' (1 Cor. 1.21). The perfect Christians (τελείοι), however, 'speak God's wisdom' which the wise of this world do not understand. The emphasis throughout 1 Cor. 1-2 is on the contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom; between, in Scroggs's words, 'that which originates out of man's own striving and thus a wisdom

³³⁶ It is difficult to interpret the quotations Celsus makes from Heraclitus since these short sayings are preserved only in this text and are lacking context.

³³⁷ What is meant by 'human wisdom' in this text is far from clear. Some identify it as the knowledge of his lack of wisdom and/or a second-order form of knowledge. See Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no. 138 (1985): 27-29; Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32-34; Jörg Hardy and Margarita Kaiser, "Expert Knowledge and Human Wisdom: A Socratic Note on the Philosophy of Expertise," *Topoi* 37 (2018): 84-86. This interpretation runs counter to Socrates's express denial of *episteme*. Hence, interpretations that do not characterise human wisdom in terms of knowledge are to be preferred. For instance, King suggests that it refers to the virtue of moderation while Futter identifies human wisdom as philosophy itself, a worthy pursuit of the ever-elusive object of the philosopher's desire. See Christopher S. King, "Wisdom, Moderation, and Elenchus in Plato's *Apology*," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 3 (2008): 345-361; Dylan Futter, "Socrates' Human Wisdom," *Canadian Philosophical Review* 52, no. 1 (2013): 61-79.

³³⁸ Plato, *Apology* 23A (LCL 36, 86).

³³⁹ See Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter*, ed. Dominic Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 40-65; John M. Rist, "Neopythagoreanism and Plato's Second Letter", *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 78-81.

³⁴⁰ On the relation of the Forms to the divine in Plato's work, see, for example, *Symp.* 203C-204A (LCL 166, 248-250); *Tim.* 90A (LCL 234, 244-246); *Phaedr.* 246E-247E (LCL 36, 472-474). Also, see Gerd van Riel, *Plato's Gods* (London: Routledge, 2016), 95-103.

that does not know God' and 'revelatory wisdom.'³⁴¹ How Origen understood and adapted Paul's words concerning this revelatory wisdom will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Despite his acknowledgement of Socrates's words in Plato's *Apology*, Origen clearly could not accept his argument that wisdom is impossible for humankind, at least when graced by the Spirit. However, Origen demonstrates conflicting tendencies with regards to the value and function of human wisdom. On occasions, he exhibits Plato's tendency to see human wisdom as useful if imperfect, while on others he presents it as antithetical to true wisdom.

2. Peri Archon 3.3

The longest extant passage examining Paul's words in 1 Cor. 2.6-7 is found in Book III of *Peri Archon* as part of Origen's discussion of the influence of hostile spiritual powers upon the soul.³⁴² Origen applies his typical hermeneutic of non-redundancy to suggest that 'the wisdom of this world,' 'the wisdom of the rulers of this world,' and 'the wisdom of God' must each refer to their own categories of knowledge. More commonly, however, Origen applies a bifold distinction between divine wisdom and human wisdom. The latter may be referred to as 'human wisdom' (see 1 Cor. 1.24-25 and 2.5), by either of the terms used in 1 Cor. 2.6, or as 'wisdom according the flesh' (σοφία κατὰ σάρκα) (See 1 Cor. 1.26; Rom. 8.6). Though these differences cannot be harmonised, it is worth examining the threefold distinction of *Peri Archon*, both because it is the most extensive examination of this topic and because it brings out some of the nuances and distinctions in Origen's attitude to non-revelatory knowledge that are blurred elsewhere.

³⁴¹ Robin Scroggs, "Paul: Σοφος and Πνευματικός," *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 1 (1967): 40. The character of the wisdom claimed by the Corinthian congregation has been a source of a great deal of scholarly disagreement. Largely, the interpretations vary between identifying this wisdom with Gnostic or proto-Gnostic theologies, Jewish wisdom speculation, and Greco-Roman rhetorical and sophistic reasoning. Consensus has largely rejected the first option and generally prefers the latter interpretation. For a good overview of this scholarship, see Oh-Young Kwon, "A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Pauline Opposition and the Nature of its Wisdom (σοφία) in 1 Corinthians 1—4," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8, no. 3 (2010): 386-427. The precise nature of Corinthian wisdom is not important for our purposes, except to make clear that it was considered non-revelatory, was deemed by Paul as sophistic in nature, and that Paul's response often drew upon the language of Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic.

³⁴² In this regard, *P.A.* 3.3.1 is a continuation of the thought of *P.A.* 3.2. Although most editions of *Peri Archon* title 3.3.1 under a new heading, 'On the Threefold Wisdom' or something similar, John Behr correctly notes in his recent edition that 'although turning to the question of knowledge, the subject remains of the work of the opposing powers, as the first sentence of *P.A.* 3.3.2 indicates, and remains so until the conclusion of *P.A.* 3.3.6, as the final sentence there makes clear.' See Origen, *On First Principles*, ed. and trans. John Behr, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 401 n.69.

Following the example Origen sets in this passage, I will put off examining the wisdom of God for now.³⁴³ Suffice it to say at this point, the wisdom of God is that revealed by God through the inspired authors of Scripture, through the salvation history of Israel, and through Christ's Incarnation and resurrection, and revealed in the minds of the mature Christians who understand these things according to their spiritual meaning.³⁴⁴

Within the tripartite model of *Peri Archon*, 'the wisdom of the world' concerns 'those things which are of this world.'³⁴⁵ By this, Origen means that this form of wisdom does not possess nor claim to possess knowledge of divine matters or moral principles.³⁴⁶ This wisdom encompasses all those crafts included in the traditional meaning of wisdom, such as the disciplines of 'poetry or grammar or rhetoric or geometry or music, with which medicine might perhaps be included.'³⁴⁷ The 'wisdom of the rulers of this world,' on the other hand, refers to the particular intellectual specialisation of different nations. The wisdom of these rulers is not 'one wisdom common to all rulers of this world' but 'a certain wisdom for each individual ruler.'³⁴⁸ Therefore, Origen identifies this wisdom as 'what they call the secret and occult philosophy of the Egyptians, and the astrology of the Chaldeans and the Indians who promise knowledge of lofty matters, and also the multitudinous and diverse opinions of the Greeks concerning divinity.'³⁴⁹ Elsewhere, when utilising a bifold distinction, these two forms of wisdom are collapsed together.³⁵⁰

The two lower forms of wisdom, therefore, are distinguished according to the scope of their contents and according to their truthfulness and utility. The rulers of this world claim to possess wisdom that is beyond their capabilities and so it is repudiated as 'gnosis falsely so called' (1 Tim. 6.20).³⁵¹ Origen highlights their diversity, 'each having his wisdom and building up his doctrines and diverse opinions,' thereby demonstrating their falsity.³⁵² The wisdom of the world, on the other hand, concerns only the things within the world and so does not overstep its bounds.³⁵³

The domain of the wisdom of the world is comparable with the kind of wisdom that Origen identified in the *Homily on Numbers*. In both texts, they are described as arts (*ars*), doubtless

³⁴³ *P.A.* 3.3.1 (SC 268, 184).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 4.3.14 (SC 268, 392-396); *Frag.1Cor.* 11 (I, 240).

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 3.3.1 (SC 268, 182-184).

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

³⁵⁰ See, for example, *C Cels.* 1.13 (SC 132, 110)

³⁵¹ *P.A.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 188).

³⁵² *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

³⁵³ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

Rufinus's translation of the Greek τέχνη.³⁵⁴ Another text that offers important parallels is Origen's *Letter to Gregory*. The list of *technai* given in *Peri Archon* bears a striking resemblance to the contents of encyclical paideia outlined in this text, which includes geometry, astronomy, music, grammar, and rhetoric.³⁵⁵ Four of these are encompassed within the scope of the wisdom of the world. Dialectic is also frequently referred to as a *techne*, as we shall see over the course of this chapter. As we shall see, these things are frequently described as foreign to the Church and its message, though that does not exclude the possibility of their utility.³⁵⁶ Unlike the wisdom of God, these *technai* are accessible to the uninspired human rational capacity: 'All the wisdoms of this world are words taught by men, which one learns according to each of the rational skills (τῶν λογικῶν τεχνῶν). But the things taught by the Spirit, he does not teach.'³⁵⁷

This all suggests that Origen was not entirely dismissive of uninspired forms of knowledge so long as they did not present an alternative philosophical system or worldview to that presented by Christianity.³⁵⁸ These legitimate wisdoms respect the limits of created rational faculties and do not hubristically claim to possess knowledge of such things that can only be revealed by God. This portrait will presently be complicated but it nonetheless provides important co-ordinates for Origen's thought.

3. Heresy and human wisdom

The category of human wisdom does not only include secular skills and philosophies. It is also used to denigrate certain intellectual failures among Christians.

Therefore, if you perceive carnally, or you expose your life to the desires of the flesh and unleash an abundance of delights, or if you perceive the law with a fleshly understanding and not spiritually and defend this with arguments drawn from human skills rather than by spiritual grace and a more exact understanding (*haec assertionibus humana arte quaesitis magis quam spiritali gratia et intellectu subtiliore*), then through the wisdom of the flesh you have become an enemy of God.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186). This is how Rufinus translates the term τέχνη in the three times it occurs in the extant Greek of *Peri Archon*. See *P.A.* 3.1.19 (SC 268, 122); 4.1.7 (SC 268, 284-286).

³⁵⁵ *Ep.Greg.* 1 (SC 148, 188). See George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 196 n.30.

³⁵⁶ See *Ep.Greg.* 2 (SC 148, 188); *Hom.Gen.* 11.2 (SC 7, 282-284); *Hom.Luke* 31.3 (SC 87, 380); *C Cels.* 1.38 (SC 132, 182); *Frag.1Cor.* 82 (4, 45).

³⁵⁷ *Frag.1Cor.* 11 (1, 240).

³⁵⁸ Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, 112-113.

³⁵⁹ *Com.Rom.* 4.8.3 (SC 539, 286).

Human wisdom is not only contrasted with spiritual understanding but is characterised as a motivated rejection of God's grace.

Where Origen does apply this category to Christian groups, it is most commonly for those he considered heretical. In *Peri Archon*, Origen suggests that the same powers that govern the wisdoms of the rulers of the world 'have imagined certain fabulous and simultaneously impious doctrines' and have 'introduced through their prophets diverse errors against the rule of Christian truth.'³⁶⁰ By introducing their own inventions into the Christian message, heretics 'gladden the rulers of this age, whose wisdom is brought to nought, with their falsehoods.'³⁶¹ In a passage of his seventh *Homily on Joshua*, Origen accuses the three heresiarchs Valentinus, Marcion, and Basilides of importing foreign influences into the Church. Commenting upon the fall of Jericho and Achan's theft of gold from within, Origen argues that Jericho represents the world as it exists under the yoke of hostile powers. Interpreting Joshua's injunction against taking anything from the city and bringing it into Israel's camp (Josh 6.18), he states:

See that you have nothing of the world in you, so that you might bring with you to the Church neither the customs of the world, nor its faults, nor its tergiversations. Rather, let every worldly manner of life be anathema to you. Do not mix divine things with mundane and do not insert things of the world into the secrets of the Church.³⁶²

The Greek γλῶσσαν μίαν χρυσοῦν is interpreted literally as a 'tongue of gold.' Embellished and persuasive speech is a worldly thing that threatens the Church:

There is much elegance in the words and much beauty in the speeches of philosophers and rhetors, who are all from the city of Jericho, which is to say, men of this world. Therefore, if you discover perverse doctrines among the philosophers which have been adorned with excellent speech, this is a tongue of gold. However, see that the brilliance of the work does not mislead you, nor the beauty of the golden speech capture you. Remember that Jesus ordered all the gold which will be found in Jericho to be anathema. If you read a poet with measured verses weaving gods and goddesses in a very dazzling song, do not be charmed by the sweetness of its eloquence, for it is a tongue of gold. And if you take it and place it in your tent, if you introduce into your heart the things which they assert, then you pollute the entire Church of the Lord. The wretched Valentinus did this, and Basilides, and Marcion also

³⁶⁰ *P.A.* 3.3.4 (SC 268, 192).

³⁶¹ *Hom.Ps.* 77 2.5 (GCS n.f. 19, 375). As noted in Chapter One, footnote 140, Origen appears to be referring to Valentinian heretics in this passage.

³⁶² *Hom.Josh.* 7.4 (SC 71, 204).

did this. They have stolen the tongues of gold from Jericho and from the philosophers they have attempted to introduce sects into the churches that are not proper for us and to pollute the entire Church of the Lord.³⁶³

Origen passes over in silence the fact that the treasures of Jericho were intended for the Lord's treasury (Josh. 6.19, 24). Seemingly this would upset his argument. Even in his *Letter to Gregory*, where Origen commends philosophy as a potential aid to the development of Christian understanding, he still recognises its danger. Origen's interpretation of the spoiling of the Egyptians in this text mirrors his interpretation of the fall of Jericho. Where the fall of Jericho represents Christ's victory over cosmic powers, the Exodus represents the journey of the soul out of this worldly condition to a blessed way of life. However, unlike Joshua's injunction, in Exodus the Israelites are commanded to plunder the riches of the Egyptians on their departure (Exod. 12.35-36); riches that are later used in the construction of the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 37.1-9). Even so, a danger remains:

And let me tell you having learned from experience that the man who takes what is useful from Egypt and leaves that place and furnishes it for the service of God is rare, but Ader the Idumaeon has many brothers. These are the people who, from their Greek skills produce heretical ideas and furnish them, like golden calves, in Bethel, which represents the house of God. It seems to me also that through these words it is hinted that they have set up their own fabrications in the Scriptures, in which the Word of God dwells, which is figuratively called Bethel.³⁶⁴

These heretics are led into their mistakes by their failure to follow the proper course of Christian education. This subject will be examined in detail in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to say that their heresies stem from their rash desire to attain wisdom without first undergoing the necessary moral reformation. The person who falls into their snares 'departs and exits from the Church and forsakes this word as something stupid; they flee to heresy as if to gnosis and to wisdom.'³⁶⁵ However, since they have not undertaken a moral way of life, the bread they promise is not the bread of life.³⁶⁶ In reality, one must seek God through just conduct, rather than merely in systems of thought or in the use of esoteric language.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ *Ibid.* 7.7 (SC 71, 214-216).

³⁶⁴ *Ep. Greg.* 3 (SC 148, 190-192).

³⁶⁵ *Hom. Ps. 80* 2.6 (GCS n.f. 19, 504). Also, see *Hom. Ps. 77* 2.5 (GCS n.f. 19, 375).

³⁶⁶ *Hom. Ps. 77* 2.5 (GCS n.f. 19, 375).

³⁶⁷ *Hom. Ps. 76* 1.4 (GCS n.f. 19, 298).

The elaborate systems that they create are semblances of genuine wisdom, except they rely, as secular philosophies do, upon human ingenuity rather than divine grace. In the words from the *Commentary on Romans* quoted above, their beliefs defended ‘with arguments drawn from human skills rather than by spiritual grace.’

All these people have ‘made for themselves gods’ (Exod 31.32) and ‘worshipped the works of their own hands’ (Jer. 1.16). I believe such is the case either among the Greeks who beget doctrines, so to speak, of this philosophy or that, or among the heresies who first beget doctrines. These have made themselves idols and fabrications of the soul and, having turned towards them, they worship the works of their own hands, having accepted as truth their own fabrications.³⁶⁸

This is the meaning of the heretics making golden calves to worship or bringing tongues of gold into holy places.³⁶⁹

4. ‘Not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power’

The foreign treasures with which the heresiarchs corrupt the Lord’s camp are said to be the ‘beauty of the golden speech’ they produced. One of the key characteristics of human wisdom in Origen’s thought is its sophistic style. Human wisdom favours literary style and argumentative sophistication over the genuine pursuit of the truth and the moral good of its practitioners and audience. The worldly wise ‘pursue only pompous, lofty, and challenging words, being captivated by arguments.’³⁷⁰ Their associated skills ‘entangle things in speaking, not speaking the truth.’³⁷¹

This clearly draws upon Paul’s characterisation of his Corinthian opponents. Seemingly, the crucial problem that Paul encountered in this city was a congregation that negatively evaluated him for his lack of oratory skill.³⁷² There was seemingly a desire from some that Paul and his gospel should be

³⁶⁸ *Hom.Jer.* 16.9 (SC 238, 152-154). See also *Hom.Ps.77* 7.4 (GCS n.f. 19, 442-443); *Hom.Ps.77* 8.7 (GCS n.f. 19, 459).

³⁶⁹ *Ep.Greg.* 3 (SC 148, 192); *Hom.Josh.* 7.7 (SC 71, 214-216).

³⁷⁰ *Hom.Exod.* 1.1 (SC 321, 42).

³⁷¹ *Frag.1Cor.* 16 (I, 247).

³⁷² See especially Duane Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching: The Apostle’s Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, I.L.: Intervarsity Press, 2015). Also, see Timothy Lim, “‘Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in Demonstrative of the Spirit and Power’ (1 Cor. 2.4),” *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1987): 137-149; Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990), 157; Birger A. Pearson, “Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Paul,” in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 51, 56-57; Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2008), 152-154.

vindicated by argument and persuasion and he, the suggestion was, was not a formidable rhetor. Paul himself did not dispute this suggestion, saying, 'My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom,' and contrasting this rhetorical skill with his Christian message.

In keeping with this negative evaluation, the most common *technai* with which Origen associates human wisdom are dialectics, rhetoric, and grammar.³⁷³ Origen goes so far as to refer to the 'dialectical wisdom of the Greeks.'³⁷⁴ Origen's dismissive attitude towards dialectic is not a denigration of reasoning or logical skills as such but what he sees as the argumentative trickery utilized by pagan philosophers and rhetors. While in *Peri Archon* Origen equivocates on the question of whether the wisdom of the rulers of the world is proselytised out of a mistaken belief in its own validity or from a malicious desire to deceive,³⁷⁵ he very commonly falls on the latter side in other works, describing it as a 'deceptive fraud' undertaken 'by cunningness of speech, through clever falsehoods and dialectic arguments.'³⁷⁶

Clement had also described 'the sophistic skill' as something 'for which the Greeks have been enthused,' which utilises rhetoric and the dialectic to 'persuasively rob the whole work of wisdom and promises a wisdom which it does not practise.'³⁷⁷ Clement's sophists, like those described by Origen, 'puff themselves up in their skills; they babble in their own subtlety; they labour all their lives concerning distinctions between words and the intricate compositions of expressions.'³⁷⁸ Clement, however, distinguishes between sophists and philosophers.³⁷⁹ To a far greater degree than Origen, Clement dissociates sophistry from those he sees as genuine Greek philosophers and from the science of dialectic, which Clement frequently advocates for Christian believers.³⁸⁰

This 'hackneyed way of proof among human beings' that relies only on 'human craft' (*humana arte*) is contrasted with the form of proof on which the Christian faith is founded.³⁸¹

³⁷³ *C Cels.* 1.62 (SC 132, 246); *Com.Cant.* 4.3 (SC 376, 734); *Com.Rom.* 4.1.1 (SC 539, 182); 6.13.1 (SC 543, 216); *Hom.Exod.* 4.6 (SC 321, 134); *Hom.Lev.* 5.7 (SC 286, 238); *Hom.Josh* 26.2 (SC 71, 494); *Hom.Num.* 9.6 (SC 415, 250); etc.

³⁷⁴ *C Cels.* 1.38 (SC 132, 182). Also, see *Ep.Greg.* 1 (SC 148, 186-188); *Hom.Gen.* 11.2 (SC 7, 282-284); *Frag.1Cor.* 82 (4, 45).

³⁷⁵ *P.A.* 3.3.3 (SC 268, 188).

³⁷⁶ *Hom.Exod.* 4.6 (SC 321, 130-134); 4.9 (SC 321, 146); *Com.Cant.* 4.3 (SC 376, 734).

³⁷⁷ *Strom.* 1.8.39.1-2 (SC 30, 76). Clement also quotes Sextus Empiricus here, wrongfully attributing it to Plato, who calls sophistry an 'immoral practice' (*Against the Professors* 2.12 (LCL 382, 193)), and Aristotle, who refers to it as 'a capacity for theft' (*Topics* 4.126 (LCL 391, 462)).

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 1.3.22.4 (SC 30, 60).

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 1.10.47.4 (SC 30, 83).

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 1.9.43.1 (SC 30, 79-80).

³⁸¹ *P.A.* 4.1.7 (SC 268, 288); *Hom.Num.* 14.2 (SC 442, 166); *Com.Rom.* 3.1.1 (SC 539, 38).

It must be said that our word has its own proof, one more divine than that of the Greeks based on dialectics (Λεκτέον δ' ἔτι πρὸς τοῦτο ὅτι ἔστι τις οἰκεία ἀπόδειξις τοῦ λόγου, θειότερα παρὰ τὴν ἀπὸ διαλεκτικῆς ἐλληνικῆν). The Apostle called his more divine proof a proof of Spirit and power (1 Cor. 2.4).³⁸²

The meaning of this divine proof is not uniform across Origen's thinking. In Book I of *Contra Celsum*, demonstrations of the Spirit are said to be prophecies and those of power to be miracles (μὲν διὰ τὰς προφητείας... δὲ διὰ τὰς τεραστίους δυνάμεις).³⁸³ These provide verifiable evidence of the truth of Christian claims. The fact that the events of the New Testament were foretold accurately and the miracles effected by Jesus and his followers are both evidence of God's hand in Christ's mission. Origen expends significant effort in his counter-polemic to defending the validity of the Hebrew prophets and their application to Jesus's life and the truth of New Testament miracle accounts.

The divine proof of the Christian message is also understood in a more spiritual manner, as the divine grace that God provides that confirms the truth of Christianity to the faithful in the Church and in the hearts of the believers. In fact, Origen explicitly states that conversion and reformation is only possible on the basis of divine power, and that 'words of wisdom' are insufficient without God's grace to influence the inclinations of human souls.³⁸⁴ Origen is not unequivocal on this point we have already seen the power he believed dialectic to have in ensnaring human souls.

So far, we have focussed on those cases in which Origen characterised the human wisdom which he denigrates as false. This was not always the case, however. An educated man, he was well aware of the parallels between certain Christian and non-Christian beliefs. In cases where he admits as much, Origen changes tack, condemning human wisdom not so much for its content as for its effects or lack thereof. The wisdom of the apostles, who as uneducated men had no access to human wisdom, is evident in the beneficial effects their work has had on humanity as a whole:

Therefore, if it is granted in some way that the same doctrines exist among the Greeks and among those from our teaching, nonetheless, they are not at all equally capable at winning over souls and at putting them right according to these things. For this reason, the students of Jesus, who were uneducated with regards to Greek philosophy, went out to many nations

³⁸² *C Cels.* 1.2 (SC 132, 82).

³⁸³ *Ibid.* 1.2 (SC 132, 82).

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 6.2 (SC 147, 180-182). Compare *Strom.* 1.20.98-100 (SC 30, 123-125); *1st Apol.* 60.11 (SC 507, 286-288).

of the earth, putting each of their listeners right according to his merit, as the Word wished, and the listeners became better in proportion to their free will's reception of the good.³⁸⁵

Thus, Origen could describe Plato as having made a 'fine utterance about the highest good' and having 'taught such profound philosophy about the highest good.'³⁸⁶

However, the Gospel is superior both in its reach and in the moral quality of the lives of its adherent. Origen takes the rapid expansion of the Christian faith across the Roman Empire and beyond as evidence of its inspiration.³⁸⁷ What distinguishes their message from the teachings of the likes of Plato, which Origen also admits to be beneficial, is that while Plato's more polished style benefits only few people, the gospel has turned a great many to more beneficial ways of life.³⁸⁸ The simplicity of Christian Scripture invites people of all kinds to be healed. The fact that the Gospel spread so widely in spite of its lack of rhetorical flair or linguistic skill only further illustrates its divine inspiration. It was for this reason, in fact, that God chose men untrained in worldly wisdom to preach his Gospel, lest its captivating effects be credited to the rhetorical skill of its messengers.

Therefore, I say that to those able to prudently and reasonably examine the facts concerning Jesus' apostles, it appears that they taught Christianity and succeeded in leading men to the word of God by divine power. For in them there was no power to speak nor was there in them ordered statements according to the dialectical or rhetorical skills of the Greek to convince their listeners (τὰς Ἑλλήνων διαλεκτικὰς ἢ ῥητορικὰς τέχνας ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑπαγομένη τοὺς ἀκούοντας). It seems to me that if Jesus had chosen some wise men who were lofty in the eyes of the multitude and who were capable of thinking and speaking agreeably to crowds, and if he had made use of these servants for his teaching, he might have been suspected to use the similar methods to the philosophers who are leaders of certain sects. The proclamation that his word is divine would no longer have been self-evident, in that the gospel and the proclamation would be in persuasion and in the composition of words of wisdom. And the faith, like the faith of the philosophers of this world concerning their doctrines, would be in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ *C Cels.* 6.2 (SC 147, 182). Also see *C Cels.* 1.2 (SC 132, 82); 1.43 (SC 132, 190); 3.68 (SC 136, 154); 6.5 (SC 147, 190).

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 6.5 (SC 147, 190). On Origen's admiration for Plato, see Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," *Religions* 8, no. 2 (2017): 2-4.

³⁸⁷ *C Cels.* 3.29 (SC 136, 70); *Ser. Matt.* 39 (GCS 38.2, 75-76); *Hom. Exod.* 1.4 (SC 321, 52-54).

³⁸⁸ *C Cels.* 6.2 (SC 147, 180-182); 6.5 (SC 147, 190); 7.60-61 (SC 150, 154-158).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 1.62 (SC 132, 246). For other applications of the same argument, see *C Cels.* 3.39 (SC 136, 92-94); *P.A.* 4.1.7 (SC 268, 288).

The distinguishing factor in divine wisdom in this passage and those like it is its effects rather than its contents.

In addition to its wider propagation, the divinity of the Christian message is evident in its greater ability to reform the moral character of its audience. Plato's knowledge and understanding, for instance, did not prevent him from bowing down before idols.³⁹⁰ In his third *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Six*, Origen states that he has often known 'rhetors, grammarians, and those who promise philosophy and dialectic who are not only idolators, but also men who sleep with men, fornicators, and adulterers.'³⁹¹ On the other hand, even the simplest of Christian believers exhibit a way of life far superior to their pagan counterparts, to say nothing of the wise amongst the Church congregation.

5. Abimelech and positive evaluations of worldly wisdom

Origen's characterisation of Plato illustrates that he does not conceive of secular philosophy in exclusively negative or even neutral terms. On occasion, he demonstrates a degree of admiration for the wisemen of the world. Origen's interpretation of the Old Testament figure of Abimelech demonstrates a positive evaluation of non-Christian wisdom. The Philistinian king 'represents the studious and wise men of the age' who pursue philosophical endeavours.³⁹² This, however, is not presented as being to his detriment. He does not seek to entrap Abraham or Isaac with false teachings nor exhibit a love of fleshly things. In fact, he is presented as the mirror image of the Pharaoh, Origen's symbol *par excellence* of worldly evil.³⁹³ Both desired Sarah, the symbol of virtue (Gen. 12.15; 20.2). However, while the Pharaoh is 'an impure man and a destroyer,' Abimelech lived 'purely and philosophically' and had a 'pure heart' which genuinely desired virtue.³⁹⁴ Like the Pharaoh before him, he is still forbidden from touching Sarah but in his case it is only because Christ had not yet extended this grace to the Gentiles.³⁹⁵ There is no slight on his character, only a recognition that the unfolding economy of revelation had not yet come to include him.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 6.5 (SC 147, 190). Also, see *C Cels.* 7.54 (SC 150, 140).

³⁹¹ *Hom.Ps.36* 3.6 (GCS n.f. 19, 146).

³⁹² *Hom.Gen.* 6.2 (SC 7, 188).

³⁹³ See Agnethe Siquans, "Nach Ägypten, in Ägypten, aus Ägypten: Die Funktion von „Räumen“ in der Exodusauslegung des Origenes und deren ekklesiologische Dimension," *Protokolle zur Bibel* 26, no. 2 (2017): 142, 145-147.

³⁹⁴ *Hom.Gen.* 6.2 (SC 7, 186); 6.3 (SC 7, 190).

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 6.3 (SC 7, 190).

Far from disseminating a false gnosis, Abimelech represents the worldly wise who 'have comprehended many things of the truth by their learning of philosophy.'³⁹⁶ Since the name Abimelech means 'my father is king,' Origen suggests that the wise philosopher understands that God rules all creation.

Although they do not achieve the complete and perfect rule of piety, they still perceive that God is father and king of all things. Therefore, with regards to ethics, which is to say moral philosophy, these people are acknowledged to have dedicated some measure of effort to the purity of their heart and to have sought the inspiration of divine virtue with all their soul and devotion.³⁹⁷

Knowledge of God and of the virtuous life are precisely the sort of things denied to the wisdom of the world and only falsely claimed by the wisdom of the rulers of the world in *Peri Archon*. While he does not possess full knowledge of God, the heavens, or his divine economy, Abimelech is able to recognise, through his philosophical examination of the cosmos, the existence and certain qualities of God as Creator.³⁹⁸ Since such philosophers only achieve an incomplete and imperfect degree of knowledge and understanding, Abimelech appears in the Book of Genesis at some points as a friend of the Jewish patriarchs and at other times as an antagonist: 'Indeed, philosophy is neither contrary to everything in the Law of God nor in agreement with everything.'³⁹⁹

Origen outlines the areas on which Abimelech agrees and disagrees with the philosophy of the Church as follows:

For many philosophers write that there is one God who has created all things. In this they accord with the Law of God. Some have also added that God both made and rules all things through his Word and that it is his Word by whom all things are governed. In this they write in agreement not only with the Law but with the Gospels. Truly, nearly all the philosophy called moral and physical believes what we do. However, it disagrees with us when it says matter is coeternal with God. It disagrees when it denies that God cares for mortal things but that his providence is confined above the spaces of the lunar sphere. They disagree with

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 14.3 (SC 7, 340).

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 6.2 (SC 7, 188).

³⁹⁸ Robert Somos describes this branch of knowledge as the 'theistic thesis,' while Crouzel interprets it as something akin to our metaphysics. See Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie* (Paris: Aubier, 1962), 23; Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation in Origen* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2015), 30.

³⁹⁹ *Hom.Gen.* 14.3 (SC 7, 340).

us when they weigh the lives of those being born by the course of the stars. They disagree when they say that this world is permanent and will have no end.⁴⁰⁰

In the panegyric dedicated to Origen by one of his students traditionally attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus,⁴⁰¹ Gregory recounts that his master encouraged his students to read widely the works of Greek philosophers.⁴⁰² The exception to this instruction was ‘those of the atheists who, having turned away from common and human conceptions (ὁμοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐννοιῶν), say there is no God or providence.’⁴⁰³ Two groups appear to be in mind here. The first are the Epicureans, who are primarily characterised in *Contra Celsum* in terms of their denial of providence.⁴⁰⁴ The opprobrium with which Origen attacks Celsus with the charge of Epicureanism (a false charge) demonstrates his low opinion of this school of thought.⁴⁰⁵ To the two charges above, Origen adds the immorality of materialist ethics to his attacks on the Epicureans.⁴⁰⁶ The second group is comprised of Aristotle and the Peripatetics, who Origen frequently associates with the Epicureans.⁴⁰⁷ While Origen was no doubt familiar with Aristotle,⁴⁰⁸ throughout his writings, wherever he directly references Aristotle or the Peripatetic school, Origen is at best ambivalent towards them, though noticeably he does not receive the same degree of vitriol as Epicurus.⁴⁰⁹ The

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 14.3 (SC 7, 340-342).

⁴⁰¹ This traditional attribution was challenged by Pierre Nautin who argued that it resulted from Eusebius’s mistaken identification of its author Theodore as the pre-baptismal name of Gregory, bishop of Neocaesarea, also identified as the recipient of Origen’s letter to Gregory. Pierre Nautin, *Origène*, 81-86. In response, Crouzel defended the original interpretation. Henri Crouzel, “Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge? A propos du ‘Remerciement à Origène’ et de la ‘Lettre à Grégoire,’” *Gregorianum* 60, no. 2 (1979): 287-320. Also, see Francesco Celia, *Preaching the Gospel to the Hellenes: the Life and Works of Gregory the Wonderworker* (PhD diss., de Vrije Universiteit, 2017), 3-8, 52-59, 75-84. Celia’s recent study offers an excellent account of the *status quaestionis* and a forceful rebuke of Nautin’s argument. Whether or not the author of the panegyric was one and the same as the recipient of Origen’s letter and later bishop of Neocaesarea has no great effect on the present study. I have chosen to follow the traditional attribution and scholarly consensus by referring to the author as Gregory, though I accept that the matter is not settled.

⁴⁰² *Orat. Pan.* 11.133 (SC 148, 150); 13.150-152 (SC 148, 158).

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.* 13.152 (SC 148, 158).

⁴⁰⁴ See *C Cels.* 1.8 (SC 132, 96); 1.10 (SC 132, 104); *C Cels.* 1.13 (SC 132, 110); *C Cels.* 1.21 (SC 132, 128); 2.13 (SC 132, 320); 3.75 (SC 136, 168-170); 4.4 (SC 136, 196); 4.75 (SC 136, 370); 5.61 (SC 147, 166).

⁴⁰⁵ On the reason for this charge, see Silke-Petra Bergjan, “Celsus the Epicurean? The Interpretation of an Argument in Origen, *Contra Celsum*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (2001): 181-206.

⁴⁰⁶ See Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie*, 27-31.

⁴⁰⁷ *C Cels.* 1.21 (SC 132, 128); 1.24 (SC 132, 137); 1.43 (SC 132, 188); 2.13 (SC 132, 320); etc. See Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie*, 29, 31-35; Silke-Petra Bergjan, “Celsus the Epicurean? The Interpretation of an Argument in Origen, *Contra Celsum*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2) (2001), 181-206.

⁴⁰⁸ Illaria Ramelli has convincingly argued that Origen was influenced by the Peripatetic philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias. Illaria Ramelli, “Alexander of Aphrodisias.” Mark Edwards has suggested that Origen’s teacher was in fact a Peripatetic philosopher named Ammonius, highlighting Origen’s emphasis on human free will as an indication of Peripatetic influence. Mark Edwards, “Ammonius, Teacher of Origen,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, no. 2 (Jan, 1993): 169-181.

⁴⁰⁹ Of the twelve direct references in *Contra Celsum*, four relate to the Peripatetic denial of the efficacy of prayer (*CCels.* 1.21; 2.13; 3.75; 7.66), including that quoted above; three attempt to deflect Celsus’ accusations against Jesus by reference to Aristotle’s own perceived indiscretions (*CCels.* 1.64; 2.12; 3.13), including twice

figure of Abimelech, therefore, suggests that there exists a real degree of knowledge and understanding among the Platonist, Stoic, and Pythagorean philosophers, in contrast to the characterisation of the passage of *Peri Archon* already discussed.

6. Christian Uses of Human Wisdom

Origen is therefore capable of presenting human wisdom as beneficial to those who possess it, both within and outside the Church. As he states in a fragment on Romans: ‘human wisdom is an indifferent thing (ἀδιάφορος μὲν [ἢ ἀν]θρῶπινη σοφία); but if one uses it nobly and if one understands as one should, it opens to divine wisdom.’⁴¹⁰ The most famous example is Origen’s *Letter to Gregory*, in which he advocates for his reader to utilise Greek philosophy as a ‘helpmate’ and a ‘propaedeutic’ (συνέριθος and προπαιδεύματα) in his study of the Christian Scriptures.⁴¹¹ Consequently, Origen suggests that there are members of the worldly wise among the body of the Church. Defending Christians from Celsus’ accusations that they only target the uneducated, Origen highlights that Paul did not say that no wise men according to the flesh were included in his Corinthian audience, but that there were ‘not many wise men according to the flesh’ (1 Cor. 1.26).⁴¹²

Now the churches have wise men, although few in proportion to the multitudes, who have applied themselves to what is called by us wisdom according to the flesh, and they also have men who have progressed from that to divine wisdom.⁴¹³

This is not merely a defence forced upon Origen by the apologetic undertaking of this text. This verse is interpreted in the same manner in his exegetical works.⁴¹⁴

On occasion, he even suggests that it is not only beneficial but necessary for the pursuit of divine wisdom. It is ‘training (γυμνάσιον) for the soul,’ with divine wisdom as its goal (τέλος).⁴¹⁵ The suggestion that follows this statement that human wisdom is the milk required for children implies

referencing what he describes as Aristotle’s desertion of Plato; twice discussing what he believes to be Aristotle’s incorrect understanding of relationship of names to their referents (*CCels.* 1.24; 5.45); one reference to Aristotle’s incorrect theory of the soul (*CCels.* 4.56); and finally twice referenced as evidence of the fact that the Greek oracles are not even understood to be authoritative by all Greeks (*CCels.* 7.3; 8.45). Only the last two can be interpreted in a positive manner. The lesser degree of opprobrium results from the Peripatetics’ less wholehearted rejection of providence. While Aristotle denied that providence governs the happenings on earth and to individuals, the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo* does uphold the regulating function of providence for the superlunary spheres, a doctrine intimated in the discussion of Abimelech quoted above.

⁴¹⁰ *Ser.Rom.* 6.9 (230).

⁴¹¹ *Ep.Greg.* 1 (SC 148, 188).

⁴¹² *C Cels.* 3.48 (SC 136, 116).

⁴¹³ *Ibid.* 6.14 (SC 147, 214).

⁴¹⁴ *Com.Jn.* 4.2 (SC 120, 368).

⁴¹⁵ *C Cels.* 6.13 (SC 147, 210).

that it plays a necessary role in the spiritual development of the Christian soul. This is confirmed when Origen states that 'we also say that it is not possible unless one has been trained in human wisdom to proceed to the more divine.'⁴¹⁶ Quite clearly this contradicts his arguments regarding the uneducated nature of the Gospel's first preachers but demonstrates most strongly that Origen does not view human wisdom entirely negatively.

As an indifferent thing, human wisdom can be put to positive ends when used in the pursuit and defence of divine wisdom. Unsurprisingly, Origen focusses on the argumentative and persuasive aspects of human wisdom when highlighting its potential utility to the Church. The rhetorical and dialectical skills that characterise the Greek method of inquiry can be put to good purpose when used to improve the linguistic eloquence and sophistication of reasoning with which the Christian message is delivered. In his fifth *Homily on Leviticus*, Origen explains why, after prohibiting leavened bread from the sacrifice itself, the sacrifice is offered with leavened loaves (Lev. 7.12-13). He links this text with Matt. 16.5-12, in which Jesus warns his disciples to 'beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,' meaning not 'the leaven of bread but the teaching (διδασκαλίας) of the Pharisee and Sadducees' which are elsewhere identified as 'human precepts' (ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων) and as a 'human tradition' (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων) (Mark 7.7-8).' Thus, the leaven is 'human doctrine, such as the grammatical, rhetorical, or even the dialectical art.'⁴¹⁷ Nothing of this nature is to be taken to the sacrifice, meaning that these skills must not impinge on the Christian doctrines concerning God. However, these skills may be used by lending their 'splendour of eloquence and reason of disputation' to the Christian ministry of these doctrines.⁴¹⁸ Greek philosophy is used in the construction of the tabernacle but have no part in the divine Law placed within it.

In his dispute with Celsus, after arguing that the Christian Church does not reject the wise of the world, Origen continues:

And it is clear that, having described the character of those called bishops and what sort of person a bishop must be, Paul also says they must be a teacher, saying he must be able to refute those who contradict him (Titus 1.9), in order that he might bridle those who talk idly and deceive souls through his wisdom.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.* 6.14 (SC 147, 212).

⁴¹⁷ *Hom. Lev.* 5.7 (SC 286, 238).

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.* 5.7 (SC 286, 238).

⁴¹⁹ *C Cels.* 3.48 (SC 136, 114-116).

In a catena on 1 Corinthians, Paul's words that the Corinthian church has been enriched 'in all speech' are understood to refer to 'both that called discursive and the method of question and answer', that is, to dialectics.⁴²⁰ This skill is necessary so that 'They are also prepared to speak against every heresy and to come to the defence of true doctrine' and thus 'give a defence to everyone who asks you for an account of the faith' (1 Pet. 3.15).⁴²¹ Thus, the Christian teacher is able to counteract the sophistic attacks against the Gospel by means of his opponents' own methods.

These skills are also to convert those outside the Church to the truth of the Gospel. This is the interpretation Origen gives to the concubines and foreign wives of the Old Testament patriarchs. Drawing upon an Alexandrian interpretative tradition concerning the wives and servants of biblical figures found in Philo and Clement, Origen suggests that they represent forms of knowledge or virtue.⁴²² The foreign women with which the biblical figures partner represent secular skills foreign to the Church. However, where Philo and Clement suggest that Hagar acts a propaedeutic for philosophy,⁴²³ Origen suggests that the role of these skills is to convert those outside the Church by means of their own reasonings:

And if, from this manner of marriage, by disputing, by discussing, by rebuking those who contradict us, we are able to convert some to the faith, and if, overcoming them by their own reasonings and arts, we persuade them to take up the true philosophy of Christ and the true piety of God, then we will be seen to have begotten sons from dialectic or rhetoric as from a foreign woman or a concubine.⁴²⁴

Finally, Origen highlights the role that argumentative skills can have in elucidating the Christian Scriptures. This was the role that Origen gave to Greek philosophy in his correspondence with Gregory, a letter written with the primary aim of encouraging the recipient to devote himself to the investigation of the Christian Scriptures.⁴²⁵ Here, he highlights the way in which the sciences of geometry and astronomy can elucidate the divine writings. These skills are useful in deciphering the secrets of the Scriptures because many of its authors were skilled in precisely these disciplines.⁴²⁶ Moses's writing is said to evidence his skill as an excellent rhetor; Jeremiah is written 'in a most dialectical manner'; and Paul 'utilises syllogisms established and assembled from the art of

⁴²⁰ *Frag.1Cor.* 2 (1, 233).

⁴²¹ *Ibid.* 2 (1, 233).

⁴²² Annewies van den Hoek, "Mistress and Servant: An Allegorical Theme in Philo, Clement and Origen," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 344-348; Johanna Louise van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the Stromateis* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 23-47.

⁴²³ *De Congr.* 71-84 (LCL 261, 492-500); *Strom.* 1.5.30.1-1.5.324 (SC 30, 67-69).

⁴²⁴ *Hom.Gen.* 11.2 (SC 7, 284).

⁴²⁵ *Ep.Greg.* 4 (SC 148, 190).

⁴²⁶ *Hom.Gen.* 2.2 (SC 7, 86); *Hom.Num.* 18.3 (SC 442, 324-326).

dialectic.⁴²⁷ Again, Origen does not seek to reconcile this with his frequent assertions that the biblical writers were unskilled in human and worldly wisdoms. Origen mentions in his *Commentary on Romans* that Paul makes use of syllogisms derived from the art of dialectic but states that he does not wish to dwell upon this 'so that we might not be seen to be champions not so much of his knowledge as of his words, in which he did not want to be called skilled.'⁴²⁸ Origen appears to suggest that Paul may indeed have been skilled but chose not to boast about it. Regardless, since Origen believed the scriptural exegete must share the same mind and same charism as its author, if its writers possessed these secular skills, then possession of these same skills would aid the interpreter in their task.⁴²⁹ An excellent example of this occurs on Origen's second *Homily on Genesis*: Moses, having been instructed in science of geometry for which the Egyptians were especially reputed, utilised this skill in his description of Noah's Ark in Gen. 6.15.⁴³⁰ Consequently, unlocking the deeper figurative sense of this text requires, or at least is greatly aided by, an understanding of the geometrical science that emerged among the pagans.

7. *The Origin of the Truths of Non-Christian Philosophy*

Granting that there is some degree of truth and understanding among the human wisdoms of non-Christian philosophy, the question still remains from where this understanding originates. In the most fundamental sense, of course, it originates from the intellectual nature of God and his Son. In a more immediate sense, however, this issue is one that was central to much of the apologetic discourse the early Christian period, of which Origen's *Contra Celsum* was notable example. There were a number of possible responses to this question. Daniélou highlights two passages in which his Alexandrian forebear Clement lists possible hypotheses on this subject.⁴³¹ In *Stromateis* 1.80, Clement states:

Therefore, Greek philosophy, according to some, becomes acquainted with the truth by accident, but obscurely and incompletely. Others, however, maintain that it is set in motion by the devil. Some suggest that all philosophy is inspired by fallen powers.⁴³²

⁴²⁷ *C. Cels.* 1.18 (SC 132, 122); *Hom. Jer.* 1.10 (SC 232, 216); *Com. Rom.* 6.13.2 (SC 543, 216).

⁴²⁸ *Com. Rom.* 6.13.1 (SC 543, 216).

⁴²⁹ On the requirement of the exegete to place themselves in the shoes of the inspired author, see Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*.

⁴³⁰ *Hom. Gen.* 2.2 (SC 7, 86).

⁴³¹ Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), 49.

⁴³² *Strom.* 1.16.80 (SC 30, 108).

Later, in *Stromateis* 1.94, he provides an alternative list of possibilities: the philosophers alighted on it governed by divine providence; that they acquired knowledge through a natural conception (φυσική έννοια) or common intellect (κοινός νοῦς); that they were inspired in like manner to the prophets; or that the truths contained in the philosophers' words are 'a reflection of the truth,' the truth being reflected in their minds – that is, they were able to 'perceive God through a reflection or a something transparent.'⁴³³ In fact, these hypotheses alone do not exhaust the possibilities concerning the origin of the truth in not Jewish-Christian traditions. Missing from both of these lists is one of the most common explanations in early Jewish and Christian apologetics: that foreign nations pilfered whatever wisdom they possess from the more ancient tradition of the Hebrews and its Scriptures. Clement himself made a great deal of this dependency theme and claimed that all the higher truths found in Greek philosophy were stolen from the Hebrews.⁴³⁴

In the following, I shall deal with the use of each of these various hypotheses in Origen's works, contextualised by reference to his predecessors. I will proceed in the following order, starting with divine inspiration; proceeding next with the hypothesis of knowledge acquired through natural contemplation; then finally addressing the dependency hypothesis in two forms: the hypothesis that the Greek stole their ideas from the Hebrew Scriptures, and the hypothesis that the Gentiles learnt their wisdom from demons who stole their knowledge from God. Origen drew upon an extensive history of Jewish and Christian apologetic in his work refuting Celsus and elsewhere and drew upon streams of theological thought evident in his predecessors including Philo, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, and Clement of Alexandria.

7.1. *The Inspiration of the Greeks*

The first possibility is that Greek philosophers derived their knowledge and understanding of God, ethics, and other more divine truths by direct inspiration from God in a manner comparable to the Hebrew prophets. It is an idea that has been ascribed to a number of early Christian theologians, most notably Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria.

In examining the first two hypotheses, inspired knowledge and un-inspired knowledge of higher truths, one runs into a conceptual difficulty. This difficulty arises from the fact that the distinction between natural and supernatural faculties are not as clear in this period as in contemporary

⁴³³ *Ibid.* 1.19.94 (SC 30, 120).

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 1.25.165-166 (SC 30, 164-165). See Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 55-68; George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 188-194; Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?* (Tübingen : J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 138-149.

discourse. Wayne Hankey adeptly describes the problem of attempting to reduce late antique thought to contemporary distinctions between the natural and the supernatural:

When those listed as ‘philosophers’ in our histories touch on theological or religious matters, they are usually treated as if what they wrote was all ‘natural’, in the sense of coming from inherent human capacity, as opposed to what is inspired or gracious. Packing the natural theology of what we are calling ‘the Patristic Period’ into such crudely undifferentiated lumps moulded by later binary schematizing destroys what it most distinctively accomplished... We discover not only that there is no operation of pure nature abstracted from the divine activity but also that physics leads to theology and that nature, the human, and community depend on gifts given beyond them from above.⁴³⁵

For this reason, I avoid use of the phrase ‘natural theology.’ While there was some usage of this phrase in the period, its meaning is very different to its contemporary usage.⁴³⁶ Therefore, I prefer the terminology of ‘natural law’ to refer to knowledge of God and virtue that is available to all humankind outside the special economy of revelation. Origen probably drew this language of the law of nature (ὁ νόμος τῆς φύσεως, translated *lex naturalis*) from Philo,⁴³⁷ reading it into Paul’s words in his Epistle to the Romans, in which he says: ‘When gentiles, who do not possess the law, by nature do what the law requires (τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα, φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν), these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves’ (Rom. 2.14). On occasion, he also uses the phrase ‘natural reason’ (*ratio naturalis* or λόγος φυσικός).⁴³⁸ Origen includes within the category of natural law not only knowledge of right and wrong but also some degree of knowledge of God as Creator:

⁴³⁵ Wayne Hankey, “Natural Theology in the Patristic Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, ed. John Brooke, Russell Manning, and Fraser Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38-39.

⁴³⁶ When Varro uses the phrase ‘*theologia naturalis*’ in the fragments preserved in Augustine’s *City of God*, it is not used to in distinction from supernatural revelation. Since Greek and Roman philosophy had a limited conception of a direct and special divine disclosure separate from other forms of epistemic activity, there was no need to distinguish natural from supernatural knowledge of God and virtue. In his usage, the phrase refers to philosophy and its understanding of the divine and the person’s proper attitude and practice towards it, in distinction from mythical theology and civic theology; that is, the narratives about the gods produced by the poets and the institutions of religious practice of the state. It is, therefore, equivalent to the discipline of physics. See Augustine, *City of God* 6.5 (LCL 412, 304-306).

⁴³⁷ As Koester notes, before Philo, there is scant attestation of this term besides Cicero, using the Latin *lex naturae*. Koester goes on to argue that Philo was the originator of the concept. Helmut Koester, “Νόμος Φύσεως: The Concept of Natural Law in Greek Thought,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 521-541. However, this seems unlikely. See Richard Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978): 35-59; John Martens, *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13-16. Though Philo did not originate this concept, he is the first to consistently apply the term νόμος φύσεως to the concept. It is likely, therefore, that Origen took this language from the Alexandrian.

⁴³⁸ *Frag.Rom.* 5 (1, 215); *Com.Rom.* 1.20.1 (SC 532, 244); 2.5.25 (SC 532, 330).

It is certain that the Gentiles who do not have the law are not said to do naturally the things of the law with respect to the Sabbath or new moons or the sacrifices which are written about in the law. For this law is not said to be written in the hearts of the Gentiles. It is rather what they can perceive by nature (*hoc est quod sentire naturaliter possunt*): for instance, that they should not commit homicide or adultery, that they should not steal nor speak falsely, and they should honour their father and their mother, and things like this. Possibly also the fact that God is one and creator of all is written in the hearts of the Gentiles.⁴³⁹

This form of knowledge is still a form of participation in God and Origen does not divorce it completely from God's revelatory activity.⁴⁴⁰ Paul had described non-Christians' knowledge of God through observation of the cosmos as being 'revealed (Ἀποκαλύπτεται) from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those who by their injustice suppress the truth. For what can be known about God (τὸ γνωστὸν) is plain (φανερὸν ἐστίν) to them because God has made it plain (ἐφάνερωσεν) to them' (Rom. 1.18-19). Commenting upon this verse of Romans, Longenecker argues 'God's actions in creating and preserving the world were understood by Jewish thinkers to be both personal and direct, and so theistic deduction was considered possible only because God himself had implanted a revelation of himself in the warp and woof of his created universe.'⁴⁴¹ Even so, there is still a distinction to be made between this manner of universal self-disclosure available to everyone and the special economy of revelation within the Jewish and Christian traditions. Origen certainly distinguished this manner of participation in the divine from that of the Scriptures' inspired authors and inspired readers and listeners. What is 'known about God' (*quod notum est Dei*), which is 'perceived by inference from the creation' (*per coniecturam creaturae*) and by reason, is contrasted with what is 'unknowable about God,' such as his substance and nature, which can only be revealed by the Son.⁴⁴² Origen states later in the same commentary:

If, therefore, the diversity of the word "law" is sufficiently clear, let us now see which righteousness is manifested apart from the natural law. The Apostle Paul himself says of Christ that "he has become our wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1.30). Therefore, this righteousness of God, which is Christ, is manifested apart from the natural law, but not apart from the law of Moses or the prophets.

⁴³⁹ *Com.Rom.* 2.7.1 (SC 532, 346). Also, see *Com.Rom.* 3.4.9 (SC 539, 116).

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1.19.2-1.21.1 (SC 532, 236-248); 3.4.9 (SC 539, 116). See Robert Somos, "Theologia Naturalis and Theologia Revelata in Origen's First Homily on Psalm 77," *Studia Patristica* 111 (2021): 56-58.

⁴⁴¹ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 225.

⁴⁴² *Com.Rom.* 1.19.5-6 (SC 532, 240-242).

For the law gives testimony about this as he himself also says. "Search the Scriptures and they are what gives testimony about me" (John 5.39). For the natural law can offer opportunity and give understanding, as we have said, of what equity demands to be done among human beings or it might perceive that God exists. However, who is able to perceive by nature that Christ is the Son of God? Therefore, apart from the law the righteousness of God, which is Christ, has been manifested, as testified by the law of Moses and the prophets.⁴⁴³

While such people possess some rational understanding of God and virtue, they do not possess spiritual knowledge:

Therefore, I think that the activity of the Father and Son occurs as much in the saints as in sinner... truly the activity of the Holy Spirit does not at all extend either to those things which are without life or to those which are living but dumb, but nor is it found even in those things which, through rational, *lie in malice* (1 John 5.19), not having converted to better things. I think that in those alone is the Holy Spirit active, who have already converted to better things and walk in the ways of Jesus Christ, that is who are doing good works and who remain in God.⁴⁴⁴

When referring to the possibility of the Greeks deriving their knowledge by divine inspiration, I mean that they acquired their beliefs in a manner similar to the prophets and Gospel writers, through direct inspiration and participation in the divine Spirit.

Looking at the Christian precedents for this position, the two most notable possible examples are found in Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria. Concerning the possibility of direct inspiration of philosophers in Justin Martyr's theology, most discussion concerns a cluster of statements concerning the *logos spermatikos* in the *Second Apology*.⁴⁴⁵

For each one spoke rightly, seeing from a part of the divine spermatik logos (μέρους τοῦ σπερματικοῦ θείου λόγου) what was connatural to it, but when they said something counter to themselves, they are evidently seen not to have held stable understanding and irrefutable

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.* 3.4.9 (SC 539, 116)

⁴⁴⁴ P.A. 1.3.5 (SC 252, 152-154).

⁴⁴⁵ See, for example, Salvatore Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 23-26; Dariusz Karłowicz, *Socrates and Other Saints*, trans. Artur Sebastian Rosman (Eugene, O.R.: Cascade Books, 2017), 29-30; Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 41; Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 40-45. However, while Daniélou identifies the Logos as personally sowing knowledge into the souls of philosophers, he makes clear that this differs from the economical revelation in its fullness or clarity.

knowledge... For all these writers, through the naturally implanted seed of the Logos (διὰ τῆς ἐνούσης ἐμφύτου τοῦ λόγου σπορᾶς), were able to dimly see the things which are true.⁴⁴⁶

In the *Second Apology* 7, the Word is said to sow the seeds of reason (σπέρμα τοῦ λόγου) in the rational soul.⁴⁴⁷ The *logos spermatikos* is not, it is argued, a passive ability of human reason implanted into the soul but, as Salvatore Lilla puts it, 'is nothing but the divine Logos himself engaged in a special activity.'⁴⁴⁸

However, scholarly discussions concerning Justin's *logos spermatikos*, the 'seeds of reason,' and their relationship to humans and their rational faculties are hotly contested.⁴⁴⁹ The question that requires addressing is 'whether we have to do with a title of Christ or with one of the universal faculties, reason and speech, by which his revelation is apprehended and propagated in the human sphere. When we are told, for example, that Socrates suffered because he lived "according to logos" in a deluded society (5.3–4), should we take this to mean that he was a man of reason or that he was instructed by Christ himself?'⁴⁵⁰ Indeed, while some have detected concepts of direct inspiration in Justin's *Second Apology*, Justin's concept of *logos spermatikos* has also commonly been understood to reflect a concept of natural law. For instance, when discussing Justin's *Second Apology*, Chadwick states:

So both Abraham and Socrates were 'Christians before Christ'. So also the noble morality of the Stoics comes from their share in the 'seminal Logos', the divine Reason who has sown the seeds of truth in all men as beings created in God's image. Accordingly the philosophers have been able to read God both in the book of nature and in the inner deliverances of their reason. Justin loves to find the footprints of God in the non-Christian order and in nature.⁴⁵¹

The problem surrounding much of the discussion of Justin's understanding of the origin of Greek philosophy is the focus on this cluster of statements in the *Second Apology*. The quotation above from the *Second Apology* 13 does indeed strongly suggest that the Greeks were directly acquainted

⁴⁴⁶ *2nd Apol.* 13.3-5 (SC 507, 362-364).

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 7.1 (SC 507, 338-340).

⁴⁴⁸ Salvatore Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 24.

⁴⁴⁹ For the following discussion on this difficult subject, I am indebted to the work of Mark Edwards, which is largely reconcilable with the positions of Droge and Boys-Stones. Mark Edwards, "Justin's Logos and the Word of God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 261-280; Mark Edwards, "From Justin to Athenagoras," in *Intertextuality in the Second Century*, ed. Dwight J. Bingham and Clayton N. Jefford (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 151-152.

⁴⁵⁰ Mark Edwards, "From Justin to Athenagoras," 151.

⁴⁵¹ Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 16-17. Also, see Ragnar Holte, "Logos Spermatikos, Christianity and Ancient Philosophy According to St. Justin's Apologies," *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958); Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation*, 39-40.

with the divine Word, 'seeing from a part of the divine spermatic logos what was connatural to it.'⁴⁵² However, as Edwards has highlighted, this contradicts Justin's own statements elsewhere.⁴⁵³ Moreover, given the disputed position of the *Second Apology*, it is unclear whether Justin ever intended for this statement to be published.⁴⁵⁴ Statements on the *logos spermatikos* taken from the *Second Apology* should perhaps not, therefore, hold the central position they often do in this discussion.

This being so, the best evidence in Justin Martyr for divine inspiration of Greek philosophers is found in the *Dialogue with Trypho* 2.1:

For to God philosophy is the greatest and most honourable possession... Has not philosophy's true nature and why it was sent down to men escaped the notice of the majority? For if not, there would be no Platonists, Stoics, Peripatetics, Theoreticians, and Pythagoreans, since it is one science.⁴⁵⁵

However, Holte correctly points out that this is explained in light of Justin's claim in *Dialogue with Trypho* 8.1 that Christianity is 'the only safe and profitable philosophy.'⁴⁵⁶ What is 'sent down to men,' therefore, is not a divine gift to the Greeks but the very inspired teachings of Christianity as found in the Scriptures.

Turning to the *First Apology*, what is meant when Justin states that in rejecting the religious practices of his Athenian peers Socrates lived 'according to logos'?⁴⁵⁷ Mark Edwards provided a convincing answer to his own question, quoted above, pointing out that Socrates is said to have learnt the falsity of Greek religion not ὑπὸ τοῦ Λόγου but ὑπὸ λόγου, not from the Word but from reason (without the definite article): 'they had their critical faculties by nature, but, except through plagiarism, no acquaintance with the Word.'⁴⁵⁸ This, we shall see, is how Origen most commonly understands the matter. It is worth noting what it is for which Socrates is praised since it corresponds to Paul's argument in his Epistle to the Romans: his supposed rejection of Greek idolatry and nature worship.⁴⁵⁹ Drawing upon precedents within Jewish literature and especially upon Wis. 13-15, Paul condemns the Gentiles who, though they had every reason to know better,

⁴⁵² *2nd Apol.* 13.3 (SC 507, 362).

⁴⁵³ *Dial. Tryp.* 4.2 (PTS 47, 77). See Mark Edwards, "Justin's Logos and the Word of God," 273.

⁴⁵⁴ See Paul Parvis, "Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: The Posthumous Creation of the *Second Apology*," in *Justin Martyr and his Worlds*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis, MS: Fortress Press, 2007), 22-37.

⁴⁵⁵ *Dial. Tryp.* 2.1 (PTS 47, 71).

⁴⁵⁶ Ragnar Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 164.

⁴⁵⁷ *1st Apol.* 5.4 (SC 507, 140).

⁴⁵⁸ Mark Edwards, "Justin's Logos and the Word of God," 277, 279.

⁴⁵⁹ On the influence of Romans on Justin Martyr's *Apology*, see Ragnar Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 129-130; Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 68.

‘exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles’ (Rom. 1.23). However, this alone is insufficient to support the wide-ranging ‘natural or general revelation’ Chadwick envisioned.

Therefore, while it would be wrong to suggest that Justin rejects any possibility of knowledge on the basis purely of humankind’s rational faculties, the greater significance in the *First Apology* is certainly given to the loan or plagiarism theory.⁴⁶⁰ Justin explicitly describes the ‘seeds of truth’ (σπέρματα ἀληθείας), from which philosophers and poets derived their best ideas concerning ‘the immortality of the soul, or punishment after death, or contemplation of heavenly things, or doctrines of this kind,’⁴⁶¹ as having been disseminated through the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴⁶² While all the best doctrines, the positive doctrines concerning higher truths, are drawn from the writings of the prophets, nevertheless, through the use of reason, Socrates was able to understand the corruption of Greek religious practices and the importance of living virtuously.⁴⁶³ According to Justin, therefore, reason supports a basic, if unclear, knowledge of God’s existence and the how to live virtuously, but cannot achieve close to the fullness of Christian philosophy without the knowledge disseminated through the inspired prophets. It is enough to enable condemnation of those who fall into immorality, particularly idolatry, but insufficient for much more than that.

Clement of Alexandria provides a slightly more fruitful source for the inspiration hypothesis for the origin of the truth in Greek philosophy. In Book I of *Stromateis*, mentioned above, Clement lists inspiration in the manner of prophets as one possible hypothesis.⁴⁶⁴ While in this case Clement’s argument is made in response to others, accepting their premises (‘For if one speaks of prediction...’), there are a number of occasions in which Clement seems to suggest direct inspiration of non-Christian thinkers such as Plato and Pythagoras.⁴⁶⁵ However, when discussing Clement, it is important not to reduce the different possibilities to a single hypothesis. Clement’s interest is less in giving a singular explanation of the truth of philosophy than in offering numerous possible explanations that together offer surety in justifying his eclectic philosophical impulses.⁴⁶⁶ The

⁴⁶⁰ *1st Apol.* 44.9-10 (SC 507, 244-246). See Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 66-8.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* 44.10 (SC 507, 244).

⁴⁶² Mark Edwards, “Justin’s Logos and the Word of God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), 275.

⁴⁶³ See Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 66.

⁴⁶⁴ *Strom.* 1.19.94.3 (SC 30, 119).

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 5.5.29.1-4 (SC 278, 70-72); 5.14.116.1 (SC 278, 215); 6.7.55.3-4 (SC 446, 172); 6.17.153.1 (SC 446, 366); *Protr.* 6.71.1 (SC 2, 135-136). See Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 50-52; Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 140; Salvatore Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 16-27; Dariusz Karłowicz, *Socrates and Other Saints*, 29 n.63.

⁴⁶⁶ Molland highlights the way in which Clement does not make a definitive decision on the way in which philosophy originates from God a number of times throughout his article. The only options Clement cannot entertain are those which deny this origin completely, whether direct or indirect. Einar Molland, “Clement of Alexandria on the Origin of Greek philosophy,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 15 (1936): 57-85.

presence of this inspiration hypothesis does not negate the possibility of natural apprehension of certain truths or of some knowledge being derived from plagiarism.

Origen for the most part does not follow his predecessor in this respect. While Origen certainly held Plato, Socrates, and Pythagoras in relatively high regard, there is little evidence to suggest that he considered them to be directly divinely inspired. Since he did not proudly display his philosophical and classical knowledge in the same manner as Clement did, Origen probably did not feel the need to justify its divine origin in such strong and direct terms as Clement had done. Nonetheless, Ilaria Ramelli suggests that Origen might have proposed that Plato was divinely inspired:

Origen ranks Plato as the best of all philosophers, the closest to scriptural doctrines (CC 1.10). Origen explicitly agrees with Plato on the supreme Good's inexpressibility in the *Seventh Letter*, and praises him as inspired by God (CC 6.3).⁴⁶⁷

However, if one examines *Contra Celsum* 6.3 in context, while Origen does state that God revealed or made known (ἐφάνέρωσε⁴⁶⁸) to Plato what he says in his pseudepigraphal *Seventh Letter*, Origen uses this language in the context of an exposition of Rom. 1.18-23, from which this terminology is drawn. The entire thrust of his argument is intended to lambast Greek philosophers for their impious religious practices and idolatry, despite the knowledge they had that such practices were sinful. I will deal with Origen's usage of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* 1-2 in greater detail below, but for now it suffices to say that Origen's appeal to this passage contextualizes his statement in terms of natural law rather than direct inspiration. Additionally, as Ramelli more frequently states, Origen believes 'Plato was inspired by Scripture or by the same Logos that is also manifested in Scripture.'⁴⁶⁹ Therefore, the inspiration found in Plato may be easily explained as indirectly derived from the Hebrew Scriptures from which Plato drew.

The idea that Origen may have believed Plato to have been inspired seems to rest more concretely on Ramelli's contention that Origen wrote commentaries allegorically interpreting Plato's mythical discourses.⁴⁷⁰ Origen's now lost *Commentary on Genesis*, Ramelli argues, assimilated Plato's Poros myth to the biblical garden of Eden narrative.⁴⁷¹ The very act of reading a text allegorically would

⁴⁶⁷ Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," 4.

⁴⁶⁸ Lampe's lexicon notes that this term can be used in a general sense. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1470.

⁴⁶⁹ Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," 2, 17.

⁴⁷⁰ See *Ibid.*; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen's Allegoresis of Plato's and Scripture's Myths," in *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Nathaniel Desrosiers and Lily Vuong (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 85-106.

⁴⁷¹ Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," 4, 9, 11, 14, 15; Ilaria Ramelli, "Plato in Origen's and Gregory of Nyssa's Conception of the Ἀρχή and the Τέλος," in *Plato in the Third Sophistic*, ed. Ryan C. Fowler (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2014), 212-214.

suggest a belief that it was a medium of divine revelation.⁴⁷² In response to Celsus's mockery of the Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve and the garden of Eden, Origen drew parallels between this narrative and the myth of Poros and Penia that Socrates recounts in Plato's *Symposium*.⁴⁷³ The description of Plato's literary method resembles how Origen characterised the Christian Scriptures: 'he had been able to hide the great doctrines which became clear to him from the multitude in the form of myths, but to say what was necessary for those who know how to find from the myths the intention of the composer concerning the truth.'⁴⁷⁴ The evidence that Origen wrote such commentaries, however, is rather unconvincing. It seems to rely too heavily on the contention that the Christian Origen can be identified with Origen the Neoplatonist⁴⁷⁵ and on speculation concerning the lost *Commentary on Genesis* to which Origen refers in *Contra Celsum*. Continuing on from the passage just quoted:

Now is the time to explain neither the myth of Plato, nor the narrative concerning the serpent and the paradise of God and everything that is recorded to have happened in it, for, as far as possible, we have treated these things previously in the Commentary on Genesis.⁴⁷⁶

Origen does not detail how he covered these topics in the lost commentary and it is possible that 'these things' (ταῦτα) was not even intended to include Plato's myth but only the biblical narratives of Genesis just referenced. There is, therefore, little to justify Ramelli's speculation that 'Origen extensively exegeted Plato's Poros myth in his *Commentary on Genesis*.'⁴⁷⁷ The other extant piece of evidence for engagement with Platonic myths in Origen's commentaries is found in the prologue of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, where Origen makes references to the Plato's *Symposium*. However, this short and unattributed reference to a Platonic dialogue in the introduction to his commentary is certainly not sufficient evidence to suggest that Origen wrote extended commentaries on Plato. It seems far more likely that the comparison between the myths of Plato and those of the Christian Scriptures was an apologetic response to the specific attacks levelled by Celsus and at most he made passing and oblique reference to it in his other work. Furthermore, even within this context, Origen offers two possible efficient causes of Plato's doctrines: perhaps 'Plato

⁴⁷² See Blossom Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 86-96.

⁴⁷³ *C Cels.* 4.39 (SC 136, 284).

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 4.39 (SC 136, 286).

⁴⁷⁵ This, however, is far from a settled issue. See Mark Edwards, "One Origen or Two? The Status Quaestionis," *Symbolae Osloenses* 89 (2015): 81-103; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy and Christian Platonism," 217-263.

⁴⁷⁶ *C Cels.* 4.39 (SC 136, 288).

⁴⁷⁷ Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," 14.

fell upon these things by chance (κατὰ συντυχίαν) or, as some suppose, he met with those who philosophise the Jewish Scriptures on his journey to Egypt and learned some things from them.⁴⁷⁸

There is one isolated passage, however, that provides evidence for divine inspiration of non-Christian knowledge in Origen's work. Returning once more to Origen's discussion of Balaam, Origen suggests that he was inspired by God when Num. 23.5 says God 'put his word into his mouth.'⁴⁷⁹ Thus, by divine provenance, Balaam's words might provide a means of pedagogy to the Gentile nations in advance of the coming of Christ.

Thus, a remarkable and great plan was being delivered. For, since the words of the prophets which were contained within the Israelite court were not able to reach the nations, through Balaam, who had the trust of all the nations, the secret mysteries of Christ would still become known to the nations, and he would announce a great treasure to the nations, though it was not carried so much in the heart and understanding as in his mouth and speech.⁴⁸⁰

Through Balaam, God's inspired words are disseminated among the Gentiles, though, not having them in their 'heart and understanding,' the truths included therein were not truly understood. In this respect, the manner of Balaam's inspiration is quite unlike that of the Hebrew prophets. This extra-scriptural tradition bears its fruit in the form of the Magi from the Matthean account of Christ's birth, who Origen considered to have descended from Balaam.⁴⁸¹ This case, however, is an outlier within Origen's work. For the most part, Origen is resistant to the idea of a directly inspired tradition outside that of the Jews and the Christians.

7.2. Natural Law

While there is little substantial evidence that Origen believed the wisdom of the Gentiles to have been directly inspired by God, the idea they derived their knowledge and understanding of God, ethics, and similar higher truths from the use of their uninspired rational faculties is certainly found in Origen's works.

⁴⁷⁸ *C. Cels.* 4.39 (SC 136, 286).

⁴⁷⁹ On Origen's evaluation of Balaam and his prophecies, see Claire Hall, *Origen and Prophecy: Fate, Authority, Allegory, and the Structure of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 125-133. Hall argues that while Balaam is not considered a prophet on account of his low moral standing, his words are considered inspired prophecies.

⁴⁸⁰ *Hom. Num.* 14.3 (SC 442, 178).

⁴⁸¹ Claire Hall, *Origen and Prophecy*, 131.

While certainly not the dominant strain of thought in the first few centuries of Christian development, as seen above, natural law doctrines were clearly a recurring component of Christian theology, starting from its earliest point and influenced by its Jewish roots. We have already seen this in the cases of Justin Martyr and Paul before him. In addition to his Epistle to the Romans, there are aspects of this thought in Luke's accounts of Paul's speech on the Areopagus (Acts 17.16-34) and that of his and Barnabas's words in Lystra beforehand (Acts 14.15-17).⁴⁸² It should be noted that what is found in the *Epistle to the Romans* is uncharacteristic of Paul's general approach, so much so that some have suggested that there is in fact no doctrine of uninspired, rationally derived knowledge of God to be found in the text.⁴⁸³ However, any attempt to completely deny its presence is, I believe, to go against the plain reading of the text.

It is therefore no surprise that Origen's most extensive discussion of natural law occurs in his *Commentary on Romans*. Origen interprets the law written on the hearts of the Gentiles that Paul references in Rom. 2.14-15 as moral precepts distinguishable by 'natural reason.'

But a Greek – that is a Gentile – who, 'though he does not have the law, is a law to himself, showing the work of the law in his heart (Rom. 2.14-15)' and being moved by natural reason (*naturali ratione*⁴⁸⁴) – as we see not uncommonly among the Gentiles –, might take hold of justice or serve chastity or maintain wisdom, temperance, and modesty.⁴⁸⁵

Origen is not motivated only by his scriptural sources to develop his notion of natural law. Origen's chief concern here, found also in *On First Principles* 1.3.6, reflects Paul's concern in Romans 1-2: the righteous judgment of all humanity by God.⁴⁸⁶ The ability of rational creatures to perceive moral principles and the existence of God without direct revelation is required to justify the righteousness

⁴⁸² Paul is not, of course, the originator of such ideas. They can be traced backwards into the Hellenistic Judaism of Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: SCM Press, 1980), 39-40.

⁴⁸³ See, for instance, Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 40-41. I am firmly in agreement with James Barr on this issue: 'Even if creation is not an 'independent theme' in the other genuine letters, this does not entirely prove that it is not a theme here: after all, the argument of Romans 1-2 in general does not find a duplicate elsewhere in the genuine letters.' James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). 47-48.

⁴⁸⁴ This is likely Rufinus's translation of λογισμοί, drawn from Paul's words in the following verse of Rom. 2.16, or possibly λογισμοί φυσικοί.

⁴⁸⁵ *Com.Rom.* 2.5.25 (SC 522, 330). Justice, chastity, wisdom, modesty: these are all *epinoiai* of Christ, which Origen elsewhere in *Com.Rom.* 7.5.3 (SC 543, 304) says are formed in the soul through their conformation to Christ's deiform image. Perhaps, just as there is a human and divine wisdom, there are likewise human versions of other attributes of Christ.

⁴⁸⁶ As Käsemann argues, the rhetoric of Rom. 1 is one of accusation against mankind, maintaining the reality of God's wrath, and the primary focus is not on proving God's existence or establishing 'a point of contact.' While this is undoubtedly true, James Barr is once again correct in arguing against Käsemann that 'The fact that the argument is one of accusation rather than of abstract discussion does not show that natural theology could not have taken part in such an argument.' James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 48.

of God's judgment of all those outside the Church, some of whom never have had the opportunity to hear Christ, the Gospel, or the Law. So, in *Peri Archon*, Origen states:

Men are said to have sin when they participate in the word or reason, that is, from that time they are capable of understanding and knowledge, when the reason implanted in them furnishes them the distinction between good and evil. And when they begin to know what is evil, if they do it, they become guilty with sin. And this is what he said, that 'men have no excuse for their sin,' from the time the divine word or reason has begun to show in their heart the distinction between good and evil.⁴⁸⁷

If men were not able to perceive good from evil without the grace of the Church, only its members could justly be punished for their actions. Origen establishes reason as an alternative to the Law and the Gospel as a means for knowing good and evil.⁴⁸⁸

This capacity only develops after the soul achieves maturity.⁴⁸⁹ This is how Origen interprets Jesus' words that 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin... If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin' (John. 15.22-24). Origen could not have accepted this with regards to Jesus's historical mission. This would be to deny the sin not only of everyone outside the historical economy of revelation but also of all the recipients of that economy before the first century B.C.E.⁴⁹⁰ Rather, Origen this visitation to be that of the Logos within the soul as it develops its rational faculties and grows from childhood.⁴⁹¹ It is this rational faculty that provides the basis for uninspired knowledge of God and of the elementary aspects of virtue.

⁴⁸⁷ *P.A.* 1.3.6 (SC 252, 154-156). Also, see *C Cels.* 1.4 (SC 132, 84-86), which makes direct reference to 'the law written in his heart' of Rom. 2.15, and *Philoc.* 9.2 (SC 302, 352).

⁴⁸⁸ In a surprising move, in the *Commentary on Romans* 2.7, Origen does also suggest that it is the spirit by which souls come to know the natural law: 'It is according to the Spirit by means of which alone that the law is able to be fulfilled. This is the work of the law which he says is fulfilled by nature. Indeed, when they do what is written in the law, the law written by God in their hearts is seen, written 'not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3.3)'. There seem to be a couple of reasons for this. The first is that, because the natural law is rational, it cannot be identified with the irrationality of the literal interpretation of the Mosaic Law, which Gentiles clearly do not follow anyway. Therefore, the natural law is more closely associated with the spiritual interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Second is that the conscience which guides the non-Christian to follow the law written on their heart is best understood in Origen's anthropology as the spirit, since it guides the volitional component of man, the rational part, which is the soul. Nonetheless, the interpretation given here is a speculative outlier and Origen far more frequently interprets natural law in terms of mankind's reason, common to all men, not the spirit, which is not active in the sinful.

⁴⁸⁹ See Robert Somos, "Origen on the Kidneys," *Studia Patristica* 81 (2017): 74-77.

⁴⁹⁰ *Com.Jn.* 1.272-273 (SC 120, 196).

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.* 1.274 (SC 120, 196).

In developing his doctrine of natural law, Origen marshalled the originally Stoic doctrine of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι and φυσικὰ ἔννοιαι or ‘common conceptions’ and ‘natural conceptions.’⁴⁹² In a fragment of the original Greek of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* preserved in the *Philocalia*, Origen identifies these κοινὰ ἔννοιαι as the contents of the natural law read into Paul’s Roman correspondence:

Besides all these things, the reason (λόγος) which is sown in the soul according to the common conceptions (κατὰ τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας ἐνεσπαρμένος τῇ ψυχῇ) and, as Scripture puts it, “written in the heart,” commanding what must be done and prohibiting what must not be done, is also called “law.” And this is made clear in the words: “For when gentiles, who do not possess the law, by nature do what the works of the law, they, who do not have the law, are a law to themselves. They show the works of the law are written on their hearts, being witnessed by their conscience” (Rom. 2.14-15). For the law written in their hearts and among the Gentiles who do the works of the law by nature is not other than that of the common conceptions written by nature in our governing faculty (οὐκ ἄλλος ἐστὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας φύσει ἐγγεγραμμένου τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ ἡμῶν), and everyday becoming clearer with the perfecting of reason.⁴⁹³

Within their original context, these terms referred to the beliefs developed from the *prolepses* naturally imprinted upon the rational faculty of the soul by its sensible representations of the world and which are therefore universally held, even if not consciously so.⁴⁹⁴ Chrysippus described these *koinai ennoiai* as ‘the highest criteria of truth which we receive from nature’ and, as Henry Dyson argues, the reliability of these conceptions and the related *prolepses* is guaranteed by the providential nature of the cosmos.⁴⁹⁵ They thus provide the conceptual grounding that allows for philosophical inquiry into matters about which we are uncertain, securing a Stoic response to the problem of concept-formation raised by Plato’s *Meno* without recourse to his doctrine of *anamnesis*.⁴⁹⁶ Common conceptions need not be universally accepted nor majority consensus, since the Stoics accepted that our natural conceptions can be distorted by our social environments. Origen makes a similar argument, placing the blame for this distortion upon the works of the devil.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹² As Somos notes, Origen does not use the concept of *logos spermatikos* to discuss this rationally derived knowledge, but utilises the terminology of *lex naturalis*, κοινὰ ἔννοιαι, and φυσικὰ ἔννοιαι. See Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation*, 40-42.

⁴⁹³ *Philoc.* 9.2 (SC 302, 354).

⁴⁹⁴ See Henry Dyson, *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), esp. 60-71, to whose account of this Stoic doctrine I am indebted.

⁴⁹⁵ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione* 217.2 (116).

⁴⁹⁶ See Henry Dyson, *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa*, 72-79.

⁴⁹⁷ *Com.Matt.* 10.2 (GCS 40, 2). See Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation*, 49.

Nonetheless, certain commonly accepted beliefs were particularly identified in this manner, particularly regarding the existence of God or the gods.⁴⁹⁸ In the words of Cicero:

Therefore, the principal matter is agreed among all people of all nations, since it is innate and, as it were, engraved in the soul of every person that god exists. Of what nature they are, there is disagreement, but no one denies that they exist.⁴⁹⁹

There is clearly some overlap between this notion and the universally available knowledge of God that Paul asserts in his Epistle to the Romans.⁵⁰⁰

However, by Origen's day, this concept had lost much of its conceptual specificity, having been adopted into common philosophical parlance through the work of Stoicising Platonists and Platonising Stoics. Driven by similar concerns regarding the questions of concept formation and concept clarification, Alcinoüs incorporated the notion into the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*, a procedure in which he was followed by Plotinus.⁵⁰¹ Somos suggests that Origen followed this Middle- and Neoplatonist interpretation of the common conceptions, arguing that this formed an important part of his epistemology.⁵⁰² While he does appeal to the term on a number of occasions, Origen's usage does not seem to be particularly technical, an example of the bastardisation of this terminology in the first few centuries C.E. Somos himself admits the inconsistencies in Origen's treatment of this issue.⁵⁰³ Certainly, Somos's suggestion that 'In Origen's theology common conceptions and natural notions constitute the field of faith' is untenable.⁵⁰⁴ While he is correct in arguing that this stage must be surpassed if one is to achieve Christian wisdom, there is little warrant to understand the Christian faith of the simple believers as merely the κοινὰ ἔννοια. Common conceptions could hardly include knowledge of Christ and his crucifixion and resurrection, as Origen himself says with regards to the law written on the Gentiles' hearts.

⁴⁹⁸ See Gerd van Riel, *Plato's Gods*, 12; Frans A. J. de Haas, "Deduction and Common Notions in Alexander's Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics A 1-2*," *History of Philosophy and Logical Analysis* 24, no. 1 (2021): 78-79.

⁴⁹⁹ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.12-3 (LCL 268, 134-136).

⁵⁰⁰ Also, see Wis. 13.6-7.

⁵⁰¹ Wouter Gorus, "The Starting Points of Human Understanding: Πρῶτον νοητόν and φυσική ἔννοια in Alkinoüs' *Didaskalikos*," *Mnemosyne* 67, no. 2 (2014): 218-223; John Phillips, "Stoic 'Common Notions' in Plotinus," *Dionysius* 11 (1987): 33-52. Also, see Pauliina Remes, "Plotinus on Starting Points of Reasoning," *Χώρα* 14 (2016): 29-57. Remes accepts the relation of Plotinus's understanding of *ennoiai* to the Platonic doctrine of recollection but cautions against identifying them precisely with the fully formed ideas acquired before embodiment; they require development and clarification through empirical observation and philosophical articulation.

⁵⁰² Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation*, 48.

⁵⁰³ Robert Somos, "Origen on the Kidneys," 76.

⁵⁰⁴ Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation in Origen*, 48.

What Origen's usage of this terminology does affirm is first of all the link between reason and common conceptions, the fact that such conceptions are acquired through a developmental process from irrationality to rational maturity, and, above all, the liability of non-Christians for their impiety. The doctrine of *koinai ennoiai* is a form of epistemic innatism. It is important, however, to specify what form of innatism Origen subscribed to. Innate ideas could be conceived in terms of universal knowledge of certain ideas or propositions or with regards to certain dispositions that naturally lead the mind to certain beliefs. This leaves open the role of empirical observation in the development of this common theistic conception and common ethical disposition, a matter on which Origen appears to equivocate. In *Contra Celsum* 1.4, when defending Christianity from the accusation of the unoriginality of its ethical teachings, Origen states:

To this it must be said that to those who maintain the righteous judgment of God, they would have been unable to believe in the penalty for those who have sinned unless all had a sound conception of ethical principles according to common notions (μη πάντων ἐχόντων κατὰ τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας πρόληψιν ὑγιῆ περὶ τοῦ ἠθικοῦ τόπου). Therefore, there is nothing amazing about the fact that God has sown in the souls of all men the things he taught through the prophets and the Saviour, in order that every man might be without excuse at the divine judgment, having the meaning of the law written in his heart.⁵⁰⁵

Here, it is not only reason that is implanted in the soul, but the truths themselves, so that no one might be without such knowledge.

On the other hand, in *Contra Celsum* 8.52, after stating that since some non-Christians agree with Christian ethical teachings, that their teachings 'have not completely destroyed the common notions concerning good and evil, righteous and unrighteous (τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας περὶ καλῶν καὶ αἰσχροῶν καὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀδίκων),' Origen goes on to argue that all men who examine the world and heavens around them should 'fear doing anything displeasing to the Creator of all things and of their souls and of the mind within them.'⁵⁰⁶ Similarly, in the passage from his *Commentary on Romans* 1.19 above, Origen suggests that such knowledge is not innate but derived 'by inference from creation; from the things that can be seen, the invisible are known.'⁵⁰⁷ These inferences are made possible by the partial reflection of the Word in the soul which enables it to perceive the rationality of the Logos-made creation and infer God's existence from it.⁵⁰⁸ From the particulars of visible creation,

⁵⁰⁵ *C Cels.* 1.4 (SC 132, 84-86).

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 8.52 (SC 150, 288).

⁵⁰⁷ *Com.Rom.* 1.19.5 (SC 532, 242).

⁵⁰⁸ Also, see *C Cels.* 6.4 (SC 147, 186): 'And having been shown invisible things of God and the ideas from the creation of the world and the sensible realities, from which they ascended to the intelligible things, and having

one is able to move to the invisible things which lie behind them, the *logoi* and *theoremata* which are contained with Wisdom. There are clearly conflicting interpretations of the *koinai ennoiai* in Origen's work. It appears to me that Origen was less concerned with the nature and origin of *koinai ennoiai* than in its utility with regards to upholding the goodness and justice of God. The same is the case with regards to the potential of human uninspired rational capacities in general. Origen gives them only as much competency as is required for his defence of divine justice. For the other elements of secular and pagan knowledge, he is typically more likely to turn to our last two hypotheses: that the Greeks and other cultures attained their knowledge by loan or theft.

7.3. The Dependency Theory

Within the intellectual zeitgeist of the imperial period, a great deal of significance was given to antiquity. Older traditions were venerated as containing deep-seated wisdom passed down through the ages. If a culture, religious movement, texts, or ideas could demonstrate their long provenance, they would be shown a reverence not given to novelties or innovations. Within this context, anti-Christian polemics and the countervailing Christian apologetics devoted significant effort to demonstrating the relative ancientness of their own particular religious and philosophical practices, ideas, and texts. The same tendency is noticeable within intramural Christian disputes. The originality of heretical systems such as Valentinus's or Basilides's is a frequently argument against them. Each side was at pains to stress their own apostolic lineage and consequently the veracity of their teaching.

Philosophically speaking, the reasoning within the intramural disputes and within the pagan polemics was very similar. Within Christian circles, the ability to trace the lineage of one's teachings to the apostles demonstrated their origin in the special moment of divine revelation through Jesus's Incarnation. Similarly, within Greek philosophical discourse, the appeal to antiquity was justified by the special affinity of early humankind with the divine that has since been corrupted by society. The wisdom this acuity afforded them has been preserved in the doctrines and practices of those nations and peoples with the longest lineages. The profundity of Plato's doctrines thus could be explained by his investigation into, and preservation of, the doctrines of ancient humankind, whether his sources were exclusively Greek or drawn from across the traditions of the ancient Near East.⁵⁰⁹

seen his eternal power and divinity, they became foolish in their argumentations and their ignorant heart wallows in darkness and ignorance concerning the worship of the divine.'

⁵⁰⁹ George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, 99-122.

This intellectual distrust of novelty presented a sizeable challenge for the young Christian movement. In anti-Christian polemics, it was a common accusation that the Christians were dependent upon more ancient traditions for their doctrines and practices. These accusations took two forms, both of which are made by Celsus. Firstly, Greeks accused Christians and the Jews before them of diverging from the truths they inherited from ancient Near Eastern peoples: the Jews from their surrounding cultures, and the Christians from the Jews.⁵¹⁰ For instance, Celsus argues that the Hebrews were originally Egyptians by race but, having rebelled against Egypt, added innovations to their religious traditions.⁵¹¹ In doing so, they perverted the original wisdom received from the more ancient people, a problem compounded by the Christians' own subsequent innovations.⁵¹² Secondly, their dependence could be explained by plagiarism on the parts of Jewish and Christian authors. Eusebius recounts that the Platonist Amelius, a student of Plotinus, accused the Fourth Evangelist of stealing his account of the Logos from Heraclitus.⁵¹³ This is another form of accusation that Celsus makes on numerous occasions.⁵¹⁴

Given the novelty of their religion, Christian apologists emphasised the harmony of their message with the ancient Hebrew tradition. Provided they could demonstrate that Christianity was not an innovation on this religion, their task would simply be to demonstrate the antiquity of the Jewish people.⁵¹⁵ Jewish apologists had already provided the template with which to counter these accusations of novelty, simply by turning the tables on their accusers. It was not the Jews or Christians who were dependent on more ancient traditions or who had plagiarised others' practices or texts, but others had deviated from or plagiarised from the Hebrews, that most venerable of peoples. Josephus, for instance, was insistent on the antiquity and independence of the Jewish tradition and argues that it was the Greeks, and Plato and Pythagoras in particular, who borrowed from the Jewish Scriptures.⁵¹⁶ Philo also cites Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Aristotle, and Zeno as philosophers who drew from Jewish scriptural sources.⁵¹⁷

Clement and Tatian also expended significant effort constructing intellectual genealogies: the former to demonstrate the greater novelty of Greek philosophy compared with other Near Eastern cultures,

⁵¹⁰ *Ad Auto.* 3.1 (PTS 44, 98); 3.4 (PTS 44, 102); 3.23 (PTS 44, 126); Eusebius *P.E.* 1.2.2-5 (SC 206, 104-106); 1.5.11-13 (SC 206, 136-138); 4.1.3 (SC 262, 72-74).

⁵¹¹ *C Cels.* 3.5 (SC 136, 20-22). This accusation is already attested in the work of Josephus. See Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.288-289 (109).

⁵¹² *C Cels.* 3.5 (SC 136, 20-22); 5.33 (SC 147, 96).

⁵¹³ *P.E.* 11.19.1 (SC 292, 146).

⁵¹⁴ See *C Cels.* 4.21 (SC 136, 232-234); 6.7 (SC 147, 192); 6.16 (SC 147, 216); 7.28 (SC 150, 76-78).

⁵¹⁵ George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, 162-175.

⁵¹⁶ Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.161-162 (31-32); 2.168 (87); 2.222-224 (98).

⁵¹⁷ Philo, *Leg.All.* 1.108 (LCL 226, 218); *Quod Omnes.* 57 (LCL 363, 42); *Who is the Heir of Divine Things* 214 (LCL 261, 388); *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 3.16 (LCL 380, 200).

of which the Hebrews were a notable example; the latter to demonstrate the greater antiquity specifically of Moses and the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵¹⁸ Origen, however, did not devote similar effort to producing elaborate proofs of the ancientness of the Hebrew tradition. This does not justify Boys-Stones' conclusion that Origen was not particularly interested in either form of the dependency hypothesis.⁵¹⁹ Origen could hardly have avoided Celsus's argument that there was 'an ancient doctrine from the beginning, which the wisest nations and cities and wise men have always held,' manifested in the doctrinal kinship that exists among many peoples.⁵²⁰ As he explicitly states in *Contra Celsum*, he did not believe it necessary to do so since this work had already been comprehensively accomplished by Josephus and Tatian.⁵²¹ While Origen does not devote any effort constructing extended intellectual genealogies as did some other Jewish and Christian apologists, he is frequently found in *Contra Celsum* asserting the greater venerability of Moses, David, Solomon, and the prophets when compared with the great figures of Greek literature and philosophy.⁵²²

Origen demonstrates more interest in the plagiarism formulation of the dependence theory than in the primordial wisdom explanation exemplified by Clement. Early Christian apologists frequently adopted this line of argument. Justin's adoption of the plagiarism theory has already been demonstrated above and his student Tatian utilised the same line of argument.⁵²³ Clement also brought numerous counts of plagiarism to bear against Greek philosophy.⁵²⁴ It is usually in response to accusations of Christian theft that Origen makes such claims. Taking *Contra Celsum* 4.11 as an example, Origen responds to the accusation that the Genesis flood narrative is a misunderstanding of the Stoic doctrine of cycles of conflagrations. His reaction is to assert the priority of Moses and appeals to Josephus' work as his evidence. He does not dwell on the historical evidence as he believes it sufficiently supported by previous writers. Having established that Celsus is mistaken in suggesting Moses' dependence on Greek philosophers, however, Origen proceeds further and argues that it was in fact the later philosophers who misunderstood and failed to accurately reproduce the truths contained within the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵²⁵ Origen does not always do so.

⁵¹⁸ *Orat. Graec.* 31 (PTS 43, 57-59); 36-41 (PTS 43, 67-74); *Strom.* 1.66.1-73.6 (SC 30, 98-103).

⁵¹⁹ See George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, 195. Chadwick similarly argues that 'Origen is so much more detached... Origen is not one of those apologists who derived encouragement from similarities to Christian ideas in Plato or Chrysippus.' Henry Chadwick, "Origen," in *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Alistair H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 185. For the opposing position, with which I agree, see Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 76 n. 36; Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 15-8.

⁵²⁰ *C Cels.* 1.14 (SC 132, 114).

⁵²¹ *Ibid.* 1.16 (SC 132, 118).

⁵²² See *Ibid.* 4.11-12 (SC 136, 208-212); 4.21 (SC 136, 234); 4.39 (SC 136, 286-288); 5.15 (SC 147, 50); 6.4 (SC 147, 188); 6.19 (SC 147, 226); 6.43 (SC 147, 284); 7.30 (SC 150, 80-82); etc. Also, see *P.A.* 3.6.1 (SC 268, 236).

⁵²³ *Orat. Graec.* 40.1-2 (PTS 43, 72).

⁵²⁴ See, for example, *Strom.* 1.81.1-1.87.7 (SC 30, 109-113); 6.4.1-6.38.12 (SC 446, 64-138).

⁵²⁵ *C Cels.* 4.11-12 (SC 136, 208-212).

Sometimes, he responds simply by noting that the Hebrew authors predated the Greek philosophers without explicitly suggesting that plagiarism took place.⁵²⁶

Therefore, while in the *Homilies on Numbers* Balaam's knowledge is interpreted for the main part by appeal to the provenance of all knowledge from God and in one instance in terms of his direct inspiration by God, with regards to specific philosophical doctrines, particularly regarding more divine matters, Origen most commonly appeals to their origin within the Hebrew traditions. These traditions were then corrupted in the process of their adoption by non-Jewish, non-Christian peoples. Here, we see a pretty low estimation of human rational faculties. Origen felt compelled to attribute those elements of human wisdom which most closely grasp the truth not to their innate human capacities but to their derivation from the inspired experiences of the chosen people.

7.4. *The Demonic Origin of Foreign Wisdom*

Humankind was not the only group capable of plagiarism. In Jewish and Christian literature, the philosophies and skills of foreign peoples could also be attributed to the influence of demonic powers. The similarities between Jewish or Christian and pagan practices and doctrines could consequently be explained by the deceptive character of such forces who, recognising the truth of the Jewish or Christian religion, inspired similar things among pagans in order to muddy the distinction between truth and falsity.⁵²⁷ The two sources of plagiarism by and large reflect different valuations of the beliefs or skills attributed to foreign nations. If one traced a doctrine or practice back to Moses or the inspired prophets, it suggested a certain esteem for them, while asserting a demonic provenance for a belief or practice was in most cases intended as a condemnation.⁵²⁸

This hypothesis was dramatized in the Book of Watchers in 1 Enoch, composed probably not long after 200 BCE.⁵²⁹ Whether or not this was the direct inspiration for the later development of the trope of the demonic inspiration of pagan cultures and religions, it is certainly the earliest extant

⁵²⁶ See, for instance, *Cels.* 6.12-13 (SC 147, 206-210).

⁵²⁷ See, for example, *1st Apol.* 54.2-10 (SC 507, 270-274); 56.1-57.1 (SC 507, 278-280); *Strom.* 1.17.84.6-7 (SC 30, 111).

⁵²⁸ Richard Bauckham, "The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy in Hermias and Clement of Alexandria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39, no. 4 (1985): 317-319.

⁵²⁹ Robert H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:170. The myth in this text is also recounted in other sources, including Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Nonetheless, 1 Enoch is its earliest attestation and most detailed presentation. See James C. VanderKam, "1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 60-61.

example, as well as one which had a wide circulation in early Christian circles,⁵³⁰ though it fell increasingly out of in the third and fourth centuries C.E.⁵³¹ Origen certainly knew of the Book of Watchers. In *Peri Archon*, written in his early years, he was happy to cite the book of 1 Enoch among the Scriptures without comment or proviso.⁵³² However, as Annette Reed delineates, Origen became increasingly uncertain of its authoritative status; perhaps a result of his increasing familiarity with rabbinic circles after his emigration to Caesarea.⁵³³ By the time of his composition of *Contra Celsum*, he states that ‘the books ascribed to Enoch are not universally understood to be divine in the churches.’⁵³⁴

A reinterpretation of Gen. 6.1-8, the Book of Watchers functions primarily as a mythological explanation of the problem of evil. The author describes how the fallen sons of God, the watchers, procreated with human women and through their illicit union brought forth a race of giants whose spirits go on to become the evil spirits that inhabit the earth.⁵³⁵ Additionally, however, these watchers are charged with having illicitly ‘disclosed to the world all the secret things which are done in the heavens.’⁵³⁶ In this fashion, they gave to humankind knowledge of various kinds: of magic arts; of mineral- and metal-working; and of astronomy and astrology.⁵³⁷ Emphasis is particularly placed on those skills used in divination – astrology and sorcery – and those that contributed to moral decay; the metalworking used to create weapons and the creation of cosmetics and jewellery which incite vanity and lust. The author of the Book of Watchers, however, makes clear that even the secrets stolen by the watchers did not comprise true wisdom; the watchers only had access to the least profound of the secrets held in heaven.⁵³⁸

In early Christian interpretations of this text and references to the disclosures of the fallen angels more generally, the contents of their teaching follow the subjects identified in 1 Enoch 7-8 closely.

⁵³⁰ See James C. VanderKam, “1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch,” 42, 61; Annette Y. Reed, “The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2002): 142-143; Rondall D. Chesnutt, “The Descent of the Watchers and its Aftermath According to Justin Martyr,” in *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Angela K. Harkins, Kelley C. Bautch, and John C. Endres (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 171. R.H. Charles offers a catalogue of citations of the text in patristic literature. See Robert H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:181-4.

⁵³¹ Annette Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 218-221.

⁵³² P.A. 1.3.3 (SC 252, 148); 4.4.8 (SC 268, 420).

⁵³³ Annette Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 197-198.

⁵³⁴ *C Cels.* 5.54 (SC 147, 152).

⁵³⁵ 1 En. 15.8-12.

⁵³⁶ 1 En. 9.5. Also, see 1 En. 7.10; 10.11; 16.3-4.

⁵³⁷ 1 En. 8.1-9. See Richard Bauckham, “The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy,” 314-315.

⁵³⁸ 1 En. 16.3.

Astrology and sorcery are especially frequently mentioned.⁵³⁹ The knowledge revealed is often referred to as ‘skills’ (τέχναι or *artes*), suggesting the ‘knowledge they considered attributable to the fallen angels was, as in the Book of Watchers, technical knowledge rather than speculative wisdom.’⁵⁴⁰ This also harmonises well with the manner in which Origen’s outlines human wisdom. This ‘technical knowledge,’ however, was not neutral when it trained people in demonic arts of divination or when it encouraged concupiscence.

However, in early Christian thought, the fallen sons of God are not only credited with the dissemination of technical skills. The most recurrent claims focussed on 1 Enoch 19.2, where the wicked spirits of angels’ progeny ‘made men profane and caused them to err, so that they sacrificed to demons as to gods.’⁵⁴¹ Justin Martyr identifies the watchers and their progeny directly with the Greco-Roman pantheon.⁵⁴² The demonic inspiration of pagan religion is a recurring theme in Justin’s work, even in the ostensibly Christian-Jewish debate published in the *Dialogue with Trypho*.⁵⁴³ Similar claims are made by his student Tatian, by Athenagoras, and by Tertullian.⁵⁴⁴

Clement of Alexandria, however, expanded the contents of the watchers’ teaching to include philosophy. He may not have been the first to have done so. The obscure *Satire on Pagan Philosophers*, ascribed to ‘Hermias the philosopher,’ also claimed that Greek philosophy ‘took its beginning from the apostasy of the angels.’⁵⁴⁵ While most likely composed in the second or third century, due to the uncertainty concerning the date of this text, it may or may not have predated Clement.⁵⁴⁶ As Bauckham suggests, philosophy was more commonly explained by appeal to Mosaic origins than to demonic influence since Greek philosophy was more highly regarded than its religious practices.⁵⁴⁷ Clement was responding to those, however, who understood philosophy as demonically inaugurated and thus unsuitable for Christian use.⁵⁴⁸ Clement accepts the basic position of their argument, saying of philosophy: ‘a power or angel, learning something of the truth and not remaining in it, having stolen these things taught and inspired them.’⁵⁴⁹ However, this angelic

⁵³⁹ Annette Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 175.

⁵⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham, “The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy,” 322.

⁵⁴¹ 1 En. 19.2.

⁵⁴² 2nd *Apol.* 4 (SC 507, 330). Justin Martyr was the first to make this equation. See Rondall D. Chesnutt, “The Descent of the Watchers,” 172.

⁵⁴³ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 55.1-3 (PTS 47, 159-160); 73.2 (PTS 47, 195-196); 73.6 (PTS 47, 197); 79.2-4 (PTS 47, 207-208); 83.4 (PTS 47, 214); etc. Rondall D. Chesnutt, “The Descent of the Watchers,” 178-9; Annette Y. Reed, “The Trickery of the Fallen Angels,” 155–59.

⁵⁴⁴ *Orat. Graec.* 8.2 (PTS 43, 19); 22.1-2 (PTS 43, 44); *Legatio* 24-26 (SC 379, 160-172); Tertullian, *On Idolatry* (PL 1, 661-696).

⁵⁴⁵ Hermias, *Satire on Pagan Philosophers* 1 (SC 388, 96).

⁵⁴⁶ See the R. P. C. Hanson’s introduction in *Sat. Phil* (SC 388, 66-67).

⁵⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, “The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy,” 323.

⁵⁴⁸ See *Strom.* 1.16.80.5 (SC 30, 108); 6.66.1 (SC 446, 194); 6.159.1 (SC 446, 376).

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 1.17.81.4 (SC 30, 109). Clement identifies this this angel as ‘the devil.’ *Strom.* 1.17.83.2 (SC 30, 110).

thievery is compared to that of the Hebrew Scriptures by philosophers and is likened to the story of Prometheus, demonstrating Clement's positive valuation of what was stolen.⁵⁵⁰ In Clement's view, the theft undertaken by these errant powers was foreseen by God but he allowed it to take place, guided by his providence, since he knew that what was given to humankind would be of benefit to them.⁵⁵¹ This does not entail a wholly positive view of philosophy as it now exists among the Greeks, since the devil has mixed among the truths of philosophy falsities to ensnare human souls in death, just as philosophers twist and deface biblical doctrines.⁵⁵²

Origen certainly believed in the demonic provenance of aspects of human wisdom. However, Origen did not utilise the narrative of Gen. 6.1-8 or the Book of Watchers to support his arguments. Origen's disavowal in *Contra Celsum* of 1 Enoch's universal acceptance in the Church was elicited by Celsus's use of the watchers narrative to argue that the Incarnation was not in fact a unique event.⁵⁵³ After rejecting this interpretation of this pericope of Genesis, Origen suggests an exegesis not in terms of angelic powers but in anthropological terms.⁵⁵⁴ The 'sons of God' represent the soul and the 'daughters of men' are figures of the human body, and so the narrative figuratively describes the fall of rational beings into an earthly mode of existence.⁵⁵⁵ This is not to say that 1 Enoch had no influence on Origen's conception of the demonic origin of secular and pagan knowledge and practices, but its influence was less direct and it did not form the scriptural basis of Origen's argumentation.

Origen instead finds his scriptural support in the reference of 1 Corinthians to a wisdom of the rulers of this age. As with most aspects of 1 Cor. 2, there is significant scholarly debate concerning whether Paul conceived of human or demonic rulers in this text. I agree with the scholarly consensus in preferring the human interpretation.⁵⁵⁶ Both the context of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1.26-31 and the

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 1.17.87.1-2 (SC 30, 112-113).

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.* 1.17.81.4-5 (SC 30, 109); 1.17.86.1-2 (SC 30, 112).

⁵⁵² *Ibid.* 1.17.84.6-1.85.2 (SC 30, 111-112); 1.17.87.2 (SC 30, 113).

⁵⁵³ *C Cels.* 5.52 (SC 147, 146).

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 5.55 (SC 147, 152-154).

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 5.55 (SC 147, 152). Also, see *De Gig.* 6-18 (LCL 227, 448-454). This form of anthropological interpretation of Gen. 6.1-8 became the norm in the fourth and fifth century. See Annette Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 190-232; James C. VanderKam, "1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch," 79-84; Richard Bauckham, "The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy," 316, 321-322.

⁵⁵⁶ See Sigurd Grindheim, "Wisdom for the Perfect: Paul's Challenge to the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 4 (2002): 694 n. 20; Wesley Carr, "The Rulers of this Age – I Corinthians II.6-8," *New Testament Studies* 23, no. 1 (1976): 20-35; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, M. I.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 103-104; Gene Miller, "Ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος – A New Look at 1 Cor. 2:6-8," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 4 (1972): 522-528; Robin Scroggs, "Paul: Σοφός and Πνευματικός," 40. For the alternative position, see Angela Standhartinger, "Weisheit in Joseph und Aseneth und den Paulinischen Briefen," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 497; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. George MacRae (Philadelphia, P.A.: Fortress Press, 1975), 61; G. H. C. Macgregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of St Paul's

parallels with the unrighteous rulers in the Wisdom of Solomon, who were undoubtedly human, militate against a demonic or angelic interpretation. Nonetheless, this is precisely how Origen interpreted the passage, understanding the rulers through the lens of Old Testament passages such as Deut. 32.8: 'he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods.'⁵⁵⁷ The Old Testament belief that God divided the nations among his angels, reserving the nation of Israel as his chosen people, is interpreted through a third century Christian demonology. Origen also appeals in this regard to Ps. 95.5 LXX, 'all the gods of the nations are demons.'⁵⁵⁸ Each of these demons held command of a particular nation, inspiring their religious and philosophical ideas and practices. While this jurisdiction was rescinded after the coming of Christ, they nonetheless struggle to maintain their grip over the souls under their influence. Consequently, the rulers of 1 Corinthians were 'not humans but certain powers,' especially associated with the pantheons of gods among the Gentiles.⁵⁵⁹

It is no accident that Origen's most extensive treatment of 1 Cor. 2.6 is made in the context of an exposition of the role of Satan and his powers in inciting humankind into sin. The philosophies of the Greeks and Egyptians and the astrological sciences of the Chaldeans and Indians, therefore, are the works of demonic inspiration. In addition, Origen suggests that that the technical skills of the wisdom of the world lie within the influence of spiritual powers. There are 'some spiritual powers effecting certain things' such as poetry or geometry: 'they energise each individual art and discipline in this manner.'⁵⁶⁰ Like the contents of the wisdom they animate, these powers are not presented in a negative light.⁵⁶¹ While the distinction becomes slightly blurred in the *Peri Archon* passage, Origen appears to differentiate between these spiritual powers and those who, for instance, actuate the art of divination. These spiritual powers are called 'demons' and 'opposing powers,' and are invoked by magi or malevolents, and those who are not devoted to God.⁵⁶²

Thought," *New Testament Studies* 1, no. 1 (1954): 17-28; Birger A. Pearson, "Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Paul," 57-58.

⁵⁵⁷ See *Com.Jn.* 13.332-3 (SC 222, 216); *Hom.Jer.* 5.2-3 (SC 232, 282-288); *Hom.Exod.* 8.2 (SC 321, 246); *Hom.Gen.* 9.3 (SC 7, 248); 16.2 (SC 7, 376-378); *Hom.Luke* 35.6 (SC 87, 418-420); *Hom.Josh.* 23.3 (SC 71, 458); *Hom.Ezek.* 13.1 (SC 352, 404).

⁵⁵⁸ See *C Cels.* 3.2 (SC 136, 18); 3.37 (SC 136, 86); 4.29 (SC 136, 252); 7.65 (SC 150, 166); 7.69 (SC 150, 174); 8.3 (SC 150, 184); *Hom.Num.* 27.8 (SC 461, 304).

⁵⁵⁹ *P.A.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 3.3.3 (SC 268, 190).

⁵⁶¹ For a point of comparison, in his twenty-third *Homily on Joshua*, after relating how the nations are divided among the angels, Origen suggests that some powers have 'assumed the administration of this world, that it is not accidentally or by chance that one power presides over the earth or the budding of trees, another sufficiently maintains the springs and rivers, another, rains,' and so on. The effects of spiritual powers are clearly not universally malicious, and Origen conceives all worldly matters as resting on their energising principles, both for natural phenomena and intellectual pursuits. See *Hom.Josh.* 23.3 (SC 71, 458).

⁵⁶² *P.A.* 3.3.3 (SC 268, 190).

George Boys-Stones, in perhaps the most extensive scholarly discussion of *Peri Archon* 3.3, argues that Origen considers this form of wisdom a ‘relatively valid theology.’⁵⁶³ He interprets this passage in terms of the Middle-Platonist theory of ancient cultures preserving primordial wisdom and suggests that Origen Christianised this concept by ascribing this role not to gods but spiritual powers. Since these powers are associated with the stars, and the stars are considered divine, their wisdom is, if not perfect, generally positive.⁵⁶⁴ Origen was thus conceding the validity of foreign forms of wisdom and simply argued for the superiority of Christian wisdom which was unavailable in the pagan tradition. Boys-Stone is not without justification for this position. In the second book of his *Commentary on John*, Origen identifies the heavenly bodies as the powers assigned to govern the nations. While Israel was reserved as God’s portion, he allotted the stars to the other peoples so that ‘those unable rise to the noetic nature, being moved concerning divinity by the sensible gods, might contentedly stand in these things and not fall to idols and demons.’⁵⁶⁵ This is not to say that the worship of the heavens is entirely beneficial, though it is superior to pagan idol worship:

Therefore, some have the God of the universe as their God; others, second after this, stand on the Son of God, his Christ; others, third, have the sun, moon, and all the world of heaven: these have been led astray from God, but their error differs greatly and is better than those who call gods the works of human hands, gold and silver, and the inventions of skill. However, last are those who dedicate themselves to what are called gods but which are in no manner gods.⁵⁶⁶

Origen makes a similar suggestion in the third *Homily on Psalm Seventy-Six* when discussing Gentile practices of nature-worship:

And perhaps the more superstitious among the Greeks who sacrifice to rivers as to gods are imagining these things, not altogether having fallen away from the truth but having fallen away in part. For if they sacrifice as to gods, they sin, but if they imagine a certain power to be there, they do not sin.⁵⁶⁷

While I do not disagree entirely upon Boys-Stone’s evaluation of Origen’s attitude to human wisdom in general – that is, that he viewed it as relatively valid but inferior to Christian wisdom –, his argument that Origen believed that the provenance of foreign philosophies and sciences in the workings of spiritual powers ensured their validity must be rejected. The discussion of the

⁵⁶³ George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, 195-200.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 196-198.

⁵⁶⁵ *Com.Jn.* 2.26 (SC 120, 224).

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 2.27 (SC 120, 224). See Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 132-133.

⁵⁶⁷ *Hom.Ps.76* 3.2 (GCS n.f. 19, 330).

inspiration of human wisdom is part of his examination of the corrupting influence of ‘the opposing powers or the devil himself’ who ‘struggle against the human race.’⁵⁶⁸ They are presented as having laid snares and traps for Christ and those who follow him, and their wisdom is ‘knowledge falsely so-called’ (1 Tim. 6.20).⁵⁶⁹ This is made even more explicit in Origen’s thirteenth *Homily on Ezekiel*. In order to explain that the ‘ruler of Tyre’ referred to in Ezek. 28.12 is not a corporeal ruler (an example also used in *Peri Archon*⁵⁷⁰), Origen levies testimonies from throughout the Old and New Testaments. This includes reference to 1 Cor. 2.6-8: the rulers of this world are not human beings.⁵⁷¹ These non-human rulers are identified as demons and as Christians’ opponents in spiritual battle, and as the ultimate source of persecution that Christians experience at the hands of human powers. Within this context, there is very little basis for suggesting that he viewed it as valid.

Origen included within the influence of demonic activity pagan worship, human *technai*, and a vast array of non-Christian philosophies. Like Clement and possibly Hermias before him, Origen includes philosophy among the operations of hostile powers. In addition to his statement in *Peri Archon* 3.3.2 quoted already, he also attributed Plato’s words to the influence of demonic inspiration in *Contra Celsum*. The contents of the ‘secret and occult philosophy of the Egyptians’ goes unexplained, although elsewhere Origen associates Egyptian religion and culture with animal worship and idolatry.⁵⁷² The terminology of occultism suggests the mysteries of Isis might have been intended and the ‘astrology of the Chaldeans and the Indians’ fits well with the characterisation of the fallen angels’ teaching in the Book of Watchers and in early Christian literature.⁵⁷³ In *Contra Celsum* and elsewhere, Origen frequently associates pagan worship with demonic power. For instance, the Pythian priestesses are condemned as inspired by wicked spirits.⁵⁷⁴ The Pythia was induced to a state of ecstasy, giving up her rational faculties rather than having them illuminated in the manner of the Hebrew prophets.⁵⁷⁵ These demons use their knowledge of the future – in itself neither a good nor evil thing – to entice men away from piety to the true God.⁵⁷⁶ In *Contra Celsum*, demonic influence is primarily conceived in relation to pagan religion, idolatry and divinatory arts, in keeping with the majority of early Christian appeals to this thesis.⁵⁷⁷ Philosophy is far more associated with the

⁵⁶⁸ *P.A.* 3.2.1 (SC 268, 152); 3.3.2 (SC 268, 188).

⁵⁶⁹ *Com.Cant.* 4.3 (SC 376, 730); 4.3 (SC 376, 734); *P.A.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 188).

⁵⁷⁰ *P.A.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 188).

⁵⁷¹ *Hom.Ezek.* 13.1 (SC 352, 402-404).

⁵⁷² See *C Cels.* 1.52 (SC 132, 218); 3.17-21 (SC 136, 44-50); 5.51 (SC 147, 144).

⁵⁷³ *P.A.* 3.3.2 (SC 268, 186).

⁵⁷⁴ *C Cels.* 7.3 (SC 150, 18).

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 7.3 (SC 150, 20).

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 7.5 (SC 150, 22-24).

⁵⁷⁷ See *Ibid.* 3.2 (SC 136, 18); 3.37 (SC 136, 86-90); 7.3-5 (SC 150, 16-24); 7.69 (SC 150, 174-176).

plagiarism of the Scriptures, reflecting the greater degree of esteem given to Greek philosophy than to their religious practices.

Assessing this various evidence, we can see that Origen did not present a single unified position on the character and scope of human wisdom and of uninspired rational faculties. At times, human wisdom is presented as entirely corrupting and alien to the Church; at others, it is potentially a boon to the development of Christian wisdom or even, on a few occasions, a necessary step in this process. Similarly, at times, Origen confines the possible scope of human capacities to mundane matters, while at others it is able, of its own accord, to acquire some knowledge of higher matters.

There are, nonetheless, certain common themes. Typically, Origen allows at least some fundamental elements of moral and theistic knowledge to be discerned through uninspired reason. Enough understanding had to be possible to make humankind morally culpable for their own failures. Other aspects of non-Christian intellectual traditions, however, - particularly those that bear close resemblance to Christian mysteries – can be explained by their indirect provenance from inspired sources, whether the derivation took place by human or demonic hands.

Origen is also nearly uniform in associating human wisdom with rhetorical skill and sophistic reasoning. They are characterised as being more concerned with the power to convince their audience than in a genuine pursuit of truth. In this regard, these elements are understood to have some applications within the Church in their ability to convince others and logically reinforce its message. However, even where Origen does allow some suitability for these skills, they are still as much a threat as a boon to the Christian soul.

Throughout his work, Origen is resolute in his denigration of human wisdom beneath the Christian message. It is always – even in those passages in which it receives the most commendation – presented as insufficient and imperfect; something that needs to be superseded in the pursuit of salvation and of true wisdom. While in his *Commentary on Romans* he allows for some degree of reward for those who follow the precepts of natural law and believe in a single divine Lord, even here it is at best a secondary reward.⁵⁷⁸ The fullness of salvation is reserved for those who receive God's revelation through his Son and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the salvation of the faithful is further gradated according to each soul's spiritual and rational development. With all this in mind, Origen's view of uninspired human reason comes to be seen as rather disparaging. This is despite the importance of intellectualism and rationality within his theological outlook. However, this should

⁵⁷⁸ *Com.Rom.* 2.5.19-2.5.25 (SC 532, 324-332).

not surprise us since reason is not an indifferent thing in Origen's mind. It is, by its very nature, directed towards God, the true Logos, and so only realises its dynamic vitality when directed towards the divine and when energised by the true Logos who inspires the Christian Church and soul to receive revelation. This, however, is not an easy process. Origen devoted significant effort to outlining the manner in which humankind to become capable and worthy of receiving this revelation. We shall now turn our attention to this process.

Chapter Four: Christian Pedagogy and the Path to Wisdom

Despite the limited outcomes that Origen attributed to the activities of unassisted human rationality, it is nonetheless the case that the cultivation of human reason was fundamental to his theological project. Although unaided human reason is capable of divining only the most elemental aspects of theological and ethical matters, the true virtue of wisdom is characterised as the highest accomplishment of human reason. After all, as outlined in the first two chapters, virtues such as *sophia* exist essentially only in the divine Trinity and are not given simply as a gift to created beings. For created beings, they are always possessed contingently, and so human beings are capable of passing from ignorance to wisdom.

This virtue is understood to be contingent upon both human reason and divine inspiration and pedagogy. Grace and human reason and works dovetail together in a delicate dialectic within Origen's thought. True reason, we shall see, exists only in the alignment of created reason with that Logos of which it is an image. This reason is exhibited in the freedom which rational creatures exert in their pursuit of either heavenly or earthly matters. The Logos aids rational creatures in their free pursuit of himself, since they are unable attain the object of their desire of their own accord. Since human freedom is exerted within the bounds of temporal extension and since Origen allows for degrees of contingent participation within the Logos and Spirit, the acquisition of wisdom is understood within Origen's work as a process from lesser to greater virtue and understanding. From humanity's current condition – Origen appears uncertain whether it is the result of the Fall or an inherent aspect of the created condition – no one exemplifies this virtue without first endeavouring through moral and intellectual application to live in accordance with its requirements.

Origen understood there to be embedded within reality a certain predetermined procedure that leads from ignorance to understanding. One could not approach the virtue of wisdom in just any manner. We saw in the previous chapter the limitations that Origen considered to be placed on human faculties when they stray from this path and the moral pitfalls present for those who attempt to bypass this lengthy process in pursuit of an easy wisdom. The nature of this process is influenced by the cosmological considerations outlined in the first two chapters. The process of development from ignorance to wisdom requires a deepening perception of the noetic reality through the bodily and sensible cosmos.

In this chapter, we shall now turn our attention to how Origen conceived of this process and the educational foundation of the virtue of wisdom in the practice and form of Christian pedagogy. The Logos and humankind's rational faculties provide the subjective basis which makes possible the

existence of aretological wisdom among created beings; Christian pedagogy is the means of actualising this potential. This examination will focus more upon his educational theory than his practice, concentrating on his understanding of how the Christian curriculum and the order of instruction should ideally be given. Origen himself was a renowned teacher, accomplished in both Christian and philosophical teaching. Eusebius attests to his training as a Greek *grammatikos*, his instruction of Christian catechesis, and the respect he was given by non-Christians as a philosophical teacher.⁵⁷⁹ However, in examining how Origen understood wisdom to develop, I believe focus should be spent more upon his conception of proper pedagogy than his practice which is necessarily complicated by the indeterminacies of reality. The examination of this subject draws connections to his ecclesiology, his conception of the nature of mysteries and the nature of the cosmos, and to Greek philosophical understandings of pedagogy and of the divisions of philosophy. Origen incorporated these subjects into his understanding of Scripture and of Christian hermeneutics, Christianising ideas developed in Greek circles through his interpretation of how he believed the Christian Scriptures (as well as other means of revelation) to edify its readers and enable them to perceive the revelation it contains.

1. The Wisdom of God and the Message of Christ Crucified

In Origen's *Commentary on John*, the human wisdom discussed in the previous chapter is placed into a hierarchy of rational activity that includes Christian faith and wisdom. In the same passage in which Origen commends the worship of heavenly bodies above idolatry but below Christian worship, Origen draws a parallel hierarchical quartet with regards to the soul's participation in the Word. Two forms of non-Christian participation are placed below Christian wisdom and Christian faith respectively. At the bottom of the hierarchy are 'those who have believed in words which are entirely corrupt and ungodly, which reject clear and all but sensible providence and welcome a certain goal other than the good.'⁵⁸⁰ After these come 'Those who have devoted themselves to words' (λόγοις... προσεσχίκασι) including 'those who follow the famous and prevailing schools in philosophy among the Greeks' (οἱ μετερχόμενοι τὰς εὐδοκίμουσας καὶ διαφερούσας ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ παρ' Ἑλλήσιν αἰρέσεις).⁵⁸¹ These two appear to be the worldly wise and heretics who believe in

⁵⁷⁹ *H.E.* 6.15.1 (SC 41, 109); 6.3.13 (SC 41, 90). On the school of Alexandria, see André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1966), 62-70; Robert L. Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue," in *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Patrick Henry (Philadelphia, P.A.: Fortress Press, 1984), 15-30; Annewies van den Hoek, "The 'Catechetical' School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage," *The Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 1 (1997): 59-87.

⁵⁸⁰ *Com.Jn.* 2.31 (SC 120, 226).

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* 2.30 (SC 120, 224-226).

things altogether false and those wisemen who have some degree of knowledge of God, the cosmos, and virtue respectively. Above both, however, are the message of 'nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2.2) and the Word who exists in the beginning, which is to say, in Wisdom.⁵⁸²

Origen distinguishes Paul's message of Christ crucified from the wisdom which is spoken among the mature Christians. The former is the start of Christian faith; the latter its *telos*. Paul's invocation of divine wisdom in 1 Cor. 2.6 has been a source of a great deal of scholarly disagreement. The puzzle arises from the fact that, having disavowed wisdom in the epistle up until this point, Paul suddenly reverses his stance and lays claim to a wisdom of his own. The wisdom Paul claims is clearly associated with the message of Christ and his crucifixion. Close parallels can be adduced between 1 Cor. 2.6-8 and 1 Cor. 1.18-31. Both the wisdom of God and Christ's cross were unknown by the wisemen of the world, whose wisdom is coming to nought (καταργήση, καταργουμένων; 1 Cor. 1.28; 2.6). Furthermore, the Christological significance of God's wisdom has already been made clear in 1 Cor. 1: 'we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1.23-24). This is contrasted with the human wisdom of the Greeks and the Jews. The question remains, however, whether the wisdom spoken among the perfect is identical with the simple and unvarnished message of Christ and his crucifixion. On this matter, scholars have been greatly divided.

On the one hand, the identity position is supported by Paul's statement that he 'did not come proclaiming the testimony of God to you with superior speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2.1-2). As Fee argues, a distinction between the mature and the worldly members of the Church 'runs counter not only to the argument as a whole (not to mention this paragraph), but also to the whole of Pauline theology. Indeed, such an argument would effectively destroy the point of everything said in 1:18-2:5.'⁵⁸³ On this interpretation, Paul rejects the paradigm of the sage and any traditional aspiration of wisdom: 'For Paul, wisdom is not so much fulfilled by Christ as nullified by him.'⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² *Ibid.* 2.28-29 (SC 120, 224).

⁵⁸³ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, 99-100. Also see William Baird, "Among the Mature: The Idea of Wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2-6," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 13, no. 4 (1959): 425-432. In support of this interpretation, also see Michael Legaspi, *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 223-232; Sigurd Grindheim, "Wisdom for the Perfect," 692-697; Elizabeth Johnson, "The Wisdom of God as Apocalyptic Power," in *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer*, ed. John Carroll, Charles Cosgrove, and Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta, G.A.: Scholars Press, 1990), 140-145.

⁵⁸⁴ Michael C. Legaspi, *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition*, 224.

On the other hand, Bockmuehl argues that these interpretations fail to account for the genuine shift in approach that Paul makes in 1 Cor. 2.6. While Grindheim argues that this shift represents a change in angle of approach without any substantial alteration of Paul's teaching,⁵⁸⁵ Bockmuehl suggests that the introduction of apocalyptic terminology suggests a new element must be perceived in this passage. A cluster of terms Paul uses here, including 'hidden wisdom,' 'mystery,' 'Lord of glory,' 'Spirit,' 'revelation,' and 'depths of God,' are clearly drawn from the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic.⁵⁸⁶ Specific parallels have been adduced between 1 Cor. 1-3 and both the book of Daniel and that of 1 Enoch.⁵⁸⁷ Unlike before, Paul now says that the wisdom of God is 'hidden in a mystery' and now asserts that this has been 'foreordained before the ages' (1 Cor. 2.7). This eschatological emphasis suggests that Paul has in mind more than simply the fact of Christ crucified when discussing God's wisdom.⁵⁸⁸ Hamerton-Kelly notes that the 'wisdom of God' refers by synecdoche both to God's overall plan of salvation and to the individual contents of that plan; both to the plan as a whole and to 'the things that God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor. 2.9).⁵⁸⁹ On this interpretation, Christ's death and resurrection is the central but not sole element of this wisdom. Paul, therefore, would have widened the scope of teaching from the history of Christ to include God's future purposes, which are yet to be revealed.⁵⁹⁰ It would be on account of this that the wisdom of God still hidden, despite the open proclamation of the cross.

There is insufficient space to disentangle the numerous competing interpretations of this passage and their differing frameworks in this chapter, though the first interpretation represents the consensus position which I believe to be stronger. The distinction Origen draws between the message of Christ's crucifixion and Christian wisdom has been the source of some embarrassment among scholars positively disposed to his work.⁵⁹¹ Roukema identifies a gnosticising tendency in the attenuation of simple faith and of the efficacy of Christ's bodily mission, death, and resurrection.⁵⁹² While it may cause some apprehension among contemporary Christian writers, the fact that

⁵⁸⁵ Sigurd Grindheim, "Wisdom for the Perfect," 693.

⁵⁸⁶ See Robin Scroggs, "Paul: Σοφός and Πνευματικός," 33-55; Benjamin Gladd, *Revealing the Mysterion: The Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with Its Bearing on First Corinthians* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 127; Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 157-166.

⁵⁸⁷ See Benjamin Gladd, *Revealing the Mysterion*.

⁵⁸⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 162. Also, see Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 57-61; Angela Standhartinger, "Weisheit in Joseph und Aseneth und den Paulinischen Briefen," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 496.

⁵⁸⁹ Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, wisdom, and the Son of Man: a study of the idea of pre-existence in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 115-117.

⁵⁹⁰ Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 162.

⁵⁹¹ Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 85-86; Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 175; Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice*, 255-259.

⁵⁹² Riemer Roukema, "La Prédication du Christ Crucifié," in *Origeniana Sexta*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 523-529.

numerous modern scholars have perceived the presence of a deeper teaching in Paul's words demonstrates that Origen was not simply trying to sneak a foreign philosophical or 'Gnostic' worldview into the Church via a backdoor. I wish primarily to demonstrate that Origen's interpretation was not a result of any attempt to read his own doctrine into the text.

In fact, Origen thought his distinction to be validated by Paul's own practice with regards to the different congregations to which he ministered. He saw these two levels of teaching instantiated by the Corinthian and Ephesian congregations respectively.⁵⁹³ On account of the divisions and conflict that Paul documented in Corinth, Origen identifies them as the untrained and inexperienced simple believers; the children, in Paul's own words (1 Cor. 3.1). On account of their weakness, they could not receive wisdom, but only received the message of Christ and his crucifixion. More than anywhere else, it was in Ephesus that Paul revealed mysterious and wise doctrines. In a way, Origen anticipated Conzelmann by seventeen centuries.⁵⁹⁴ While Origen's *Commentary on Ephesians* has been lost, Richard Layton has demonstrated that Jerome's own commentary, including the two prologues to its first and third books, were based on Origen's to a significant degree.⁵⁹⁵ According to the argument preserved by Jerome, the position of the Epistle to the Ephesians in the centre of the Pauline corpus demonstrates its central importance: it is the mystical heart of Paul's teaching.⁵⁹⁶ In a fragment on the letter, Origen identified its contents as the perception of things seen and unseen, and their reasons⁵⁹⁷ and Jerome's prologue similarly suggests that Paul 'compiled obscure ideas and mysteries unknown to the ages principally in this epistle.'⁵⁹⁸ As we shall see below, Origen took a similar approach to explaining the Solomonic corpus.

2. *Mysteries, Concealment, and Degrees of Revelation*

The Jewish concept of mysteries upon which Paul draws in 1 Corinthians expresses the simultaneous revelation and concealment by God, particularly in relation to matters of eschatological

⁵⁹³ Judith Kovacs, "'Servant of Christ' and 'Steward of the Mysteries of God': The Purpose of a Pauline Letter according to Origen's Homilies on 1 Corinthians," in *In Dominico Eloquio: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul Blowers et al. (Grand Rapids, M.I.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 155-161.

⁵⁹⁴ Hans Conzelmann postulated that Paul led a wisdom school, which he suggested was most probably located in Ephesus. See Hans Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weisheit," *New Testament Studies* 12, no.3 (1966): 233.

⁵⁹⁵ Richard Layton, *Origen as a Reader of Paul: A Study of the Commentary on Ephesians* (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 331-335.

⁵⁹⁶ Jerome, *Com.Eph.* prol. 1.539-540 (*PL* 26, 441). As Layton argues, the placement of Ephesians in the centre of the Pauline canon suggests an Eastern, and more specifically Alexandrian, provenance for this order of the canon. Richard Layton, "Origen as a Reader of Paul," 315-319.

⁵⁹⁷ *Frag.Eph.* 5 (1, 239). Compare Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.633-634 (*PL* 26, 514).

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 5 (1, 239). Compare Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.633-634 (*PL* 26, 514). Jerome, *Com.Eph.* prol. 1.541-542 (*PL* 26, 442).

importance.⁵⁹⁹ The notions of mystery and hidden things (τὰ κρυπτά) and wisdom were deeply intertwined in Jewish and Christian thought.⁶⁰⁰ The nature of wisdom is a mystery (Wis. 6.22); God's revelation of mysteries is an act of his wisdom (Dan. 2.19-20, 28-30, 47); Wisdom reveals what is hidden (Wis. 7.21-22; Sir. 4.18); and the ignorance of mysteries is what leads the worldly wise astray (Wis. 2.21-22). The term mystery was used flexibly of both the form and content of this manner of revelation. As Clement aptly regards in the *Stromateis*, 'The mysteries are transmitted mysteriously (τὰ μυστήρια μυστικῶς παραδίδονται).'⁶⁰¹

Within the New Testament, emphasis is usually placed on the revelatory dimension of these secrets which have now become manifest for the first time, having been hitherto kept secret.⁶⁰² If one takes the consensus opinion on Paul's words in 1 Cor. 2.6-7, this is clearly true in the case of his use of mystery terminology. Nonetheless, despite their revelation, mysteries persist in their hiddenness. For instance, Jesus speaks to the crowd in parables, revealing mysteries in a manner that concealed them from the crowds (Matt. 13.11-13, 34-35).⁶⁰³ As aspects of God's secret plan, of his wisdom, mysteries were understood to be inaccessible to human beings without divine dispensation, even when disclosed. As Paul states in 1 Cor. 2.10-14, such things are only understood by the Spirit and so only become intelligible through its operations. There is, therefore, a tension at the heart of the Jewish and Christian concept of mystery between the simultaneous concealment and disclosure and different accounts give differing degrees of weight to each pole. The works of Alexandrian Christians such as Clement and Origen place far greater emphasis on the hiddenness and enigmatic nature of mysteries than their New Testament sources.⁶⁰⁴

The secrets revealed can be taxonomised into those concerning God's plan for the coming eschaton (eschatological mysteries) and those concerning the inner workings and divine governance of the cosmos (cosmological mysteries). The two are not unrelated, since both attest to God's hidden sovereignty over the course of history.⁶⁰⁵ Within the Jewish and Christian tradition, mysteries can

⁵⁹⁹ See Günther Bornkamm, "μυστήριον, μύεω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 1967), 802-828. As he says on p.822, 'Since the μυστήριον of God as such is disclosed in revelation, its concealment is always manifest with its proclamation.'

⁶⁰⁰ See Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, esp. 24-68.

⁶⁰¹ *Strom.* 1.13.4 (SC 30, 53). See Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, 148.

⁶⁰² Mark Edwards, "The Term *Musterion* in Clement, Origen and Gregory" (forthcoming).

⁶⁰³ See Raymond E. Brown, "The Semitic Background of the New Testament *Mysterion* (I)," *Biblica* 39, no. 4 (1958): 427-431.

⁶⁰⁴ Mark Edwards, "The Term *Musterion* in Clement, Origen and Gregory" (forthcoming).

⁶⁰⁵ 'While the revelation of cosmological mysteries gives assurance of salvation through God's *a priori* sovereignty over creation and the heavens, eschatological secrets constitute God's pre-existent heavenly plan of redemptive action in the imminent climax of history.' Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 35.

only be revealed obscurely through symbols: dreams, visions, and figurative narratives. These are often accompanied by a secondary interpretative discourse that elucidates their meaning delivered by a divinely inspired individual, whether angel, prophet, or patriarch. Jesus himself provides this kind of secondary interpretative discourse for his own parables (see Matt. 13.10-13. Also see Mark 4.10-11; Luke 8.9-10). The mysteries are simultaneously revealed and concealed, and the very ability to understand the revelation requires the revelatory presence of a divine actor.

Origen, however, extends the concealment of mysterious beyond the visionary images and literary figures of the apocalyptic tradition to include the entirety of creation, at least as it is currently found. Mysteries are not concealed only by the enigmatic forms in which they are disclosed but by the metaphysical structure of creation itself. As Tilling notes,

The object of concealing changed so that it now was regarded in a more metaphysical sense. In Origen of Alexandria the important question is not how to contend with God, but how to get to know anything about God's goodness and his inner reasons, beginning and end of creature.⁶⁰⁶

Within the metaphysical framework outlined in Chapters One and Two, Origen argues that the noetic content of divine revelation could only be mediated to the rational creatures which exist in the material cosmos by means of sensible media. This has already been seen in part in the previous chapter with regards to the capacity to perceive certain divine things by examination of the material, sensible cosmos. Thus, in this current age, heavenly realities are perceived only in enigmas and shadows (see 1 Cor. 13.12; Heb. 8.5).⁶⁰⁷

The sensible media which conceal the divine, noetic mysteries prevent the majority of rational creatures from perceiving the deeper realities that they cover. However, this form of reserve is not only a means of restricting certain divine things from the masses. It is also a method by which the Word accommodates himself and his revelation to the needs of each individual. Humankind as it currently exists is ill accustomed to the divine and so needs to be acclimated to it in a gradual manner. For this to take place, the divine must clothe itself in a manner more perceptible to our current condition. Origen's understanding of God's revelation is closely tied to his understanding of the nature of the Christian community. The degree of divinity perceptible in the Scripture or in Christ

⁶⁰⁶ Fabian Tilling, "It is Right to Keep the Secret of a King' (Tobit 12:7) – the King's Secret as a Metaphor for the *Mysterium Dei* in Origen," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum* 23, no. 1 (2019): 102.

⁶⁰⁷ P.A. 2.3.2 (SC 252, 20-252); 2.6.7 (SC 252, 324); 2.11.6-7 (SC 252, 406-412); *Com.Jn.* 1.40 (SC 120, 80-82); 2.229 (SC 120, 364); 10.85-86 (SC 157, 434-436); 10.305-306 (SC 157, 570); 13.58 (SC 222, 62); 13.113 (SC 222, 90-92); 13.146 (SC 222, 110); *Com.Rom.* 1.3.7 (SC 532, 160); 3.2.17 (SC 539, 74); 4.8.10-14 (SC 539, 292-298); 6.3.8-9 (SC 543, 106-108); 7.4.5 (SC 543, 106-108); 7.2.5 (SC 543, 262-264); *C Cels.* 7.50 (SC 150, 132); etc.⁶⁰⁸ Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 101-106.

or in the world is dependent on the level of spiritual progress made by each soul. Consequently, among the Church community, there will be members of greater and lesser understanding. The gradations in the Son's degrees of condescension reflect a hierarchy within the Church according to degrees of understanding.

The majority of the Christian community are characterised by an unreasoning belief in Jesus, while the mature possess a reasoned understanding of what the simpler only accept on faith.⁶⁰⁸ Origen also introduces intermediate categories between the initial and perfected stages of Christian stages. In discussing the multiple senses of Scripture in Book IV of *Peri Archon*, in addition to the simpler Christians (ὁ ἀπλούστερος) and the perfect (ὁ τέλειος), Origen refers to 'the person who has ascended to a certain degree' (ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ ποσὸν ἀναβεβηκώς).⁶⁰⁹ As Alviar notes, Origen is not in fact concerned with classifying the Christian community into a distinct number of discrete categories.

Strictly speaking, Origen conceives an infinite variety of spiritual levels, not just two or three, as a result of applying the idea of participation to the concept of sanctity... Within the Church, therefore, the picture that our author presents is less simple than a clean twofold or threefold division. More shades of perfection are possible.⁶¹⁰

What is most important for Origen is the capacity to develop from lesser to greater levels of understanding, virtue, and sanctity.

The scope of Christian wisdom is, therefore, set by the parameters of the exoteric Christian teaching. It is a deepening understanding of that teaching, rather than a separate, esoteric doctrine.⁶¹¹ In seeking to understand the points left unexplained by the common reading of Scripture, the more mature Christian will seek to understand Scripture in a more spiritual manner. There is no separate

⁶⁰⁸ Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 101-106.

⁶⁰⁹ P.A. 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310).

⁶¹⁰ José Alviar, *Klesis*, 122-123. Also, see Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice*, 264-266; Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 70.

⁶¹¹ Contra R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954), 73-90; Guy Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom, Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden, Brill, 2005), 117-131. Crouzel's statement summarises the situation well: 'Rien dans les textes ne décèle des traditions secrètes, transmises d'initié à initié. La raison des hésitations d'Origène est le manque de préparation morale et ascétique des auditeurs.' See Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 162. Similar accusations are also made against Clement before him, particularly in the wake of Morton Smith's discovery of a letter he attributed to Clement in 1958 which referred to a 'secret Gospel of Mark.' However, in a similar fashion to Origen, I do not consider Clement to have delivered a set of esoteric doctrines but to have practiced a process of pedagogic concealment and progressive revelation. See E. L. Fortin, "Clement and the Esoteric Tradition," *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966): 41-56; Eric Osborn, "Teaching and Writing in the First Chapter of the "Stromateis" of Clement of Alexandria," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 10, no. 2 (1959): 340-341; Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139, 148-149.

interpretative discourse. The interpretation of the mysteries is internalised by Origen as the spiritual illumination of the soul which enables it to perceive the deeper meanings of the exoteric teaching.

Origen does not limit the Son's pedagogic activity to his physical visitation to first century Judea. His pedagogic activity is core to Origen's understanding of the divine Word. He frequently portrays the Logos as a pedagogue (*paedagogos*) and teacher (*didaskalos*) and he interprets the Son's *kenosis* in this light.⁶¹² In fact, on divine matters there is only one teacher, God (see Matt. 23.8-10), and human 'teachers' in fact do not teach but only hand down what has been revealed to them.⁶¹³ As a pedagogue, the Son mediates knowledge of God and the divine to rational creation, adapted to the needs of each individual. Chapter One examined how knowledge and understanding are ontologically grounded in the Son as hypostasised Wisdom. However, he also takes an active role in the education of rational creatures and the revelations made to them. His active self-disclosure is best exemplified in his Incarnation: Origen characterised Jesus as a teacher of divine doctrines, admired for his wisdom, who won over and reformed many souls, not by force but by rational consent and instruction.⁶¹⁴ However, his divine act of teaching continues to the present day. The Word is always with the soul, his student, constantly making suggestions and giving instructions, even if the soul disregards it or doesn't even notice.⁶¹⁵

The centrality of the Son's pedagogic role can be seen in how Origen interprets the self-emptying of the Son as that of a teacher who lowers himself to meet his student in their current position.⁶¹⁶

However, when he says, "conformed to the image of his Son," I would like to inquire, to which form are they said to be conformed? For we read that the Son of God was at one time

⁶¹² See Karen Jo Torjesen, "Pedagogical Soteriology from Clement to Origen," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 370-378. The *paedagogos* taught children in their infancy, focussing therefore on introductory and basic things as well as disciplinary instruction; the *didaskalos* taught in higher level contexts such as philosophical schools, with their teaching associated with fuller understanding and explanation.

⁶¹³ *Frag.1Cor.* 11 (1, 240).

⁶¹⁴ *C Cels.* 1.30 (SC 132, 156-158); 3.75 (SC 136, 170-172).

⁶¹⁵ *Com.Jn.* 2.109 (SC 120, 276-278).

⁶¹⁶ See Joseph O'Leary, "Origen's Metaphysical Interpretation of the Johannine Logos," in *The Philosophy of Logos*, ed. K. I. Boudouris, vol. 2 (Athens: International Society for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1996), 140-55, who states 'The incarnation is integrated into a gnoseological schema, according to which the Logos takes diverse forms corresponding to the degree of knowledge of him that has been attained. The essence of the incarnation is revelation, which takes place essentially as a visitation of the mind by the Logos; if this inner revelation has occurred, the incarnation is dispensable.' Fédou also highlights the revelatory aspect of the Son's *kenosis*, though he focusses more upon how the act of *kenosis* itself reveals the beneficent nature of the Godhead, rather than the role of *kenosis* in enabling revelatory activity. Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 321-328. Also see Corine B. Milad, "Incarnation and Transfiguration: Origen's Theology of Descent," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (2018): 201-202. As Daniélou noted, however, this was not the only aspect of his soteriology, as he forwarded alongside this pedagogical interpretation a theory of redemption. See Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, 269-275.

in the form of God but at another in the form of a slave (see Phil. 2.6-7). For the distinction between these two forms does not seem superfluous to me, about which the Apostle says those who love God, for whose good all things cooperate, will be conformed. Therefore, I consider it in accordance with what the same Paul describes elsewhere, where he says: “My little Children, for whom I am again labour until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4.19). He says that Christ is formed in those who strive for perfection: inasmuch as he is the Word, when the soundness of the Word of God is formed in them purely; and inasmuch as he is truth, when truth without admixture of any deceit; and inasmuch as he is wisdom, when the wisdom of God is which Paul speaks among the perfect is preserved in them, pure and without and deviation of error. The same is the case with regard to everything that Christ is, whether righteousness, or sanctification, or any other virtues; if these are clearly formed in them, when they have been conformed to his image, they will be seen in that form which Christ has in the form of God. However, if one returns to the beginning – the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom – and, being situated in fear, takes up the first elements of the worship of God, it is according to the form of a slave, which he took in order to teach the fear of God to the uncultivated and the ignorant; to this form are those who receive the first starting points understood to be conformed.⁶¹⁷

His *kenosis* and his illumination of the mysteries is an ongoing presence to the Christian soul, mediated through the rationality of creation, through the Incarnation, Scripture, and many other means.⁶¹⁸

This pedagogic activity is clearly differentiated according to the needs of different people.⁶¹⁹ The differentiation of the Church congregation into grades of progress is expressed in the biblical figures of the disciples and the crowds. The distinction Origen makes between the crowd and the disciple is deeply intertwined with the hermeneutic distinction between Jesus’s parable discourse and its explanation (see Matt. 13). What was true of the disciples, therefore, is reflected in the spiritual experience of the divinely inspired exegete. In Matt. 13.36, Jesus retires from the crowds after delivering parables to them. Once within his house, he explains the meanings of the parables to his disciples who follow him into his dwelling place. The crowds, however, are unable to partake of any

⁶¹⁷ *Com.Rom.* 7.5.3 (SC 543, 304-306). Also, see *Com.Rom.* 6.3.8-9 (SC 543, 108-110); *C Cels.* 4.15-16 (SC 136, 218-222); *P.A.* 4.3.13 (SC 268, 390).

⁶¹⁸ See Karen Jo Torjesen, “Pedagogical Soteriology,” 370-8; Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 361-364.

⁶¹⁹ *Com.Jn.* 10.15-17 (SC 157, 390-392). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 1.52-53 (SC 120, 89); 1.119-124 (SC 120, 122-124); etc.

of these in their current condition.⁶²⁰ They are those who, while hearing the word of Christ and having faith, are nonetheless still bound to cares of the world.⁶²¹

The parables of Jesus contain the treasures of wisdom and gnosis hidden within: that is, they contain numerous doctrines of the wisdom hidden in a mystery (1 Cor. 2.6).⁶²² In *Contra Celsum*, Origen asserts that, unlike the crowd, the disciples were deemed worthy of Jesus's wisdom and thus learnt the esoteric explanation of the parables.⁶²³ In order for them to be able to receive said explanations, the disciples needed to participate in Wisdom and Logos and be given the 'word of wisdom' in order to understand the meaning of the parables.⁶²⁴ Prov. 1.1-6 provides an important scriptural justification for these claims.⁶²⁵ In this manner, the parables are understood as a specific instance of the broader divine economy of the Scriptures, adapted to the various needs of different elements of the Christian congregation and containing the wisdom of God in a hidden and mysterious way only knowable for the wise and mature Christians.

Within Origen's metaphysical system, the aim of Christianity was to perceive through the sensible veils the divine truths and person that lies behind them, whether they be the veil of Christ's flesh, the letter of the Christian Scriptures, or the sensible realities of the divinely created and governed cosmos. When interpreting Paul's words in 1 Corinthians Origen understands the message of Christ crucified as the sensible veil that both covers and points towards the divine Word. This veil is the starting point of a soul's intellectual and spiritual development towards wisdom. Christ's enfleshment provides the first step on a ladder from the current condition of humankind to God. In the twenty-seventh *Homily on Numbers*, the Son's descent from the promised land to Egypt, from heaven to earth, is the precondition for the ascent of the soul. We must pass through each of the same stages in our journey from earth to God that he passed through in coming to earth.⁶²⁶ The first stage of our journey, therefore, is the last stage of his – namely, his Incarnation by way of the Virgin Mary.⁶²⁷ It is this stage that Origen identifies with 'foolishness of preaching' (μωρία κηρύγματος) – the simple message of Christ crucified, which forms the introductory elements of Christian

⁶²⁰ *Com.Matt.* 11.4-5 (GCS 40, 34-43).

⁶²¹ *Hom.Lev.* 4.6 (SC 286, 184).

⁶²² *Com.Matt.* 14.14 (GCS 40, 315). Origen makes the same association between the explanation of the parables spoken by Jesus to the disciples and the wisdom of God that Paul says is spoken among the perfect in his homilies on Leviticus and on Jeremiah. See *Hom.Lev.* 4.6 (SC 286, 182); *Hom.Jer.* 12.13 (SC 238, 44-48).

⁶²³ *C Cels.* 3.46 (SC 136, 110).

⁶²⁴ *Com.Matt.* 14.6 (GCS 40, 288-289); 14.11 (GCS 40, 303); 17.17 (GCS 40, 634).

⁶²⁵ See *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 134-136); *C Cels.* 7.10 (SC 150, 36-38); *Com.Rom.* 1.1.1 (SC 532, 138-140); *Com.Jn.* 2.171-174 (SC 120, 322-324); *P.A.* 4.2.3 (SC 268, 304-305); *Frag.Prov.* (PG 13, 20-25); *Hom.Jer.* 20.1 (SC 238, 250). See Harry Lines, "The Self-Sufficiency of Scripture for Figurative Exegesis in Origen's *Contra Celsum*," *Studia Patristica* 111 (2021): 27-32.

⁶²⁶ *Hom.Num.* 27.3 (SC 461, 284).

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.* 27.3 (SC 461, 286).

understanding. As Origen states concerning the various appearances of Jesus to people of different degrees of spiritual perception, most notably in the case of his Transfiguration:

But if you are able to understand figuratively the differences of the Word, which is proclaimed to the believers in the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1.21) and is spoken to the perfect in wisdom, then you will see in what way the Word has a form of a slave (Col. 2.7) to beginners, that they might say “We saw him and he had no form or beauty” (Isa. 53.2), but to the perfect he comes in the glory of his Father” (Matt. 16.17), that they might say “We have seen his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1.14). For, to the perfect the glory of the Word and the only-begotten of God the Father and the fullness of grace and of truth is manifested, which the person who needs the foolishness of the preaching for their belief is not able to comprehend.⁶²⁸

Returning to Origen’s discussion of the Son’s ἀρχή in the *Commentary on John*, he states that with regards to the act of learning, the Word has two *archai*: ‘One involves his nature and the other his relation to us.’⁶²⁹ The difference between the two is that one is the starting point of a student’s education and the other is the most fundamental epistemic basis of that branch of science. The Son in his divinity, as the eternal Word and Wisdom of God, is the foundation of learning, as discussed in Chapter One. However, according to our ability to acquire knowledge of him, our beginning is his humanity: Jesus Christ and his crucifixion (1 Cor. 2.2).⁶³⁰

And perhaps, just as there were certain steps in the temple by which one might enter the Holy of Holies, thus the Only Begotten of God is all our steps, and just as the first of the steps is the lowest, and the next higher, and so on one after another until the highest, thus our Saviour is all the steps. His humanity is the first, lower one, as it were, by stepping upon which we might proceed to his other elements.⁶³¹

The veil of Christ’s flesh is required because at the beginning of the soul’s education, they need to be taught by means of sensible things.

At some time, condescending to the person who is not able to look upon the radiance and brightness of his divinity, he becomes, as it were, flesh, speaking in bodily terms, so that the

⁶²⁸ *Com.Matt.* 12.30 (GCS 40, 133-134). Also see *C Cels.* 4.15-16 (SC 136, 218-222), in which pedagogy, the Transfiguration, and Eph. 2.7 are again combined in this manner. Also, see John A. McGuckin, “The Changing Forms of Jesus”; Corine B. Milad, “Incarnation and Transfiguration.”

⁶²⁹ *Com.Jn.* 1.107 (SC 120, 116); *Hom.Ps.15* 2.2 (GCS n.f. 19, 92).

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.* 1.107 (SC 120, 116). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 1.58 (SC 120, 90).

⁶³¹ *Ibid.* 19.38 (SC 290, 68-70).

person who has received him in this way is slowly raised up by the Word until they are able to behold him in his primary form, so to speak.⁶³²

As Origen states in Book III of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the Word approaches the soul by means of the windows of their 'bodily senses' (*sensus corporeos*).⁶³³ Only having drawn near to the soul in this way is the Bridegroom able to draw it out of its bodily existence towards spiritual things.

The approach of the Bridegroom takes place not only through the sensible body of Christ but also through the words of Scripture and the marvels of creation which enter the ears and eyes of the body. Scripture is the primary manner in which the Logos is now experienced; the contemporary expression of the same pedagogy undertaken by means of the Incarnation, and before that, through the prophets and patriarchs.⁶³⁴ Hällström notes, 'Origen makes almost no difference between *revelatio mediata* and *revelatio immediata*.'⁶³⁵ What Hällström means by '*mediata*' is not mediation in the sense that Christ's humanity mediated his divinity in Origen's thinking. Rather, it is the distinction between the direct experience of the divine by inspiration or vision and the experience of the divine through the act of reading the accounts of those who experienced such things. This distinction is dissolved within Origen's thought, since 'The charism of the interpreter is the same as that of the inspired author.'⁶³⁶

Consequently, Origen draws direct comparison between Christ's flesh and the body of Scripture:

Whence Paul, when he is to learn more divine things, comes out of our earthly world and is carried off into the third heaven, in order that thence he might be able to hear the unspeakable words. For what was said here is recorded and we believe it to be the Word of God, the Word made flesh who, as regards "God with God," emptied himself. Thus, we see the Word of God on earth and, since he became a man, in a human manner; for the Word continually became flesh in the Scriptures, in order that he might tabernacle among us.⁶³⁷

⁶³² *C Cels.* 4.15 (SC 136, 220).

⁶³³ *Com.Cant.* 3.14 (SC 376, 664-666).

⁶³⁴ Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 117-118.

⁶³⁵ Gunnar af Hällström, *Charismatic Succession: A Study on Origen's Concept of Prophecy* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1985), 47.

⁶³⁶ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 73. Karen Jo Torjesen delineates how Origen's exegetical procedure worked to place its audience within the experience of the historical biblical author as a means of attaining the same spiritual perception as they had received. See Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*.

⁶³⁷ *Philoc.* 15.19 (SC 302, 438). This passage comes at the end of an extract from *Contra Celsum* VI. However, 15.19 is not found in manuscript evidence of *Contra Celsum*. Nonetheless, R. P. C. Hanson has argued strongly that this section is in fact authentic. See Richard P. C. Hanson, "The Passage Marked 'Unde?' in Robinson's *Philocalia* XV 19", in *Origeniana Secunda*, ed. Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1980), 293-303.

I think that as Christ came concealed in a body, so that a man might be seen by the carnal who look at the appearance of his body and do not consider his miracles, but God was understood by the spiritual who do not attend to the appearance of the body but consider his works of power, so also is all divine Scripture embodied, especially the Old Testament. For the spiritual and prophetic meaning of Scripture is concealed in the history of things narrated, so that every Scripture is understood by ordinary people according to history, but according to a spiritual mystery by the spiritual and perfect.⁶³⁸

Therefore, the same verses of 1 Corinthians are applied to the letter and inner meaning of the Scriptures. Just as the outward, carnal (σάρκινος) form of Christianity focusses on the physicality of the Incarnation of the Word while the spiritual (πνευματικός) participate in the Word as Wisdom, the carnal Christians are the audience of the literal gospel whose message is that of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, while for the advanced Christian exegete the task is 'render the sensible gospel (τὸ αἰσθητὸν εὐαγγέλιον) into the spiritual one.'⁶³⁹ The humble style of the Christian texts reflects the lowliness of Christ's own human form. Just like the flesh of Christ, the text of Scripture also acts as a physical and sensible medium for the revelation of the divine and incorporeal Word.⁶⁴⁰ Thus, even the carnal can perceive the body of Christ and the body of the text. This is in contradistinction to the high style of Greek literature, as discussed in the previous chapter. The text, like Jesus's body, allows God to extend his salvific act beyond the minority of humanity that could otherwise understand the loftier matters of God's wisdom. As we shall see below, in the relation of the Solomonic curriculum to the three senses of Scripture and the relation of the Temporal Gospel to Eternal Gospel, the process of advancing from the simple message of Christ crucified to God's wisdom and from Jesus's Incarnation to the eternal Word is paralleled by that of the process of advancement from the literal to the psychic and subsequently spiritual senses of Scripture. Just as Jesus's body of flesh, the Word's textual body accommodates itself to the various needs of different people.⁶⁴¹

The entire structure of the cosmos also exhibits this same mediatory function. Origen presented an analogy between creation and the Scriptures.⁶⁴² On a number of occasions, Origen exhorts his audience not to disavow the presence of a mystical sense within every passage of Scripture simply

⁶³⁸ *Ser. Matt.* 27 (GCS 38.2, 45).

⁶³⁹ *Com. Jn.* 1.45 (SC 120, 84).

⁶⁴⁰ *Hom. Lev.* 1.1 (SC 286, 66-68). Also, see *Com. Matt.* 15.3 (GCS 40, 354). See Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 60-63.

⁶⁴¹ See *P.A.* 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310-312).

⁶⁴² See Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 109; Paul Blowers, "Entering 'This Sublime and Blessed Amphitheatre': Contemplation of Nature and Interpretation of the Bible in the Patristic Period," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Jitse van der Meer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 153-155.

because they are often difficult to discern. To do so would be like those who reject divine providence or who limit it only to the regions of heaven because its operations on earth are often obscure and mysterious.⁶⁴³ When discussing astrology in his *Commentary on Genesis*, Origen states:

For if Pharaoh was preserved for the sake of demonstrating the power of God and announcing his name in all the earth (Exod. 9.16), reflect upon the how great a demonstration of the power of God the heavenly signs contain, all of which from the age until its consummation have been engraved in the heavens, a book worthy of God. Secondly, I conjecture that the signs are exposed to the powers which govern human things, in order that we may only know some of things but influence others, just as in our books are some things which have been written in order that we might know them, such as the creation of the cosmos or any other mystery, and others in order that knowing them we might do them, such as the commandments and ordinances of God... And we will not miss the mark in maintaining the heaven and the stars to be analogous to what is in the Law.⁶⁴⁴

In the previous chapter, the manner in which Origen believed God could be perceived through the natural world was explained. While Origen considered a certain degree of rationally acquired understanding to be available through the contemplation of the cosmos, creation in its fullness is a mystery that needs to be revealed to the rational creature:

Indeed, once one has accepted these Scriptures as being from the Creator of the world, one must be persuaded that whatever might confront those who investigate the creation, these will also be the case concerning the Scriptures. There are also in creation certain things which are difficult or even undiscoverable for those of human nature, but on account of this one must not lay blame upon the creator of all, for example, if we do not find the reasons for the creation of basilisks or other poisonous beasts. For, perceiving the weakness of our race and the impossibility of us to understand the reasons of God's skill which are contemplated, it is pious to attribute the knowledge of these things to God, and later, if we are judged worthy, he will reveal to us these things which we now reverently consider.⁶⁴⁵

As Blowers argues, patristic writers such as Origen incorporated natural contemplation into a religious ideal that had ascetic and hermeneutical practices at their centre. Despite the minimal accomplishments of natural law reasoning, scriptural study and the contemplation of the cosmos

⁶⁴³ *P.A.* 4.1.7 (SC 268, 284-292); *Philoc.* 2.4-5 (SC 302, 244-248).

⁶⁴⁴ *Philoc.* 23.20-21 (SC 226, 200-202).

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 2.5 (SC 302, 246-248).

ought to go together hand in hand.⁶⁴⁶ As he states in a passage already quoted in Chapter Two, ‘The Word who is present with the disciples urges his listeners to lift up their eyes to both the fields of Scripture and the fields of the reason in each thing which exists, in order that one might contemplate the whiteness and the brightness of the omnipresent light of truth.’⁶⁴⁷ By doing so, one is able to perceive the *logoi* that the Logos mediates through sensible creation, and will thus be able to understand the cosmos according to the divine wisdom that structures and sustains it.

Somos also highlights a passage from the Greek *Homilies of Psalms* which sets out in unusual terms the relationship of natural contemplation to Scripture.⁶⁴⁸

I say these things not to accuse the Scriptures, but wishing the aforesaid faith be proven not so much by the text but by something clearer than the text, which is the heaven, the earth, and the things in them.⁶⁴⁹

Since the text is liable to corruption, particularly at the hands of the devil, Origen appeals to the regularity of the cosmos in defence of the unity of the Scriptures. Somos thus presents a theistic natural theology as a foundation on which Origen considered Christianity to be built.⁶⁵⁰ However, Origen’s statement in this text must be balanced with his broader conceptions of both the cosmos and of the limitations of human rationality. Despite noting the problem of delineating natural theology from revealed theology in this period, Somos still appears to draw this distinction too sharply. In spite of his statement in this homily, Origen’s tendency is to read Scripture and the cosmos in light of the harmony between the two, rather than the former through the lens of the latter. This harmony, in Origen’s eyes, precludes the possibility of dividing the two testaments.

3. *The Curriculum of Christian Education*

The veiled nature of divine revelation and the resulting stratified composition of the Christian community necessitated a process of gradual education deeper and deeper into the mysteries revealed by the Word. One could not simply stumble across wisdom, nor was it a gift that one could inherit by nature or birth-right.⁶⁵¹ Since certain truths of Christianity are not simply openly

⁶⁴⁶ Paul Blowers, “Entering “This Sublime and Blessed Amphitheatre”,” 148-156.

⁶⁴⁷ *Com.Jn.* 13.284 (SC 222, 182-184).

⁶⁴⁸ Robert Somos, “*Theologia Naturalis* and *Theologia Revelata*,” 55-64.

⁶⁴⁹ *Hom.Ps.* 77 1.1 (GCS n.f. 19, 353).

⁶⁵⁰ Robert Somos, “*Theologia Naturalis* and *Theologia Revelata*,” 61-63.

⁶⁵¹ Of course, this is in contrast with Valentinian Christians and other ‘Gnostic’ sects. It also puts Origen somewhat at odds with Philo, who interprets the figure of Isaac in contrast to Abraham and Jacob. While Abraham represents those who learn by studying and Jacob those who learn by practice and habituation, Isaac is ‘self-learnt’ (τὸ αὐτομαθὲς) and ‘has been allotted a nature which is simple and unmixed and unadulterated,

proclaimed, they can only be understood by those who have gained a certain character, a degree of understanding, and a certain level of divine grace. The purpose of Christ's *kenosis* outlined in the twenty-seventh *Homily on Numbers* is to provide the basis for the soul's ascent to the Son's divinity. Since this condescension involves the self-concealing revelation through mysteries, this ascent will naturally involve the gradual unveiling of these secrets. On account of terminological parallels, Origen and other early Christian writers elucidated this process through metaphors of initiation, drawing upon the imagery of Greek mystery rituals, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail below. Origen considered this pedagogical initiation to take a particular form, passing through particular stages of development in a specific order.

It is important to note that Origen's characterisation of Christian initiation does not place much emphasis on the sacraments and their physical rituals. By the third century C.E., the term *τό μυστήριον* was not yet commonly applied to the Christian sacraments.⁶⁵² Responding to Celsus who accuses Christians of inviting all-comers to their mysteries regardless of their degree of intelligence or virtue, Origen states:

To these words, we say that it is not one and the same thing to call those whose souls are ill to be healed and to call those who are healthy to more divine gnosis and knowledge (*τῶν θειοτέρων γνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστήμην*). We consider both of these. At the beginning, when calling men to be cured, we urge sinners to hear the words teaching them not to sin, and the unintelligent to hear those that produce intelligence, and children to ascend to be men, and those who are simply miserable to happiness or, speaking more properly, to blessedness. However, when some of those exhorted have advanced to demonstrate that they have been purified by the Logos and that as much as possible they live in a better way, then we call them to our mysteries (*τὰς παρ' ἡμῖν τελετάς*), for we speak wisdom among the perfect (1 Cor. 2.6).⁶⁵³

Clearly, Origen does not identify Christian baptism in this text with initiation into Christian mysteries.⁶⁵⁴ With regards to the inaugural sacrament of Christian life, Origen only occasionally

needing neither practice nor teaching' and gains wisdom without toil on account of his gifted nature. See *De Congr.* 34-36 (LCL 261, 474-476); *De Abr.* 49-52 (LCL 289, 28-30). However, this is tempered by the statement that all possess each quality in some degree: 'But also, we must not fail to remark that each lays claim to the three powers, but is named after that which abounds in them; for teachings cannot be perfected without nature or practice, nor is nature able to become complete without learning and practice, nor practice if not founded in nature and teaching.' *De Abr.* 53 (LCL 289, 30).

⁶⁵² See Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 159.

⁶⁵³ *C Cels.* 3.59 (SC 136, 138).

⁶⁵⁴ See Joseph W. Trigg, "A Fresh Look at Origen's Understanding of Baptism," *Studia Patristica* 17, no. 2 (1982): 961-964.

applied this term, preferring the more traditional terms βάπτισμα and λουτρόν.⁶⁵⁵ This contrasts his baptismal theology with that of Clement who utilised the term φωτισμός, uncommon before the fourth century C.E., to refer to baptism, demonstrating that he considered baptism not only purificatory but also illuminative.⁶⁵⁶ In *Paedagogus*, he even went so far as to apply to the ritual of baptism the term *epopteia*, the crowning vision of the ritual of initiation into the Eleusinian mystery cult.⁶⁵⁷

One of the striking features of Origen's work is comparatively how little interest he displays in the ritual sacraments, focussing instead upon the hidden noetic elements of the world, history, and Scripture and the process of spiritual development that enables souls to comprehend them.⁶⁵⁸ Even when faced with texts which might naturally invite discussion on the Eucharist, for instance, Origen nonetheless prefers to focus upon the importance of spiritual exegesis. The blood and flesh that Christ entreats his followers to consume are not the bread and wine of the Eucharist but the letter of Scripture which needs to be ruminated upon in order to understand the mysteries of its spiritual meaning.⁶⁵⁹ Origen's noetic outlook does not disregard the importance of the physical ritual entirely. Baptism was essential for the soul to be purified and the forgiveness of sins.⁶⁶⁰ If the ritual of washing in water were simply a symbol of inner cognitive states, Origen would not have argued for the necessity of sensible water baptism nor endorsed the practice of infant baptism.⁶⁶¹ However, while baptism may be an important part of the process of Christian salvation, it is wholly insufficient for the soul that wishes to attain wisdom, godlikeness, and the beatitudes promised in the eschaton. It is this latter process to which Origen applies the language of initiation.

Origen understood the course of Christian pedagogy to follow a particular curriculum, ordered according to subject matter. In addition to Gregory's panegyric, the text that shed most light upon Origen's understanding of the curriculum of Christian education is the prologue to his *Commentary*

⁶⁵⁵ Gunnar af Hallstrom, "More Than Initiation? Baptism According to Origen of Alexandria?", in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Tor Vegge, David Hellholm, Christer Hellholm, and Oyvind Noderval (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 991.

⁶⁵⁶ See Henny Fiskå Hägg, "Baptism in Clement of Alexandria," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Tor Vegge, David Hellholm, Christer Hellholm, and Oyvind Noderval (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 983-985; Joseph Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Begt, 1962), 174.

⁶⁵⁷ *Paed.* 1.26.1-1.28.2 (SC 70, 169-164). More will be said on the philosophical and Christian adoption of the terminology of Greek mystery initiations below.

⁶⁵⁸ See Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 224-226; Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, 70-74, who highlight the symbolic importance of Christian baptism as a type of the eschatological baptism to come.

⁶⁵⁹ *Com.Jn.* 10.99-111 (SC 157, 440-448).

⁶⁶⁰ Cécil Blanc, "Le Baptême d'après Origène," *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 113-124; Gunnar af Hallstrom, "More Than Initiation?", 996-1000; Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 338-340.

⁶⁶¹ See *Hom.Luke* 14.5 (SC 87, 222); *Hom.Lev.* 8.3 (SC 287, 16-20); *Com.Rom.* 5.9.13 (SC 539, 498); *Orat.* 5.1 (GCS 3, 308).

on the *Song of Songs*. In this prologue, Origen presents wisdom as the *telos* of the Solomonic corpus. He characterises the reader of these three books in the manner of a philosopher, comparable to those trained in Greek philosophy,⁶⁶² and describes them as ‘they who desire to know wisdom and those who strive for wisdom’⁶⁶³ in the manner of Solomon’s own declared erotic pursuit of Wisdom.⁶⁶⁴ This pursuit, he says, must begin with moral instruction and with the correct understanding of the text and it reaches its climax in the *epithalamium* of the *Song of Songs*.⁶⁶⁵ There is a close association between the three stages of Solomonic education and the three senses of Scripture to which Origen frequently refers. This connection will be discussed in greater detail below. The highest aim of scriptural reading, the interpretation of the spiritual sense, is described in *Peri Archon* as containing ‘the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery.’⁶⁶⁶ The pedagogical aims of Scripture, like that of Origen himself, is the inculcation of wisdom, and all its associated virtues, in the student.

The account of this commentary and that of Gregory’s oration, however, reflect different emphases.⁶⁶⁷ The order of teaching outlined in Gregory’s panegyric is far more in keeping with wider Greek philosophical educational practices and is less specifically Christian in its contents.⁶⁶⁸ This is not to say that Gregory did not receive Christian instruction – it is quite clear that he did – but it was not the focus to the same extent as it was in Origen’s work. Christian Scriptures only became the main focus at the very end of the curriculum. The prologue, on the other hand, is far more overtly Christian in its pedagogy; unsurprisingly, given that this curriculum is conceptualised in the terms of the three Solomonic texts of the Christian Scriptures.

In both, the curriculum is divided and ordered dogmatically according to divisions in the parts of philosophy. These divisions, as Origen makes clear in the prologue, were commonplace in Greek philosophy.⁶⁶⁹ According to Origen, the original division of philosophy was that found in the

⁶⁶² *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 128-132).

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 136-138).

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.* prol. 2 (SC 375, 108).

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 138).

⁶⁶⁶ *P.A.* 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310-312).

⁶⁶⁷ As Trigg notes, ‘we should not assume that the philosophical education Origen provided Gregory was characteristic of his teaching activity. Theology, which Gregory did not apparently stay around to study, was really the focus of Origen’s concerns, and it is to the *Peri Archon* rather than to the *Speech of Appreciation* that we should turn if we want to know how Origen handled that subject.’ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 168. Nautin makes the same point, though disagrees, correctly in my opinion, on whether he received instruction in theology. See Pierre Nautin, *Origène*, 198, 193-195.

⁶⁶⁸ Nonetheless, there are clear Christian allusions peppered throughout Gregory’s oration and the conceptual framework expressed therein is entirely compatible with Origen’s. See Joseph W. Trigg, “God’s Marvelous Oikonomia,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 27-52.

⁶⁶⁹ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 128).

Solomonic corpus, which was only later adopted into Greek philosophical discourse.⁶⁷⁰ However, the order of subjects and the terminology applied differs between the two texts. The prologue associates the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs with ethics, physics, and *epoptics*: the ‘moral,’ ‘natural,’ and ‘inspective’ sciences, respectively. In addition to these three, Origen also refers to logic, which he says some include as a fourth part of philosophy, while others say it is not an independent part in itself but pervades all the other sciences.⁶⁷¹ In the *Thanksgiving Oration*, on the other hand, Gregory refers to dialectics, ethics, physics, and theology. It is quite clear that logic and dialectics refer to the same science,⁶⁷² and that *epoptics* and theology are much the same. However, while logic is not given its own place in the prologue and ethics is the first stage of instruction, in the *Thanksgiving Oration*, dialectics takes the place of the introductory stage. Furthermore, while in the former ethics precedes physics, this order is reversed in Gregory’s account.

There are in fact a number of different divisions that Origen offers in other works. Panayiotis Tzamalikos offers an extensive list of passages in Origen’s corpus that concern the division of philosophy, though it should be noted that, as a consequence of Tzamalikos’ idiosyncratic methodology, a number of catenae of dubious authenticity are included in his list.⁶⁷³ These terminological inconsistencies are typical of Origen’s writing but also reflect the wide array of taxonomical schemas utilised in Late Antique philosophical discussions. There was, in fact, significant disagreement on how to divide and to order correctly the constituent parts of philosophy. Pierre Hadot’s article, ‘Les Divisions Des Parties De La Philosophie Dans L’antiquité,’ delineates the differing systems and theorisations that influenced them.⁶⁷⁴ As he notes, by the third century C.E., tripartite divisions of the branches of philosophy had come to proliferate.⁶⁷⁵

The most notable of Origen’s other schematizations of the philosophical sciences are found in the two *Homilies on Genesis* in which Origen allegorises Abimelech’s meetings with Abraham and Isaac. In addition to interpreting Abimelech in the manner described in the previous chapter, Origen considers his companions in the two narratives to represent their own sciences. In both biblical

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 130).

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 130). The latter possibility, favoured by Origen, is the Peripatetic position on the position of dialectics.

⁶⁷² The term dialectic reflects Platonic and Aristotelian terminology, while the term logic became ubiquitous after originating in Stoic circles. In latter writers, the two are often used interchangeably. See Pierre Hadot, “Les Divisions Des Parties De La Philosophie Dans L’Antiquité,” *Museum Helveticum* 36, no. 4 (1971): 207-208.

⁶⁷³ Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 359. For instance, Tzamalikos includes a catena on Psalms ascribed to Origen which clearly derives from Clement of Alexandria’s *Strom.* 1.28.176 (SC 30, 173).

⁶⁷⁴ Pierre Hadot, “Les Divisions.”

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

passages, Abimelech is accompanied by two others. In Gen. 20, he is accompanied by his wife and his handmaidens; in Gen. 26, by two companions: Phicol and Ochozath. What is represented by the two groups differs in Origen's mind, with his account of the latter the more cogent of the two analyses. Analysing the etymologies of the names Phicol, Ochozath, and Abimelech – meaning 'the mouth of all,' 'containing,' and 'my father is king,' respectively – Origen argues that each figure represents a part of philosophy. Phicol is moral philosophy because ethics is that which is in the mouth of everyone due to 'common conceptions'; Ochozath is physics because nature is that which contains all things; and Abimelech is logic because the rational is that which acknowledges God as father of all.⁶⁷⁶ The logic symbolised by Abimelech clearly is not that of the prologue nor identifiable with the dialectic of the *Thanksgiving Oration*, but the highest science of the secular world, as discussed in the last chapter. While he offers an account of the division of the parts of philosophy in these two homilies, the relationship between them is left unexplored. However, by examining the *Thanksgiving Oration* and the prologue of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, we will be able to see that each science is a step on the ladder leading towards the divine and how each prepares the Christian student for the highest form of Christian understanding. Though Origen's terminology varies from place to place, with the exception of Gregory's account, the process remains largely the same across his corpus, moving from the development of proper conduct towards greater understanding, and from faith to wisdom.

It is important to note that these divisions were always somewhat arbitrary. Philosophy is a complex and interconnected whole, and so any division requires some attenuation of the subdivided parts. The full significance of whatever is taught as the introductory branch of philosophy will only become clear when it is integrated with the later branches. As a consequence, the precise number of stages envisioned in the process of learning could be flexible. Clement, for instance, often outlined a three-tiered process of instruction.⁶⁷⁷ However, a thinker as attentive to the meanings of number symbolism as Clement was could not fail to take interest in other ways of enumerating this process. In particular, Clement was especially interested in the ogdoad and decad, and incorporated these

⁶⁷⁶ *Hom.Gen.* 14.3 (SC 7, 342). I disagree with Robert Somos's analysis of this passage. Somos believes Origen to be following the common Stoic order of the parts of philosophy: logic, physics, ethics. This does bear some resemblance to the scheme outlined in the *Thanksgiving Oration*, provided one separate these three traditional parts of philosophy from theology. However, the endmost position of ethics is entirely at odds with Origen's approach to Christian education more broadly and to the order of the sciences found in the prologue of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. It appears to me that the order in which Origen presents these subjects – logic, physics, ethics – is, in fact, a descending order, rather than his more usual ascending one. Since Abimelech is the lord of the other persons, logic appears to me to be at the pinnacle of a three-tiered hierarchy. Furthermore, as we shall see, the placement of ethics at the final stage of philosophy is entirely at odds with Origen's broader conceptualisation of its pedagogical role and finds nowhere else in his work.

⁶⁷⁷ See, for instance, *Paed.* 1.3.3 (SC 70, 112); *Strom.* 4.162.5 (SC 463, 328).

numerological symbols into his pedagogic model.⁶⁷⁸ In a manner parallel to the fluidity noted with regards to Origen's taxonomy of the Christian congregation, Origen could at various times postulate two, three, or forty-two stages in the pedagogical process. Nonetheless, the thrust of his thinking remains much the same throughout and the overall outlook which placed moral instruction before the acquisition of wisdom is consistent throughout his work.

3.1. Epotike or Theorike?

As these various classifications make clear, the question of the correct division and hierarchy of the branches of philosophy, if indeed there even was a hierarchy, was not a settled question among or within philosophical schools. The tripartite division of philosophy Origen attributes to the Greeks and Solomon before them in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in fact displays more originality than he suggests, finding no exact equivalent in the extant philosophical literature.⁶⁷⁹ The division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and logic in the *Homilies on Genesis* was far more common, having originally been developed in the Stoic school.⁶⁸⁰ For instance, the second century philosopher Atticus, some of whose writings are preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote:

Therefore, there are three divisions of the complete philosophy, into what is called Ethics, Physics, and Logic, with the first furnishing in us each fine beautiful and good things and restoring our entire affairs to what is best, and setting in order the entire people with enduring order and the most precise laws; the second reaches for knowledge concerning divine things, the same first principles and causes and the other things, as many as derive from them, which Plato named the investigation of nature; and the third interprets the distinction and discovery concerning each of these, which Plato said is first and best, gathering into one all the parts of philosophy, which hitherto had been dispersed and scattered like the limbs of Pentheus, as someone said, and shows philosophy to be a living and complete body.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ See Andrew Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 39-51; Joel Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic: Number Symbolism in Platonism and Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), 224-274.

⁶⁷⁹ Marguerite Harl, "Les Trois Livres de Salomon et les Trois Parties de la Philosophie dans les Prologues des Commentaires sur le Cantiques des Cantiques (d'Origène aux Chaînes Exégétiques Grecques)," in *Text Und Textkritik*, ed. Jürgen Dummer (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987), 252; Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 139; Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation*, 22. This is true regardless of which rendering of the inspective science is preferred.

⁶⁸⁰ Pierre Hadot, "Les Divisions," 208, 211-212.

⁶⁸¹ *P.E.* 11.2.1-2 (SC 292, 56-58).

Even where some consensus concerning the respective branches could be reached, the proper order of their arrangement was not unanimously agreed upon. Sextus Empiricus, writing not long after Atticus's death, also divided philosophy in this manner and, although he was uncertain concerning the respective positions of ethics and physics, he was clear that logic was the correct starting point of philosophical education.⁶⁸²

There are, in fact, three possible renderings of the term branch of philosophy described as 'inspective' in the manuscripts: *epopticen*, *enopticen*, and *theoricen*. While *enopticen* was the favoured reading among twentieth century scholars on the basis that it is the *lectio difficilior*, it has generally fallen out of favour more recently since the term is incredibly rare and the only extant philosophical uses of the term ἐνοπτική do not share the meaning Origen gives to this science.⁶⁸³ The remaining two readings each have their own merits and scholars disagree on which to prefer. Edwards argues in favour of *theoricen*, while Tzamalikos commends *epopticen*.⁶⁸⁴ The former has the advantage that the term finds common usage in Origen's lexicon. Furthermore, theoretics was a common subdivision of philosophy within Greek thinking going back to Plato and Aristotle, though according to the latter this category typically included both physics and theology, as well as mathematics, distinguished from the practical sciences: ethics, politics, and poetics.⁶⁸⁵ Edwards also argues for the reading of theoretics on the basis that a manuscript corruption from theoretics to *epoptics* is easier to explain than its opposite, and on the semantic affinity between the terms θεωρική and θεολογική, a term found in the philosophical divisions of Clement before him and Evagrius after him.⁶⁸⁶

On the other hand, the possible reading of *epoptics* also finds a terminological basis in the same passage from Clement's *Stromateis*:

Therefore, philosophy according to Moses is divided in four: into history; into what is rightly called legislation, which would be the particular affairs of ethics; third, into religious observances, which is a part of natural contemplation; and fourth, into the theological kind (τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος), the *epopteia* (ἡ ἐποπτεία), which Plato says to be among the great mysteries, while Aristotle calls this kind "metaphysics" (μετὰ τὰ φυσικά).⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸² Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* 1.17-18 (LCL 291, 20); 1.24 (LCL 291, 12).

⁶⁸³ See Panayiotes Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 359-360.

⁶⁸⁴ Mark Edwards, "The Term *Musterion* in Clement, Origen and Gregory" (forthcoming); Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 140; Panayiotes Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 359.

⁶⁸⁵ See Pierre Hadot, "Les Divisions," 202-203.

⁶⁸⁶ *Strom.* 1.176.1-2 (SC 30, 173); Evagrius, *Praktikos* 1.1 (SC 171, 498); *Gnostikos* 13 (SC 356, 106); *On Prayer* prol. (SC 589, 212); *Scholia on Proverbs* 2 (SC 34, 90); 247 (SC 344, 344).

⁶⁸⁷ *Strom.* (SC 30, 173).

Furthermore, as the reference to Plato indicates, the term draws upon a significant tradition that incorporated the language of the initiation rites of the Greek mystery cults into terminology of philosophical education.⁶⁸⁸ For example, Diotima's crowning speech in the *Symposium*, a text to which Origen alludes in this same prologue, is replete with the language of initiation into cultic mysteries. The entire passage is structured as an initiation, with Diotima acting as a mystagogue initiating her disciple Socrates into the mystery of Eros.⁶⁸⁹ Likewise, the process of love that leads to the final vision of the Form of Beauty is depicted through the language of mystery and initiation, specifically of the Eleusinian mysteries:

Therefore, these are the aspects of love into which perhaps you too, o Socrates, might be initiated (μυηθείης). But concerning the final mysteries and revelations (τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά), for which the previous things exist, provided one pursues them properly, I do not know if you are able.⁶⁹⁰

This text is most likely that to which Clement referred when discussing the Mosaic division of philosophy.⁶⁹¹ Other examples can be found in a number of Platonic dialogues.⁶⁹² In order to consolidate the position of philosophy as the true mediator between mankind and the divine and recognising the inability of rational discourse to describe heavenly and divine realities,⁶⁹³ Plato reached for the terminology of the mysteries to express his own philosophical theories.⁶⁹⁴

Plato, does not, however, identify τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά as a particular branch of philosophy. This was a development of the first centuries C.E.⁶⁹⁵ Plutarch read this classification back into Plato and Aristotle, stating that the term ἐποπτικὸν was applied by Plato and Aristotle to the highest part of philosophy (τὸ μέρος τῆς φιλοσοφίας).⁶⁹⁶ Aristotle, for his part, never referred to the *epopteia*. Theon of Smyrna, discussed in greater detail below, placed the *epopteia* as the third stage of an educative schema.⁶⁹⁷ For both Theon and Plutarch, as for Origen and Clement, this stage of learning was preceded by natural philosophy.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁸⁸ See Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*.

⁶⁸⁹ See *Ibid.*, 1-29; Francese Casadesús, "The Transformation of the Initiation Language of Mystery Religions," in *Greek Philosophy and Mystery Cults*, ed. María José Martín-Velasco and María José García Blanco (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 14-20.

⁶⁹⁰ *Symp.* 209e (LCL 166, 270-272).

⁶⁹¹ Also, see *Phaedr.* 250C (LCL 36, 484).

⁶⁹² See *Ibid.* 244A-250C (LCL 36, 464-484); *Ep.* 7.341C-D (LCL 234, 530); *Rep.* 7.515C-D (LCL 276, 108-110).

⁶⁹³ Francese Casadesús, "The Transformation of the Initiation Language," 4-5.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 23.

⁶⁹⁵ Pierre Hadot, "Les Divisions," 219-220.

⁶⁹⁶ Plutarch, *De Iside* 382D (LCL 306, 180).

⁶⁹⁷ Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio.* (14-15).

⁶⁹⁸ On Plutarch, see *De Iside* 382A-C (LCL 306, 178-180). For Theon, see below.

Clement's own division of philosophy bears significant resemblance to that Origen proposes in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Both identify the supreme science using the language of Eleusis, both place ethics at the start of philosophical education, and Clement, like Origen, places natural philosophy as an intermediate step. As Edwards notes, using this reading, the three stages of the prologue curriculum map onto the three stages of the Eleusinian ritual of initiation: ethics corresponds to the *dromenon* (the thing done); physics to the *legomenon* (the teaching imparted); and the final stage corresponds to the *epopteia*.⁶⁹⁹ Clement's schema is complicated by the addition of the fourth science of history (τὸ ἱστορικόν). This unusual inclusion is likely consequence of the difficult task of imposing the classification of a philosophical curriculum onto the Pentateuch. Clement could hardly ignore the historical material of the texts with which he was concerned. The same contrivance is discernible in Clement's identification of 'religious observances' (τὸ ἱεραργικόν) with natural philosophy. As will be seen below, Origen faced similar difficulties when categorising the material of the Solomonic corpus.

Clement clearly provided an important template for the integration of the philosophical use of initiatory language into a Christian understanding of salvation and spiritual development. While, as stated above, he does in places apply this language to the ritual of baptism, for the most part he used this terminology in a manner consistent with Greek philosophical usage.

Within Jewish and Christian circles, the philosophical precedent provided useful material to explain the mysteries described in their holy Scriptures while also distinguishing them from the obscenity of the Greek cults. Clement's *Protrepticus* is an excellent example of this. In this treatise, Clement compares the debased and impious mystery rites of the Greeks, which he implores his audience to abandon, with the true mysteries of Christ into which he bids them be initiated. While the polemic context of this text may have been a factor in his adoption of the language of Greek initiation, the same characterisation of the Christian path to gnosis is found in the *Paedagogus* and the *Stromateis*. In the latter, he compares a three-tiered pathway to gnosis to the threefold process of initiation into the Greek mysteries, starting with a ritual purification, followed by the minor mysteries, culminating with the great mysteries.⁷⁰⁰ The climax of this initiation is characterised in terms of the student's contemplative activity in beholding true reality.⁷⁰¹ The implications of the adoption of this terminology on the epistemology and mystical theology of Clement and Origen will be examined in the next chapter.

⁶⁹⁹ Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 140. For this account of Eleusis, see Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 69-73.

⁷⁰⁰ *Strom.* 5.71.1 (SC 278, 142). Also, see *Strom.* 4.3.1 (SC 463, 58).

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.* 5.71.1 (SC 278, 142).

3.2. *The Curriculum of the Thanksgiving Oration*

Gregory arrived in Caesarea a young man. He had already received the essentials of education in the imperial Roman period: general education and grammar. He had also received training in rhetoric.⁷⁰² All education in this period was the reserve of the elite.⁷⁰³ Philosophy and law, in which Gregory had planned to be trained before falling under Origen's influence,⁷⁰⁴ were reserved for the elite of the elite. The education Gregory received from Origen reflects the common educational practices among Greek philosophers of this period, which was not undertaken institutionally but through a personal relationship between student and master. It was common for students of philosophical masters to live in their teachers' household. The close personal bond Gregory felt towards his master is described by analogy to 1 Sam. 18.1: 'the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' Gregory's soul was similarly knit with Origen's, such that the bond between himself and Origen could not be broken.⁷⁰⁵ This affection for his teacher was inspired Origen's piety and virtue: his teacher acting both as an instructor for and paradigm of virtuous living.⁷⁰⁶

As emphasised by Pierre Hadot, philosophical education in the Classical and Late Antique periods was never a purely intellectual affair.⁷⁰⁷ One did not study philosophy simply to gain a greater scientific understanding of the world. The study of philosophy was the pursuit of wisdom and wisdom, as we have seen already, was not a cold and analytic knowledge but deeply tied to virtue and flourishing. Accordingly, Gregory recounts how Origen expected his students to abandon their previous ways of life and adopt the philosophical life, a life of moral and spiritual improvement.⁷⁰⁸ As

⁷⁰² *Orat.Pan.* 5.56 (SC 148, 118).

⁷⁰³ Clelia Martínez Maza, "Christian Paideia in Early Imperial Alexandria," in *The Alexandrian Tradition: Interactions between Science, Religion, and Literature*, ed. Luis Arturo Guichard, Juan Luis García Alonso, and María Paz De Hoz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 213-215. Gregory certainly fits this category. As he recounts, his brother-in-law was an advisor to the governor of Palestine: this is what brought him to Caesarea. *Orat.Pan.* 5.65-66 (SC 148, 120-122).

⁷⁰⁴ *Orat.Pan.* 5.56 (SC 148, 118-120).

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 6.85-92 (SC 148, 130-132). Nautin perceives these statements of affection as little more than platitudes in keeping with the rhetorical requirements of the genre of encomium, suggesting that he in fact held little love for Origen, only staying under compulsion and leaving at the first opportunity. See Pierre Nautin, *Origène*, 186-187, 197. For an alternative and preferable explanation, see David Satan, *In the Image of Origen*, 48-54.

⁷⁰⁶ *Orat.Pan.* 6.85-92 (SC 148, 130-132); 9.115-126 (SC 148, 115-148).

⁷⁰⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*

⁷⁰⁸ *Orat.Pan.* 6.75-77 (SC 148, 124-126); 6.84 (SC 148, 128). See Robert L. Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue," 20-21.

we shall see, the idea of moral and spiritual progress was also central to Origen's account in the prologue.

In the second section of his oration, Gregory outlines the stages of his training, beginning with a period of questioning and refutation. Described by Gregory as 'purifying' (ἐκκαθαίρων),⁷⁰⁹ this training prepares the student by removing from them any mistaken beliefs or incorrect ways of thinking. Just as a farmer must first remove the weeds and plough the earth before scattering the seeds on the earth,⁷¹⁰ Origen first had to remove everything fruitless and wild from his student's thoughts before he could sow the seeds of true doctrine.⁷¹¹ Origen then trained Gregory in how to correctly reason and how to correctly assess arguments and propositions, so that Gregory would pay no heed to reputation or persuasive rhetoric and be deterred from the truth on their account.⁷¹² Dialectics is not, in this case, understood as a doctrinal stage of philosophical study. It was undertaken in 'a very Socratic fashion,'⁷¹³ seeming to reflect the gymnastic form of zetetic discourse 'which aims at training the mind.'⁷¹⁴ In this regard, it is unlike the other stages of philosophical education outlined. The placement of logic or dialectics at the beginning of philosophical study was very common, providing a solidity and protection to the doctrines learned thereafter.⁷¹⁵ The aim of Origen's teaching of dialectics was to enable his students to be able to reason critically for themselves.⁷¹⁶ This was Origen's common objective throughout his work, including his exegetical writings. Origen very rarely puts his interpretations forward as authoritative or unquestionable but presents them as suggestions which his listeners or readers will need to evaluate themselves.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 7.98 (SC 148, 136). It was a commonplace for philosophical curricula to begin with a purificatory stage, though, as discussed below, the form of this purification varied.

⁷¹⁰ The scriptural allusion to the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13.1-23, Mark 4.1-20; Luke 8.4-15) further demonstrates Gregory's familiarity with Christian Scriptures.

⁷¹¹ *Orat.Pan.* 7.93-97 (SC 148, 134-136).

⁷¹² Joseph Trigg and Pierre Nautin distinguish these as two stages: a purificatory stage and then dialectics. This suggestion is based on the structure of Gregory's discussion in *Orat.Pan.* 7. Only with the latter, he says, does one begin the study of philosophy proper. However, Trigg also divides dialectics from what he describes as the substantive branches of philosophy. Here, he seems to be unnecessarily multiplying the preliminary stages. Cruzel's analysis, which unites the purificatory stage under the heading of dialectics, is certainly preferable. See Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church*, 169; Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 189-190; Cruzel's introduction to *Orat.Pan.* (SC 148, 40-41).

⁷¹³ *Orat.Pan.* 7.97 (SC 148, 136).

⁷¹⁴ See *V. P.* 3.49 (LCL 184, 320). Zetetic discourse, whose aim is the development of the intellectual capacities of its audience, is contrasted with hyphegetic, which provides positive doctrines. This distinction explains why Trigg correctly divides dialectics – which in Gregory's eulogy aimed at training his reasoning skills before imparting any doctrinal content – from the substantive branches of philosophy.

⁷¹⁵ For instance, see the references to Zeno and Chrysippus in *V. P.* 40 (LCL 185, 150).

7.40 (LCL 185, 150). Also, see below concerning the place of the *Organon* in the arrangements of the Aristotelian corpus and Neoplatonic reading curricula.

⁷¹⁶ *Orat.Pan.* 7 (SC 148, 135-140).

Unquestioning acceptance was never what was required, but only, where appropriate, reasoned consent.

Having been grounded in how to assess arguments critically and reason correctly, Gregory then passed on to study physics. The study of nature was intended to replace irrational wonder at the cosmos with an informed and rational one.⁷¹⁷ Issues touching upon the divine were not included within this stage, being reserved for the last stage of instruction.⁷¹⁸ The same will be true of the scope of the natural sciences in the prologue. This stage of study also included instruction in geometry and astronomy.⁷¹⁹ The former provided the 'immutable groundwork and secure foundation of all'; the latter lifted the student up to what is highest above us.⁷²⁰ These, then, provide 'ladders reaching the skies,' making the heavens understandable to the student.⁷²¹

Thereafter, Gregory moves on to ethics. Wilken correctly notes that the inclusion of ethics as a particular branch must not mislead us into thinking it is only an isolated, if important, strand of study.⁷²² Moral and spiritual transformation are the ultimate purpose behind the entire practice of philosophical study, and so not one stage in the educational curriculum is without normative import. They all play a part in the development of virtue. Wilken oversteps the mark, however, when he suggests that this is the heart education Gregory received, even admitting the latter's statement that it is for the sake of the divine virtues 'above all that the whole philosophical family toils.'⁷²³ Wilken's suggestion runs counter to both the position of Ethics in Gregory's outline and the tendency found throughout Origen's work which subordinates moral instruction to spiritual exegesis and theological understanding.⁷²⁴

Moral instruction is conceptualised in the terms of the four Platonic cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. To these four is added the virtue of piety, 'the mother' and 'the

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.* 8.111 (SC 148, 142).

⁷¹⁸ Origen's physics is consequently quite at odds with the Stoics', for whom theological questions were an important part of the natural sciences. This is, of course, a consequence of the Stoics' materialist conceptions of the divine.

⁷¹⁹ This is not in keeping with the usual place of these studies in philosophical education. Geometry and astronomy, as mathematical sciences, usually had a propaedeutic role. See *Rep.* VII.527B-531C (LCL 276, 152); *Strom.* 6.80.1-4 (SC 446, 220-222); 6.90.3-4 (SC 446, 242). Trigg suggests that these might have been included here for Gregory specifically because it might have been inadequately covered in Gregory's previous general education. See Joseph Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 169. If so, then this would be an excellent example of the personal nature of the education given in this period, which could be closely tailored to the needs or deficiencies of the student. See also, Pierre Nautin, *Origène*, 188.

⁷²⁰ *Orat.Pan.* 8.114 (SC 148, 142).

⁷²¹ *Ibid.* 8.114 (SC 148, 142).

⁷²² See Robert Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue," 25.

⁷²³ *Orat.Pan.* 9.115 (SC 148, 142-144). See Robert Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue," 25-28.

⁷²⁴ See David Satran, *In the Image of Origen: Eros, Virtue and Constraint in the Early Christian Academy* (Oakland, C.A.: University of California Press, 2019), 91-92.

beginning and the end of all the virtues.⁷²⁵ The aim of ethics was a likeness to God and the virtues were the means by which to accomplish this.⁷²⁶ This entailed a mastery of the passions, in order that one can pursue a life according to reason.⁷²⁷ Gregory's moral education existed as much in the person of Origen as in his philosophical discourse. He was not merely trained in ethical doctrines but given a paradigm of virtue to which to aspire. Moral training was, therefore, not simply a theoretical exercise, learning the doctrines and listening to the truths concerning the nature of virtue, but a practice of virtue in its own right, spurred by the example of one's philosophical master.⁷²⁸

Finally, one comes to the study of theology, divided into two parts. First, one studied the various doctrines of the different philosophical schools that concern the divine, with the exception mentioned above of atheistic philosophers and those who denied providence.⁷²⁹ Studying the various conflicting opinions of the philosophers ensured that Origen's students would not develop a dogmatic attachment to any one system but would be able to weigh the truth of any of their beliefs.⁷³⁰ One could compare this with *Contra Celsum* 1.10-11, where Origen outlines precisely the sort of dogmatic attachment that he wished to avoid, which leads students of each philosophical school to accept certain teachings of theirs unquestioningly and without good reason.⁷³¹ This uncritical belief is permissible for the *simpliciores* who do not have the time or the aptitude to examine the reasons for certain Christian teachings, but is not the aim for more reasoned Christians. Once again, Origen's concern for his students to be able to reason for themselves and not accept any position uncritically is very clear.

Finally, the curriculum culminates with the study of scriptural theology. These texts contained a greater wisdom than any human teacher, full of obscure and enigmatic sayings which require a truly philosophical mind – one attuned to God's desires and intentions – to explicate.⁷³² It is in these inspired works that the goal of philosophy ultimately found its reward. This is, of course, the focus of the vast majority of Origen's literary output and Gregory presents him as an exemplary model of the inspired exegete.⁷³³ It also accords with the role Origen gives to philosophical study in his *Letter to Gregory*. Once more, Origen's pedagogy is presented as a medium of God's revelatory action. God

⁷²⁵ *Orat. Pan.* 12.149 (SC 148, 156).

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.* 12.149 (SC 148, 156-158).

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.* 9.119 (SC 148, 144).

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.* 9.126 (SC 148, 146-148). See Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 268-269. While Gregory asserts that other philosophers only discourse upon virtue without living in concordance with it, all philosophical schools warned against this problem.

⁷²⁹ *Orat. Pan.* 13.152 (SC 148, 158).

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.* 14.170 (SC 148, 166).

⁷³¹ *C. Cels.* 1.10-11 (SC 132, 102-106).

⁷³² *Orat. Pan.* 15.173-174 (SC 148, 168).

⁷³³ *Ibid.* 15 (SC 148, 168-172).

bestowed the same spirit upon Origen as received by the prophets, so that 'he should be an interpreter of the oracles of God to men, and that he might understand the words of God, even as if God spoke them to him.'⁷³⁴

3.3. *The prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs as a philosophical introduction*

As Henri Crouzel states, the spiritual orientation of Origen's educational program, while present in Gregory's oration, is made even clearer in the prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.⁷³⁵ The means by which each stage prepares the student for the full realisation of Christian spiritual life is made far more explicit, as are the normative roles of each branch of philosophy. Moreover, unlike the pedagogy of the *Thanksgiving Oration*, the act of deciphering the obscure and enigmatic sayings therein is not reserved for the final stage of study.⁷³⁶ The curriculum of this text focusses entirely on the study of Scripture. The spiritual orientation of the educational program is best exemplified by Origen's usage of the terminology of mystery initiations, while its engagement with Scripture is evident in the way Origen lays out his curriculum in terms of the contents and function of each book in the Solomonic corpus.

During the imperial period, philosophical education was increasingly focussed upon the exegesis of revered texts.⁷³⁷ In keeping with his observed practice in other extant prologues to his commentaries, Origen follows what became the established Neoplatonist conventions for introductions to Aristotelian and Platonic texts.⁷³⁸ Ilsetraut Hadot lists six points of discussion commonly found in Neoplatonic introductions that can be found in the prologue to the *Commentary*

⁷³⁴ *Orat. Pan.* 15.181 (SC 148, 171).

⁷³⁵ See Henri Crouzel's introduction in *Orat. Pan.* (SC 148, 41).

⁷³⁶ *Com. Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 134).

⁷³⁷ Blossom Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary*; Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 232-237.

⁷³⁸ On the relationship between the prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, see Ilsetraut Hadot, "Les Introductions Aux Commentaires Exégétiques chez les Auteurs Néoplatoniciens et les Auteurs Chrétiens," in *Les Règles de l'interprétation*, ed. Michael Tardieu (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 99-122. For Origen's other prologues, see Ronald E. Heine, "The Introduction to Origen's Commentary on John Compared with the Introductions to the Ancient Philosophical Commentaries on Aristotle" in *Origeniana Sexta*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 3-12; Caroline Bammel, "Origen's Pauline Prefaces and the Chronology of his *Pauline Commentaries*," in *Origeniana Sexta*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 495-513; Richard Layton, *Origen as a Reader of Paul*, 331-335.

on the *Song of Songs*.⁷³⁹ The main two that concern us are the *taxis*⁷⁴⁰ of the Solomonic corpus, the order in which the works should be read, and the part of philosophy to which the work belongs. Since the two concerns are very closely related, they are treated concurrently in Origen's work.

There is an important difference between Origen's prologue and introductions to philosophical texts and corpuses. The arrangement of the texts in the Platonic and Aristotelian corpuses was not a settled issue in Origen's day. There was a fierce debate over how the philosophic texts were to be organised, as well as over which were to be included as authentic. The organisers of the Platonic corpus were able to arrange the texts to fit their own conceptions of the correct order of reading, whether based on text-critical or philosophical ideas. Origen, however, did not have the same freedom to arrange the Solomonic corpus as he saw fit: he received the texts already arranged in the Septuagint in an authoritative manner. This helps explain the otherwise potentially puzzling absence of the Wisdom of Solomon from the *taxis* of the Solomonic corpus described in the prologue.⁷⁴¹

The *taxis* of the corpus Origen received is Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Origen justifies the order of the Solomonic corpus as he finds it on account of the parts of philosophy which they instantiate: ethics, physics, and *epoptics* respectively. It is important to note that this was not the only type of classification available to him. There were other means of ordering the texts or, in Origen's case, justifying the order that were available. Arrangements could be justified on the basis of the dramatic associations within the text, as in the case of Aristophanes of Byzantium's trilogical

⁷³⁹ Ilsetraut Hadot, "Les Introductions Aux Commentaires Exégétiques," 111-112. As Ilsetraut Hadot summarises, in the fifth century C. E., there were established rules for introductions to the Isagogue; to Aristotelian philosophy; to the individual works of the Aristotelians corpus; to the philosophy of Plato; and to the individual Platonic dialogues. Each included its own set of issues commonly touched upon, and Origen's prologue does not reflect any one genre completely.

⁷⁴⁰ Since the commentary only survives in Rufinus' translation, we cannot be sure of the original terminology Origen used. It is not unlikely that he did not use what became the technical terminology for introductions in the fifth century, having written two centuries earlier. Nonetheless, for the sake of convenience and to draw attention to the parallels, I will make use of this term when describing the order of the canon in Origen's prologue.

⁷⁴¹ R. P. C. Hanson argued – and R. P. Lawson gave at least some credence to his argument – that the absence of this text, which Origen clearly viewed as authoritative and quotes as Scripture in this very commentary, from the *taxis* of the Solomonic corpus in the prologue is the consequence of a redaction made by Rufinus. See Richard P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, 46; Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (New York: Newman Press, 1957), 39 n65. As Mark Edwards notes, had he wished to include this text in his taxonomy, it may have been a good fit for the branch of logic. See Mark Edwards, "Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis," in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, ed. George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 246. Even so, Hanson's argument is unconvincing: the level of editorial activity required to remove the Wisdom of Solomon from curriculum of the prologue is far beyond what is evidenced elsewhere in Rufinus' translations; not to mention that had this been Rufinus' intention, he failed in executing it because his translation quotes Wis. 8.2 in the prologue. See *Com.Cant.* prol. 2 (SC 375, 108). Rather, its absence is best explained by the fact that Origen was bound by the Septuagint canon as he found it (see *H.E.* 6.25.2 (SC 41, 125-126)), which did not include this text.

arrangements.⁷⁴² Such associations are not entirely absent from Origen's prologue: Origen also understands the order of the Solomonic corpus and the differences between the texts in terms of the personal and spiritual development of the person of Solomon between the different works. However, this is given less emphasis than the doctrinal interpretation of the order. One of the most common arrangements of the Platonic dialogues in the first couple of centuries C.E. was according to their 'character,'⁷⁴³ probably originating in the work of Thrasyllus.⁷⁴⁴ This character arrangement divided the Platonic corpus into *hyphegetic* and *zetetic* dialogues: *hyphegetic* dialogues aimed to provide positive instruction; *zetetic* dialogues did not aim to instruct but to inquire.⁷⁴⁵ Each could be further subdivided: *hyphegetic* into the physical; logical; ethical; political; and *zetetic* into the *maieutic*; *peirastic*; *endeictic*; and *anatreptic*.⁷⁴⁶ Even those who disagreed with Thrasyllus' arrangement made use of this 'character' classification.⁷⁴⁷ Unlike in Origen's prologue, there are texts in these arrangements whose purpose is not to convey any particular doctrine but to foster important critical faculties.

Origen, however, categorises the Solomonic texts according to the types of doctrine they contain. This does not diminish the normative value of each stage. While classified according to the science they represent, each text is intended to further the spiritual growth and progress of the student. The knowledge they contain is not a passive or disinterested thing but one oriented towards the Logos, whose significance is felt behind every page of the prologue. Proverbs, containing 'moral philosophy,' contains 'rules for living': instructions in the most basic sense.⁷⁴⁸ It also teaches one to 'differentiate between true justice and right judgment.'⁷⁴⁹ In much the same manner as Gregory describes the first stage of his education, Origen suggests that the student is purified (*purificator*) by their education in moral philosophy.⁷⁵⁰ However, the position of ethics at the start of the prologue's curriculum is far more representative of Origen's thought than its placement in Gregory's *Thanksgiving Oration*. Throughout Origen's corpus, moral reformation is understood to be the foundation of spiritual and intellectual progress. As Henri Crouzel stated, in Origen's view, 'the most important subjective condition for knowledge is the moral and ascetic life.'⁷⁵¹ For instance, in his

⁷⁴² V. P. 4.50-51 (LCL 184, 320-321); 4.62 (LCL 184, 330-332).

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.* 3.49-51 (LCL 184, 320-322).

⁷⁴⁴ See Harold Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁷⁴⁵ V. P. 3.49 (LCL 184, 320).

⁷⁴⁶ The distinction between the *maieutic* and the *peirastic* is far from clear. *Endeictic* concerns one's (or Socrates's, given the dialogue context) skill in demonstrating the falsity of another's arguments, while *anatreptic* art is concerned with the overturning of opposing positions by eristic arguments.

⁷⁴⁷ See Albinus, *Prologue* 3-4 (31-32).

⁷⁴⁸ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 132).

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 134).

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 138).

⁷⁵¹ Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique,"* 409.

fifth *Homily on Judges*, Origen distinguishes the milk that Paul gives to children from the solid food reserved for the mature (see 1 Cor. 3.2):

With milk as food, the Holy Scriptures mean the first moral instruction that is given to beginners as small children. For one cannot immediately begin candidates with instruction on the deeper and more secret mysteries but they must be taught to improve their way of life, as well as to renew their morals and the first elements of a religious way of life and simple belief.⁷⁵²

The same verse of 1 Corinthians is used to describe the Son's kenotic pedagogy.⁷⁵³ The *epinoiai* that provide the starting points of the soul's relationship with the Son are associated with moral improvement: the Lord, whose commands one must follow; the Shepherd who guides his sheep; the Physician who heals the soul of its sin; and so on.⁷⁵⁴ Thus, in a passage from the third book of *Contra Celsum* already quoted above, Origen argues against Celsus's characterisation of Christians as inviting even the wicked into their fold in order to swell their ranks.⁷⁵⁵ Distinguishing between calling sinners to be healed and inviting the mature to be initiated into the mysteries of the Christian faith, Origen states that the mysteries cannot be revealed to those who have not first purified themselves of sin and lived an upright life.⁷⁵⁶ Moral instruction was consequently a fundamental aspect for catechesis.⁷⁵⁷

The aim of physics is that 'each individual thing might be examined, so that nothing in life might be done contrary to nature, but each thing might be assigned to that use for which it was produced by the Creator.'⁷⁵⁸ Origen identifies the book of Ecclesiastes as containing natural philosophy on account of the Ecclesiast's statements on the vanity of life. This, Origen assures us, simply refers to the vanity of material life and of what is fleeting, not of what is eternal and true. In *Peri Archon*, the vanity to which creation is subjected is 'nothing other than the body' and bodily existence.⁷⁵⁹ Origen appeals in that text to Eccl. 1.9-10 in order to demonstrate the distinction between the particular and the universal, which exists eternally in God's Wisdom.⁷⁶⁰ The aim of learning about the cosmos,

⁷⁵² *Hom.Jud.* 5.6 (SC 389, 144).

⁷⁵³ *Com.Jn.* 19.68 (SC 290, 88)

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 1.124 (SC 120, 124); 20.285 (SC 290, 294-296).

⁷⁵⁵ *C Cels.* 3.59 (SC 136, 136-138).

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 3.59 (SC 136, 138).

⁷⁵⁷ This process also included elementary teaching of the Christian doctrines, probably something like the rule of faith outlined in the preface to *Peri Archon*. See Benjamin A. Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 130-137. This only further demonstrates the unusual position of ethics in Gregory's account.

⁷⁵⁸ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 130).

⁷⁵⁹ *P.A.* 1.7.5 (SC 252, 218).

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 1.4.5 (SC 252, 172).

therefore, is that one may know what is true and eternal and live according to God's providential plan for creation. The aim is in keeping with the purpose given to the revelation of cosmological mysteries in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, though it has been integrated into a Greek philosophically-inspired metaphysics.

Origen speculates upon the existence of the eschatological classroom that precedes the *apokatastasis*, in which souls 'might be taught about all things which they had seen on earth and may also receive some information about things which will happen in the future.'⁷⁶¹ The contents of this instruction include the meaning of the types of Scripture and biblical history, and also of a wide range of natural phenomena, of the nature of flora and fauna, and the reasons for their existence:

... he will come to understand, also, what are the good powers and their quantity and qualities, and likewise those of the opposite kind, and what is the love of the one for humankind and the contentious rivalry of the other. He will also see what is the principle of souls and the diversity of animals, whether of those who live in the water, or of birds or beasts, and what is the cause of why every genus is divided into many species, and what was foreseen by the Creator or what meaning of his Wisdom is hidden in each thing. He will also come to understand the reason certain powers are associated with certain roots or herbs and, on the other hand, are absent from other herbs or roots...⁷⁶²

This process will be multiplied through the various spheres of the heavens that he postulates, observing all the things in each sphere and the reasons for them, before the soul passes beyond the visible heavens and comes to contemplate the invisible reality, and from there, to behold the face of God itself.⁷⁶³ The study of the natural world, therefore, is imbued with existential meaning and its phenomena are examined for the spiritual meaning they provide, rather than simply for their own sake.⁷⁶⁴

The *epoptic* science concerns 'dogmatic and mystical matters' and 'the contemplation of the divinity.'⁷⁶⁵ These two elements reflect what Christopher King refers to as the two registers of the Song of Songs: firstly, 'the words of perfect doctrine' which the Bridegroom instructs us in; and

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.* 2.11.6 (SC 252, 408).

⁷⁶² *Ibid.* 2.11.5 (SC 252, 404). Also, see *Ibid.* 2.11.7 (SC 252,410).

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.* 2.11.6-7 (SC 252,408-412).

⁷⁶⁴ This is in keeping with the outlook of Greek philosophers. See Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 316-322. This perhaps excludes the encyclopaedic pursuits of Peripatetics, which are most difficult to categorise into Pierre Hadot's thesis.

⁷⁶⁵ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 138).

secondly, the union of the Bride-soul with the Bridegroom.⁷⁶⁶ The context of this union is thoroughly eschatological in nature.⁷⁶⁷ The Song of Songs is not simply the height of Christian doctrinal education, but experientially transformative, giving the perfected Christian soul a glimpse into the eschatological beatitude.

In addition to these three, there is the case of logic. As stated above, Origen equivocates somewhat on the position of logic, suggesting some include it as a fourth branch of philosophy while others intertwine it within the other sciences.⁷⁶⁸ The latter is Origen's preferred solution. Gregory's education began with training in dialectics and logical works were often placed at the beginning of literary corpuses, as the *Organon* was in the Aristotelian corpus and in Neoplatonic reading curricula.⁷⁶⁹ While the first work of the Solomonic corpus is primarily focussed on ethics, the importance of logic at the beginning of one's education was not overlooked by Solomon. Hence, at the very opening of his first text, he gives it the name 'Proverbs'; a proverb being a saying where 'one thing is openly said, and another inwardly meant.'⁷⁷⁰ The 'rational science' is disclosed in the book of Proverbs by the exposition of 'vast and perfect meanings in succinct and brief sentences,'⁷⁷¹ allowing one to understand the various different modes of enigmatic expression contained within the Scriptures. The Christian logical science, therefore, is primarily a hermeneutical one.⁷⁷² Even this hermeneutical science, however, is not without an affective aspect. By meditating on the divine words of Scripture, the Christian interpreter 'stretches out his words' (Prov. 1.24) in his heart, the centre of humans' intellectual capacities. They are able to stretch out their words because God graces them with fuller hearts as a result of their engagement with his Logos in Scripture.⁷⁷³ Such is the inspiration of Scripture that even in cases in which one is unable to discern any appropriate

⁷⁶⁶ Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 206-214. Also, see John D. Dawson, "Allegorical Reading and the Embodiment of the Soul in Origen," in *Christian Origins*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 26-28; Marguerite Harl, "Les Trois Livres de Salomon," 254-255.

⁷⁶⁷ See Chapter Five below.

⁷⁶⁸ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 128-130). The same equivocation is evident in a catena on Lamentations. See *Frag.Lam.* (GCS 6, 241).

⁷⁶⁹ See below for its their placement in Andronicus of Rhodes's organisation of the Aristotelian canon.

⁷⁷⁰ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 132). The hermeneutic significance of this understanding of the rational science will be discussed below.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 134-136).

⁷⁷² See Marguerite Harl, "Les Trois Livres de Salomon," 252; Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie*, 24; Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 168-169; Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 79; Robert Somos, *Logic and Argumentation in Origen*, 22-24.

⁷⁷³ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 136). See Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 168-169.

meaning within a biblical passage, even the act of meditating on its words is beneficial to the reader.⁷⁷⁴

Therefore, these parts of philosophy and the texts which contain them need to be arranged in the order in which the Septuagint presents them. One cannot read the Song of Songs without being prepared for this most difficult text by training in the other philosophical sciences: ethics purifies the student and gives him the necessary knowledge to distinguish good from evil, while physics teaches the student to distinguish true from false, eternal from fleeting.⁷⁷⁵ As a result, one can approach the study of *epoptics*, the apperception of the divine, having been purified from one's past sin that tainted the eye and knowing clearly to what one must turn one's gaze.

In categorising the Solomonic corpus according to the different branches of philosophy, Origen's practice appears in keeping with Porphyry's composition of Plotinus' *Enneads*, composed later in the third century, and with Andronicus' arrangement of the Aristotelian corpus in the first century B.C.E. As Porphyry recounts in the *Life of Plotinus*, he arranged the *Enneads* by subject matter.⁷⁷⁶ He explicitly states that he followed the example of Andronicus of Rhodes in his editorial activity.⁷⁷⁷ Andronicus' organisation of the Aristotelian corpus, which likely served some inspiration for Thrasyllus' work as well,⁷⁷⁸ divided the works into the exoteric treatises (the now lost Aristotelian dialogues); the esoteric treatises, which correspond largely to the works that have passed down to us; then loosely associated material made up of notes, propositions, and other miscellanea; the *Constitution of the Athenians*; and finally, his correspondences.⁷⁷⁹ Taking the esoteric material, the treatises are arranged beginning with the group of logical works that became known as the *Organon*, followed by works of ethics, then those on poetics and rhetoric, and finally those on theoretics, subdivided into physics and metaphysics. If one were to ignore poetics and rhetoric, subjects about which Origen had mixed opinions, the outline is similar to that found in Origen's prologue, though logic and ethics have been combined by Origen in the book of Proverbs.

⁷⁷⁴ See Marguerite Harl, "La langage de l'expérience religieuse chez les pères grecs," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 15 (1977): 14-16; Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 179-181; Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), 76-77.

⁷⁷⁵ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 132 and 138)

⁷⁷⁶ *Vit. Plot.* 24 (48).

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 24 (48).

⁷⁷⁸ Harold Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism*, 57.

⁷⁷⁹ I am reliant for this reconstruction on the works of Paul Moraux, *Les Listes Anciennes des Ouvrages d'Aristote* (Louvain: Éditions Universitaires de Louvain, 1951), 306-310; Ingemar Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Göteborg: Elanders, 1957), 221-231, 241-246.

The similarities between Origen's interpretation of the Solomonic corpus and Porphyry's arrangement of the *Enneads* have been noted by Ilsetraut Hadot and Mark Edwards.⁷⁸⁰ Porphyry arranged Plotinus's treatises into six *Enneads*, subdivided into three sections. The first section contains Ennead One, concerning ethics, and Enneads Two and Three, concerning cosmology; the second section, containing Enneads Four and Five, concerns the soul, the intellect, and the Ideas; and the third section, the sixth Ennead, contains the logical treatises⁷⁸¹ and those on the One.⁷⁸² Mark Edwards relates this arrangement to Origen's hermeneutic distinction between the bodily, the psychic, and the spiritual senses of Scripture.⁷⁸³ The association of the latter two senses with sections two and three are easy enough, but the association of the body of Scripture with the second and third Enneads is difficult to reconcile.⁷⁸⁴ Furthermore, it is the second section that most of Plotinus' works on intellectual vision are found.⁷⁸⁵ However, for Origen, the intellectual vision of the divine, the *epopteia*, is the final stage of the curriculum.⁷⁸⁶ Consequently, despite clear similarities existing between the two, no precise correspondence can be drawn.

3.4. *The curriculum of the prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs as mystagogy*

A closer parallel is found in the work of Theon of Smyrna who categorised the course of Platonic education in terms explicitly compared to the course of the initiation process into the Eleusinian mysteries. In the introduction to the *Expositio*, Theon outlines the five stages of the curriculum by direct comparison with the initiation practices used in the Eleusinian mysteries. He describes the five stages of initiation as:

- 1) a preliminary purification;
- 2) the communication of the sacred tradition (the παράδοσις⁷⁸⁷), which he describes as the initiation proper;

⁷⁸⁰ Ilsetraut Hadot, "Les Introductions Aux Commentaires Exégétiques," 116-117; Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 51 n. 309.

⁷⁸¹ The position of these logical treatises in the final *Ennead* is a reflection of the identification of logic with Platonic dialectics and their resulting ultimate position in the order of sciences, as exemplified in the words of Atticus.

⁷⁸² *Vit. Plot.* 24-26 (48-53).

⁷⁸³ Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints*, 51 n. 309.

⁷⁸⁴ Especially if, as Edwards argues elsewhere, the soul of Scripture primarily concerns cosmological truths. See Mark Edwards, "Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis," 247-248.

⁷⁸⁵ Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints*, 51 n. 308.

⁷⁸⁶ Edwards himself associates the discussions of intellectual vision in the second section with the *epoptic* stage of Theon's educative schema. See Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints*, 47 n. 279.

⁷⁸⁷ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 69.

- 3) the *epopteia*;
- 4) the placement of crowns upon the initiates, who are then capable of transmitting the sacred tradition to others;
- 5) finally, companionship with the Deity.⁷⁸⁸

While Theon outlines five stages in the initiation process, others attest to only the first three.⁷⁸⁹

Drawing on the educative schema outlined by Plato in *Rep.* VII,⁷⁹⁰ Theon outlines the corresponding Platonic education as follows:

- 1) the mathematical sciences (arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, astronomy, and music);
- 2) the logical, political, and natural sciences;
- 3) the *epopteia*; the occupation of the spirit with true existence and with the ideas;
- 4) the philosophers activity as teacher and pedagogue;
- 5) the achievement of a godlike state.⁷⁹¹

While Theon's schema is fivefold, the first three bear important resemblances to Origen's prologue: a purificatory first stage, the inclusion of natural sciences in the second, followed by the *epoptic* perception of the Ideas and of true being.⁷⁹² Parallels can also be adduced to Porphyry's arrangement.⁷⁹³ In making this comparison to mystery initiations, the non-dogmatic roles of the first two stages in purifying and orienting the soul are made paramount. It also reinforces the importance of undertaking each in their proper order, as the initiation couldn't be undertaken without first being purified.

There are, nonetheless, important differences between the two cases, beyond the obvious question of the number of stages. In the curriculum developed by Theon and in the pedagogy of book VII of the *Republic*, the purification is enacted through the mathematical sciences. Theon, misquoting *Rep.* 7, 537d, describes the mathematical sciences as purifying the eye of the soul.⁷⁹⁴ Their purificatory

⁷⁸⁸ Theon, *Expositio* (14-15).

⁷⁸⁹ Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 36.33 (LCL 358, 450); *Strom.* 5.71.1 (SC 278, 142). Riedweg correctly argues that Theon's account of the mystery has been adapted to suit his philosophical needs. See Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 125-130.

⁷⁹⁰ This schema was possibly mediated by Thrasyllus' tetralogical arrangement. See Harold Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism*, 68-84.

⁷⁹¹ Theon, *Expositio* (15-16).

⁷⁹² This has also been highlighted by both Mark Edwards and Ilsetraut Hadot. See Ilsetraut Hadot, "Les Introductions Aux Commentaires Exégétiques," 116-117; Mark Edwards, "Precursors of Origen's Hermeneutic Theory," *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 235-236. Riedweg makes a similar observation with regards to Clement and *Strom.* 5.70.7-5.71.2 (SC 278, 142). Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie*, 6, 125.

⁷⁹³ Mark Edwards makes this association, saying that Plotinus' arrangement appears to combine the first two stages and ignored the fourth. Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints*, 47 n. 279.

⁷⁹⁴ Theon, *Expositio* (3). Also, see *Strom.* 6.90.4-6.91.1 (SC 446, 242-244).

potential lies in the way in which orient the soul away from the fleeting world of sense. Clement summarises their role as follows:

Thus, he [Socrates] does not allow that encyclical paideia has its fulfilment in the Good, but it assists the soul in its awakening and its exercise towards noetic things.⁷⁹⁵

Arithmetic 'raises the soul to pure intelligence, and leads it to the contemplation of being'⁷⁹⁶; the study of astronomy causes the soul to look heavenward and away from earthly existence⁷⁹⁷; and music, the study of harmony, encourages investigation of the good and beautiful.⁷⁹⁸ These studies certainly have a morally transformative effect by directing attention to what is true and beautiful, but their purificatory effect is more focussed on the student's mental processes than their conduct. There is, therefore, a clear difference between this method of purification and that of Origen's prologue. In fact, in orienting the soul away from earthly existence, this mathematical purification has more in common with the role of Ecclesiastes and natural philosophy in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Perhaps this helps to explain the otherwise unusual (for Origen) placement of physics in the *Thanksgiving Oration*, especially as it is associated there with geometry and astronomy.⁷⁹⁹

In Origen's prologue, moral instruction holds the place of the purificatory stage, not the mathematical sciences. Ethical discourses have a similar position in the arrangement of the *Enneads*, though Porphyry does not use purificatory terminology. The focus of purification in Origen is on the amendment of one's conduct and habits.⁸⁰⁰ The second major difference is Origen's identification of the *epopteia* with the *telos* of Christian pedagogy. Much as in the *Life of Plotinus*, the visionary element – the *epopteia* – is not the climax of Theon's educative schema and is not the moment of deification. Origen is not alone in his treatment of the *epopteia*. It forms the climax of Diotima's mystagogy in the *Symposium*.⁸⁰¹ His predecessor Clement states that when one experiences the great mysteries which come after purification and *paradosis*, 'nothing remains to be learned of the universe, but only to contemplate and comprehend nature and what is real.'⁸⁰² For Origen, the vision

⁷⁹⁵ *Strom.* 1.93.5 (SC 30, 119).

⁷⁹⁶ *Rep.* 7.526B (LCL 276, 148). Also, see *Rep.* 7.525C-D (LCL 276, 144-146), where the study of arithmetic is said to lead to consideration of being outside of what is visible, tangible, and transitory, and Theon, *Expositio* (4-5), where the study of unity and number is said to awaken our intelligence and lead to knowledge of truth.

⁷⁹⁷ *Rep.* 7.529A (LCL 276, 158). Theon, *Expositio* (5, 9-10).

⁷⁹⁸ *Rep.* 7.531B-C (LCL 276, 166). Theon, *Expositio*, (5-6).

⁷⁹⁹ The purification described in the *Thanksgiving Oration* focuses on the cleansing of his mental processes and his mistaken beliefs. This is not accomplished through the mathematical sciences, however, but through dialectics.

⁸⁰⁰ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 130, 136).

⁸⁰¹ See Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 70 n.18.

⁸⁰² *Strom.* 5.71.1 (SC 278, 142).

and the deification cannot be separated, since the revelation beheld is itself eschatological, a vision of and union with God when he is 'all in all.'

4. Education and Scripture

Christian education centred on the Christian Scriptures. This is demonstrated in the prologue where the curriculum is instantiated within the *taxis* of Christian texts. Scriptural pedagogy is not reserved solely within these three texts and nor are the different stages of that pedagogy separated according to different books of the Bible. As Origen repeatedly makes clear, three tiers of edification are discernible in nearly every sentence of Scripture; the exception being the minority of sentences or passages that have no edifying bodily sense such as the Song of Songs itself.

Clearly, a close analogy exists between the three tiers of the Solomonic corpus in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and the three senses of Scripture for which Origen is famous.⁸⁰³ How closely they can be identified, however, is more difficult to discern. The Song of Songs maps very closely onto the spirit of Scripture: it is a bodiless text, the highest stage of the Solomonic pedagogy, and closely associated with the spirit.⁸⁰⁴ The bodily reading of Scripture relates to ethical precepts of instructional or legal passages and the bare narrative of historical ones.⁸⁰⁵ This makes its identity with Proverbs fairly easy, given the lack of any narrative sense resulting from Proverbs' particular style and aims.

The equation of natural philosophy with the soul of Scripture is the most difficult, not least because the precise contents or register of the psychic meaning is the hardest to identify. It is another figurative sense of Scripture but differentiated from the spiritual figurative sense. However, as has widely been noted among scholars, Origen often forgoes a second figurative sense when interpreting a scriptural passage. It is referred to as the 'moral' sense of Scripture in Rufinus' translations but this rendering is unattested in the extant Greek. Clearly, the body of Scripture must be understood to be ethical in some sense since it is full of direct moral instructions and laws. The only explicit example Origen gives of the psychic sense is to quote Paul's words from 1 Cor. 9.9-10.⁸⁰⁶ As Edwards argues, the example alone gives little indication of nature or contents the soul of

⁸⁰³ The most famous example being *P.A.* 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310-316).

⁸⁰⁴ See Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*. Also, see Chapter Five on the relation between the song, the spiritual reading of Scripture, and the *apokatastasis*.

⁸⁰⁵ The association of the body with moral and historical content draws particular parallels with Clement's division of Mosaic philosophy in *Strom.* 1.176.1 (SC 30, 173).

⁸⁰⁶ *P.A.* 4.2.6 (SC 268, 318-320).

Scripture since Origen does not explain it.⁸⁰⁷ Edwards forwards the argument that the soul of scripture should naturally convey knowledge proper to the soul of the reader and appeals to the knowledge of the cosmos that the soul must attain after death, as described *Peri Archon* 2.11.7.⁸⁰⁸ Only after it has perceived the reasons for each of the natural phenomena in the cosmos is the soul able to behold God face to face, whereupon it will cease to be a soul and will be restored to the state of intellect.

There is yet another threefold division which Origen utilises which further bolsters this argument; that with which we started this investigation: the division of 1 Cor. 12.8-9 between faith, gnosis, and wisdom. The scriptural body and spirit are hermeneutical functions of faith and wisdom respectively. Though there is unfortunately no full examination of this tripartite hierarchy, there is a clear link between the concept of gnosis and the type of natural philosophy Origen describes in the prologue. Following C. P. Bammel's rendering of the text,⁸⁰⁹ Origen defines gnosis in a catena on 1 Corinthians as 'the knowledge of the composition of the universe and of the activity of elements and times.'⁸¹⁰ Furthermore, in another catena, while asserting that knowledge of mysteries is really a special subset of gnosis, Origen states that 'I believe gnosis to be what is known concerning manifest things.'⁸¹¹ Gnosis, therefore, is or includes knowledge of the cosmos.⁸¹² While not definitive, the fact that Origen associates the middle tier of another three-tiered schema with cosmology strongly suggests this is a reasonable identification for the soul of Scripture. As the example of Ecclesiastes

⁸⁰⁷ Mark Edwards, "Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis," 247.

⁸⁰⁸ P.A. 2.11.7 (SC 252, 410-412). Mark Edwards, "Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis," 247-249.

⁸⁰⁹ Caroline P. Bammel, "Origen's Definitions of Prophecy and Gnosis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (Oct. 1989): 489-493. Claire Hall's recent monograph argues against Bammel's amendment, arguing that this knowledge should in fact be understood under the concept of prophecy. Hall argues that 'prophecy is a type of knowledge for Origen' and so there is no need to amend the text. However, given the frequent link between wisdom and gnosis in Origen's work and the clear quotation of Wis. 7.17-18 in this definition, I believe Bammel's amendment to be preferable. It is important to recognise that Origen's more technical statements and attempted definitions, which is what we find here, do not necessarily align completely with his actual usages. Thus, Hall correctly notes the importance of knowledge and teaching within Origen's understanding of prophecy, though with regards to how Origen defines it as a specific genre of biblical speech, what distinguishes prophecy is above all its predictive capability. However, even if one does accept the unamended text, the use of gnosis language in this text would nonetheless demonstrate the importance of the Wisdom of Solomon's cosmological speculation with regards to the contents of gnosis. See Claire Hall, *Origen and Prophecy*, 20-21.

⁸¹⁰ *Frag.1Cor.* 55 (4, 36).

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.* 49 (4, 33).

⁸¹² As noted in the Introduction, Origen's use of any term is rarely universally applied or technical in nature. Therefore, there are examples in which Origen applies the term gnosis to things that fall outside this purview. Most notably, in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen interprets the words of Song 1.8, 'Unless you know yourself' (ἀν μὴ γνῶς σεαυτήν), in terms of the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν. Included in this self knowledge (*scientia*, doubtless a translation of γνῶσις) is not only knowledge of one's own dispositions, of the cosmos, and of the nature of the soul, but also of the Trinity, the 'principal function of knowledge' (*principale munus scientiae*). See *Com.Cant.* 2.5 (SC 375, 366). Origen's interpretation here is clearly guided by the language of his source.

demonstrates, this doesn't mean that the psychic sense of Scripture is without moral or spiritual importance. Knowledge of the cosmos and of what is true and what is false is important in orienting the soul towards good, and so will have normative importance in the current life of the Church and of the soul.

The Solomonic curriculum and the three senses of Scripture are not quite identical, however. There is little in Origen's words to suggest that the natural philosophy of Ecclesiastes is delivered via figurative means. The statements that 'all is vanity' and that 'there is nothing new under the sun' are interpreted straightforwardly. Furthermore, the association of Proverbs with logic complicates its identification with the bodily sense. While the body of Scripture is the 'obvious interpretation' of the text,⁸¹³ the book of Proverbs hides 'vast and perfect meanings in succinct and brief sentences.'⁸¹⁴ The form associated with Proverbs is not that which is associated most readily with the bodily sense of Scripture. This appears to be a difficulty foisted upon Origen's interpretative schema by the idiosyncrasies of the Solomonic texts that he found himself compelled to rationalise according to their pedagogic contents. The two schemas are, therefore, two ways of formulating the crucial pedagogic heart of Origen's theological project: that of spiritual progress within the Christian life, from faith towards perfect knowledge.

The threefold Solomonic corpus and the three senses of Scripture demonstrate the importance of the development of interpretative skills within Christian education. Gregory praises Origen for his wisdom in elucidating enigmatic and obscure sayings in Scripture. Introducing its reader to variegated forms of speech, Proverbs teaches the difference between the parables, obscure sayings, words of the wise, and riddles (Prov. 1.6) and thus the ability to perceive the proper meanings of scriptural sayings.⁸¹⁵ Its location at the initial stage of instruction follows the pattern for the placement of logic among Greek philosophers and Neoplatonic corpus organisers. The function in the prologue, however, is subtly different. Rather than providing the means to critically assess arguments and propositions, thus preparing the student for the positive doctrines of ethics, physics, and so on, the logic of Proverbs provides the means to interpret scriptural sayings in order to prepare the Christian reader to be able to seek out the doctrines that are otherwise hidden.

The Book of Proverbs, therefore, serves a dual function: ethical instruction and logical training. Concerning the order of the Solomonic corpus, Origen says:

⁸¹³ *P.A.* 4.2.4 (SC 268, 318).

⁸¹⁴ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 136).

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 134-136).

For that reason, this book is kept last, so that one comes to it with their customs having been cleansed, and having learnt knowledge and the distinction between corruptible and incorruptible things, in order that nothing in these figures concerning the Bride and her celestial Bridegroom – that is, of the love of the perfect soul for the Word of God – might offend them.⁸¹⁶

The exegetical importance of the first two stages is made transparent in these words: one cannot study the *epoptic* science contained in the Song of Songs without deciphering the potential stumbling-blocks of its erotic language. It is not only for the doctrines of the Song that students require preparation: the language in which those doctrines are hidden is potentially dangerous if one is not properly trained in the interpretative art. Therefore, the study of logic, the meaning of terms and phrases, is crucial. However, the other two preliminary sciences, ethics and physics, also maintain important exegetical functions.

It is a common refrain in Origen's work that moral instruction must be prior to the elucidation of obscure passages and sayings in Scripture. After all, the body of scripture is associated with the literal moral precepts of the text which is required before one is able to perceive the spirit through allegorical interpretation. The necessity of moral reform for spiritual exegesis is no more than a specific instance of Origen's broader theological outlook which conditions contemplative understanding upon moral virtue. In his first *Homily on the Seventy-Seventh Psalm*, Origen discusses the order of the narrative in Matthew's Gospel.⁸¹⁷ In a fashion very similar to that found in the prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, he justifies the placement of the parables discourse in Matt. 13 after the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) by way of its pedagogical order. The parables could not have been delivered earlier, as it is only on account of the moral instruction received through the sermon that one is able to receive the parables in the correct manner and properly understand them:

So too our Saviour and Lord, when creating with the order of teaching (τῆς διδασκαλίας ποιούμενος τὴν τάξιν), did not begin with parables or mysteries but with a code of law and teaching, as it were.⁸¹⁸

Therefore, moral purification was not only crucial to any sense of spiritual progress that was required in the pursuit of the spiritual sense of scripture: it was also a guide for the interpretative

⁸¹⁶ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 138-140).

⁸¹⁷ Origen, *Homily on Ps. 77*, 1.1-6 (GCS n.f. 19, 293-305). See Ronald Heine's introduction in Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. and trans. Ronald E. Heine, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20-24.

⁸¹⁸ *Hom.Ps.77* 1.5 (GCS n.f. 19, 360).

process. The Scriptures are full of enigmatic sayings and passages open to numerous possible interpretations, and many of them, such as the erotically charged Song of Songs, could easily rouse morally questionable ideas. A foundational education in ethics provides important limits on the possible meanings of the text, since the divinely inspired Scriptures could not advocate for immoral precepts or doctrines.⁸¹⁹

The education of the book of Ecclesiastes is also vitally important in developing one's interpretative skills. Again, the ability to perceive what is true and what is fleeting is important not only in life but also in distinguishing in Scripture the spirit of what is said, which is true and eternal, from the body, which needn't even be true. As Christopher King argues, physics include the study of natural and the varieties of things and living beings found within it: precisely the sort of knowledge useful in deciphering the many references to plants and animals that are common in the Song of Songs, and indeed, in all of Scripture.⁸²⁰

Education in interpretative skill is undertaken through the very reading of Scripture for which that skill is necessary. After all, it is the biblical book of Proverbs that teaches this science. In *Peri Archon*, Origen highlights the 'stumbling-blocks' (σκάνδαλα) that the Logos placed within the text of Scripture as a means by which the Scriptures themselves highlight the requirement to look deeper into its words because they contain more than a surface meaning.⁸²¹ The same function is given to the 'silver inlays' in the 'likenesses of gold' of Song 1.11, which is figuratively interpreted as referring to Scripture. The silver represents 'some sparks of spiritual understanding cast into their souls.'⁸²² It is present only in 'inlays' – small disjunctions in the text – in order to invoke desire within the reader to understand the whole text in a manner that transforms it from likenesses of gold into true silver.⁸²³ The enigmas, obscure sayings, proverbs, and parables all likewise act a spurs for deeper investigation.⁸²⁴ Since Scripture is instrumental in teaching the methods of interpretation needed for spiritual progress, the framework of Christian education is one of progressively deeper engagement with Scripture. Scripture incrementally opens new aspects of itself to its reader by incrementally teaching the skills necessary for each stage, drawing the soul deeper and deeper into its inner meanings and closer and closer to the divine Word.

⁸¹⁹ See Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 162-167, who makes much the same argument.

⁸²⁰ Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 169-170.

⁸²¹ *P.A.* 4.2.9 (SC 268, 334-340). Also, see Harry Lines, "The Self-Sufficiency of Scripture."

⁸²² *Com.Cant.* 2.8 (SC 375, 428).

⁸²³ See Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 159-164.

⁸²⁴ *C Cels.* 3.45 (SC 136, 108).

The virtue of wisdom, therefore, is built upon a foundation of moral purity, an understanding of the distinction between spiritual/noetic and material matters, and upon a deep understanding of Scripture and its multifaceted meanings and forms of edification. Fundamental to Origen's conception of Christianity were the gradations of revelation and concomitant degrees of understanding that characterise the conditions of the Christian Church and of individual Christian souls. The graduated character of creation, therefore, necessitated a graduated form of education. In the Introduction, the instrumental character of practical virtue in the pursuit of the contemplative was noted and this clearly shaped how Origen conceived of Christian education. Time and again, Origen prioritised moral purity as the starting point towards the virtue of wisdom, both because such works encourage divine grace to be dispensed upon the moral soul, allowing for greater understanding of hidden spiritual matters, and because the knowledge of what is good circumscribes the limits of acceptable speculation and orients the soul's desire to the correct ends. Questions of desire are closely tied to those of rationality and understanding in Origen's work. His understanding of pedagogy has been seen to be deeply affective: Christian education not only seeks to inform its students but also to transform them. This is evident above all in the erotic mysticism of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which draws all these considerations together. The sensible media of the physical scriptural text and its audible words must be transcended, guided by ethical and cosmological considerations, to understand its deeper mysteries and draw the soul into the personal intimacy of Solomon's wedding-song. Without this education, undertaken both by the divine Logos through multiple media and by the more advanced and spiritual Christian, rational creatures would be left at best in a state of unreasoned acceptance of God's message and unable to fulfil the *telos* for which they were created. The nature of this *telos* and how it informs the tenor Origen's mystical theology shall be examined in greater detail shortly in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: The Eschatological Orientation of Wisdom

The mystical register of the Song of Songs and the *epoptic* character of the pinnacle of Christian education noted in the previous chapter must be understood within the context of Origen's eschatological epistemology. Origen understood the end of creation in profoundly epistemic terms and the eschatological condition of rational creatures as the fulfilment of all epistemic activity. The mystical theology and erotic union of the Song's epithalamium, therefore, acts as a prefiguration of the condition of all souls at the end of God's redemptive economy, when all will be reunited in contemplation of God. Any pursuit of wisdom, therefore, a pursuit of the *telos* of the entire rational cosmos and, therefore, we shall see that the virtue of wisdom is ultimately and in its strictest sense the reserve of this eschatological state.

This chapter will be devoted to exploring how this eschatological horizon conditions Origen's understanding of aretological wisdom. Of course, this eschatological state will be quite different to our current human condition, one in which the intellectual aspect of the human being comes to the fore and humankind becomes characterised in an entirely spiritual and rational manner. The unitive nature of this state entails that our epistemic condition in the eschaton – and so the virtue of wisdom as well – will be characterised by a form of knowledge that transcends all our current propositional and conceptual reasoning. Wisdom, it will be seen and in accordance with the mystical tendencies of Origen's theology highlighted particularly by Crouzel, is a direct apprehension of the divine and of the divine realities contained therein.

1. Wisdom and Eschatology

The scope of the Song of Songs outlined in Origen's prologue is not only understood in terms of the spiritualisation of the soul and its eros for God, but also as an anticipation of the future reality for which rational creatures are destined. The two are much the same; the heavenly reality that transcends our present perceptible world is precisely that envisioned as its *telos* and consummation. As Barret says concerning the tradition of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism:

The secrets in which apocalyptic deals are not simply secrets of the future—of the Age to Come; they include secrets of the present state of the heavenly world. Indeed these two mysteries, of heaven and the future, are very closely allied, since in apocalyptic the

significant future is the breaking into this world of the heavenly world, and to know what now is in heaven is in consequence almost the same as knowing what will be on earth.⁸²⁵

The influence of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions upon Origen's own brand of philosophic-mystical theology should not be underplayed. De Conick highlights the mystical aspects of Jewish apocalypticism and argues that the embryonic mystical strain of theology in the early Christian movement developed primarily out of this tradition.⁸²⁶ John McGuckin summarises nicely Origen's reception of and contribution to this tradition:

Origen who sees the implication on a single metaphysical canvas, and tries to translate the Eschaton, a fundamental Semitic vision of a moral philosophy of history, into Hellenistically recognizable categories of teleological ontology and metaphysics.⁸²⁷

While utilising the ontological categories of contemporary philosophical schools, especially Platonism and Neopythagoreanism, Origen put these tools to the explication of the eschatological thought, both realised and futurist, received from the Christian Scriptures.⁸²⁸

The eschatological register of the Song of Songs in Origen's understanding is made clear in his discussion of the titles given to Solomon in the three texts of the Solomonic corpus. In Proverbs, he is described as 'Solomon, son of David, who reigned in Israel' (Prov. 1.1); in Ecclesiastes, 'the Ecclesiast, the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem' (Eccl. 1.1); while in the Song of Songs, he is described simply as 'Solomon' (Song 1.1). These changes are explained by the progress of Solomon as author, and so of the Solomon's reader also, as he advances from one stage of education to the next. The author of Proverbs is situated in Israel since, on account of their faith, the reader of Proverbs and the recipient of ethical instruction is part of the figurative nation of Israel. Jerusalem represents the heavenly Jerusalem, which one reaches after ridding oneself of one's worldly concerns.

When all things have truly come to perfection and the perfect Bride – that is, the entire rational creation – is married to him, because he has made peace not only with the things

⁸²⁵ Charles K. Barrett, "New Testament Eschatology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 2 (1953): 138-139.

⁸²⁶ April De Conick, "What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April De Conick (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 18-22.

⁸²⁷ John A. McGuckin, "Origen's Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Origen*, ed. Ronald E. Heine and Karen Jo Torjesen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 411. Also, see See Panayiotes Tzamalikos, *Origen: The Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 196-198.

⁸²⁸ On Origen's meditation on the tension between realised and futurist eschatologies, see Richard A. Layton, *Origen as a Reader of Paul*, 236-245; Richard A. Layton, "Recovering Origen's Pauline Exegesis: Exegesis and Eschatology in the *Commentary on Ephesians*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2000): 382-386. Layton notes that Origen interprets realised eschatological statements in the Epistle to the Ephesians in terms of the noetic system which, as we have seen, draw heavily upon Greek philosophical models.

which are on earth but also those in heaven through his blood, then he is called only Solomon, when he will have handed over the kingdom to God and the Father, when purged every principality and power. For he must reign until his enemies are placed under his feet and death, the last enemy, is destroyed. Thus, when all things have been pacified and subjected to the Father, when God is all in all (1 Cor. 15.28), then he will be called only Solomon – that is, only peaceable.⁸²⁹

The language in this passage clearly invokes Origen's famous (or infamous) doctrine of *apokatastasis*, presenting significant parallels with Origen's account in *Peri Archon*.⁸³⁰ As Christopher King notes, while Origen interprets the titles of Solomon in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in spatial terms, that of the Song of Songs is temporally located.⁸³¹ The Solomon of Proverbs exists in Israel, that of Ecclesiastes exists in Jerusalem, but that of the Song of Songs exists only when the perfection of all things has been achieved. It is not a case of where Solomon is in this text, but when. The spiritual understanding of the Song of Songs is properly located at the end of the ages, when all things have been united with the Son; when all sin and sinners have been reformed; and when creation has been subjected to the Father, such that God exists as 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15.28).

The *telos* of Christian education, therefore, is union with God; participation in him in such a way that he is 'all in all.'⁸³² The purpose for which God created rational creatures was so that they might be 'capable of understanding him worthily (*eum digne capere possent*).'⁸³³ It was for this reason that God created humankind in the image of God, which is the seed of rational participation in and understanding of God.⁸³⁴ Origen believed the soul's very desire for this understanding to be humanity's guarantee of the fulfilment of wisdom in the age to come. God would not have

⁸²⁹ *Com.Cant.* prol. 4 (SC 375, 160).

⁸³⁰ Christopher J. King notes the numerous similarities between the language and concepts present in this passage and those found in Origen's extended account of the *apokatastasis* in *P.A.* 3.6 (SC 268, 234-254). See Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture*, 234-240. On Origen's doctrine of the *apokatastasis*, see Henri Crouzel, "L'apocatastase chez Origène," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1985), 282-90; Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); 1-221; Ilaria Ramelli, "Harmony between *Arkhē* and *Telos* in Patristic Platonism and the Imagery of Astronomical Harmony Applied to Apokatastasis," *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 7, no. 1 (2013): 1-49; Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan," ; Ilaria Ramelli, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61, no. 3 (2007): 313-356; etc.

⁸³¹ Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 235.

⁸³² Alviar makes a similar observation *vis-à-vis* Origen's understanding of Christians' vocation: 'A striking parallelism thus emerges between Origen's vision of the *Christian's* goal, and his vision of the final end of *man as such*. In our author's mind there is a substantial identity between the goal that God proposes to prospective converts to Christianity, and the goal He offers to spiritual beings at the beginning.' José Alviar, *Klesis*, 69.

⁸³³ *P.A.* 4.4.8 (SC 268, 420).

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.* 4.4.9 (SC 268, 426).

implanted this desire into humankind without a purpose and God's will cannot fail to be realised.⁸³⁵ Therefore, the desire (*desiderium*) and love (*amorem*) for knowledge points towards its eventual fulfilment. It is precisely for these same reasons that the rational soul cannot be destroyed, since were a rational creature to perish, it would be a negation of God's will in bringing that creature into existence in the first place.⁸³⁶ The importance of pedagogy and education to Origen's theological worldview could hardly be demonstrated more starkly than this. The *telos* of Christian education is one and the same as the *telos* of creation as a whole.

Perfect wisdom and understanding, therefore, do not belong to our present condition; they will only be fulfilled at the end of the ages. This is a recurrent theme in Origen's work, drawing heavily from 1 Cor. 13. In our present life humankind can only know 'in part' (1 Cor. 13.9) and 'through a glass darkly' (1 Cor. 13.12).⁸³⁷ When Origen contemplates the meaning of Ps. 36.30 LXX in the fifth *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Six*, he takes seriously the future tense of the words 'The mouth of the just will meditate wisdom.' The verse is first contextualised in Christological and exegetical terms: it is Christ who is the Wisdom of God and his words that are meditated on by the just.⁸³⁸ The reason for the use of the future tense μελετήσῃ (translated as *meditabitur* by Rufinus) is as follows:

However, it does not seem without reason that he did not say "the mouth of the just meditates wisdom," which could certainly be considered to refer to the present tense, but said "will meditate wisdom," because without doubt it looks towards the future, upon which all the translators except one agree.⁸³⁹

The mouth of the just *will* meditate wisdom in the future because it cannot do so, at least not fully, in its present condition. In this future,

The mouth of the just is filled neither with food and drink, nor delicacies and pleasures, nor by enjoying feasts, but by meditating on wisdom. No longer will anyone be unskilled in the Kingdom of God, nor will they remain ignorant, no one will be a stranger from the

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.* 2.11.4 (SC 252, 400-402).

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.* 3.6.5 (SC 268, 244-246); 4.4.9 (SC 268, 422-4).

⁸³⁷ See *Ibid.* 2.3.2 (SC 252, 254-256); 2.6.7 (SC 252, 324); 2.11.6-7 (SC 252, 408-412); *De Orat.* 25.2 (GCS 3, 358); *Com.Jn.* 2.229 (SC 120, 229); 13.58 (SC 222, 62); *Com.Rom.* 3.2.17 (SC 539, 74); 10.9.2-10.3 (SC 555, 324-328); *Com.Matt.* 12.6 (GCS 40, 77-78); *Hom.Num.* 23.11 (SC 461, 140-146); *Hom.Lev.* 5.9 (SC 286, 246-248); 7.2 (SC 286, 320); *Hom.Josh.* 6.1 (SC 71, 182-184); *Hom.Ps.38* 1.11 (SC 411, 362-368); *Frag.Eph.* 5 (I, 239-241); etc. Clement also utilises this verse in this manner, though with greater emphasis upon the obscuring effect of the body and the senses. See *Strom.* 1.94.4-6 (SC 30, 119-120); 4.12.2 (SC 463, 74); 5.7.5 (SC 278, 34); 5.40.1 (SC 278, 90); 5.74.1 (SC 278, 146); etc.

⁸³⁸ *Hom.Ps.36* 5.1 (SC 411, 224).

⁸³⁹ *Ibid* 5.1 (SC 411, 226-228).

knowledge of the things that are (*rerum scientia*); we will all be made, if we merit it, disciples of wisdom.⁸⁴⁰

The eschaton is conceptualised primarily in terms of intellectual activity: knowledge, wisdom, illumination, and so forth.⁸⁴¹ Origen's characterisation of the paradise to come is, after all, a schoolroom. It should be noted, however, that this is only an initial post-resurrection beatitude. Origen speculates on numerous stages of illumination and education that the soul undertakes in the afterlife. The contents of this instruction have been examined in the previous chapter. Through an ongoing process of education in the afterlife, the soul is lead to the contemplation of the Father himself, face to face.⁸⁴² This is one of the interpretations Origen gives of the forty-two stages of the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land in in the twenty-seventh *Homily on Numbers*:

The other, which one will ascend to the heavens after the resurrection, does not rise to the summit suddenly nor inopportunately, but is lead through many stages, in which they are enlightened one by one, always receiving an increase in splendour, being illuminated in each stage by the light of Wisdom, until it will come to the Father of lights himself.⁸⁴³

These stages of instruction are a continuation of the education that the soul received in this life.⁸⁴⁴

Through the education undertaken in this life and the next, the soul is restored to the image and likeness of God.⁸⁴⁵ Since God's original intention was for the harmony of all creation, all things will be reconciled to God in the end, since 'the end is always like the beginning.'⁸⁴⁶ The *apokatastasis*, therefore, entails a return to the original form of knowledge and union with God. However, Origen only says that the end will be 'like the beginning,' not that the two will be identical. Progress is made between beginning and end, as the soul in the beginning is only imbued with the image of God: his likeness is only added at the end on account of the training the soul undergoes between these two points.⁸⁴⁷ In this respect, the endpoint of humanity is superior to its starting point.

How can anything be added to the soul's contemplation of God? How could the original contemplative state in which the rational creature existed be improved upon? As Ramelli argues, the primary distinction between humankind's state in Origen's protology and his eschatology is the

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid* 5.1 (SC 411, 228).

⁸⁴¹ See Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 209-210.

⁸⁴² *P.A.* 2.11.7 (SC 252, 412).

⁸⁴³ *Hom.Num.* 27.6 (SC 461, 296).

⁸⁴⁴ *P.A.* 2.11.4 (SC 252, 400-402); *Hom.Num.* 27.2 (SC 461, 280-282).

⁸⁴⁵ Alexander H. Pierce, "Apokatastasis, Genesis 1.26-27, and the Theology of History in Origen's *De Principiis*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 29, no. 2 (2021): 183-185.

⁸⁴⁶ *P.A.* 1.6.2 (SC 252, 196).

⁸⁴⁷ José Alviar, *Klesis*, 28-37.

perfection of love.⁸⁴⁸ Through the process of *paideusis* that takes place in the course of this earthly life and in the pedagogy imparted in the afterlife, the soul's free will, which previously wavered from its contemplation of the divine, develops a steadfast devotion to God that will prevent a second fall after the restoration. The perfection of love achieved through God's pedagogic economy bestows immutability to the soul which contemplates the divine. Through the perfect love of Christ's soul, 'that soul which, like the iron in a fire, always remains in the Word, always in Wisdom, always in God, is God in all that it does, that it feels, and that it thinks; and therefore, it cannot be said to be changeable or mutable, which has come to possess unchangeability by unceasingly being inflamed by its union with the divine Word.'⁸⁴⁹ Only Christ's soul, which never fell from its contemplation of God, forever displayed perfect love of the Word and so never had need of the temporally extended pedagogical process of salvation. Hypostasised Wisdom is the totality of all virtues and the human soul united to it is the pinnacle that rational creatures can attain in the pursuit of those virtues. In many ways, Christ's human soul is the ideal sage which humankind is compelled to imitate, though Origen never started this quite so explicitly. The past and present condition of his soul is the future to which all human souls will attain in the end.

Hypostasised Wisdom itself plays a crucial role in this process of eschatological instruction. It is its light that illuminates each stage of this journey in the *Homily on Numbers*. In *Peri Archon*, this is initially undertaken through intermediaries. In the lower ranks of afterlife instruction, the soul is guided by 'princes and rulers', angelic beings who act as 'stewards and guardians' (Gal. 4.2).⁸⁵⁰ These lower pedagogues lead the soul to the Son: 'After their instruction in the holy virtues, he himself will instruct those able to receive him according to the fact that he is Wisdom.'⁸⁵¹ It is Wisdom who provides the intellectual food that sustains the perfected soul (see Prov. 9.2-5) and rejuvenates them to the image and likeness of God.⁸⁵²

The end to which all this eschatological instruction is aimed is the same to which all education aims – the *apokatastasis*. The knowledge of truth 'face to face' depends upon the experience of God as 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15.28). Origen conceptualises the existence of God as 'all in all' in totalising contemplative terms. God will only exist in this manner when he exists in every rational soul 'in this way: that everything which the rational mind, having has been purified of all the dregs of vice and having wiped away every cloud of malice within, can perceive (*sentire*) and understand (*intellegere*) and think (*cogitare*) will all be God. It will no longer sense (*sentiat*) anything other than God: it will

⁸⁴⁸ See Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 168-175.

⁸⁴⁹ *P.A.* 2.6.6 (SC 252, 320). Also, see *Com.Cant.* 1.4 (SC 376, 224).

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 2.11.3 (SC 252, 400); 3.6.9 (SC 268, 254).

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.* 3.6.9 (SC 268, 254). Also, see *P.A.* 2.3.1 (SC 252, 250).

⁸⁵² *Ibid.* 2.11.3 (SC 252, 398-400). Also, see *P.A.* 4.4.9-10 (SC 268, 422-428).

think (*cogitet*) God, see (*videat*) God, grasp (*teneat*) God. God will be the mode and measure of all its motions, and thus God will be all in it.⁸⁵³ The contemplative mode of eschatological bliss is made clear in the terms used here: *sentire, intelligere, cogitare, videat*.

The spirit of Scripture, therefore, also has an eschatological orientation. As Martens notes, 'For Origen, scriptural interpretation was a fragmentary anticipation of the more perfect eschatological contemplation of God.'⁸⁵⁴ The same charisms and virtues that are required of the spiritual exegete in a partial manner are fully instantiated in every soul in the *apokatastasis*. Morwenna Ludlow notes this feature of the spirit of Scripture with regards to Origen's fifth *Homily on Leviticus*:

Therefore, since these things are true, those who invoke God, who made the soul and body and spirit of Scripture, the body for those who came before us, the soul for us, but the spirit for those who 'will obtain inheritance of eternal life in the future' (Luke 19.30), through which they come to the heavenly kingdom.⁸⁵⁵

This should not surprise us as the perfection of the spiritual part of humankind is only completed in at the end of the age. Origen's anthropology and hermeneutics align on this point. Origen prays so that Jesus would open the spiritual understanding of Scripture (*spiritalis in lege visus et intellectus*), so that 'we also might begin to observe not the "things which are seen but the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4.18), and that he might open for us those eyes which do not look at present things but future ones, and might reveal to us the aspect of the heart by which God is seen in the spirit.'⁸⁵⁶ This is not to say, however, that the spirit of Scripture is solely concerned with future and eschatological occurrences. As Hällström argues, the context of this statement makes clear that 'the temporal connotation of the word [*futura*] is weakened and an epistemological ring is unmistakable.'⁸⁵⁷ Here, we see Origen translating the more (though not exclusively) temporal aspect of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism into the philosophical realms of ontology and epistemology. 'Ultimately, it speaks of eternal things, relaying mysteries concerning God's past and future relations to humankind, all centering on Christ and conveying truths about the Incarnation, the church and the Eschaton.'⁸⁵⁸ The eschaton and what occurs therein are of crucial importance to the spiritual reading of Scripture but they are but one element of it. Not simply concerned with future historical events, the spirit

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.* 3.6.3 (SC 268, 240).

⁸⁵⁴ Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 234.

⁸⁵⁵ *Hom. Lev.* 5.1 (SC 286, 206). Morwenna Ludlow, "Spirit and Letter in Origen and Augustine," in *The Spirit and the Letter: A Tradition and a Reversal*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes and Günter Bader (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 95-96.

⁸⁵⁶ *Hom. Gen.* 15.7 (SC 7, 370).

⁸⁵⁷ Gunnar af Hällström, *Charismatic Succession*, 45.

⁸⁵⁸ Elizabeth Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 73.

instantiates the kind of knowledge which will be fulfilled in the eschaton, one that is already present in heaven.⁸⁵⁹ In Book IV of *Peri Archon*, Origen outlines the doctrines that are included in the ‘intellectual conception of Scripture’ (τῆς νοήσεως τῶν γραφῶν): knowledge of God and his Son and their relationship to one another; the reason for the Incarnation; the nature of rational beings, including angels and demons; the reason for their fall and for the diversity of creation; and the nature of the world and why it exists.⁸⁶⁰ Nothing here is explicitly eschatological, though the protological nature of many of these topics clearly has a bearing on this matter. However, a comparison of these contents with those taught in the eschatological schoolroom of Book II demonstrate clear parallels. Origen says there that what is taught in the afterlife is a continuation and fulfilment of one’s education on earth, and this education is primarily fulfilled through the spiritual reading of Scripture.

2. Scripture and the Eternal Gospel

It follows that our understanding of Scripture can only ever be partial while we still live within this earthly existence. As highlighted by de Lubac and Crouzel, Origen developed yet another threefold schema of progressive revelation, this time with regards to the historical economy of scriptural revelation.⁸⁶¹ What was expressed in our examination in the previous chapter in terms of individual spiritual progress in deciphering the mysteries of Scripture is formulated in this instance with regards to an historical or, given its eschatological orientation, trans-historical process.⁸⁶² The first gift of the Old Testament was superseded with the coming of the Gospel, while the Gospel itself will only be consummated after the resurrection.

From which, it seems to me that, just as on this earth the Law was a kind of pedagogue for those who were compelled by it to be led to Christ, having been educated and instructed by it, in order that, after the education of the Law, they could more easily receive the more perfect principles of Christ, so likewise the other earth, when it receives the saints, first gives

⁸⁵⁹ See *Ser. Matt.* 18 (GCS 38.2, 32-34).

⁸⁶⁰ *P.A.* 4.2.7 (SC 268, 326-330).

⁸⁶¹ Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 217-227; Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 324-370; Henri Crouzel, *Origène*, 100, 146-155. Also, see Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 166-168. For a detailed examination of each reference to Rev. 14.6 in Origen’s extant corpus, see Shawn W. J. Keough, “The Eternal Gospel: Origen’s Eschatological Exegesis,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: proceedings of the Montréal colloquium in honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13 October 2006*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser, Lorenzo DiTommaso, and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 193-226.

⁸⁶² See *Com. Jn.* 1.40 (SC 120, 80-82), in which Origen refers to ‘what John calls an “eternal gospel” (Rev. 14.6), which might properly be called spiritual,’ and *Com. Rom.* 1.6.1 (SC 532, 172), where Origen links the Eternal Gospel to the deciphering of the riddles of the wise (Prov. 1.6).

initial instruction and informs them in the education of the true and eternal law, because of which they more easily will receive the perfect principles of heaven, to which nothing can be added, in which will be what is called the eternal Gospel and the testament which is always new and which will never grow old.⁸⁶³

Origen draws this language of an Eternal Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον) from the Book of Revelation (Rev. 14.6). In this passage, the Eternal Gospel is contrasted first of all with the law and the 'precepts of Christ,' and secondly with the spiritual law received in the schoolrooms of the afterlife. Elsewhere, Origen hierarchises the Eternal Gospel above the Temporal Gospel, and the latter above the Law.⁸⁶⁴ In either case, the revelation of the Eternal Gospel is identified as the fulfilment of knowledge and understanding in the *apokatastasis*. The Eternal Gospel is, then, closely entwined with the concept of wisdom. The Temporal Gospel is established by Christ's humanity, while the Eternal Gospel is established by participation in the Word 'who was restored from having been made flesh to what 'he was in the beginning with God,' the *arche* of the Word being none other than the *epinoia* of Wisdom.⁸⁶⁵ Consequently, it is reserved for those who are established in the spirit and desiring of heavenly wisdom.⁸⁶⁶ Origen interprets the rending of the Temple veil in these terms. The tearing of the veil represents the opening of the Old Testament's mysteries. However, Origen states, this refers only to the outer veil in the Temple; the veil that covers the Holy of Holies remains intact until the end of the age. Just as the Incarnation fulfilled the Law which contained 'a shadow of good things to come' (Heb. 10.1), the current stage of Christian revelation is itself a shadow of what will be fulfilled in Christ's second coming in glory. Origen could not fail to account for the present experience of the Christian community which, despite Christ's revelation, continues to persist within a world of sensible images, whether those of the natural world or those of Scripture, whether perceived in the written text or spoken word. Only at the second coming, 'the second veil is taken away so we might see the things that have been hidden by the second veil as they are in their own nature (*sicut ipsa se habet natura*).'⁸⁶⁷

Even though the Gospel as the Church currently possesses it is not the fulfilment of God's revelatory economy, it is nonetheless still to be distinguished from what the Jews had received before Jesus's coming. The relation of the Law to the Gospel is that of a promise to its fulfilment, while the relation of the Temporal Gospel to the Eternal Gospel exemplifies the paradox of a mystery. 'Mystery' refers both the concealing sign and the concealed reality signified. The Temporal Gospel is identified as one

⁸⁶³ *P.A.* 3.6.8 (SC 268, 252).

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 4.3.12-13 (SC 268, 390); *Com.Jn.* 1.39-40 (SC 120, 80-82); *Com.Rom.* 1.6.1 (SC 532, 172).

⁸⁶⁵ *Com.Jn.* 1.43 (SC 120, 84).

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 1.43 (SC 120, 84).

⁸⁶⁷ *Ser.Matt.* 138 (GCS 38.2, 285-286).

and the same as the Eternal Gospel, though the latter is the reality itself while the former is the same reality as concealed within the mysterious sign. The relation of Leviticus to Deuteronomy is a type of that between the temporal and eternal Gospels. Deuteronomy does not contain a separate legislation from Leviticus but the same one 'declared more clearly and manifestly than in those which were written first.'⁸⁶⁸ Therefore, as Couzel notes, the Old Testament represented a promise of things to come but not yet possessed, while the Temporal Gospel is sacramental in nature, being both presently possessed and yet not fully realised.⁸⁶⁹ Origen recognises this when interpreting John 4.23: 'But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him' (John 4.23). Origen understands this within his exegetical framework. To worship in spirit is to worship in accordance with the spiritual meaning of Scripture.⁸⁷⁰ To worship in truth is to understand not according to types but according to the true reality that the types figure.⁸⁷¹ Origen notes the distinction between what is said in John 4.23 and John 4.21, where Jesus says only that 'the hour will come.' Origen recognises the eschatological intention of this phrase: 'the first signifies the reverence outside the body that will begin at the fulfilment.' However, the additional phrase 'and is now here' demonstrates that worship in truth is possible in this life insofar as progress is possible in this life, even if it cannot be present in its perfect manner until the time comes when they contemplate God face to face.⁸⁷²

3. Language and Wisdom

What distinguishes the Eternal Gospel from humankind's current perception of God's wisdom, therefore, is that it is contemplated in an unveiled and unmasked manner. Nowhere is the unmediated nature of eschatological knowledge stated more clearly than in Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*:

You will know the accurate reason concerning this and other passages if, desiring to learn in Christ and to go beyond what is presently known through a glass and in enigmas, you press on to Him who calls us. Never having known face to face (see 1 Cor. 13.12), you will know as friends of the Father in heaven and Teacher. For friends learn by form (ἐν εἴδει⁸⁷³) and not by enigmas, or by a wisdom naked of sounds, words, symbols, and types (ἡ γυμνῆ σοφία

⁸⁶⁸ P.A. 4.3.13 (SC 268, 390-392).

⁸⁶⁹ Henri Couzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 352-361; Henri Couzel, *Origène*, 100, 153-155. Also, see Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 85-86.

⁸⁷⁰ *Com.Jn.* 13.84 (SC 222, 74-76); 13.110 (SC 222, 88-90). See Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 225-226.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.* 13.85 (SC 222, 76).

⁸⁷² *Ibid.* 13.87 (SC 222, 76); 13.112-113 (SC 222, 90-92).

⁸⁷³ The Aristotelian term for a form or species.

φωνῶν καὶ λέξεων καὶ συμβόλων καὶ τύπων), coming into contact with the nature of noetic things and to the beauty of truth (προσβάλλοντες τῇ τῶν νοητῶν φύσει καὶ τῷ τῆς ἀληθείας κάλλει).⁸⁷⁴

The objects of aretological wisdom are things as they are: πράγματα in Greek and *res* in Rufinus's Latin translation.⁸⁷⁵ True knowledge, therefore, transcends the confines of language and propositional reasoning. This spiritual understanding is non-propositional and non-linguistic, an apprehension or intuition of the thing in itself.⁸⁷⁶

Origen's mystical language and the terminology of initiation is a means of conveying this fact linguistically. The mystery cults were primarily characterised by imagistic tendencies rather than doctrinal or conceptual ones.⁸⁷⁷ Aristotle described the purpose of undergoing initiation as 'to experience' or 'to feel' (παθεῖν) rather than 'to learn' (μαθεῖν).⁸⁷⁸ Consequently, this language could be used to indicate in linguistic terms the non-linguistic nature of the soul's apprehension of the heavenly reality. Origen appears to suggest something similar in the *Commentary on John*, when the spiritual contemplation of *theoremata* is said to be inebriating, producing cheer and ecstasy (εὐφραίνοντα καὶ ἐνθουσιᾶν).⁸⁷⁹ This form of rational drunkenness (μέθην οὐκ ἀλόγιστον ἀλλὰ θεῖαν), a concept already utilised by Philo, expresses that the highest stage of contemplation is experienced in a hyper-rational manner.⁸⁸⁰ Hyper-rational but not irrational, that is, since the nature of this inebriation is one of superhuman union with true Logos.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ex.Mart.* 13 (GCS 2, 13).

⁸⁷⁵ See *Hom.Ps.* 36 5.1 (SC 411, 228), in which Origen says of the soul's eschatological acquisition of wisdom: 'No longer will anyone be unskilled in the Kingdom of God, nor will they remain ignorant, no one will be a stranger from the knowledge of the things that are (*rerum scientia*); we will all be made, if we merit it, disciples of wisdom.' Also, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 153; Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 352.

⁸⁷⁶ Henri Crouzel describes this form of knowledge as 'intuition.' Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 104, 401, 457. This position is one of scholarly consensus. For instance, Torjesen describes perfect knowledge as 'to know the good in a direct and immediate form'; Martens describes it as the eschatological condition as a 'direct encounter' in which 'the saints gaze directly upon Christ'; while Ramelli describes the *apokatastasis* as 'an illumination and a direct vision of the truth.' See Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 121; Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 240-242; Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 178.

⁸⁷⁷ Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 44-48; Radcliffe Edmonds, "Alcibiades the Profane: Images of the Mysteries," in *Plato's Symposium: A Critical Guide*, ed. Pierre Destrée and Zina Giannopoulou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 201-204. This is not to deny that teachings, the *legomenon*, were an important part of the mystery, only to note the competing emphases.

⁸⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Frag.* 15 (31).

⁸⁷⁹ *Com.Jn.* 1.208 (SC 120, 162).

⁸⁸⁰ See *Leg. All.* 1.84 (LCL 226, 202): μεθύει τὴν νήφουσαν μέθην. See Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179 n.89.

The spiritual Christian receives the spiritual Gospel ‘no longer by written letters but by living *logoi* (οὐκέτι δὲ διὰ γραμμάτων, ἀλλὰ διὰ ζώντων λόγων).’⁸⁸¹ Origen’s words resemble Plato’s in the *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates contrasts written documents with personal and spoken instruction:

Socrates: That which is written with knowledge in the soul of the person learning, which is able to defend itself, but knows to speak and when keep silent to people as is necessary.

Phaedrus: You speak of the living and animate word (λόγον λέγεις ζῶντα καὶ ἔμψυχον) of the knower, of which what has been written (ὁ γεγραμμένος) is rightly said to be an image.⁸⁸²

The disparagement of written discourse was commonplace within the predominantly oral culture of Late Antiquity and was a recurring feature of Greek philosophical literature. After all, as Socrates states:

This is also so with [written] words: you might think them to speak as if they understand something but if, wishing to learn something, you ask about what they speak, every time they only indicate the same thing. Once it has been written, every discourse is whirled around everywhere in the same way among its listeners, even among those to whom it is not at all fitting, and it does not know how to speak to those for whom it is necessary and to those for whom it is not.⁸⁸³

Clement opened his *Stromateis* with an extended meditation upon the purpose of committing teaching to a text, both highlighting the disadvantages Socrates identified in the passage above and explaining his own enigmatic style.⁸⁸⁴ In the passage of *Peri Archon* quoted above, however, Origen applies this distinction to biblical hermeneutics. The living words are not those of an oral teaching of master in direct relationship with his student but a spiritual teaching, delivered to ‘the disciple of the Spirit himself’ by the Holy Spirit, through the medium of the written word.⁸⁸⁵ The importance of oral pedagogy is not Origen’s concern but the need to transcend the written words of Scripture – its types, images, symbols, and its propositional content altogether – in order to perceive the true realities themselves.

⁸⁸¹ P.A. 4.2.4 (SC 268, 314).

⁸⁸² *Phaedr.* 276A (LCL 36, 566).

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.* 275D-E (LCL 36, 568).

⁸⁸⁴ *Strom.* 1.1.1-1.18.4 (SC 30, 44-57), esp. 1.14.4 (SC 30, 54). See Eric Osborn, “Teaching and Writing”; Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria*, 141-142.

⁸⁸⁵ P.A. 4.2.4 (SC 268, 314).

Hadot conceptualises this non-discursive element primarily in terms of the philosophical life which is both inseparable from and incommensurable with philosophical discourse.⁸⁸⁶ There is some truth in this, particularly with regards to Stoic, Epicurean, and Cynic schools. However, the ineffable contemplation of the highest things should not be subsumed under the rubric of a way of life. Hadot blurs the line, at least with regards to the Peripatetic and Platonic schools, between the characterisations of philosophical activity and the goal of that activity. An attempt to include the category of experience under that of a way of life or *savoir-faire* strikes me as forcing the data to fit the model. While philosophical discourse and philosophy do not map onto the contemplative-practical virtue distinction, there is space for contemplation or knowledge outside the bounds of either discourse or activity. Within Middle- and Neoplatonist circles and among intellectually and philosophically oriented Christians such as Origen, philosophical activity and way of life was the means by which to reach this perfect contemplation but the aim itself is the latter rather than the former.

Within Platonist philosophical thought, the highest form of knowledge was believed to be impossible to express linguistically and indeed not to be propositional in nature.⁸⁸⁷ The pseudonymous *Seventh Letter* of Plato, for instance, states that Plato has written no text upon this subject not only on account of the problems of the written medium but because it is impossible to convey by words:

But this much I declare concerning all who have written or will write who claim to know about what I study, whether having heard me or heard another, or having discovered them themselves: they do not, in my opinion, understand anything about this matter. There is not any written work concerning these matters, nor will there ever be. For in no way is it communicable verbally, as with other teachings, but by applying oneself to the habitual association and communion with the matter itself, as a light set fire by a leaping spark, it suddenly comes to be in the soul and sustains itself forthwith.⁸⁸⁸

As Gerson states concerning Plato's epistemology, 'for Plato if knowledge is the inerrant or infallible mental seeing of Forms or essences, it is not a representational state. It is not of propositions. When representations do occur, belief, including false belief, is possible... The content can be represented or expressed to oneself and to others, but the knowing itself is not the representation or expression.'⁸⁸⁹ Similar considerations apply in Aristotle's work and in Middle-Platonist syntheses of

⁸⁸⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 266. He does, however, offer some caveats with regards to Plotinus on p. 249-251 though he still characterises it as an 'option existentielle,' contrasted with 'le discours philosophique,' on p. 259.

⁸⁸⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 265-275.

⁸⁸⁸ Plato, *Ep.* 7.341C-D (*LCL* 234, 530).

⁸⁸⁹ Lloyd Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41.

these two.⁸⁹⁰ Middle Platonists drew heavily from this passage, as well as from Plato's account of the One in the *Parmenides*, incorporating them into their analyses of the metaphysics of the *Republic*.⁸⁹¹ In the *Parmenides*, Plato states concerning the first One that it is 'neither named nor spoken nor thought of nor known,' while of the one as unity of all things, he states that 'there is a name and a word for it, and it is named and spoken, and all the attributes which also concern other things also concern the one.'⁸⁹² Linguistic and propositional reasoning relies upon the distinction between subject, predicate, object, and so on. The very method of this discourse demands division and multiplicity and so is entirely unable to recognise or express knowledge of the simple unity of the One which could not admit such distinctions.⁸⁹³ Alcinous's description of the first divine principle demonstrates this mode of thought very clearly:

He is inexpressible and capable of being apprehended only by the intellect (ἄρρητος δ' ἐστὶ καὶ ὧ μόνῳ ληπτός), as it has been said, since he is neither genus, nor species, nor distinction, nor is there anything incidental in him, neither bad (for it is not right to say this), nor good (for he would be thus by participation in something, namely, goodness), nor indifferent (for neither is this according to our conception of him), nor of a certain quality (for he is not endowed with quality nor is his perfection due to a quality), nor without quality (for he is not deprived of any quality which might be applied to him). Neither is he part of anything, nor a whole which has certain parts, nor is he the same as anything or different, for nothing corresponds to him, according to which he could be distinguished from other things.⁸⁹⁴

Plato's considerations concerning these two types of unity were clearly incorporated into the Platonist hierarchy of divine principles and the pre-Nicene Trinitarian theologies of Origen and Clement. As examined in Chapter One, the latter two both interpreted the Son in terms similar to the Second One, the one as unity of things. However, their Trinitarian theologies were not guided by the same initial considerations as their Greek counterparts. Despite the economic and epistemic activities of the Son, they were nonetheless compelled to uphold his transcendence and so could still

⁸⁹⁰ Lloyd Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, 84, 88-89.

⁸⁹¹ See John Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources," *Center for Hellenistic Studies* 16 (1975): 1-8 (now reprinted in John Dillon, *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990)).

⁸⁹² Plato, *Parmenides* 142A (*LCL* 167, 250); 155D-E (*LCL* 167, 294-296); 165B (*LCL* 167, 328).

⁸⁹³ See Raoul Mortley, "What is Negative Theology? The Western Origins," in *The Via Negativa*, ed. by Raoul Mortley and David Dockrill (Auckland, NZ, 1981), 6-7, 10-11; Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, 216-217.

⁸⁹⁴ *Didask.* 10.165.5-17 (23-24). Also see *Didask.* 10.164.8 (22).

apply the same considerations Plato attributed to the first One to their second Trinitarian principle, even if they did not do so entirely consistently.⁸⁹⁵

Clement focuses particularly upon the problem of how language can be utilised with reference to God in the fifth book of his *Stromateis*. God is described as ‘above all speech and all conception and all thought, and can never be transmitted in writing, being inexpressible (ἄρητος) in his own power,’ ‘above place, time, name and thought (ὑπέρανω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου καὶ ὀνόματος καὶ νοήσεως),’ and declaring ‘the inexpressibility of God’ who is ‘unspeakable by human power’ (ὡνάμει δὲ ἀνθρωπεῖα ἀφθεγκτον).⁸⁹⁶ This is not limited only to the Father, even admitting that Clement emphasises his transcendence to a far greater degree.

Origen’s understanding of the transcendence of God and the divine is expressed in similar terms: ‘darkness surrounds God, inasmuch as words rich enough to be worthy of him cannot be found.’⁸⁹⁷ Any language or image that concerns these things can therefore only partially capture the truth of what they represent.⁸⁹⁸ Consequently, one must ‘ululate (ἀλαλάζειν) to God’ (Ps. 80.2 LXX), must express oneself without means of signs, and when one does so, one steps beyond things signified (ὑπερβαινούσης τὰ σημαίνόμενα) and comes to things that are unspeakable.⁸⁹⁹ It is in this realm of the unspeakable that the mysteries of God’s wisdom reside. The spoken things are a step used on the way to the more mysterious and divine matters. There are, therefore, certain things that it is not possible to grasp using human language, but which are not beyond the scope of divine illumination to impart.⁹⁰⁰

Given the common agreement upon the ineffability of divine matters, the appeal to divine texts was a philosophically difficult position.⁹⁰¹ Origen himself was compelled to defend his Scriptures when

⁸⁹⁵ See Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, 246-251.

⁸⁹⁶ *Strom.* 5.65.2 (SC 278, 132); 5.71.5 (SC 278, 144); 5.79.1 (SC 278, 154). For Philo, see below.

⁸⁹⁷ *Com.Jn.* 2.172 (SC 120, 322-324). Also, see *Com.Matt.* 14.12 (GCS 40, 304): ‘on this account the writers of the Gospels have concealed the clear expression of the parables, since what is signified by them was greater than the nature of words [to express], and any solution and exposition of such parables was such that the world could not contain the books to be written (see John 21.25) in relation to such parables.’

⁸⁹⁸ *Com.Matt.* 10.11 (GCS 40, 12).

⁸⁹⁹ *Hom.Ps.80* 1.3 (GCS n.f. 19, 484). On Origen’s use of musical metaphor to capture the essence of mystical experience, in this case relating to his interpretation of the Song of Songs, see Christopher J. King, *Origen and the Song of Songs*, 206-214.

⁹⁰⁰ *P.A.* 2.7.4 (SC 252, 332).

⁹⁰¹ There is an interesting dialectic to be found here between the denigration of the written medium in Late Antique thought and the profound sense of reverence held for inspired texts, whether the works of Plato, Moses, or Paul, which were treated as the foundations of philosophical investigation. The inspired work of writing is worthy of reverence precisely because it does not give its meaning straightforwardly, and so does not always give the same answer, as Socrates suggested. To my mind, this tension is best resolved within the Christian Alexandrian tradition, in which the text could be the medium of the Logos’s own personal presence, and so the teacher’s own living pedagogy could be received through the inert letters.

Celsus appealed to Plato's *Seventh Letter* to suggest that they could not possibly contain the truths for which Christians championed them.⁹⁰² As the reader should expect by this point, Origen's first response is to claim Moses's pre-eminence in this discovery. He accepts the underlying premises of Celsus's attack but responds that not only are there truths not contained within the Christian texts but that they were the progenitors of this concept. For instance, Origen refers to Genesis, in which it is recorded that God appeared to the Patriarchs but it is left unsaid what it was that these men beheld.⁹⁰³ There are indeed truths that were too mysterious to have been laid down in writing. In particular, he appeals to Paul's account of his rapture to third heaven wherein he heard ineffable words (ἄρρητα ῥήματα – 2 Cor. 12.4) and the traditions of Apocalyptic literature in which the receiver of apocalyptic revelation was ordered not to disclose it (Ezek. 2.9-10; 3.1-2; Rev. 10.4; 10.9-10).⁹⁰⁴

In Book XIII of his *Commentary on John*, Origen interprets the distinction between the water of Jacob's well and the living water Jesus offers in this manner. Origen interpreted this passage in hermeneutic terms. Jacob's well represents the Scriptures, while Jesus's water is 'the truth itself.'⁹⁰⁵ Origen appeals to the final verse of the Johannine Gospel: 'But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21.25). Drawing once more upon Rev. 10.4 and 2 Cor. 12.4, Origen interprets this verse to mean that 'For Scripture has not contained some of the more lordly and divine parts of the mysteries of God, and neither has the human voice or human tongue, according to the common understandings of what is signified.'⁹⁰⁶ Origen understands this verse in a qualitative rather than quantitative sense. It is not a hyperbole referring to the sheer number of amazing acts Jesus performed but instead indicates the ontological transcendence of heavenly truths over linguistic and propositional forms:

For we must not interpret the world not containing the books that could be written as due to the multitude of writings, as some do, but as due to the greatness of what had been done. The greatness of these deeds are not only incapable of being written, but nor can they be declared by fleshly tongue, nor rendered in human language and speech.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰² *C Cels.* 6.3 (SC 147, 182-184).

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.* 6.4 (SC 147, 188).

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 6.6 (SC 147, 192).

⁹⁰⁵ *Com.Jn.* 13.26 (SC 222, 46).

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 13.27 (SC 222, 46).

⁹⁰⁷ *Philoc.* 15.19 (SC 302, 436-438).

As surprising as it might seem for a thinker so devoted to the biblical texts as Origen, he nonetheless affirms:

I believe that all of the Scriptures, even if understood very accurately, are merely the elements of and very short introductions to all knowledge (τῆς ὅλης γνώσεως στοιχεῖα τινα ελάχιστα και βραχυτάτας εἶναι εἰσαγωγὰς).⁹⁰⁸

Therefore, the Christian exegete must seek through the reading of Scripture those things that cannot be contained within those texts. Clement states that the aim of scriptural exegesis is to ‘walk towards the truth which shows in a written manner the things which are unwritten.’⁹⁰⁹ This is the aim of spiritual exegesis; in the same passage of the *Commentary on John* just quoted, Origen contrasts ‘the elementary aspects of the truth’ (τὰ στοιχειωτικὰ τῆς ἀληθείας) with ‘the things that are learned of the Spirit.’⁹¹⁰ In his recent monograph, Mark Randall James highlights the importance in Origen’s thought of, in the act of imitating the procedures of Scripture, going beyond what is written in Scripture and forming new propositions from those in the text.⁹¹¹ However, given his focus on the pragmatic aspects of Origen’s theological enterprise, the element of Origen’s extra-scripturalism on which James focusses is still propositional and linguistic in nature.⁹¹² Clearly, however, the need to move beyond the words of Scripture cannot be disconnected from the ineffability of the divine and the inadequacy of linguistic discourse as a means of theologising.

The placement of the divine beyond linguistic discourse represented an embryonic developmental stage of apophatic theological thought. A rigorous apophaticism was not achieved within Greek thought until Plotinus. Within Jewish and Christian traditions, important developments were made by Philo and Clement.⁹¹³ Drawing upon Philo’s interpretation of Moses’s ascent of Mount Sinai, Clement states:

And where the Scripture states that “Moses entered into the darkness where God was,” this makes clear to those able to understand that God is invisible (ἀόρατος) and inexpressible (ἄρρητος).⁹¹⁴

⁹⁰⁸ *Com.Jn.* 13.30 (SC 222, 48).

⁹⁰⁹ *Strom.* 1.10.1 (SC 30, 50).

⁹¹⁰ *Com.Jn.* 13.36 (SC 222, 50).

⁹¹¹ Mark Randall James, *Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 212-226.

⁹¹² Mark Randall James, *Learning the Language of Scripture*, 244-294.

⁹¹³ Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria*; Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*, 176-182.

⁹¹⁴ *Strom.* 5.78.3 (SC 278, 152). See Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.158 (LCL 289, 358); *De Mut.* 7-12 (LCL 275, 144-148). In the latter, God’s self-reference as ‘ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν’ is understood to mean ‘My nature is to be, not to be spoken’ (ἴσον τῷ εἶναι πέφυκα, οὐ λέγεσθαι) since ‘the name Lord cannot be applied to what truly is.’

The connection between mystery and apophysis in Philo is made explicit in *On the Giants*, in which he states:

Thus, having pitched his own tent outside the camp and the whole quarters of bodily things, which is to say he established his mind where it is steadfast, Moses begins to worship God and, entering the darkness – the invisible place, he remains fixed there being initiated into the most holy mysteries (τελούμενος τὰς ἱερωτάτας τελετάς). There, he becomes not only an initiate (μύστης) but also a hierophant of secret rites (ἱεροφάντης ὀργίων) a teacher of divine things (διδάσκαλος θείων), in which he will guide those whose ears have been purified.⁹¹⁵

While there is a strong strain of apophatic thought within Philo and Clement, Origen's thought is far more optimistic concerning the possibility of attaining knowledge of God. We have already seen as much with regards to the Eternal Gospel and his characterisation of the virtue of wisdom in the *apokatastasis*. His interpretation of the same passage of Exodus differs significantly from his two predecessors, interpreting the darkness not as the nature of God's unknowability but the manner of his revelation in mysteries.

In this darkness "he made his hiding-place" (Ps. 17.12 LXX), in which he made unknown the things about himself which are infinite. But if someone takes offence at such interpretations, let them be persuaded from the dark sayings (τῶν σκοτεινῶν λόγων) and the dark, hidden, invisible treasures given by God to Christ (see Col. 2.3), for I do not suppose the dark treasures revealed in Christ ("God made darkness his own hiding-place") to be anything other than "The saint will understand the parable and dark saying" (Prov. 1.6). Consider whether on this account the Saviour says to his disciples, "As much as you have listened in the darkness, speak in the light" (Matt. 10.27; Luke 12.3).⁹¹⁶

Andrew Louth characterises Origen's epistemology as 'a mysticism of light' which 'knows nothing of the cloud, the dark night, found in the mysticism of others.'⁹¹⁷ Louth may overstate his case by suggesting Origen knows nothing of divine incomprehensibility, since there are certainly passages within Origen's work that suggest that God can never be truly grasped or comprehended. There are suggestions in *Peri Archon* of a doctrine similar to Gregory of Nyssa's concept of ἐπέκτασις; that is,

⁹¹⁵ *De Gig.* 54 (LCL 227, 472).

⁹¹⁶ *Com.Jn.* 2.172-173 (SC 120, 322-324). See Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria*, 257.

⁹¹⁷ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55. Also, see Raoul Mortley, "Origen: Christian Mysticism without the Via Negativa," *From Word to Silence: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek*, ed. Raoul Mortley, vol. 2 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), 63-84.

an eternal progress into the ungraspable infinitude of the Godhead.⁹¹⁸ This doctrine naturally requires a form of apophatic theology. Origen expresses this in a beautiful fashion in his seventeenth *Homily on Numbers*. Origen distinguishes Jacob's houses and Israel's tent (Num. 24.5-6): Jacob represents perfection in work and deeds, while Israel represents those who zealously pursue wisdom and gnosis.⁹¹⁹ Perfection in deeds is associated with a house because 'the perfection of works is not without an end.'⁹²⁰ Israel's tent, on the other hand, represents the fact that there is no end to the pursuit of wisdom since there is no limit to the depth of God's wisdom. 'For by however much someone approaches it, by that much more he will discover deeper things, and by however much one has examined, by that much more will he discover ineffable and incomprehensible things... by however much one progresses, by that much more the road progressed is enlarged before them and extended into the immeasurable.'⁹²¹

On the other hand, however, in the fourth *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Six*, Origen describes the *telos* of Christian progress as the perception of a 'great sight.' When Moses is confronted with the burning bush, he says 'Stepping through (διαβάς), then, I shall see what this great sight is (τὸ ὄραμα τὸ μέγα)' (Exod. 3.3). The act of 'stepping through' is that of transcending the affairs of ordinary life and of the material world.⁹²² It is also the progress on the path of virtue, an ἐπεκτεινόμενος (see Phil. 3.13⁹²³) or straining forward into greater progress. However, this act of straining forward is not an endless journey in pursuit of an elusive divinity but culminates in a great sight; in the *theoria* of intellectual matters, of God and his Wisdom and Logos.⁹²⁴ The journey appears to have a definitive endpoint. This lack of certainty and coherence concerning apophatic approaches towards the divine was fairly typical of Middle-Platonist philosophy and early Christian writers.⁹²⁵ Nonetheless, Louth is

⁹¹⁸ See *P.A.* 4.3.14 (SC 268, 392-394): "How inscrutable are the judgments of God, and how uninvestigable are his ways" (Rom. 11.33). For he did not say the judgments of God can be searched with difficulty, but that they cannot be so at all. For however much one might by searching make advances and by intense study make progress, with the aid of God's grace and with illuminated thoughts, he will not be able to come to the perfect end of the things which are investigated. Nor is any mind, which is created, able to comprehend everything, but when it discovers a little piece of this which it seeks, it sees again other things which are to be sought; and if it were to arrive that these, it will again come to see more from them which must be pursued.'

⁹¹⁹ *Hom.Num.* 17.4 (SC 442, 286-288). See Philo, *On Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by him and Cain* 120 (LCL 227, 180).

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.* 17.4 (SC 442, 288).

⁹²¹ *Ibid.* 17.4 (SC 442, 288-290).

⁹²² *Hom.Ps.36* 4.1 (GCS n.f. 19, 157).

⁹²³ The same verse is used in *P.A.* 4.3.14, following on from the passage quoted above.

⁹²⁴ *Hom.Ps.36* 4.1 (GCS n.f. 19, 157).

⁹²⁵ Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria*, 130; Matthias Baltes, "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's *Republic* Beyond Being?," 15-16; Andrew Louth, "Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 139. Clement is a notable exception whose approach is far more rigorous than his contemporaries and predecessors, as Hägg argues over the course of her monograph.

not far off in his assessment. Origen has a great deal of faith in the power of spiritual illumination to overcome our limitations as created beings:

The things which, on account of being so great that they are placed above man and above perishable nature, are impossible for our rational and mortal race to grasp, by the great and immeasurable grace of God poured forth by God upon humans through the minister of unsurpassable grace to us, Jesus Christ, and through the fellow-worker of the will of God, the Spirit, they become possible. Certainly, the acquisition of wisdom, by which all things were established (for, according to David, God made “all things by wisdom” (see Ps. 103.24 LXX)) was impossible for human nature, but, from impossibility becomes possible through our lord Jesus Christ, who was made our wisdom by God, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1.30)... Who can say that it is possible for a human to know the mind of the Lord? But even this God gives through Christ.⁹²⁶

Ineffability does not, therefore, entail that the divine exists only in the darkness of unknowability. While there is some equivocation on the matter, it is not out of chance that within Middle-Platonist works the first principle is identified as Intellect.⁹²⁷ While the first principle, the Good, or the Ideas are inexpressible in conceptual or linguistic terms, they are nonetheless still intelligible. Plato places the Form of the Good within the bounds of the intelligible, describing it as that which ‘among the knowable the form of the Good is last and required great effort to be perceived’ and ‘the true goal of the intelligible world’ grasped ‘by pure intellect alone.’⁹²⁸ As quoted above, Alcinoüs considered God to be both ineffable and ‘capable of being apprehended only by the intellect,’ while his contemporary Celsus stated that the Good is intelligible ‘by an inexpressible power’ (ἀρρήτω τινὶ δυνάμει).⁹²⁹

⁹²⁶ *De Orat.* 1.1 (GCS 3, 297-298).

⁹²⁷ In a famous passage of the *Republic*, Plato suggested that the Good was ‘not being but even rising beyond being in dignity and power (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος).’ *Rep.* 7.508B (LCL 276, 94). While Matthias Baltes provides a compelling argument that Plato did not intend to suggest that the Good stood outside the category of being – rather, he was emphasising that, on account of its pre-eminence, it did not participate in being in the same manner as all other beings which derive their being from the Good – Platonist thinkers nonetheless persistently flirted with the possibility of elevating their first principle above being. See Matthias Baltes, “Is the Idea of the Good in Plato’s *Republic* Beyond Being?” Not until Plotinus is an unambiguous assertion of this position forwarded. As noted in Chapter One, Origen was among these thinkers.

⁹²⁸ *Rep.* 7, 517B (LCL 276, 116); 7, 532B (LCL 276, 170). See Matthias Baltes, “Is the Idea of the Good in Plato’s *Republic* Beyond Being?,” 5.

⁹²⁹ *C Cels.* 7.45 (SC 150, 122).

4. *The Person and Perception of Wisdom*

Origen's doctrine of spiritual senses is an important aspect of his characterisation of true knowledge in non-propositional terms. This innovation was one of Origen's greatest bequests to the mystical Christian tradition. In a discussion in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* prompted by a question about whether the soul is the blood (see Deut 12.23; Lev. 17.11), Origen argues that the names of the parts of the outer man are homonyms for the faculties of the inner incorporeal man.⁹³⁰ On this principle, he proceeds to argue that each of the bodily senses have an inner, spiritual counterpart. This is far from the only occasion in which Origen drew this conclusion. It was a common hermeneutical procedure when faced with sensory language in the text. Just as the corporeal man has the senses of physical sight, physical smell, physical touch, and so on, the spiritual man has a sense of spiritual sight, with which he sees God; a sense of spiritual smell, with which he smells the good odour of Christ (see 2 Cor. 12.15); a sense of spiritual touch, with which he touches Christ (see Matt. 9.20-22; Mark. 5.27-34; Luke 8.44-47); and so on.⁹³¹ These spiritual senses do not reside naturally in the soul: they must be acquired by training and by the mortification of the carnal senses.⁹³² Attachment to bodily things and to sin dulls the clarity of one's spiritual perceptions. An extended and rigorous period of moral reformation and rational progress is required before the direct perception of higher realities can be attained.⁹³³

The concept of the spiritual senses is not intended only as a metaphor for rational or intellectual understanding of divine matters. Metaphorical use of such language is found throughout Origen's work but it is not the full extent of it⁹³⁴ In some instances, language used to refer to seeing, touching, or hearing God by means of the spiritual senses means to understand a certain fact about him; in others, this language is used to refer to a direct perception by some spiritual faculty of the soul of God or some aspect of him.⁹³⁵ With regards to the latter, Mark McInroy draws attention to the importance of the concept of spiritual senses in describing the perception of divine presence in the

⁹³⁰ *Dial. Hera.* 14-15 (SC 67, 84-88).

⁹³¹ *Ibid.* 15-19 (SC 67, 88-94). Also see *P.A.* 1.1.9 (SC 252, 108-110); 4.4.10 (SC 268, 426-428); *C Cels.* 1.48 (SC 132, 200-208); 7.34 (SC 532, 90-92); *Com.Cant.* 1.4 (SC 375, 220-238); *Frag.Luke* 186 (SC 87, 530-534).

⁹³² *Com.Cant.* 1.4 (SC 375, 230).

⁹³³ See, for comparison, Plato, *Ep.* 7.340A-341D (LCL 234, 526-530).

⁹³⁴ See John M. Dillon, "Aisthesis Noete: A Doctrine of Spiritual Senses in Origen and Plotinus," in *Hellenica et Judaica*, ed. A. Caquot, M. Hadas-Lebel, and J. Riaud (Leuven and Paris: Editions Peeters, 1986), 443-455; Mark J. McInroy, "Origen of Alexandria," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20-35. McInroy argues effectively against Dillon that the metaphorical use of sensory language is not the preserve of Origen's early work, nor his genuine doctrine of the spiritual senses found only in his later work.

⁹³⁵ Mark J. McInroy, "Origen of Alexandria," 21-26.

souls.⁹³⁶ Cognition of God in an unmediated manner is like sense-perception in that it involves a direct contact with its intelligible object, without requirement of propositions or mental representations.⁹³⁷ While what we commonly consider rational or intellectual capacities are able to consider things, remember them, predicate things of them, and so on, without their actual presence, one cannot perceive an object through the senses without them being present to the perceptive subject (the possibility of hallucinations and dreams notwithstanding). The spiritual senses, therefore, reflect a belief in the availability of direct, non-discursive perception of God.

There is not one object of the spiritual senses but many. With regards to the sight Moses sees in the *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Six* quoted above, the straining forward in virtue ends in the perception of divine presence, seen with the ruling faculty of the soul. However, Origen goes on to say that, since Moses refers to 'this great sight,' there must be other sights, of which Moses's entrance into the darkness where God resides (Exod. 19.16-20) is the greatest.⁹³⁸ One perceives through the spiritual senses not only the presence of the persons of God but also certain truths and hidden mysteries, themselves the constituent parts contained within the Son. While the concept of perceptible presence is most readily associated with the personal aspect of the divine, it also extends to the knowledge of certain truths and mysteries. The mystical perception of wisdom includes both the person of hypostasised Wisdom and the system of *theoremata* and *logoi*, also called wisdom, that is contained within her. As Karen Jo Torjesen argues, the Logos serves a dual function in God's revelatory activity, being both the personal subject and objective content of the revelation: 'The Logos announces himself, he is the subject matter of his own proclamation.'⁹³⁹ Consequently, the soul's wish to be united with God is one and the same as its wish to be enlightened in understanding the mysteries of his wisdom and gnosis and conversely, the persona of Christ, the Son, Wisdom and Logos, by drawing near to the soul, explains the mysteries and obscurities that trouble the soul.⁹⁴⁰

This is seen most clearly in the interplay and respective movements of the Bride and Bridegroom in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. The song is understood to express the drama of the Bridegroom's coming and going to and from the Bride and her respective pursuit of her beloved. The intermittent absence and presence of the Son is a key feature of Origen's commentary. The

⁹³⁶ Mark J. McInroy, "Origen of Alexandria," 26. Also, see Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 498, 505-508; Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xviii-xx, 278-9; William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 9-67, esp. 51-4.

⁹³⁷ See Lloyd Gerson's account of Platonic epistemology in Lloyd Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, 40-42, 139-131.

⁹³⁸ *Hom.Ps.36* 4.1 (GCS n.f. 19, 158-159).

⁹³⁹ Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 119-120.

⁹⁴⁰ *Com.Cant.* 1.1 (SC 375, 182-184).

visitation of the Bridegroom to the Bride entails the unadulterated, unmediated reception of his doctrine – without aid of teachers. Hypostasised Wisdom, through her divine presence, reveals and illuminates her own contents to the mature Christian. As the true Solomon, Christ comes to the Gentiles to resolve their perplexity concerning knowledge of the true God, concerning created things of the world, concerning immortality of the soul, future judgment, all of which had been uncertain for Gentiles and their teachers, the philosophers.⁹⁴¹ To contemplate the mind of God is to contemplate the thoughts that fill that mind and to recline on Jesus’s heart, his *hegemonikon*, is to seek the inward meanings of his teaching, the treasures of wisdom and gnosis.⁹⁴² This is primarily understood in the context of scriptural exegesis. The Bride first hears the Word by his voice, before he appears in front of her eyes. The voice is the testimony of Scripture which is then superseded by the Word’s illuminating presence. This presence, however, functions to suggest lofty interpretations of mysterious texts.⁹⁴³ For as long as the soul struggles to find an appropriate meaning of an obscure and text, the Word is absent from her. When he finally comes to her, she will find it, having been illuminated in her mind with knowledge.⁹⁴⁴ This is precisely the function Jesus’s presence plays in the explication of the parables to the soul. As discussed below, the parables cannot be understood unless Jesus comes to one’s soul to explain the deliberate obscurities of the saying, revealing the mysteries that lies therein. These mysteries are the *theoremata* contained the hypostasised Wisdom’s own being, and so the Son’s presence is one of revealing his own contents to the soul. In coming to the mind of the scriptural exegete, he opens himself up to the reader and explains his own inner being. The Word is both the teacher and the object being taught.

In itself, therefore, direct spiritual perception does not entail complete knowledge of the thing in itself, or at least not necessarily. Just as multiple individuals each have their own distinct experience of an event on account of their own particularities, so each person’s perception of the divine differs according to their own circumstances, not least of which is their degree of spiritual progress and the clarity of their spiritual senses.⁹⁴⁵ A Christian making progress may perceive some aspect of God or his mysteries through his spiritual senses but his experience will not be the same as a perfected Christian’s perception of the same things.⁹⁴⁶ Such perception of the reality of things in their own right, however, may be possible after the resurrection, when Origen says that the perfected soul will see God ‘face to face’ and when ‘realities themselves (*res ipsae*) will become more manifest to us.’⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2.1 (SC 375, 276).

⁹⁴² *Ibid.* 1.2 (SC 375, 192).

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.* 3.11 (SC 376, 604).

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 3.11 (SC 376, 606).

⁹⁴⁵ *Com.Jn.* 10.10-35 (SC 157, 386-402).

⁹⁴⁶ See, for example, the comparison of the Bride and her handmaidens in *Com.Cant.* 1.4 (SC 375, 224-232).

⁹⁴⁷ *Hom.Ps.36* 5.1-2 (SC 411, 228-232).

When God is all in all, differences in the standpoint of each perceiver will be resolved. The highest stage of knowledge, therefore, is inexpressible in linguistic or propositional terms: 'naked of sounds, words, symbols, and types.'

Aretological wisdom is, therefore, profoundly alien to everyday human experience. It is both totalising and singular in its scope, taking in all the aspects of the Divine Wisdom and Word and yet pertains only to the singular contemplation of God. It is also profoundly otherworldly in its character, aspiring both to the heavens as they currently exist and yet also anticipating a state that not only surpasses the current heavenly experience but which will only be fulfilled at the end of all creation. While only fully instantiated in the world to come, wisdom even as it is partially manifested in this life evinces qualities alien to the current human condition. As we shall see in the next chapter, the eschatological dimension of the virtue of wisdom determines the portrait one finds in Origen's work of the ideal Christian sage and their relationship to both their own body and to the cosmos of which they are a part. Since wisdom properly belongs to the heavenly realm and to the eschatological age, the Christian sage finds themselves in an unusual, in-between position, having their citizenship in heaven and anticipating the eschaton but yet still inhabiting this earthly abode, circumscribed by the specificities of the temporal, historical process.

Chapter Six: The Christian Sage and the Cosmos

The Christian sage is an unusual specimen as the eschatological orientation of wisdom places them in an ambiguous position. They are a person out of place and out of time: a divine and heavenly soul relegated to earth; a person who in his own being prefigures the future but trapped inescapably in our present age. Hadot characterises Socrates (and by extension the ancient ideal of the philosopher), quoting Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

Parlant de l'étrangeté de la philosophie, M. Merleau-Ponty disait qu'elle n'est «jamais tout à fait dans le monde, et jamais cependant hors du monde». Il en est de même de l'étrange, de l'inclassable Socrate. Il n'est, lui aussi, ni dans le monde, ni hors du monde.⁹⁴⁸

The same words could rightly be applied to the Christian sage of Origen's work as well.

As we shall see below, the ideal of wisdom requires that the sage become quite other to the current human condition. The characterisation of the type of knowledge entails a concomitant characterisation of the type of knower. The sage must be the type of knowing subject capable and worthy of achieving the totalising direct perception of God that distinguishes the intellectual mode of eschatological existence. The ascetic characterisation of the sage, therefore, is closely tied to Origen's understanding both of the *telos* of human existence and of the nature of the eschatological body, both the personal body and that of the Church.

As Hadot's and Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of Socrates suggests, this ambivalent relationship of the philosophical ideal to the world was not localised to Origenian or Christian thought. Origen's own characterisation of the perfected Christian places him in a long philosophical tradition in which there was a deep tension between the otherworldly and outwardly benevolent ideals of the philosopher. However, I will suggest over the course of this chapter that the central Christian doctrine of the divine *kenosis* provided Origen the means resolve this tension to a far greater degree than any of his Platonist predecessors or contemporaries on account of the outward looking love of the Christian God.

In keeping with his intellectualist outlook, the role of pedagogue is central to Origen's understanding of the perfected Christian. In the examination of the Christian sage's pedagogic imitation of the divine *kenosis* in the latter part of this chapter, we shall finally see the central place the Christian sage and teacher takes in the economy of revelation and salvation. As inspired teachers, they

⁹⁴⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 66. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 38.

mediate their close personal intimacy and direct mystical understanding of noetic truths to the rational cosmos which is not yet able to receive God and his divine revelation in this manner. They thus become crucial links in God's own work in restoring the cosmos to himself and aid in the accomplishment of the *apokatastasis*. The importance of wisdom and wise men could hardly be stated more clearly than this.

1. *The Apokatastasis and Deification*

The eschatological orientation of aretological wisdom necessitates a certain type of knowing subject,⁹⁴⁹ the type of subject who will exist when God is all in all. It was a common philosophical axiom in late antiquity that like knows like. The kind of person who exists in the *apokatastasis*, perceiving God directly face to face, must themselves be like the God who they perceive, think, and feel. The means of cultivating this subject was the subject of Chapter Four. The contents of the sage's knowledge have also already been examined on multiple occasions throughout this thesis. The following discussion, therefore, is not so much concerned with what the sage knows but how they act and interact with their environment and those around them. It should be taken for granted at this point that the Christian sage will devote themselves to contemplative and exegetical activities but this still leaves open the question of their relation to other elements of the world besides the Scriptures.

Origen outlines the necessary prerequisites of the eschatological subject in his discussion of the *apokatastasis* in Book III of *Peri Archon*:

Therefore, the highest good (*summum bonum*) to which every rational nature hastens, which is also called the end of all things, is defined by even many of the philosophers in this manner, that the highest good is to become as much as possible like God (*summum bonum sit prout possibile est similem fieri deo*).⁹⁵⁰

Here, Origen clearly draws from the Platonist tradition concerning the *telos* of the philosopher's life; the goal of becoming like god being the distinctive conception of the human *telos* among Platonist philosophers.⁹⁵¹ This *telos* is contrasted with that of the Stoic sage, whose aim was to live according

⁹⁴⁹ See Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 399-442; Henri Crouzel, *Origène*, 140-142.

⁹⁵⁰ *P.A.* 3.6.1 (SC 268, 236). For a similar sentiment in Clement's work, see *Strom.* 7.13.1-4 (SC 428, 68-70).

⁹⁵¹ David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 309; John Dillon, "Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue," in *Platonismus und Christentum: Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie*, ed. Friedhelm Mann and Heinrich Dörrie (Münster: Aschendorff, 1983), 93. For a list of references to this concept in Plato's works, see Lloyd Gerson,

to nature.⁹⁵² The most famous passage in which Plato utilises this idea is in a digression in the *Theaetetus*, in which Plato says:

But there is no possibility of evils being ended, o Theodorus, for there is always by necessity something opposed to the good; they are not able to be established among the gods but by necessity haunt mortal nature and this earth. On this account, one ought to endeavour to flee from hence to there as quickly as possible; this flight is an act of becoming like God as much as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), and becoming like God is to become righteous and holy and wise (δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως).⁹⁵³

It was this passage which became the *locus classicus* for the concept of becoming godlike in the Platonist tradition.⁹⁵⁴ Becoming like god involves the acquisition of true wisdom and virtue (σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ ἀληθινή), contrasted with the false seeming wisdom of politics and craftwork (human wisdom, in other words).⁹⁵⁵

Origen incorporates the Platonic concept of becoming godlike into the biblical creation narrative of humankind being created in the image and likeness of God.⁹⁵⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two, Origen distinguishes between the image of God and the likeness; the former being essential to our rational nature, the latter being a potential that is only fulfilled in the eschatological age. Origen appeals to 1 John 3.2, 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is,' to support this interpretation.⁹⁵⁷

To accomplish this likeness, the Christian soul has to become radically different from what we are in our current condition. Julia Annas describes the Platonic ideal espoused in the *Theaetetus* as thoroughly otherworldly. Rather than attempting to fulfil their human nature, the philosopher

God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology (London: Routledge, 1990), 263 n.56.

⁹⁵² Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013), 52-53. Also, see David Sedley, 'The Ideal of Godlikeness,' 309. Among Middle Platonists, these two ideals could be synthesised, as they were by Philo who absorbed the Stoic ideal of *oikeiosis* into the transcendent Platonic ideal of *homoiosis theōi*. See Richard A. Horsley, "The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero," *The Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 1 (1978): 35-59; Valentin Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie: Son Caractère et sa Portée, Observations Philologiques* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 127.

⁹⁵³ *Theaet.* 176A-B (LCL 123, 126-128).

⁹⁵⁴ John Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004): 172; David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," 322-324.

⁹⁵⁵ *Theaet.* 176C-D (LCL 123, 128).

⁹⁵⁶ P.A. 3.6.1 (SC 268, 236). For parallels in Philo and Clement, see *De Fuga* 63-69 (LCL 275, 44-46); *Strom.* 2.131.2-6 (SC 38, 132); *Protr.* 12.122.4-12.123.1 (SC 2, 190-192). See, Henny Fiskå Hägg, "Deification in Clement of Alexandria with a Special Reference to his Use of *Theaetetus* 176B," in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Jane Baun, Averil Cameron, Mark Edwards, and Markus Vinzent, vol.46 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 171-172.

⁹⁵⁷ *Com.Rom.* 7.2.5 (SC 543, 262-264).

attempts to become something other entirely: ‘whereas most of the texts already indicated contain the idea that virtue transforms a human life, by revising our values and priorities, we seem here to have the idea that virtue turns a human life into something different in kind.’⁹⁵⁸ Within Alexandrian Christian circles, this was expressed through the doctrine of deification. Origen does not explicitly describe the *summum bonum* of becoming godlike in the technical terms of the souls becoming gods, but the link between the Platonic maxim and this concept had already been established in Alexandrian circles by Origen’s forebear Clement who combined the maxim of the *Theaetetus* digression with a citation of Ps. 81 LXX⁹⁵⁹:

⁶ You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;

⁷ nevertheless, you shall die like mortals and fall like one of the rulers (Ps. 81.6-7 LXX).

This psalm was central to the development of the doctrine of deification in the early Christian period.⁹⁶⁰ In this Alexandrian milieu, the Pauline concept of adoption and participatory union was incorporated into the process of spiritual perfection we have examined above.⁹⁶¹ This process transformed the soul from human to something very other than it is now. In the *Stromateis*, Clement characterises the godlike Gnostic as ‘refraining as far as possible from everything human.’⁹⁶² For Origen, this unhuman being is the rational soul that has achieved a likeness to God. Within Origen’s understanding, the two verses above refer consecutively to two distinct sets of people. The psalm thus outlines the two possible fates that face every soul: deification or death.

For if by the preservation of the law it is said to him, “I myself said, ‘You are all gods and sons of the Most High’” (Ps. 81.6 LXX), then by doing things opposed to the law, he is reproved by the word which says to him, “But you will die as humans” (Ps. 81.7 LXX).⁹⁶³

Human nature is identified with the latter, having coalesced in the wake of the soul’s fall from its primordial paradise: ‘but since, forsaking life, he has followed death, he was made human.’⁹⁶⁴ This clearly indicates the state of ψυχή described in *Peri Archon*. It consists of standing outside of true

⁹⁵⁸ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 53.

⁹⁵⁹ *Protr.* 12.122.4-12.123.1 (SC 2, 190-192). See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128-131.

⁹⁶⁰ On the importance of this verse for the development of the Christian concept of deification, see Carl Mosser, “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 56, no. 1 (2005): 30-74; Mark D. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 53, no. 3 (1999): 289-304; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 99-112.

⁹⁶¹ See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 121-122, 147, 154.

⁹⁶² *Strom.* 2.125.4-5 (SC 38, 126).

⁹⁶³ *Com.Matt.* 17.32 (GCS 40, 638-639). See also *Com.Matt.* 16.29 (GCS 40, 573-574); 17.19 (GCS 40, 638-639); *Com.Jn.* 20.242 (SC 290, 276); *C Cels.* 8.74 (SC 150, 350).

⁹⁶⁴ *Hom.Lev.* 9.11 (SC 287, 124).

participation in God.⁹⁶⁵ The aim of deification, therefore, means either transcending or rejecting our human nature:

And at that time the kingdom of the heavens will cease being like man, whenever envy and strife and the rest of the passions and sins and conducting oneself “according to man” (see 1 Cor. 3.3) also cease, and we become worthy to hear from God, “I said, You are all gods and sons of the Most High” (Ps. 81.6 LXX), or of his Christ, no longer practicing such things from which he would say to us, “But you will die as men” (Ps. 81.7 LXX). I myself think that the likeness of the kingdom of the heavens to the human king will cease, but also countless other things of which a sinful man is needful... he no longer having those needful of him in such a manner, he manifests himself “just as he is” (1 John 3.2)... For now, even if we might be worthy to see God in the mind and in the heart, we do not see “him just as he is,” but just as he becomes for us through the economy, but at the end of things and of the “restoration of all things (ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων) of which he spoke through the mouths of the saints, from the age of his prophets” (Acts 3.21), we will see him, not as now, which is as he is not, but as it is fitting then, what he is.⁹⁶⁶

While in Origen’s use of 1 John 3.2, stress is most frequently put upon the phrase ‘we will be like him,’ emphasising that likeness to God is only fulfilled in the future, in this case Origen highlights the last phrase of the verse, ‘we will see him as he is.’ Seeing God as he is means the same as seeing him ‘face to face’ and is contrasted with seeing him in mirror and in enigmas and with knowledge only of what ‘he becomes for us in the economy on our behalf.’ The unmediated knowledge of God ‘as he is’ only becomes possible once humankind ceases to be human and become gods, fulfilling the eschatological promise of Genesis.⁹⁶⁷

None of these Alexandrian writers would have been so presumptuous as to suggest that human beings could become gods in the manner in which God is God. Origen does not believe that human beings will become gods in an unqualified manner.⁹⁶⁸ In his discussion in *Contra Celsum*, Origen qualifies the application of the term god to righteous souls by saying that ‘they were said to be gods in an ancient Jewish custom (ἐλέγοντο εἶναι θεοὶ τινὶ Ἰουδαίων ἔθει).’⁹⁶⁹ This mirrors the qualifying

⁹⁶⁵ *Com.Jn.* 20.266-267 (SC 290, 286).

⁹⁶⁶ *Com.Matt.* 17.19 (GCS 40, 638-640). Also, see *Com.Matt* 16.29 (GCS 40, 574); *Com.Jn.* 20.242 (SC 290, 276); *Hom.Jer.* 15.6 (SC 238, 126-128).

⁹⁶⁷ Also see *Hom.Lev.* 9.11 (SC 287, 122-126), in which the human condition is identified with that death which fell upon Adam and Eve after their sin.

⁹⁶⁸ See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 145-147; Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956), 175-179.

⁹⁶⁹ *C Cels.* 4.31 (SC 136, 262).

phrase ‘as far as possible’ (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) in the Platonic tradition. While God is divine by nature, created beings can only be gods by participation in the divinity of God. This is made most clear in his *Homilies on Exodus*, where Origen distinguishes between that which is God by nature – the Trinity – and those that are called gods by grace and participation in God, comparing their relationship to that between a person and a painting of that person’s likeness: ‘As far as the appearance concerns beauty, it is said to be similar; as far as it does to substance, it is very dissimilar.’⁹⁷⁰

2. Eschatology, the body, and asceticism

The transformation required of the eschatological subject is closely tied to the question of the soul’s relationship to the body. The doctrine of *apokatastasis* is deeply tied in *Peri Archon* to the question of the body’s existence in the resurrection. The ‘variety and diversity’ (*varietate et diversitate*) of physical bodies and of species of rational creatures had been a gift of divine benevolence in the wake of the fall of rational creatures.⁹⁷¹ The sensible realm could not be part of the final beatitude since it was not part of God’s original plan for creation but a consequence of his providential foresight of the Fall. Once rational creatures have all been reconciled to God and subjected to his will, there will be no need of the grosser materiality and sensory nature of our current age.

This *telos* of rational creatures places heavy demands upon the soul who wishes to transform themselves in line with God’s will. This was achieved not only through their contemplative activities but also through ascetic practices. Origen himself was reputed to be a devoted ascetic:

Through the whole day he fulfilled no small labour of discipline, and through the night, he devoted himself most of the time to the study of the divine Scriptures, persevering as much as possible in a most philosophical life, sometimes by exercise in fasting, sometimes by circumscribing the time for sleep, and in his zeal he did not partake of a bed, but of the ground.⁹⁷²

This rigorous denial of the bodily pleasures of food and drink, combined with contemplative study, would act as preparation for the next life. Despite the impossibility of completely achieving this state of godlikeness in the present age, it is incumbent on the mature Christian to pursue it nonetheless. Since the heavens currently resemble – though are not identical with – the future state of rational

⁹⁷⁰ *Hom.Exod.* 6.5 (SC 321, 184). Also, see *Hom.Exod.* 8.2 (SC 321, 244-248); *Com.Jn.* 20.262-267 (SC 290, 284-286); *Com.Rom.* 7.1.2 (SC 543, 244-246).

⁹⁷¹ *P.A.* 3.6.4 (SC 268, 244).

⁹⁷² *H.E.* 6.3.9 (SC 41, 89).

creation, the future bliss promised to rational creation is possible in the here and now, even if I'm a circumscribed manner.

On account of the incompleteness of present virtue, Origen distinguishes between 'the holy way of life' (*sancta conversatio*) attainable on earth and the holiness we shall attain in the resurrection.⁹⁷³ José Alviar draws attention to the ninth *Homily on Exodus* to substantiate this point, while John Dillon refers to the twenty-seventh *Homily on Numbers*.⁹⁷⁴ In the former, Origen emphasises the eschatological aspect of this distinction. As we saw above, the distinction between the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies was one with important eschatological meaning in Origen's work, and Origen bolsters this association in this passage, saying of the high priest's clothing:

Let the high priest have his coverings on his inner parts; let him have his shameful parts covered, 'in order to be holy in body and spirit' (1 Cor. 7.34) and pure in thoughts and works. Furthermore, let him have bells around the skirt of his garment, in order that, it says, 'when he enters the sanctuary he might give a sound and not enter in silence' (Exod. 28.35). And these bells, which should always sound, have been placed on the edges of the clothing, in order, I believe, that you might never be silent about the last times and the end of the world, but that you might always sound and dispute and speak, according to him who said: "Be mindful of your last things and you will not sin" (Sir. 7.36). In this way, therefore, our inner man is adorned as a high-priest to God, so that he might not only enter the sanctuary but also the Holy of Holies, so that he might approach the place of atonement, where the cherubim are, and where God may appear to him. The sanctuary might be what a holy manner of life can possess in the present age. However, the Holy of Holies, which is only entered once, I believe to be the transition to heaven, where the place of atonement and cherubim are and where God can appear in to the pure of heart, since the Lord says, "Look, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17.21).⁹⁷⁵

While earthly holiness and heavenly holiness are distinguished, there is a close union between the two stages.⁹⁷⁶ Origen is clear that the virtue possessed by man is the same virtue possessed by God, only in a different manner.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷³ *Hom.Exod.* 9.4 (SC 321, 302).

⁹⁷⁴ José Alviar, *Klesis*, 70-71; John Dillon, "Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue," 104.

⁹⁷⁵ *Hom.Exod.* 9.4 (SC 321, 302).

⁹⁷⁶ José Alviar, *Klesis*, 71.

⁹⁷⁷ *C.Cels.* 4.29 (SC 136, 252-254); 6.48 (SC 147, 298-300). This is in contrast to the likes of Plotinus. See *Enn.* 1.2 3 (LCL 440, 134-136); *N.E.* 10.8.1178B (LCL 73, 620-622).

Similarly, though in a conceptually distinct manner, there are certain aspects of the life of the sage that are distinct to their existence in the current age. There are certain requirements and obligations that virtue and love impose on the mature soul that arise from their existence within a hierarchy of rational souls, wherein they supersede certain souls in virtue and knowledge, whether those souls are faithful in a simple manner, those who do not believe in God and Christ, or even those who are actively hostile to the Christian teaching and community. These are genuine obligations made of people in the here and now that will nonetheless be dissolved with the passing of the ages. For instance, explaining the Song of Songs 2.4, 'Set charity in order in me,' Origen argues that love is due to all things in accordance with a hierarchy of worth. God is due love without limit, while all others are owed love according to their relative merit. This hierarchy among created beings is a contingent aspect of this age. Origen specifies that a special degree of love is due to both one's spouse and to one's teacher.⁹⁷⁸ While there are genuine obligations due to one's familial relations and to one's teacher or students, these relations will not persevere into the afterlife: in the *apokatastasis*, there will be neither husband and wife nor student and teacher since all will be one in God. There are, therefore, certain ethical requirements demanded of the perfect Christian which are contingent upon their currently fleshly and earthbound condition.

Origen was disdainful of those who envisioned that the eschaton would be experienced in a manner unchanged from our current condition. When discussing the expected beatitudes in Book II of *Peri Archon*, Origen dismisses 'those who refuse the labour of understanding' and who 'indulge in some manner their pleasure and desire,' interpreting the eschatological promises of the Scriptures in a literal fashion.⁹⁷⁹ Understanding neither the contemplative existence which is every rational creature's *telos* nor Paul's words concerning the 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15.44), Origen's literalist opponents anticipate an existence of flesh and blood in the world to come, including the enjoyment of banquets of food and wine and the preservation of marital unions (with all that entails) after the resurrection.⁹⁸⁰ Much like false interpretations of the Song of Songs that understand it in a carnal manner, these false interpretations of Christianity's eschatological promises amount to an ethical as well as a hermeneutical failure.⁹⁸¹

There would be no corporeal food and drink in the eschaton because it is only required for our current fleshly, corruptible bodies. In the *apokatastasis*, every soul will transcend this need and be

⁹⁷⁸ *Com.Cant.* 3.7 (SC 376, 556); *Hom.Cant.* 2.8 (SC 37, 128-130).

⁹⁷⁹ *P.A.* 2.11.2 (SC 252, 396).

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 2.11.2 (SC 252, 396).

⁹⁸¹ *Com.Cant.* prol. 2 (SC 375, 90-92).

sustained purely upon their contemplation of God. They will be ‘nourished with the food of truth and wisdom’ (*veritatis et sapientiae cibis nutriat*).⁹⁸²

By this food of wisdom, the mind, having been nourished to entirety and perfection, as the human was made in the beginning, might be renewed to the image and likeness of God (see Gen. 1.26).⁹⁸³

This wisdom consists of the ‘contemplation and understanding of the things that are and the reasons for their causes (*theoremata et intellectus rerum rationesque causarum*).’⁹⁸⁴ The identification of wisdom with heavenly or angelic food is a commonplace in Origen’s work. Origen’s use of food metaphors is clearly incorporated into his wider vision of pedagogy with its distinction between the various levels of edification given to the diverse members of the church.⁹⁸⁵ In addition to the examples already noted, in the fourth *Homily on Psalm Seventy-Seven*, the ‘bread of heaven’ and ‘bread of angels’ (Ps. 77.24-25) is interpreted as intellectual illumination.⁹⁸⁶ In the *Commentary on John*, spiritual food is said to consist of ‘Nourishing words and thoughts and acts of contemplation’ (τῶν τρεφόντων λόγων καὶ νοημάτων τῶν ἐν θεωρίᾳ πράξεών) and in *On Prayer*, it is said to be the truths contemplated in God’s wisdom (τὴν ἀλήθειαν μετὰ σοφίας θεωρίας).⁹⁸⁷ This food is also none other than the Son who said ‘I am the living bread who came down from heaven’ and ‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6.33-5, 51).⁹⁸⁸ In order to partake of the food of angels, humanity will require bodies similar to those the angels currently enjoy. As rational, spiritual creatures, the resurrected souls will be sustained, like the angels, by theoretical realities and by the Wisdom and Word in which they exist.

The institution is marriage and its conjugal activities will also be transcended in the resurrection. The incompatibility of marriage with the eschaton is made most clear in Origen’s interpretation of the Sadducees’ hypothetical questioning of Jesus concerning marriage and the resurrection (Luke. 20.27-40; Matt. 22.23-33). Their questioning is fundamentally mistaken since it supposes that marriage could exist at all in the resurrection:

⁹⁸² P.A. 2.11.3 (SC 252, 398).

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.* 2.11.3 (SC 252, 398-400). See P.A. 4.4.9-10 (SC 268, 422-428); *Hom.Ps.15* 1.9 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 87-90). Also, see José Alviar, *Klesis*, 68-70; Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 198.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 2.11.7 (SC 252, 412).

⁹⁸⁵ See John David Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2017), 109-137; Virginia Noel, “Nourishment in Origen’s *On Prayer*,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 481-487.

⁹⁸⁶ *Hom.Ps.77* 4.1 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 390).

⁹⁸⁷ *Com.Jn.* 13.203ff. (SC 222, 144ff.); *De Orat.* 27.10 (GCS 3, 369-370).

⁹⁸⁸ *Hom.Ps.77* 4.3 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 392).

They do not know that the Creator made all things to be useful. Since procreation is also corruption, he made such arrangements by necessity... Therefore, if those worthy of privilege on account of the present age in which they lived well will be in a more blessed state in the life to come, and none of those who have not struggled here will be deemed worthy of the resurrection of the dead, then quite clearly those things which were useful for procreation here will not exist there. For God creates nothing superfluous nor does anything fruitlessly come into being on his account. One must recognise, therefore, that the consequence of the Sadducees' opinion concerning each man receiving back his own wife is that there would be again child-bearing and procreation and death; and, if these things, then also diseases; and, if procreation, then also infancy and progression from infancy to the attainment of language and later reason; and with the attainment of reason, evil, and only then again the discovery of virtue in those few who seek it. But what would be more vain than these things?⁹⁸⁹

As Peter Brown notes, for Origen human sexuality is 'a mere passing phase,' 'a dispensable adjunct of the personality that played no role in defining the essence of the human spirit.'⁹⁹⁰ Sexuality and sexual reproduction are a safeguard for human survival in the wake of death's introduction into the world. Once the Fall has been undone through the process of universal cosmic reconciliation, this part of mortal life will no longer be required: 'Here, where there is death, marriage and children are necessary, but where there is immortality, there is need of neither wedlock nor children.'⁹⁹¹

Since marriage has no place in the *telos* of humankind, while it is perfectly licet, the perfect Christian will have no part of it.⁹⁹²

Whoever in truth falls down in all wantonness and waits everywhere for diverse and illicit sexual embraces, and is carried unchecked in every whirlpool of lust, that person is

⁹⁸⁹ *Com.Matt.* 17.33 (GCS 40, 688-690).

⁹⁹⁰ Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 168.

⁹⁹¹ *Hom.Luke* 39.2 (SC 87, 452).

⁹⁹² Christopher King argues against Crouzel and Alviar that Origen believed in 'the innate goodness of nuptial life, [including] its more intimate aspects.' See Christopher J. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 89-94; Henri Crouzel, *Virginité et Mariage selon Origène* (Paris : Desclée, De Brouwer, 1963), 132-160; José Alviar, *Klesis*, 162-165. However, I am more convinced by the thesis of a certain tension within Origen's thought concerning marriage, as outlined by Crouzel and Alviar. Origen takes seriously Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7 and sees marriage as an 'accommodation to the weakness of those who received the law,' offered 'on account of our hardness of heart and weakness to those who do not wish to strive for the greater gifts and to become more blessed... for it seems this accommodation is permitted in comparison with worse things.' *Com.Matt.* 14.23 (GCS 40, 340-341). The view of marriage as a concession to our weakness does not entail that it is not a good in its own right but it is certainly a lesser kind of good and falls short of the blessedness to which Origen hopes his audiences aspires. Also, see *C Cels* 8.55 (SC 150, 300); *Com.Rom.* 4.6.9 (SC 539, 264).

uncircumcised in the foreskin of his flesh. However, the Church of Christ, made strong by grace of him who was crucified for it, not only refrains from illicit and impious beds but also from those which are permitted and licit, and flourishes as the virgin bride of Christ with pure and chaste virgins, in whom true circumcision of the foreskin of the flesh has been enacted and truly the testament of God and eternal testament is preserved in their flesh.⁹⁹³

Even where allowances are made and familial obligations are genuine, the eschatological horizon nonetheless still conditions the most appropriate course of action for the mature Christian.

Our current, fleshly bodies act as an impediment to a perfect contemplation of heavenly realities. In the passage from his *Homily on Psalm Thirty-Eight* quoted above, Origen hints at the obstacle that prevents our attainment of wisdom when he says that 'If someone in this situation is instructed and established in the things which they are able to achieve while situated in the flesh, there they will be illuminated in more perfect instruction.'⁹⁹⁴ In our fleshly state, the soul is restricted in its perception of the divine by the manner in which its contemplative faculties are hemmed in its attachment to the sensory world.⁹⁹⁵ In the words of Wis. 9.14-15, 'For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul.'⁹⁹⁶ It is a vanity that must be overcome to attain to true knowledge and understanding.⁹⁹⁷ Consequently, it is only 'after putting off the earthly body that one is reserved to understand face to face... Since while we are occupied by the solitudes of the body and we seek things which concern humans, we cannot seek God or consider things which concern God.'⁹⁹⁸ Consequently, Origen vehemently rejects the proposition that after the resurrection humankind will continue to enjoy an existence in the flesh, including the pleasures of food and drink.

When Origen foresaw the abdication of the fleshly body, his doctrine of the body differed significantly from his Platonic counterparts. As most Platonically influenced intellectuals of his age, he felt a great uneasiness with the human body as he found it. However, Origen never considered the possibility of any created being existing in a bodiless state. As noted in Chapter Two, the defining quality of the body is its plasticity. The resurrected soul will not give up its bodily counterpart but

⁹⁹³ *Hom.Gen* 3.6 (SC 7, 134).

⁹⁹⁴ *Hom.Ps.36* 5.1 (SC 411, 228).

⁹⁹⁵ See Henri Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel," *Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique* 31 (1955): 364-85; Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, 101-104; Cecile Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène à l'égard du corps et de la chair," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982) 849-851.

⁹⁹⁶ *De Orat.* 1.1 (GCS 3, 297); *Com.Rom.* 3.2.17 (SC 539, 74); *Hom.Num.* 23.11 (SC 461, 142-144). Also, see *P.A.* 1.1.5 (SC 252, 98); *C.Cels.* 8.32 (SC 150, 242-244); *Hom.Ps.38* 1.11 (SC 411, 362-368); 2.2 (SC 411, 374-376); *Frag.Eph.* 5 (I, 239-241).

⁹⁹⁷ *Com.Cant.* prol. 3 (SC 375, 138); *Hom.Ps.38* 1.11 (SC 411, 366-368).

⁹⁹⁸ *Com.Rom.* 3.2.17 (SC 539, 74).

will transform it, as the soul is itself transformed from the image into the likeness of God. The soul will continue exist in a body but not the fleshly or psychic body it currently possesses, but a spiritual body (see 1 Cor. 15.44). The ‘psychic body’ cannot be received into the beatitude since the ψυχὴ is a fallen condition of the *nous*.⁹⁹⁹ The body’s form (εἶδος) will persist even while its material substance changes, vouchsafing its identity with the psychic and fleshly body from which it grows.¹⁰⁰⁰ Once the soul has been united to the spirit, the body will also be spiritualised, serving the spirit (*spiritui ministrans*) and being adapted to the spiritual nature of its ruler.¹⁰⁰¹ The body can, therefore, take part in the consummation of all things to God’s spiritual mode of being.

The precise nature of this spiritual body is a mystery but Origen perceives hints of its character in the current state of the angels and heavenly bodies. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen moves seamlessly from citing Ps. 81.6 LXX to stating that ‘when men are made perfect they become equal to angels,’ to saying that the resurrection state of humanity ‘is compared to sun, moon, and stars.’¹⁰⁰² In contrast to the pagans, Christians do not worship the sun, moon, and stars because it is their hope to become as the stars currently are.¹⁰⁰³ This is likely the origin of the condemnation made against Origen at the Second Council of Constantinople, which attributed to him the belief that the resurrected body would be spherical. This is clearly a misrepresentation: Origen only indicated a similarity with the astral bodies, not identity, and Origen believed the bodies of the stars would be changed as well, since they themselves were a condescension for the sake of lesser fallen rational creatures.¹⁰⁰⁴ These astral bodies are said to be ethereal and of great purity and refinement. Consequently, the spiritual body is characterised as a ‘most subtle and most pure and most splendid body.’¹⁰⁰⁵ Like the stars themselves, such entities take no part of physical sustenance. However, as Scott notes, to become like the visible stars is not the end of humanity’s hope: ‘the resurrected soul has a higher goal than the mere physical heavens.’¹⁰⁰⁶ It is only the first stage in the ascent of the resurrected saint through the spheres of the heavens, before being incorporated into the noetic heavens: into the ‘kingdom of

⁹⁹⁹ P.A. 2.8.2 (SC 252, 340-342).

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 2.2.2 (SC 252, 246-248); 2.10.1-2.10.3 (SC 252, 374-382); 3.6.6 (SC 268, 246-250); *C Cels.* 5.18-23 (SC 147, 58-72). On Origen’s use of the term εἶδος, drawn from Aristotle’s metaphysics, see Methodius, *De Resurrectione* 22 (GCS 27, 244-246). See Mark Edwards, “Origen No Gnostic,” 31-36.

¹⁰⁰¹ P.A. 3.6.6 (SC 268, 250).

¹⁰⁰² *C Cels.* 4.29-30 (SC 136, 252-260).

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.* 5.10 (SC 147, 34-38).

¹⁰⁰⁴ P.A. 1.7.5 (SC 252, 218).

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 3.6.4 (SC 268, 242-244).

¹⁰⁰⁶ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 162-163. See *Hom.Ps.36* 5.4 (SC 411, 236-238); *Ex.Mart.* 13 (GCS 2, 13-14); P.A. 3.6.4 (SC 268, 242-244).

God' or the 'kingdom of heaven'.¹⁰⁰⁷ The movement through the spheres of the heavens reflects Origen's broader pedagogic vision of progressive ascent, which continues into the afterlife.¹⁰⁰⁸

This transformative process demonstrates that the aim is not simply to refrain from certain activities. Deification requires the wholesale transformation of the soul's dispositions. To take the example of marriage once more, Origen makes clear that sexual abstinence alone did not constitute chastity.¹⁰⁰⁹ After all, even the pagan priestesses fulfil this condition without displaying the virtue required of virgin souls.¹⁰¹⁰ The acts of circumcision and castration are important symbols of true spiritual chastity. Those who maintain their physical celibacy are nonetheless uncircumcised in their hearts when they hold heretical beliefs.¹⁰¹¹ In an extended digression on the topic of circumcision in Book II of his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen distinguishes between inner and outer circumcision and between circumcision of the flesh and circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2.28-29). Here, Origen distinguishes outward from inward chastity:

For there are certain things which begin from the inner man and extend to the outer man, but others starting from the outer man extend to the inner. However, what I say is the following. If chastity begins in the inner man, undoubtedly it will extend to the outer man. Surely, it is not possible for someone who has not committed adultery in their heart to be able to commit adultery in their body. However, if someone begins their chastity in their outer man it does not follow that it extends also into inner self-control (*interioris continentiam*), as if one who does not commit adultery in their body does not commit adultery in their heart.¹⁰¹²

The abstinence of our bodies from physical sexual contact is less important than the inward purity of our souls, the self-control that characterises the inner man's chastity. Consequently, even if one's bodily purity is soiled, this does not necessarily undo their inner purity, so long as the former is not the result of the person's own autonomous decision.¹⁰¹³ Inner circumcision is accomplished when the soul rejects the not only physical acts but the desires and pleasures of the flesh that lead to them:

Circumcision is to amputate a certain part from the genital organ through which the succession of the human race and fleshly propagation is furnished. Through this, I suppose,

¹⁰⁰⁷ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 161.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 189-190.

¹⁰¹⁰ *C Cels.* 7.48 (SC 150, 128).

¹⁰¹¹ *Hom.Gen* 3.6 (SC 7, 134).

¹⁰¹² *Com.Rom.* 2.9.37-38 (SC 532, 414-416).

¹⁰¹³ *Com.Matt.* 12.7 (GCS 40, 78).

is figuratively indicated the amputation from the soul, if some impurity adheres to it from its fellowship with the flesh, or if someone covers it with a mind of seductive desire.¹⁰¹⁴

The eschatological importance of this spiritual circumcision is suggested to Origen by the fact that the physical rite takes place on the eighth day (Lev. 12.3). The eighth day represents what comes after a whole week which, on the basis of Gen. 1, represents our present age.

Therefore, spiritual circumcision is theirs who fight for the future age, in that they neither marry nor are married but will be like angels of God.¹⁰¹⁵

Origen was rumoured to have taken rather more dramatic measures than circumcision to mortify his own sexual impulses, following an overly literal interpretation of Matt. 19.12: 'here are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.'¹⁰¹⁶ Eusebius attributed this action to a mistaken youthful zeal, though his reliability on this matter is highly disputed.¹⁰¹⁷

Whether or not the original story had any basis in truth, by the composition of the *Commentary on Matthew*, written towards the end of Origen's life,¹⁰¹⁸ Origen mocks those who interpret Matt. 19.12 in this way as ignorant and bringing reproach on themselves.¹⁰¹⁹ The human body should remain untouched but the passionate faculty of the soul (τοῦ παθητικοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς), that associated with bodily desires, should be castrated by means of reason and divine teaching.¹⁰²⁰ The intellect, wielding the 'knife of self-control,' cuts away the passions of pride, anger, lust, and so on.¹⁰²¹

The mortification of fleshly passions is an important precondition for the attainment of wisdom, in keeping the pedagogical outlook already outlined in Chapter Three. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen explains why the Bride was only called forth by the Bridegroom once spring has come (Song 2.11). The soul cannot be invited out of bodily and earthly concerns while still in winter of vices and passions.¹⁰²² Without such an invitation, the soul cannot be shown the mysteries of God's 'back parts' (Exod. 33.23) – the mysteries of the age to come. The secrets of God's wisdom

¹⁰¹⁴ *Com.Rom.* 2.9.25 (SC 532, 396-398).

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.9.26 (SC 532, 398). On the importance of the eschatological importance of the figure eight, see Andrew Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis*, 47-51; Joel Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 241-258.

¹⁰¹⁶ *H.E.* 6.8.1-2 (SC 41, 95-96).

¹⁰¹⁷ For the argument against the reliability of Eusebius' account, see, for instance, John McGuckin, "The Life of Origen," *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John A. McGuckin (London: Westminster John Knox Press), 6; Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 67-68. For the opposing view, see Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, 53-4; Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 168-169, esp. 168 n.44. In light of Origen's own words on this topic, I find the former argument more persuasive.

¹⁰¹⁸ *H.E.* 6.36.1-2 (SC 41, 138).

¹⁰¹⁹ *Com.Matt.* 15.1 (GCS 40, 349).

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.1 (SCS 40, 350-351).

¹⁰²¹ *Hom.Exod.* 9.4 (SC 321, 296).

¹⁰²² *Com.Cant.* 4.2 (SC 376, 700-702).

and his hidden mysteries, therefore, remain inaccessible to those who remain gripped by the passions. Elsewhere, in the *Commentary on John*, Origen argues that the soul is only capable of receiving the θεώρηματα of God once one is separated from all trouble and come to experience a peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4.7).¹⁰²³ David was not permitted by God to construct the Temple for God since he was engaged in war against his and Israel's enemies. Only with Solomon, whose very name means 'peaceful' and who thus received wisdom in his dream, was the Temple constructed.¹⁰²⁴

These descriptions of cutting away the passionate faculty of the soul suggests that Origen envisioned an ideal of *apatheia* or impassibility. The concept of *apatheia* was central to Stoic ethics and contrasted with the Platonist and Peripatetic approach to the passions, *metriopatheia*, which sought not to eradicate them but to moderate their influence. The two concepts in their original meaning differ not so much in their characterisations of the philosophical ideal but in their understandings of the psychic origins of the passions. The ideal of *apatheia* reflects the Stoic understanding of the unitive soul in which passions cannot coexist with an ordered rational faculty, while *metriopatheia* reflects the Platonic vision of the divided soul subject to multiple impulses, wherein the unreasoning parts of the soul cannot be eradicated but should be brought under the control of the reasoning part.¹⁰²⁵ In Stoic usage, the eradication of the passions did not mean living in a manner wholly unaffected by the world but not doing so in an irrational manner. However, as we shall see for instance with regards to Plotinus's doctrine of the grades of virtues and Philo's hierarchisation of the two, they did increasingly become understood in divergent manners: *apatheia* as a complete rejection of worldly concerns, and *metriopatheia* as a controlled manner of engaging in these matters.

Crouzel questions whether Origen followed his Alexandrian forebears Philo and Clement in advocating for ἀπάθεια as the goal of godlike souls, suggesting that Origen advocated μετριοπάθεια instead. Crouzel highlights how infrequently Origen utilises the term *apatheia* in his corpus, especially when compared with Clement's work.¹⁰²⁶ Other scholars, however, disagree with Crouzel and it is worth noting that the term *metriopatheia* is found even less frequently in his extant Greek

¹⁰²³ *Com.Jn.* 6.1-5 (SC 157, 128-130).

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibid.* 6.4-5 (SC 157, 130).

¹⁰²⁵ See John Dillon, "Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics," *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy* 27 (1978): 508-517.

¹⁰²⁶ According to *TLG*, there are 48 occurrences of ἀπάθεια and 30 occurrences of ἀπαθής in Origen's extant Greek works, compared with 16 and 30 respectively in Clement's work. Given the relative proliferation of each writer, the this term clearly had a greater centrality in Clement's thought.

works.¹⁰²⁷ In a surviving fragment on the Gospel of Matthew, moreover, Origen lists the among the traditional Platonic virtues of temperance, wisdom, and righteousness (justice is not included here), the virtue of impassibility.¹⁰²⁸ Furthermore, Origen states in *Contra Celsum* that the benefit, or one of them, that Christians receives from worship God through his Word and Wisdom is to become untroubled and impassible (ἄλυτοι καὶ ἀπαθείς).¹⁰²⁹ After all, the Son is wise and impassible and confers this upon those who follow him committedly.¹⁰³⁰ By pursuing the virtues that exist in God essentially, the spiritual man imitates the impassible existence of God. Perhaps we can turn to the example of Philo to help navigate these conflicting views. Philo frequently utilises the language of *apatheia* to describe the state of his ideal sage but nonetheless believes that moderation and training of the passions is also valuable.¹⁰³¹ The former is represented by Moses and Isaac while Aaron and Abraham are symbols of the latter.¹⁰³² Complete freedom from the passions is Philo's highest ideal but the process of moderating them is still a positive pursuit, and one more realistically available to most people. Since the passions are associated with the body and the lower parts of the soul, their complete eradication while still embodied is extremely rare. A similar approach is also evident in Plotinus's grade of virtues: the civic virtues are associated with *metriopatheia*, while the higher virtues require the severing of our passionate faculties.¹⁰³³ It seems reasonable, therefore, to believe that Origen could hold *apatheia* as the ultimate aim of the spiritual soul while also preoccupying himself with the need not to excise the passions but control them, since this would be a far more useful endeavour in the here and now.

3. Asceticism and Society

However, the process of divinisation is not simply a matter of transforming the soul's relationship to its body and its own lower faculties. It also requires a transformation of the person's relationship to the world, to society, and to its institutions. This has already been evidenced in relation to the issue

¹⁰²⁷ Comparative with the results above, the same search on TLG returns 6 cases of the term μετριοπάθεια, all from catenae, and no uses of μετριοπαθής. See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 386-388.

¹⁰²⁸ *Frag. Matt.* 64 (GCS 41.1, 41).

¹⁰²⁹ *C Cels.* 8.8 (SC 150, 192).

¹⁰³⁰ *Ex. Mart.* 10 (GCS 2, 10).

¹⁰³¹ Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 231-232; Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 385-386. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 151-152; "Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections of a Controversy in Late Greek Ethics," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1983), 515-516.

¹⁰³² *Leg. All.* 3.129-132 (LCL 226, 386-390). Also see *Abr.* 256-257 (LCL 289, 124).

¹⁰³³ John Dillon, "Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue," 97.

of sexuality: sexuality and the institution of marriage are intimately linked in Origen's mind. The embodied human state is not understood as an isolated individual phenomenon but is always connected to the wider social structure of the human world. In the words of Peter Brown, 'Social and physical mingled inextricably in his thought. Behind the definition imposed upon the spirit by the body, there lay the definition imposed upon the person, through the body, by society. Origen always thought of a body as more than the physical body, seen in isolation.'¹⁰³⁴ Another way of considering this is to say, as we have repeatedly affirmed in this thesis, that Origen never considered the body outside the scope of the salvific economy and so outside of the history and destiny of humanity as a whole. What, then, does it mean to live as a godlike, spiritual, new man in a society alien to such a person?

Given the multivalence of the concept of the world in his work, it is no surprise to find Origen's understanding of how the Christian is to engage with the world is complex and multifaceted. This ambiguity mirrors a tension that runs through the Platonist tradition regarding the philosopher's relation to the world and to society. Should the philosopher withdraw from the world as a fleeting, imperfect, and wicked reflection of true supercelestial reality or is the philosopher's practice of virtue demonstrated in the excellence of their lives in this world? Plato himself seemed to give conflicting accounts on this question.¹⁰³⁵ The otherworldly vision of the *Theaetetus* is stark in its rejection of social bonds that tie the philosopher to the life of the *polis*: 'They have not learned the way to the agora, nor where the court of law is, nor the council-chamber, nor any other public assembly in the city; and concerning laws and decrees, whether spoken or written, he neither sees nor hears them; nor the exertions of political clubs for powerful positions and meetings and dinners,' and so on.¹⁰³⁶ This philosopher not only does not concern himself with the social mores and etiquette of the city in which he resides but demonstrates an utter disinterest in the good of others. He does not endeavour to educate his peers in better things,¹⁰³⁷ but 'in truth his neighbour escapes the notice of such a person; not only what he does, but also whether he is a human being or some other creature.'¹⁰³⁸ This 'inept klutz' in the words of Annas stands in stark contrast to the depictions

¹⁰³⁴ Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 170.

¹⁰³⁵ For interpretation of Plato's ideal of godlikeness in otherworldly terms, see Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*; David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness." For arguments that Plato understood godlikeness in terms engagement in the world, see Timothy A. Mahoney, "Is Assimilation to God in the *Theaetetus* Purely Otherworldly?," *Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2004): 321-338; John Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God." Michelle Jenkins, on the other hand, believes the ideal is indifferent to the philosopher's withdrawal from or engagement with the world, so long as the soul itself was ordered in a harmonious manner resembling the gods. See Michelle Jenkins, "Plato's Godlike Philosopher," *Classical Philology* 111, no. 4 (2016): 330-352.

¹⁰³⁶ *Theaet.* 173D (LCL 123, 118).

¹⁰³⁷ See Michelle Jenkins, "Plato's Godlike Philosopher," 333-334.

¹⁰³⁸ *Theaet.* 174B (LCL 123, 120).

of the role of the philosopher-kings of the *Republic* and of Socrates' own life in throughout the Platonic corpus.¹⁰³⁹ Due to their contemplation of the Good, the philosopher-kings of Kallipolis are best placed to enact the demands of justice. Socrates involved himself in the day-to-day lives of his fellow citizens, caring so much for the good of their souls that he risked his own life. Annas herself notes the 'puzzling inconsistency' between these two ideals and describes Plato and Aristotle as two philosophers who felt the pull of both the ideal of the sage as one who retreats from this life and that of the sage as one who lives this life most excellently.¹⁰⁴⁰

Alcinous provides an excellent example in this regard. Annas and Sedley interpret the ideal of godlikeness in Alcinous's *Handbook of Platonism* quite differently; Annas suggesting he prioritised withdrawal from practical endeavours, while Sedley suggests he puts forward an ideal of the philosopher as a benevolent moral actor in the world.¹⁰⁴¹ In chapter twenty-eight of this work, Alcinous states:

We can achieve likeness to God if we have been furnished with a fitting nature, and with customs, training, and practice according to law (ἔθεσί τε καὶ ἀγωγῇ καὶ ἀσκήσει τῇ κατὰ νόμον), and, most importantly, with reason, education, and a theoretical tradition (θεωρημάτων παραδόσει), in such a way as to stand apart from the majority of human matters and to be always close to the intelligibles (τοῖς νοητοῖς).¹⁰⁴²

While highlighting the importance of both the philosopher's use of reason and their retreat from most human concerns, Alcinous also highlights the importance of 'customs, training, and practice according to law.' However, in chapter two, Alcinous says that 'The soul that contemplates the divine and the thoughts of the divine are said to be in a good condition, and this condition is called 'wisdom' (φρόνησις), which might be said to be nothing other than likeness to the divine. Whence, such a condition would be of highest priority and worthy of honour, most prayed for, most appropriate to us, free of hindrance, and within our power, and the reason for the *telos* set before us.'¹⁰⁴³ The element of God whose likeness is pursued in this passage is clearly that of self-sufficiency and remoteness from the flux of earthly life. This was also an important part of Philo's understanding of the sage's godlikeness. Philo, who explicitly commends Plato's ideal of godlikeness elsewhere in *On Flight*, describes his ideal of the sage in terms very similar to Plato's:

¹⁰³⁹ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 56.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Julia Annas, "The Sage in Ancient Philosophy," in *Anthropine Sophia: Studi di Filologia e Storiografia Filosofica in Memoria di Gabriele Giannantoni*, ed. Francesca Alesse et al (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2008), 15.

¹⁰⁴¹ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 59 n. 19; David Sedley, 'The Ideal of Godlikeness,' 322.

¹⁰⁴² *Didask.* 28.182.3-8 (57).

¹⁰⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.153.5-12 (2-3).

In another manner, the careless man who lives in a state of restlessness frequents the agora, the theatres, law-courts, council chambers, assemblies, and every congregation and gathering of men, his tongue being set free for unmeasured, endless, disorderly speech, confounding and confusing everything, mixing together true with false, spoken with unspoken, personal with public, and holy with profane, serious with risible... The honourable man, on the other hand, having become desirous of a life free from business and politics, withdraws and loves solitude, think it seemly to escape the notice of the many, not due to misanthropy, for he is a philanthropist if anyone is, but due to having rejected vice which the masses welcome, being delighted by that which it is proper to mourn and grieving at that which it is right to rejoice. On this account, he shuts himself up at home most of the time, scarcely crossing the entrance.¹⁰⁴⁴

The reasons for this are twofold. First of all, Philo highlights the hazardous quality of other people to the good health of one's soul.

For living together with ignorant people is harmful, and the soul often unwillingly takes on impressions of their madness.¹⁰⁴⁵

Consequently, cities and other places in which people gather in large numbers naturally breed vices and other distractions that disrupt the contemplative life of the sage.¹⁰⁴⁶ Secondly, solitude is the natural state for those seeking God since it is the state of his own blessed nature.¹⁰⁴⁷

By contrast, since it is dependent upon the body, Alcinous suggests that the practical life is subject to such external hindrances, seemingly placing it outside the scope of godlikeness. Alcinous does not suggest that the philosopher should reject practical and social life entirely, but certainly relegates it to a subordinate good to be pursued only 'when lead by critical circumstances... It is fitting from what has been said about the philosopher that they by no means forsake contemplation, but always nourish and strengthen this, and turn to the practical life only as something attendant'¹⁰⁴⁸ The same element of compulsion is even evident in the presentation of the philosopher-kings of the *Republic*. Jenkins highlights the compulsion that must be applied to the philosopher who has beheld the Forms in order for them to aid in shaping others, whether individuals or societies, in accordance with what

¹⁰⁴⁴ *De Abr.* 20-23 (LCL 289, 12-14). Also, see *Quod Omnes* 63 (LCL 363, 46); *De Mut.* 34-38 (LCL 275, 160).

¹⁰⁴⁵ *De Fuga* 14 (LCL 275, 16).

¹⁰⁴⁶ Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 18-20 (LCL 363, 122-124); *Quod Omnes* 92 (LCL 363, 62); *De Fuga* 14 (LCL 275, 16).

¹⁰⁴⁷ *De Abr.* 87 (LCL 289, 48).

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Didask.* 2.153.21-24 (3).

he has seen.¹⁰⁴⁹ Only when necessitated by external circumstances do they utilise their greater understanding and virtue for the benefit of others. Left to their own devices, it seems, they would prefer to devote themselves to a life of contemplation.

The problem facing the Platonist philosophical school was in part a question of which aspect of the divine is to be imitated. Plato's concept of the gods and divinity were complex and multifaceted¹⁰⁵⁰ and the picture was complicated further by the Middle-Platonist incorporation of the Aristotelian Prime Mover. While the gods are said to be wanting for nothing and Aristotle's deity is defined as outside the scope of virtue,¹⁰⁵¹ the divine Demiurge orders the cosmos as an act of benevolent goodness.¹⁰⁵² The problem can be observed in Alcinoüs's treatment of the demand of the *Theaetetus*. Combining it with the account of the *Phaedrus*, Alcinoüs distinguishes the heavenly gods and the super-heavenly God (standing in place of Plato's world of the Forms¹⁰⁵³), characterised in Aristotelian terms. It is only the former who are identified as the goal of becoming godlike since virtues cannot rightly be attributed to the super-heavenly deity.¹⁰⁵⁴

This tension was not significantly harmonised within the Platonist tradition until Plotinus. I suggest, however, that the *kenosis* of God the Son offered Origen the means to a solution to this problem that not only antedates the Neoplatonist but better solves the inherent tension. Postulating a grade of virtues, Plotinus distinguishes between true or cathartic virtues (drawing from the terminology of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*¹⁰⁵⁵) and civic virtues, which are the virtues on display in the activities of good people in relation to others and to society. The civic virtues are those displayed in our embodied and social state; the virtues as they are commonly understood. The higher virtues, on the other hand, presuppose the disentanglement of the rational part of the soul from the lower parts and from the body and are thus wholly otherworldly.¹⁰⁵⁶ Consequently, the latter reflect the otherworldly ideal of the *Theaetetus*, that of the philosopher who has become so removed from most people that they would hardly even consider the philosopher virtuous, while the latter

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Rep.* VI.500d (LCL 276, 62); VII.540B (LCL 276, 198). Michelle Jenkins, 'Plato's Godlike Philosopher,' 335-336. Armstrong also highlights the former passage as evidence of the ideal of the solitary sage, though he ultimately comes down on the other side of the argument. See John Armstrong, 'After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God,' 173.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See Gerd van Riel, *Plato's Gods*.

¹⁰⁵¹ *N.E.* 10.8.1178B (LCL 73, 620-622).

¹⁰⁵² *Tim.* 29E (LCL 234, 54). How different scholars interpret the ideal of godlikeness is closely tied to which aspect of divinity they emphasise. Annas highlights the supernatural, nonhuman aspect of the divine; Mahoney emphasises the benevolence that god shows to the cosmos; and Jenkins based her interpretation of the harmoniousness of the divine.

¹⁰⁵³ *Phaedr.* 246E-247E (LCL 36, 474-476).

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Didask.* 28.181.40-182.2 (57).

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Enn.* I.2.3 (LCL 440, 132-134). See Plato, *Phaedo* 82A-B (LCL 36, 284); *Rep.* IV.430C (LCL 237, 382).

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Enn.* I.2.3 (LCL 440, 134).

represent virtue as commonly conceived and as exhibited in daily life. Plotinus does not want to deny the virtuousness of courage displayed in battle, of the righteousness of good leaders, and so on, but what relation do such things have to the state of divine? God cannot possess such courage since it depends on a form of being utterly alien to him. Godlike virtue is a truer form of virtue that relates to the regulation and perfection of the soul *qua* its own inner being: true temperance consists in not sharing in the passions of the bodily; true courage is in not being afraid to withdraw from the body; and true justice consists in the sovereignty of the logos and nous over the soul.¹⁰⁵⁷ As John Dillon outlines, the civic virtues exist in the true sage only potentially because, while they would demonstrate civic courage, temperance, and so on to others if they noticed their needs, they are so consumed by their contemplative inner lives that they never in fact do so. The Plotinian sage is 'the sort of person who would help old ladies across the road, if he happened to notice them, but he would in practice be most unlikely to do so.'¹⁰⁵⁸ The tension is resolved by organising the two ideals into a hierarchy of values, with the civic virtues being an important step on the road to developing higher ones.

In the *True Doctrine*, Celsus had charged that Christians' beliefs should logically entail that they pursue precisely this way of life, refusing all earthly things and social bonds:

If they refuse to worship the stewards of these things [the daemons that govern the various aspects of the cosmos] in the appropriate manner, neither should they come to manhood, nor marry a wife, nor have children, nor do anything else in life.¹⁰⁵⁹

Christians' refusal to honour the daemons that control this realm by engaging in the practices of civic worship requires that they should withdraw from this realm entirely. Elsewhere, Celsus criticises the tendency among Christians to refuse to take on certain roles in society; declining service in the Roman military and refusing to take civic honours and roles in the civil government.¹⁰⁶⁰ Clearly, this was a Platonist who thought it proper for the philosopher to engage in the social life of the imperial and pagan religious institutions.

Origen's response to these accusations is twofold. On the one hand, he accepts the specific accusations concerning Christians' relationship to pagan and secular society. It is true and proper that Christians do not engage in military service or hold public offices or honours. On the other, he accepts the underlying normative impulses behind Celsus's positive estimation of these forms of

¹⁰⁵⁷ John Dillon, 'Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue,' 97.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *C Cels.* 8.55 (SC 150, 298). Also, see *C Cels.* 8.33 (SC 150, 246).

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 8.73 (SC 150, 344); 8.75 (SC 150, 350).

public service, reorienting them towards the life of the Church. Thus, while the Christian does not fight a corporeal battle in the imperial military, they don the armour of God and engage in spiritual warfare:

Also, we who overthrow all demons with our prayers, who stir up wars, destroy oaths, and disturb the peace, help the emperors more than those who appear to be serving in battles. We work together in common tasks, offering prayers with righteousness and ascetic exercises (σὺν ἀσκήσει) and practices which teach us to disregard pleasures and not to be affected by them.¹⁰⁶¹

Regarding the question of Christians' relation to leadership roles in society, Origen states:

Christians avoid such things not for the purpose of fleeing the more communal public services of life, but keeping themselves for a more divine and necessary service of the church of God for the salvation of humankind, and both necessarily and rightly leading and taking thought for all, both those within, so they may live better every day, and those who appear to be outside, so they may come to join in holy words and works of worship, so that truly honouring God in this manner and instructing as many as possible, they might be permeated with the Word of God and with the divine law and thus be united to the God of all through the Son of God, the Word, and Wisdom, and Truth, and Righteousness, who unites to him all who have been persuaded according to God in all things.¹⁰⁶²

Christians' rejection of civic governmental service is founded upon their ministerial and pedagogic roles in the Church and in society more broadly. The Christian life requires a reorientation of the obligations of wider society in accordance with the true value and knowledge possessed by the Christian community. In this manner, the Church functions for the Christian congregation in a manner very similar to that Pierre Hadot identifies for the philosophers' schools. It is an attempt to instantiate a society which lives according to what is of true value apart from wider society whose value-systems are corrupted and ill-suited for human flourishing.¹⁰⁶³ In this sense, the philosopher does not reject society *per se* but society as they currently find it. Origen states as much in his response to Celsus's criticisms:

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.* 8.73 (SC 150, 346).

¹⁰⁶² *Ibid.* 8.75 (SC 150, 350-352).

¹⁰⁶³ See Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 97, 244. Hadot argues that the philosophical school institution, particularly in the Platonist and Peripatetic models, was a means of cultivating the mind away from the corrupting influences of the *polis*, originally with the goal of training men able to virtuously rule, though this aim was increasingly interiorised as decades and centuries passed.

However, they separate and break themselves off from those things alien to the society of God and from strangers to his covenants, in order to become a citizen of the society in heaven, coming to the living God “and to the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to a countless assembly of angels and to the church of the firstborn which has been written in heaven.”¹⁰⁶⁴

Philo, while emphasising retreat from the world and solitude to a far greater degree than Origen, nonetheless highlights what he perceives as exceptional parallel societies in the cases of the communities of the Essenes and the Therapeutae. Both are characterised in large part by their lives of solitude and their retreat from the crowds that populate cities and from the demands and turbulences of civic and political life while also exhibiting their own social structures centred around meditation of Scripture and ascetic practices. Nonetheless, there remains a tension within the Platonist philosophical tradition, of which Philo was undoubtedly a part. Even admitting that the problems of society can be assuaged by the establishment of parallel, more virtuous, and more rationally attuned communities, the godlike ideal of singularity and unaffectedness, undisturbed by social bonds remains, as demonstrated in Plotinus’s grade of virtues or Alcinous’s statement concerning the super-heavenly deity.

The Christian’s transformation of his social reality does not only encompass his relations to his fellow human beings. The Church is a society of both humans and the community of heavenly angels. As Peter Brown states with regard to the virgin soul’s relationship to the social institution of marriage, ‘Not to belong to married society was to belong more intensely to others. The invisible world was magnificently sociable. It was a “great city” crowded with angelic spirit. The sense of an invisible, alternative society, of a great communion of human and angelic beings, was central to Origen’s notion of the virgin state.’¹⁰⁶⁵ The process of becoming godlike is also that of becoming a peer to the society of spiritual beings that currently exists in an unseen manner throughout the world and heavens. The transformation of the soul’s relationship to the body is intricately tied to the transformation of the soul’s relationship to spiritual forces.

Since the Christian does not reject society as such but exists within a spiritual community nestled within the wider social world, Origen does not believe that Christians have to withdraw from the world completely. There are certainly aspects of civic and pagan society that are to be rejected outright, as well as other aspects from which it is better, though not necessary, to withdraw. In the former camp are pagan religious rituals and military service; in the latter is the institution of

¹⁰⁶⁴ *C Cels.* 8.5 (SC 150, 188). See *C Cels.* 8.2 (SC 150, 180-182).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 171.

marriage. Justifying Christians' refusal of military service, Origen draws a parallel between the Christian and the pagan priesthood. Christians, he argues, by their way of life act as priests among their non-Christian counterparts.

Those you believe to be priests of certain images and temple-keepers of the gods keep their right hand undefiled for the sake of sacrifices... Therefore, if this is reasonable how much more so is it that, while others are serving militarily, they [Christians] also serve as priests and servants of God, keeping their right hand pure and fighting through their prayers to God for those serving in the military and for him who reigns justly.¹⁰⁶⁶

José Alviar highlights Origen's conception of the Christian life as one of interior priesthood. Since God is not geographically limited to any space, the ministerial practice of the priesthood is spiritualised to take place within the disposition of the soul. This informs Origen's understanding of the relation of the Christian to the world and to society. The priestly soul is capable of converting any place into a temple and almost any activity into an act of worship to God.¹⁰⁶⁷

The Christian calling may thus be said to endow man with a new vision of his activity in the world, for it imbues all his actions with a supernatural worth. The renewal that the vocation works does not amount to a physical remotion, but *does* imply a new sense of presence in the world. The Christian "remains", immersed in the same life situations as before, but paradoxically is "transported".¹⁰⁶⁸

The Christian soul is capable of being in God's presence even while moving through the hustle and bustle of daily life. Even within the vicissitudes of day to day living, maintaining one's priestly disposition requires the renunciation of certain activities. This has already been seen with regards to physical violence but also extends to ascetic practices. In a catena on 1 Corinthians, Origen says that the priestly soul treats its body as a temple to God and so does not desecrate it with sexual intercourse. The social activity of the mature Christian does not lessen the demands of ascetic purity that their spiritual worship requires of them.¹⁰⁶⁹

The Christian's role as spiritual warrior is the converse element of this spiritual communion with the angels. The soul's inauguration into the Christian community also inducts them into the spiritual

¹⁰⁶⁶ *C Cels.* 8.73 (SC 150, 346).

¹⁰⁶⁷ Compare with *Strom.* 7.40.3 (SC 428, 142): 'but the Gnostic prays throughout his entire life, striving through prayer to be joined with God.'

¹⁰⁶⁸ José Alviar, *Klesis*, 151.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See *C Cels.* 8.22 (SC 150, 222-224).

battle against hostile powers.¹⁰⁷⁰ Origen usually includes all Christians in the ranks of the Church's spiritual army but on a number of occasions reserves this function for the mature, spiritual Christian. It is thus associated with the virtue of wisdom, particularly in relation to Origen's characterisation of the Ephesian church. We have already seen in Chapter Four that Origen considered the Ephesian church exceptionally possessed of the wisdom. Origen does not identify the contents of this wisdom as solely concerning spiritual battle; he defines it as the perception of things seen and unseen, and their reasons.¹⁰⁷¹ Nonetheless, it is the primary emphasis of his characterisation of this text. The verse Origen most frequently quoted from this epistle was Eph. 6.12: the Ephesian Christians' 'struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'¹⁰⁷² In the beginning of Book III of Jerome's commentary, in a passage undoubtedly based on Origen's own text, Jerome also identifies the beasts with which Paul fought at Ephesus (see 1 Cor. 15.32) with the devil and his mission there as a battle with adverse spiritual powers.¹⁰⁷³

The spiritual battle is not unrelated to the knowledge of things seen and unseen, since in order to take up the fight, the sage must have knowledge of his unseen enemies. In the wisdom of God are the secret mysteries concerning the various powers and their origins and providential roles.¹⁰⁷⁴ As a person of deeper understanding, the sage perceives that beneath visible and sensible phenomena, both natural and emotional, lie the activities of animate and rational beings. Thus, in Book III of *Peri Archon*, this spiritual battle is the contest of those who have progressed beyond wrestling with flesh and blood.¹⁰⁷⁵ Kovacs highlights how Origen distinguishes between this spiritual battle and the 'human' (ἄνθρωπινος) temptation of the Corinthian audience (1 Cor. 10.13), which Origen interprets to be temptations that arise from our own bodily condition.¹⁰⁷⁶ Even without the enticements of the devil, human beings would still experience natural temptation (*naturali instinctu*) that arise from our bodily forms: hunger, thirst, sexual desires, and so on.¹⁰⁷⁷ However, hostile powers play an important role in intensifying these temptations and, it seems, a greater emphasis is given to their activity as one progresses in controlling their natural desires.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Hom.Jud. 9.2 (SC 389, 214-218). See José Alviar, *Klesis*, 111-114.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Frag.Eph.* 5 (1, 239).

¹⁰⁷² See Judith Kovacs, "'Servant of Christ' and 'Steward of the Mysteries of God,'" 159.

¹⁰⁷³ Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.635-636 (PL 26, 515). Compare *Strom.* 7.20.3-7 (SC 428, 86-88).

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Com.Matt.* 17.1-3 (GCS 40, 575-586); *Frag.Eph.* 5 (1, 239).

¹⁰⁷⁵ *P.A.* 3.2.4 (SC 268, 172-174); *Com.Matt.* 17.2 (GCS 40, 580).

¹⁰⁷⁶ Judith Kovacs, "'Servant of Christ' and 'Steward of the Mysteries of God': The Purpose of a Pauline Letter according to Origen's Homilies on 1 Corinthians," in *In Dominico Eloquio: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul Blowers et al. (Grand Rapids, M.I.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 158-159.

¹⁰⁷⁷ See *P.A.* 3.2.2-3 (SC 268, 158-168).

The means of fighting these battles is none other than Christ himself. The armaments are those listed in Eph. 6.10-17: the armour of faith; the breastplate of justice against evil; the shield of faith; the sword of the spirit; and so on. These, Origen makes clear, are knowledge and truth and the virtues, and are each an *epinoia* of Christ.¹⁰⁷⁸ Jesus is justice and truth, and all the other virtues, and so the entire armoury of the faithful is nothing other than Christ himself.¹⁰⁷⁹ To protect oneself in the battle against the powers that seek to destroy one's hope of salvation, one must put on Christ in his entirety and become Christlike. The truth that exists in Christ with which one girds oneself guards against sophistries and falsehoods that the hostile powers raise the soul is the shield, while the sword of the spirit, which is the Word, cuts down doctrines opposed to the truth.¹⁰⁸⁰ The epistemic undergirding of the soul's spiritual battle is evident here. By donning the breastplate of justice, one's heart – their ruling rational faculty – does not suffer attacks from passions or desires but remains 'pure in heart' (Matt. 5.8): the battle is one to protect the chastity and virtue of the soul and of the Church more broadly.¹⁰⁸¹ It is the Son that protects the soul from the attacks of these spiritual powers and the whole battle takes place in order to defend the soul from slipping away from God.

Origen's sage, therefore, does not retreat from the world *tout court* but only from those aspects completely inimicable to holiness. Far from rejecting society, the spiritual Christian realises a truer set of social bonds. True virtue could not be realised in isolation, since the wise person's aim was not an individualistic personal experience with God but the same objective as God himself: the union of all rational creatures reconciled to their Creator.

4. *Homoiosis Theo* and Divine Kenosis

No other activity demonstrates the sage's outward benevolence to the world more than that of teaching. While spiritual battle could take place in isolation from society, the act of teaching must be done in co-operation with those being taught. This also distinguishes it from the governing function of the philosopher-king. A master can govern the slave without accommodating themselves to the needs of the bondsperson. Teaching, however, requires an act of condescension on the part of the teacher, lowering themselves to the needs of those less able to understand and perform virtue than themselves. The importance given to the teaching activity of the sage is also evident in the Platonic tradition. While the philosopher of the *Theaetetus* shows little interest in the education of others, in

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Frag.Eph.* 33-35 (3, 570-574). Also, see Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.669-681 (PL 26, 543-552).

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 33 on 6.11 (3, 570). Also, see Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.669-670 (PL 26, 543-544).

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 33 on 6.11 (3, 570-571). Also, see Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.670 (PL 26, 543).

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.* 33 (3, 571); 34 (3, 573-574). Also, see Jerome, *Com.Eph.* 3.670 (PL 26, 543); 3.679 (PL 26, 550-551); 3.679 (PL 26, 551); 3.678 (PL 26, 550).

the *Phaedrus*, the pedagogic activity of the mature soul is framed within the context of their devotion to and imitation of their god. As far as he is able, the philosophical soul imitates and honours the god to which it belongs, be that Zeus, Ares, or any other, and seeks to fashion the character of their beloved in accordance with that of their god.¹⁰⁸² By the love that draws the lover to the beloved, the lover is raised towards godlikeness and is then motivated to raise his beloved with him.¹⁰⁸³ The followers of each of the gods 'going and seeking a young man whose nature is their own [the god's], and when they have gotten them, imitating [the god], persuading and educating the youth, and leading them into the practice and nature of the god, as far as each is able, they have no envy nor mean ill-will to the young man, but work in all their endeavours to lead the child to the likeness to the god whom they honour.'¹⁰⁸⁴

Clement had identified two elements of the Gnostic's godlikeness: their service to God, undertaken through continual study and contemplation, and service to other human beings, both through pedagogic and through ministerial roles (θεραπείας ἢ μὲν βελτιωτική, ἢ δὲ ὑπηρευτική).¹⁰⁸⁵ The service to others is an outgrowth of the Gnostic's own love and service to God.¹⁰⁸⁶ Philo presents the ministerial activity of the Levites in very similar terms.¹⁰⁸⁷ Clement therefore highlights 'three accomplishments of the gnostic power: first, the knowledge of things (τὸ γινώσκειν τὰ πράγματα); second, the fulfilment of what the Word dictates; and third, the ability to transmit in a manner worthy of God what has been veiled in the truth.'¹⁰⁸⁸

It is no surprise, therefore, to find Origen highlighting the pedagogic aspect of the Christian soul's godlikeness, especially given the epistemic character of his soteriology. For Origen, teaching is a vital part of the life of the sage. Origen argues in response to Celsus's accusations of foolishness that wisdom is an important quality in those who lead the Christian congregation. Since such men are few, these wise men are the ideal people to lead the Christian congregation. The bishop should be a wise man capable of instructing his flock.¹⁰⁸⁹ We have already seen the utility Origen assigned to human wisdom when utilised by Church leaders in defence and explanation of Christianity. The teachers of the Church are ordered by Scripture to drive out the heretical dogmas which assail the

¹⁰⁸² *Phaedr.* 252D-E (LCL 36, 490-492).

¹⁰⁸³ *Ibid.* 253A-B (LCL 36, 492).

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 253B-C (LCL 36, 492).

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Strom.* 7.3.1-2 (SC 428, 42-44). See also *De Fuga* 38 (LCL 275, 30).

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 7.3.3-7.4.1 (SC 428, 44-46). See André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *De Fuga* 38 (LCL 275, 38).

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Strom.* 7.4.2 (SC 428, 46).

¹⁰⁸⁹ *C Cels.* 3.48 (SC 136, 114-116).

true faith, which are the doctrines of an earthly wisdom that is in fact foolishness with God.¹⁰⁹⁰ To do so, Origen says, requires God's wisdom:

Perhaps, then, just as the eye works not only to see what has been well-ordered but the things that are otherwise, thus the work of the mind is to comprehend both true concepts and those that are not so, in order that he will not be conquered by persuasive false arguments and will be able to rescue those who are conquered. He will understand the words of the other wise men who use sophistic trickeries. How else will sophistry be dissolved and deception reprov'd? For God threatens that by his own wisdom he will set aside the wisdom of the wise which is bound to be destroyed on account of its falseness, and the deceptive intelligence of those who are unintelligent in God, and thus through his own wise men he will grasp the cunning of this age. How can the disciples of the Lord overthrow their strongholds, taking down their arguments and all the tall towers lifted up against knowledge of God, if they do not understand the words of those wise with worldly wisdom? And how could one keep the word of Peter; *Always be ready to answer all who ask you for the reason for our hope*, unless he was trained in the reasons, so he could be ready to give the answer by his understanding of the words of the wise to every Greek, every Barbarian, and every wise man, and everyone with understanding, accusing and refuting some things and demonstrating and supporting others?¹⁰⁹¹

Since Wisdom is itself esoteric and withheld from beginners and those merely making progress in faith and virtue, the Christian sage has an exoteric function in guiding those who have not yet been initiated into understanding of more mysterious matters. Origen distinguishes between the pedagogic roles fulfilled within the Church by the servant of Christ and by the steward of God's mysteries (see 1 Cor. 4.1). The former presides over the more regular service (τὴν κοινωτέραν νοεῖται διακονίαν προστάς) of the Church; the exoteric teaching that is given to the crowds of *simpliciores*.¹⁰⁹² The role of the steward of the mysteries, on the other hand, is to disclose the mysteries of God to the more advanced Christian students. This requires a judicious temperament so as to make sure not to cast the pearls of God's wisdom before swine. They must judge when and how to reveal more the more mysterious elements of the Christian faith, doing so 'only after he has purified them in advance, prepared them, and distanced from the world those who wish to hear his transcendent teachings.'¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Com.Cant.* 4.3 (SC 376, 724).

¹⁰⁹¹ *Frag.Prov.* (PG 13, 24-25).

¹⁰⁹² *Frag.1Cor.* 18 (2, 354).

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.* 18 (2, 354). See also *Com.Jn.* 20.6-8 (SC 290, 158-160).

For it is neither sufficient to know nor necessary to speak about what one knows as it comes up, but to know the right time at which to give food to their fellow slaves and to see who of their fellow slaves ought to receive more food of the mysteries of God or less, and when.¹⁰⁹⁴

Origen suggests that one can be a servant of Christ without being a steward of the mysteries, but the latter should at least be able to take on the duties of the former. They are not mutually exclusive positions; Origen states that Paul spent more time devoted to the regular service than to the mysteries but it is left in no doubt that Paul had a deep understanding of the esoteric side of the faith.¹⁰⁹⁵

The hermeneutical implications of the steward's esoteric pedagogy is made clear when Origen states that 'The person who does not transcend from the word to the meaning of the mysteries hidden in the Scripture is able to be servant of Christ, but not a steward of the mysteries of God.'¹⁰⁹⁶ Since the wisdom of God is closely associated with the spiritual sense of Scripture, it is unsurprising to find Origen form a tight bond between the sage's role as a teacher and their understanding of the Scriptures. Paul is contrasted with the wise of this world because, while they are rich in the wisdom of the world, he is rich 'in all logos and in all gnosis' (1 Cor. 1.5). 'In all logos' means the logos of each book of Scripture – the logos of Genesis; that of Exodus; and of Leviticus; and so on.¹⁰⁹⁷ His knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures elevates him above the faithful who lack such wisdom. The close association of logic and hermeneutics within Origen's thought binds together the exegetical, apologetic and argumentative functions of the Christian teacher. The singular doctrine they impart is the explication of the Christian text; through their ability to sagely discern its meaning, and in a manner suitable to their audience, the ideal Christian teacher simultaneously disarms the sophisms used to attack the faith and plants the seeds of belief and virtue in unbelieving souls.

Clearly the mature Christian's pedagogic activity is an important aspect of their godlikeness. The tension between the otherworldly and outward looking ideals of godlikeness is harmonised to a far greater degree in Origen than in his Platonist contemporaries on account of God's own *kenosis*. The Christian God is very far from the *noeta noesis* of Aristotelian philosophy that influenced the characterisations of the highest divine principle among the Middle- and Neoplatonists. In fact, Fédou argues, Origen identifies the Son's humility and philanthropy in his act of *kenosis* as crucial evidence of his Godhood.¹⁰⁹⁸ Origen consequently highlights the importance of humility for the Christian

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Frag. 1Cor.* 18 (2, 354).

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 18 (2, 354).

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 18 (2, 354).

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Hom. Ps. 36* 3.6 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 147).

¹⁰⁹⁸ Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 172-173.

leader in his response to Celsus.¹⁰⁹⁹ Godlikeness entails following the example of the Son who condescends to the level of those who require instruction and reformation.

As the Teacher *par excellence*, Christ demonstrated the proper paradigm of pedagogy which his disciples followed in their own educational practices.¹¹⁰⁰ His paradigmatic role in pedagogy is not exclusive to his teaching; Christ is also the ideal of the learner. In a student's early stages of progress, one imitates the example of his humanity, and in latter stages imitate his divinity: his Wisdom, Logos, and Truth.¹¹⁰¹ The latter, though rare and difficult, is not impossible; one can progress from the former to the latter through progressive ascent and divine grace.¹¹⁰² Christ himself modelled the perfect progress through each stage of development since he 'increased in wisdom and in years' (Luke 2.52).¹¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, however, far more emphasis is placed on Christ's role as the paradigm of the teacher than his example as a student. The Christian teacher ought to imitate Christ's own pedagogy and *kenosis*. Paul is understood by Origen to be exemplary as a teacher who imitated Christ's pedagogic activity and his own adaptation to the needs of those under his charge was evidence of his godlikeness. This is demonstrated clearly when, as Kovacs notes, Origen applies Paul's description of his own pedagogic condescension to the Son, showing a singular pedagogical kenotic aim animated both.¹¹⁰⁴ Paul, himself being heavenly and knowing the heavenly law, imitated Christ's condescension and accommodated to the less heavenly needs of the flock under his charge.¹¹⁰⁵ Paul could overcome all things in Christ but, out of love, became weak for the sake of the weak, became as a Jew for the Jews, as one under the law for those under the law, and as one without the law for those without the law (see 1 Cor. 9.20-22). In doing so, Paul imitated Christ, who observed Jewish customs to win over Jews and ate and drank with sinners and tax collectors to win over the lawless.¹¹⁰⁶ As the wisest of the high priests on earth and an image of Christ, the heavenly high priest, Paul spoke wisdom of God among the perfect and the inferior message of Christ crucified to the people.¹¹⁰⁷ Origen also notes that angelic powers frequently accommodate themselves to our needs in order to aid in our salvation, further cementing the godlike facet of the act of condescension.¹¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁹⁹ *C Cels.* 8.75 (SC 150, 350).

¹¹⁰⁰ *Hom.Lev.* 4.6 (SC 286, 184).

¹¹⁰¹ *Hom.Ps.15* 2.4 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 99).

¹¹⁰² *Ibid* 2.4 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 99).

¹¹⁰³ *Hom.Ps.36* 4.3 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 166).

¹¹⁰⁴ Judith Kovacs, "'Servant of Christ' and 'Steward of the Mysteries of God'," 155-156. See *P.A.* 4.4.4 (SC 168).

¹¹⁰⁵ *Hom.Ps.77* 9.1 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 465).

¹¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* 9.1 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 466). Also, see *Hom.Ps.67* 1.3 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 181-182).

¹¹⁰⁷ *Hom.Lev.* 4.6 (SC 286, 182-184).

¹¹⁰⁸ *Com.Jn.* 13.99 (SC 222, 82). Also, see *P.A.* 1.7.5 (SC 252, 218).

There is, therefore, a dual aspect of the wise Christian teacher's godlikeness. First of all, on account of their virtue, the teacher possesses a greater likeness to the Son who is true Wisdom, Reason, Truth, and each of the virtues. On the other hand, in their relations to their students, the wise teacher imitates the Son's condescension to the rational creatures who lack what he possesses. In their own condescension, they exhibit a godlike humility and downward outflowing of love for those less worthy and more in need. The dual aspect is, therefore, a twofold movement of the wise soul: firstly towards God in a heavenward ascent; and secondly, from their comparative spiritual altitude, towards those in need of pedagogy in an outward, earthward descent. In this twofold dynamic, the sage mediates the Son's own pedagogic mission to the Church.

The God to whose likeness the Christian aspires grasps both prongs of the Platonist dilemma of godlikeness without contradiction; both perfect unity and singularity, wholly possessed of itself, and the very fount of outward-looking love which can only be expressed in communion with and care for others. As outlined in Chapter One, the latter aspect is central to Origen's understanding of the Trinity: God cannot exist without his Son, the recipient of his love and all his beneficence, nor without (as a germ within Wisdom) his creation. Consequently, Origen is able to resolve the dilemma of how to characterise the state of godlikeness to a far greater degree than any of his philosophical precursors.

5. The Christian Teacher in the Economy of Revelation

The wise person, therefore, plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of the Church. The teacher acts as a link between the heavenly realm in which they have their citizenship and the earthly plain on which they reside and where their students live, mediating the esoteric wisdom of God to those not yet able to receive it in its fullness and its more mysterious aspects. In the *Commentary on John*, when Origen reports Heracleon's interpretation of John 4.14 ('a spring of water gushing up to eternal life') he states that his interpretation of the phrase 'gushing water' as 'those who participate in what is richly supplied from above and who themselves gush forth what is supplied to them for the eternal life of others' is given 'not improbably' (οὐκ ἀπιθάνως).¹¹⁰⁹ He himself makes similar suggestions in the *Homilies on Genesis*. The wells dug by Isaac (Gen. 26-17-22) are repeatedly interpreted in terms of esoteric and spiritual understanding on the basis of the Johannine passage.¹¹¹⁰ In his seventh homily, the wells dug by Isaac, a son of a freewoman, are

¹¹⁰⁹ *Com.Jn.* 13.62 (SC 222, 64).

¹¹¹⁰ See, for instance, *Ibid.* 2.4-6 (SC 120, 214-216): '

compared with the bottle of water given to Ishmael, the son of Hagar, a bondswoman (see Gen. 21.14).¹¹¹¹ The bottle represents the insufficiency of the letter of the Law, compared with the living waters of spiritual interpretation. The former is related to the fountain of Jacob at which Jesus meets the Samaritan woman, while the latter is the living water Jesus offers to her.¹¹¹² In the twelfth and thirteenth homilies, Origen addresses Isaac's wells once more. Here, they are contrasted with the efforts of the Philistines, which represent the false teaching of those who try to overthrow the Church's doctrines.¹¹¹³ Invoking Prov. 5.15, 'drink water from your own fountains, and let not the waters flow forth from your wells, but let your waters run in your streets,' Origen says we should apply ourselves in pursuit of knowledge of Scriptures so that our understanding suffices not only for us, but such that we may also teach others and instruct others.¹¹¹⁴ As a river flowing up through his disciples, the waters of Christ's *logoi* overflow from them onto those they teach.¹¹¹⁵ Similarly, the illuminated mature Christian becomes a rock in the manner of Peter, imitating Christ who is the true rock. Others drink from the spiritual waters that flow from such a rock: the teachings of the church and life of community based on these perfect Christians who have been illuminated by the spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1.17).¹¹¹⁶ Origen also appeals to the imagery of midwifery, familiar in philosophical circles from Socrates's description of his own method of teaching.¹¹¹⁷ The holy person is a midwife to the fruits of the just, bringing forth their virtues and good deeds; whether through their example or through their teaching is not specified.¹¹¹⁸

The aim of the instruction is to raise their students to their own level: 'And this is the goal of the teacher for the disciple, insofar as he is a teacher: to make the disciple as himself, in order that he no longer need the teacher as a teacher, even if he will need him in another manner.'¹¹¹⁹ The teacher instructs his students through his more intimate knowledge of the divine so that they may be raised to the same level and receive inspiration from the same source by which the teacher is

The son of Beer, which is interpreted as 'wells,' since each of the saved becomes a son of a fount which spouts forth from the depth, which is the wisdom of God... Thus, therefore, the person who searches all things and the depths of God by the divine Spirit (see 1 Cor. 2.10), to speak plainly about him – "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11.33) – can be a 'son of wells,' to whom the Word of the Lord comes.'

¹¹¹¹ *Hom.Gen.* 7.5 (SC 7, 206-208).

¹¹¹² *Ibid.* 7.5 (SC 7, 208).

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.* 12.4 (SC 7, 300-302); 13.4 (SC 7, 328).

¹¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 13.4 (SC 7, 332).

¹¹¹⁵ *Hom.Ps.77* 7.2 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 436-437).

¹¹¹⁶ *Com.Matt.* 12.10 (GCS 40, 84-85). Also, see *Hom.Ps.36* 4.4 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 170).

¹¹¹⁷ See *Theaet.* 150-151 (LCL 123, 34-40).

¹¹¹⁸ *Hom.Ps.77* 9.6 (GCS 40 n.f. 19, 476).

¹¹¹⁹ *Com.Jn.* 32.118 (SC 385, 238). On this passage in the *Commentary on John*, see Joseph W. Trigg, "God's Marvelous Oikonomia," 46-48. Also, see *Hom.Ps.81* 1 (GCS n.f. 19, 509).

nourished.¹¹²⁰ The soul only requires a pedagogue while it is still in infancy or in the process of progressing ‘to maturity’ (Heb. 6.1). Once it reaches its fullness (Gal. 4.4), it is itself capable of receiving ‘knowledge of Christ’ (Phil. 3.8) through its own study of Scripture.¹¹²¹ One can compare the pedagogy of the celestial bodies: risen humankind’s destiny is first to imitate the life of the stars and then to receive intellectual light from the same source that they do.¹¹²² This also entails, upon being made like his teacher, that the student is then able to follow in his master’s footsteps and teach others in need of spiritual and moral guidance.

From the other perspective, the aim of the student is first to become like their teacher, and from there, their teacher’s teacher – that is, the Son. In the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen interprets Matt. 13.52: ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ The central consideration of Origen’s exegesis concerns the issue of scriptural interpretation: the act of bringing out of the treasury what is new and what is old refers to that of interpretation and cross-examination of the texts of the two testaments, comparing spiritual with spiritual. The scribe who is capable of drawing out true doctrines from the two sets of Christian texts is compared to ‘the master of the house’: who other could this be but Jesus himself, who also brings forward such doctrines? By so doing, Christ works to make the scribe studying the Word like himself and ‘become as the teacher’ (Matt. 10.25).¹¹²³ In this manner, Origen argues, the Christian student ‘first imitates the imitator of Christ, but after this Christ himself, according to the saying by Paul, ‘Be imitators of me, just as I am also of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11.1).¹¹²⁴ The teacher not only instructs their student but acts as the paradigm to which they should aspire.

A very similar conception of the pedagogue was expressed in Gregory’s *Thanksgiving Oration*. The role of the philosophical master was noted briefly in the Chapter Four, though our focus in that chapter was less on the dynamic between the pedagogue and student, and the integration of this relationship into soteriology, than on the structure of intellectual progress and instruction. However, as Valantasis argues, it is really the characterisation of Origen, rather than his curriculum or the contents of his instruction, that was the central concern of Gregory’s oration.¹¹²⁵ Origen is described

¹¹²⁰ *Frag.1Cor.* 11 (1, 240).

¹¹²¹ *Com.Matt.* 10.9 (GCS 40, 10-11).

¹¹²² See Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 150-163.

¹¹²³ *Com.Matt.* 10.15 (GCS 40, 19). The same verse from the Gospel of Matthew is utilised four times in explaining Jesus’s act of washing his disciples’ feet in the *Commentary on John*. See *Com.Jn.* 32.117 (SC 385, 238); 32.120 (SC 385, 240); 32.122 (SC 385, 240); 32.144 (SC 385, 250-252).

¹¹²⁴ *Com.Matt.* 10.15 (GCS 40, 19).

¹¹²⁵ Richard Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century: A Semiotic Study of the Guide-Disciple Relationship in Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and Gnosticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 13-17.

by Gregory as ‘paradigm of the sage’ (παράδειγμα σοφοῦ) and characterised in a near-divine manner.¹¹²⁶ Origen was ‘a man, or someone who seems and appears to be a man, but who, to those capable of perceiving the greatness of his mental state, appears to already have risen to a better condition and to have migrated to the divine.’¹¹²⁷ He was a ‘friend of God,’ ‘godlike,’ and had a ‘kinship with God,’ and was described by Gregory as ‘this divine man.’¹¹²⁸ The terms in which Gregory conceptualised this ideal correspond closely with Origen’s own thought, though Origen was steadfast in denying that he qualified as such a person.

Gregory’s master is not only superhuman but is an active participant in God’s plan of salvation. The circumstances that brought Gregory under the influence of Origen was planned (οικονομήσαντι) as part of God’s marvellous economy (θαυμαστήν οἰκονομίαν): he was led seemingly by chance to Caesarea, where he then fell under Origen’s spell.¹¹²⁹ Origen took over the role of spiritual guardian from the guardian angel and from the Saviour. It is only on leaving his master that Gregory’s soul is entrusted once more to God.¹¹³⁰ As Trigg has argued, Gregory’s understanding of Origen’s role in the divine economy of his personal salvation reflects Origen’s wider understanding on this matter.¹¹³¹ The seeds of the sage’s own journey towards the divine are implanted into the student through the master’s outreach towards him, carrying on the work of salvific pedagogy. In this manner, Gregory’s philosophical master takes on a saviour-like role to his student.¹¹³²

As teacher, Origen became for his students a mediator of divine salvation and instruction for his students.¹¹³³ This is seen particularly in the final stage of Gregory’s instruction. In spite of Origen counselling his wards not to attach themselves to any human teachers or so-called wise men and instead to rely only on the words of the prophets, Gregory nonetheless portrays his dependency on his master’s instruction for understanding the Scriptures. Since they are enigmatic, only a person inspired by God in the same manner as the prophets themselves – an intimate friend of God, as Origen was – could elucidate their meanings. Being such an inspired exegete, Origen could convey God’s words and intentions to those who listened, thus channelling God’s pedagogic activity downwards onto those unable to receive these things directly:

¹¹²⁶ *Pan. Or.* 11.136 (SC 148, 150).

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 2.10 (SC 148, 100). See Richard Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century*, 19-25.

¹¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 15.176 (SC 148, 168); 2.13 (SC 148, 100); 6.84 (SC 148, 128).

¹¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 5.55 (SC 148, 118); 5.72 (SC 148, 124).

¹¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 17.200-202 (SC 148, 180).

¹¹³¹ Joseph W. Trigg, ‘God’s Marvelous Oikonomia,’ 27-52.

¹¹³² Richard Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century*, 30.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*, 29-31, 33; Joseph W. Trigg, ‘God’s Marvelous Oikonomia,’ 39-40.

He gave him the ability to search through and find the meanings of these things, in order that, if there is a stubborn and unbelieving soul, or perhaps one eager for learning, he might learn from this man and be compelled by him to understand and believe and to follow God.¹¹³⁴

The teacher is, therefore, instrumental in God's own work. Repeatedly, it is made clear that it is Origen's special intimacy with the divine that enables and authenticates his educational activities. Due to his piety and holiness, he received the same inspiration from God as had the prophets whose words he explicated.¹¹³⁵ Origen the teacher was only able to reform, instruct, and illuminate his students – that is, to mediate God's own pedagogic soteriology – because of his exceptional relationship of closeness with and illumination by God.

Origen also identifies the ability to interpret the sacred text in terms of personal intimacy with the divine Word. As noted already, Origen understands Jesus's practice of speaking in parables to be a means of differentiating the Christian community. However, it is not only a matter of deeper intellectual development that enables one to decipher the meanings of Jesus's parables. One also needs to share an intimacy with the Son. Jesus's wisdom is reserved for the disciples who are 'friends of Jesus' and are able to follow him into his more intimate environs.¹¹³⁶ Moreover, Origen noted that while Jesus is attested to have 'explained everything in private to his disciples' (Mark 4.34), the writers of the Gospels only record the explanations of a few of the parables. These authors must, therefore, have known and understood the hidden mysteries of the parables whose explanations go unrecorded but did not entrust them to the written word.¹¹³⁷ These are one part of the many things left uncommitted to the Scriptures. Furthermore, the explanations themselves are mysterious and require interpretation that is beyond the capabilities of those in the crowd.¹¹³⁸ Some of the explanations are documented and publicly available, so the distinction between what is exoteric and what is esoteric cannot be the communicative medium. The explanations are spiritual and ineffable in nature, which the Son provides to those with whom he is particularly close in a spiritual manner. In keeping with his pedagogy more broadly, Jesus's act of explaining the meanings of obscure and enigmatic texts and sayings is not a singular historical event but an ongoing process in the soul of the mature Christian. It is impossible to understand the parables unless aided by the spirit of Christ.¹¹³⁹ The same unity of mind is frequently said to be necessary to understand the

¹¹³⁴ *Orat. Pan.* 15.177-178 (SC 148, 170).

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 15.173-181 (SC 148, 168-170).

¹¹³⁶ *Com. Matt.* 10.1 (GCS 40, 1). See Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le Monde*, 358-359.

¹¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 15.30 (GCS 40, 441-442).

¹¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 10.2 (GCS 40, 3).

¹¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 14.6 (GCS 40, 288).

words of the prophets. Jesus enters the mind (τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ) of those worthy to understand God's wisdom and explains privately everything to them as his disciple.¹¹⁴⁰ Conversely, the scriptural exegete who 'hears in a hidden way' (Jer. 13.17) enters into Jesus's house.¹¹⁴¹ The movement towards greater intimacy with the Son is a bilateral one in which each actor enters into the mind of the other. In the figurative interpretation of the Song of Songs, this is represented by the Bridegroom's royal chamber, which stands for the Son's 'secret and hidden mind' in which is hidden the secrets and mysteries of his wisdom.¹¹⁴² The soul progresses towards Christ's inner chamber, while Christ also advances in them in age and wisdom.¹¹⁴³ In this manner, those with a suitable heart are able to receive the unwritten and inexpressible truths of wisdom through the medium of the sensible text.¹¹⁴⁴

Thus, the spiritual Christian forms a charismatic link between Jesus and the simpler members of their Christian community. Trigg highlights this important aspect of Origen's understanding of religious authority, though does not note the role Origen understands the charismatic teacher to play in the development of spiritual gifts of their own students, such that they may rise to the same position.¹¹⁴⁵ Matt. 16.18, such an important verse in the development of the monarchical episcopate, does not for Origen validate the authority of the ecclesiastical order. Rather, the authority Jesus gives to Peter is given to any Christian capable of receiving it and able to teach in an inspired manner, regardless of their official standing in the Church.¹¹⁴⁶

However, the distinction between the knowledge the simpler Christian receives from their human teacher and that which the teacher receives from the Son is not only one of extent. There is also a difference in kind; that between knowledge mediated by concepts and language that can be communicated without first-hand experience of its object and knowledge that results from direct and personal experience. As noted in the previous chapter, this is precisely the distinction drawn between present recognition of God and his mysteries and that which will be experienced in the eschaton. In Origen's exegesis of the Samaritan woman in the *Commentary on John*, she becomes a

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 14.11 (GCS 40, 302).

¹¹⁴¹ *Hom.Jer.* 12.13 (SC 238, 46-48).

¹¹⁴² *Com.Cant.* 1.5 (SC 375, 242).

¹¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 1.6 (SC 375, 252).

¹¹⁴⁴ *Com.Matt.* 14.12 (GCS 40, 304-305).

¹¹⁴⁵ Joseph W. Trigg, "The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen's Understanding of Religious Leadership," *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5-19. In fact, Trigg argues that Origen rejected any appeal to an 'apostolic succession' of esoteric teachers. See *ibid.* 12. While he does not appeal to any form of succession as the basis of authority – Trigg is correct to characterise that this is 'a gift of God alone, unmediately accessible through spiritual exegesis' – this does not preclude the role of teachers in aiding their students to acquire the capability for this unmediated access, and consequently their students after them.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Com.Matt.* 12.10 (GCS 40, 85-86). See Joseph W. Trigg, "The Charismatic Intellectual," 15-16.

figure of the Christian teacher. Origen makes clear that she is presented as an example for the Christian soul to follow.¹¹⁴⁷ After conversing with Jesus at Jacob's well, the woman returns to the city and called those she found there to come to see Jesus themselves. It is on the basis of her direct and personal interaction with Jesus that the Samaritan woman is able to disclose teachings to the people in the Samaritan city. She proclaims that her educational activity was nothing other than testimony to what Jesus had told her (Jn. 4.39).¹¹⁴⁸ She could not have preached Christ to her fellow citizens if she had not partaken of Christ's living water.¹¹⁴⁹ Nor would this have been possible if she had not forsaken material concerns, figuratively represented by the fact she leaves her water jar behind her at the well (Jn. 4.28).¹¹⁵⁰ It is imperative for those who have received grace and knowledge from Christ to abandon our material ways and be eager to impart to others the benefit of which we have been partakers.¹¹⁵¹ There is, however, a qualitative difference between her own experience of Christ and the testimony of Christ she gives to those she teaches. After her compatriots have heard her words and on their account followed her back to Jesus himself:

The growth and increase of "the many more" who believed was no longer on account of the word of the woman but because of the Word himself. For the Word is not understood in the same manner when he is testified to by himself, when he enlightens the person receiving him, and when he is testified to by others' words.¹¹⁵²

The experience of someone who knows or believes something by means of a messenger is qualitatively different from that of a person who perceives it first hand: in the case of perceiving the Christ, this is the experience of being illuminated by the Son, who makes one able to see truly.¹¹⁵³ Thus, the knowledge and understanding of the student and teacher are their own distinct phenomena:

For it is impossible for someone who is taught by a person who has seen him to experience the same thing in their rational faculty (περὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν πάθος παθεῖν) as the person who has seen and reports about him.¹¹⁵⁴

Origen's interpretation of the role of the Samaritan woman in relation to her townsfolk resembles that of Heracleon, though he disintegrates the essential barriers erected by the Valentinian between

¹¹⁴⁷ *Com.Jn.* 13.173-176 (SC 222, 128-130).

¹¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 13.339 (SC 222, 220).

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 13.176 (SC 222, 130).

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 13.173-4 (SC 222, 128-130).

¹¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 13.174 (SC 222, 128-130).

¹¹⁵² *Ibid.* 13.348 (SC 222, 226).

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 13.352 (SC 222, 228).

¹¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 13.353 (SC 222, 228). Also, see *C Cels.* 6.65 (SC 147, 342); *Philoc.* 23.3 (SC 226, 140).

the woman and her countrymen. It is not her nature that grants her privileged access to Jesus but her prior effort and her aim is not simply to deliver her knowledge to the others but to lead them to the same experience as she had herself received from God.

Origen makes a very similar suggestion in his first *Homily on the Song of Songs*, where he states elusively that only those who have shared his experience of the Bridegroom will understand his words.¹¹⁵⁵ His experience was non-transferrable and could not be expressed linguistically. Origen could only exhort his audience to exert themselves in pursuit of the same experience that their teacher had experienced. The role of the Samaritan woman, therefore, is to use her own experience of Christ to draw her kinspeople out of the city and to follow her to the source of her own instruction and to thus experience Jesus directly themselves. Having initially believed on the basis of the Samaritan woman's words, they then believe on the basis of their personal intimacy with the Son.

Similarly, the benefits of the close personal intimacy which the disciples enjoyed with Christ were not limited to their entrance into Jesus's house. They are also able to follow Jesus up the mountain (Matt. 5.1); they are counted as his brothers (Matt. 12.49); they receive food directly from Jesus (Matt. 14.19); and they are allowed to depart with Jesus to the other side of the waters (Matt. 14.22). The disciples are afforded a level of intimacy with Jesus's divine presence which is compared to the inner sanctuary of the Temple, a comparison whose eschatological importance has already become clear.¹¹⁵⁶ However, the disciples do not only receive in greater measure and in a more intimate manner from Jesus than do the crowds, they also mediate his gifts to those beneath further from Christ in understanding and virtue. The chain of pedagogy from the Son through his disciples to the masses is expressed through the imagery of food. In the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen highlights that the crowd do not receive their loaves and fishes from Jesus but through the ministrations of the disciples.¹¹⁵⁷ Having already identified this food as the rational sustenance for the soul, Origen clearly understands the feeding of the five thousand as representative of an economy of *paideia*.¹¹⁵⁸ The disciples receive their rational sustenance directly from the Son, while the crowds rely on a second-hand form of sustenance from the disciples. The pedagogy of inspired teachers is, therefore, another means of the Son's mysterious economy of reserve; a man's by which his more divine nature is both simultaneously veiled from and disclosed to humankind.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Hom.Cant.* 1.7 (SC 37, 94).

¹¹⁵⁶ *Hom.Lev.* 4.6 (SC 286, 182-184).

¹¹⁵⁷ *Com.Matt.* 11.4 (GCS 40, 40).

¹¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 11.3 (GCS 40, 37-39). Also, see *Com.Jn.* 13.220-225 (SC 222, 150-152).

We see, therefore, the vital importance of the Christian sage. Not only are they moral and intellectual exemplars to the faithful, and not only do they presage the beatitude reserved for creation in their very existence, but they themselves are a key component in bringing this beatitude about. The sage holds an important place within the entire process of divine revelation and pedagogy as a vital link in an educational chain between God and rational creation. The intimacy they experience with the revelatory Son, which Origen explains in mystical, personal, and non-propositional terms, is translated into sensible teaching for other rational souls. Combined with their hermeneutical expertise, the sage thus becomes an important secondary principle of the revelatory media of Scripture, of the cosmos, and so on. These things require explanation for those less advanced in order to be understood, scalable which the inspired pedagogue provide to those capable of receiving them and at the opportune time. In a sense, the inspired exegete is another medium of the Son's mysterious and veiled revelation to rational creation.

Through their ascetic rigour and rejection of worldly matters and their understanding of the divine mysteries hidden from the majority under a veil of sensibility, the perfected Christian attain a deified mode of being – not gods as God is God, but in a manner like the soul of Christ himself. At the same time, through their imitation of the divine *kenosis* of the Word and of Christ's soul, principally demonstrated in their pedagogic activity, they take their position as a vital link in the chain between God and rational creation and become actors within the economy of divine revelation and salvation. There can be little more indicative sign of the importance of wisdom in Origen's thought than this: wisdom is not only the beginning and end of all creation but an important element in the redemptive process that draws the cosmos back to God.

Conclusions

1. Tracing Wisdom through Origen's Theology

At the start of this study, I suggested that the high valuation Origen gave to the virtue of wisdom was not simply an offhand comment utilised to explain the particularities of one specific verse of the Pauline corpus. Although his explanation of this hierarchy has unfortunately been lost to the ravages of fifth and sixth century controversies, through the course of this thesis the importance of this concept throughout his extant writing has been thoroughly demonstrated.

The study of Origen's conception of wisdom has taken us on a from first to last things; from the eternal and 'pre-cosmic' (conceptually, rather than temporally) life of the Triune Godhead, through the creation of the cosmos, Christ's Incarnation, through the process of education (both secular and Christian), and back once more to God as he is received in the eschaton. I believe that by tracing the process of creation, education, and restoration through this lens, I have confirmed my initial contention. Wisdom, in all its multiplicity, sits at the very heart of Origen's understanding of the processes of human understanding and of Christian revelation. Many of the subjects studied in this thesis have received scholarly attention previously but the connections between them have not been sufficiently addressed. The concept of Wisdom forms a vital thread that draws together first things, last things, Trinitarian and Christological theology, epistemology, asceticism, mysticism, hermeneutics, and pedagogy.

2. Wisdom, Reason, and Freedom

The hypostasis of Wisdom is crucial to how Origen conceives of the relationship between Father, Son, and the cosmos. There was no requirement that the *epinoia* of Wisdom take the prominent and preeminent role it did in his account of the Son's generation; previous Christian thinkers did not give nearly as much emphasis to this element when constructing their Trinitarian and Christological accounts. The depiction of personified Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom tradition – particularly that of Prov. 8 and Wis. 7 – were key texts used to explain the unity in distinction of Father and Son and the Son's creative role as mediator of the Father's divine power to the cosmos. Our suspicion that this was not only motivated by its explanatory or polemic convenience for elucidating this particular problem or for refuting a particular heterodox Trinitarian doctrine, whether it be that of Monarchians or of Wisdom pneumatologists, has been confirmed by this research. While the importance of wisdom within Origen's Trinitarian and Christological theology has been much

commented upon in Origenian scholarship and discussed at length in this study, the influence of post-Nicene discussions of Proverbs 8.22 and the *ktisis* of Wisdom has unduly curtailed the scope of scholarly interest in Origen's sophiology to focus primarily on Trinitarian questions and demiurgic issues. The importance of Origen's Wisdom Christology – and of wisdom more broadly – to his wider theological project has been under-recognised, a lacuna redressed by this thesis.

The pre-eminence of the *epinoia* of Wisdom does not only work to explain the development of multiplicity of the cosmos out of the unity of the Father. It also circumscribes how Origen understood the aim of Christian life. The priority of Wisdom is reflected in the intellectualist tenor of Origen's theology that prioritises contemplative virtue and epistemic aspects of both divine action and subjective reception of that action. This is not to say that the elevation of hypostasised Wisdom determined the manner of life Origen idealised. Like the proverbial chicken and egg, it is impossible to say which came first and in fact to do so would be to miss how these ideas fit together in harmony. The virtue of wisdom is idealised because it reflects the inner life of God and the inner life of God is understood in terms of wisdom because this virtue expresses the idealised contemplative life of our philosopher-theologian. Thus, we have seen the contents of the hypostasis of Wisdom – *logoi, theoremata, noeta*, and so on – recur throughout his work as the objects of the ideal subjective state of rational creatures. As discussed in Chapters Four and Six, while ethical perfection is an important criterion for the process of deification, it is the objects of *noesis* on which his thought is centred. The manner of life is an essential means of pursuing the contemplative ideal, but it is not the end in its own right. This insight provides an important nuance to the valuable scholarship of Hadou and those who have followed in his footsteps who see antique philosophy primarily as a way of life. Philosophy as a way of living was a vital part of Origen's thought and that of other Middle- and Neoplatonists, and far more important than the discourse that expresses it, but both must be understood to be subordinated to the pursuit of knowledge itself, an experiential and non-discursive form of knowledge.

This system of epistemic soteriology and the importance Origen placed on *sophia* in his account of creation inevitably brought Origen into conflict with Gnostic groups such as the Valentinians. Origen's end goal was very similar to that of his Valentinian counterparts. Both conceived of salvation in epistemic terms: contemplation, knowledge, wisdom, and so on for Origen as opposed to gnosis for the Valentinians and other heterodox sects. However, Origen's fundamental commitment to the exertion of free rationality over temporal extension requires a radically different understanding of how this epistemic activity is effected. This was the result of the complete providence and control of God over creation and history that Origen's understanding of Wisdom and the Word's generation from the Father secured, which required another explanation of the current

state of the world and its imperfection than that proposed by Gnostic Sophia myths. We have seen throughout our study the importance Origen places on free will, which was intimately tied to the theodical questions raised by groups such as Marcionites and Valentinians. Reason is so important to Origen's theology both because it ensures the blamelessness of God and also because it reflects the inner intellectualism of God himself – his Wisdom and his Logos. The imperfections of creation are not the result of Sophia itself but of the failure of created beings to contemplate it. Origen's dualism, therefore, has been seen to be a spiritual or ethical dualism, rather than ontological dualism in the manner of Marcion, the Montanists, or, to a lesser extent, various Valentinian and other Gnostic thinkers. The distinction between heavenly and earthly comes to be found not in materiality and cosmology – which themselves are imaged on God's perfect Wisdom – but in the inner subjective states of individual and collective souls. The anti-Gnostic orientation of Origen's work is widely appreciated and there are many factors which we have seen to contribute to his polemical stance. However, this research has demonstrated that this tendency cannot be fully understood without a full understanding of Origen's concept of wisdom, which is an important consideration in determining the acceptable limits of orthodox, anti-deterministic arguments.

The importance Origen placed on reason, however, is not limited to his theodical requirements. We have seen, particularly in Chapter Four, how Origen's ontological commitments informed his doctrine of spiritual progress. The interrelations of Origen's Trinitarian theology and his doctrine of free will on the one hand, and that of his conception of spiritual progress and his theodical commitments on the other, have both been well noted in Origenian scholarship. However, the manner in which Origen's Trinitarian and Christological ontology informs (and likely is also informed by) his understanding of the Christian life as one of intellectual and spiritual development has not been sufficiently noted. His understanding of God required his fundamental commitment to the autonomy of rational creatures and also suggested a hierarchised gradation of reality in which the material is a translucent veil across the more real, truer noetic. The former suggests a temporally extensional, developmental dimension to Christian salvation; the latter confirms it. If one were to accept a strict binary between lost and saved, it is conceivable that one could freely turn to God and receive full salvation in a manner similar to the instant recognition of the Valentinian *pneumatikos*; though if one takes created autonomy seriously, one would still be able to change from salvation back to perdition. The difference between being saved and remaining within salvation tends towards a belief that something can be added that secures this orientation. However, within the noetic-material cosmology Origen held, in which the latter is capable of varying degrees of transparency, there was not strict binary and so Christianity required a temporally extended pedagogical soteriology.

3. *Wisdom, Spiritual Development, and Christian Pedagogy*

In this thesis, however, I have attempted to prioritise the subjective perspective within Origen's theology: that of how the created soul navigates the cosmos, their relation to God, and how to fulfil their divinely intended *telos*. This has offered a new perspective on the idea of wisdom in his work from the more top-down, ontological treatments that have focussed upon the Christological dimension of this concept. As stated in the Introduction and noted a number of occasions in this study, my treatment of this facet of Origen's thought has built significantly upon the work of Henri Crouzel. In addition to extending his analysis of Origen's conception of wisdom, tracing more closely the lines of thought Origen draws from it within his wider theological system, my interpretation has conceptualised his thought in less mystical terms and more eschatological ones. Of course, as noted in Chapter Five, these two planes – horizontal and temporal versus vertical and spiritual – cannot be completely disambiguated within the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions nor within Origen's thought. The question is one of emphasis. By foregrounding the eschatological element of Origen's thought and his insistence that wisdom is only truly or fully achievable in the *apokatastasis*, we have not only demonstrated how his doctrine of spiritual progress is deeply intertwined with Origen's Trinitarian ontology and eschatology but have also seen how this affects his understanding of wisdom and the Christian sage in the here and now.

Origen's doctrine of spiritual development – of increasing intellectual perspicacity through a temporally extended process – is reflected in the diverse and pluripotent nature of divine revelation. The Pauline distinction between the wisdom of God and the message of Christ crucified was central in how Origen framed this revelatory activity. Though Origen interpreted this distinction through his cosmological prism entirely alien to his Pauline source and thus in a manner Paul would not have intended, in keeping with the characterisation I have given throughout this study, he was motivated by his genuine pursuit of a philosophical explanation of this text in a manner consonant with the rest of Scripture. Over the course of this thesis, I have attempted to place the Alexandrian in his proper context. The influence of Greek philosophy, particularly the thought of Middle-Platonists, has been noted throughout my research, particularly with regards to his interpretation of the relations between the Father and his Wisdom and his conception of Christian pedagogy. However, we have also seen that his philosophical learning was always subordinated to the interpretation of Scripture. While his methodology might be alien to our modern sensibilities and fail to appreciate the intended meaning of scriptural authors, his understanding of wisdom finds its foundation above all in the texts of Jewish Wisdom literature, the Johannine Gospel, and the Pauline epistles.

This diversity of revelation – the message of Christ crucified versus the wisdom spoken among the perfect – is reflected in the diversity of the Christian community. Like so much of Origen’s theological thought, both these aspects are characterised by a deep-seated dynamism, in which all things are guided by God’s providence heavenward and towards the perfection that characterises the end of all creation. Hypostasised Wisdom; the multifaceted nature of divine revelation and the variety of media of the Son’s soteriological activity; the diversity of the Christian community – all these things are addressed in Fédou’s study on Wisdom in Origen. However, on account of his Christological focus, in his account the community of rational creatures becomes somewhat homogenised; an object on which the Son acts or to which Christ comes. This is not to say that he ignores the subjective aspects of reception involved in Origen’s conception of revelation. This is a crucial axis upon which the Christological activity which Fédou outlines depends. However, in the trans-historical and God’s eye perspective that he adopts, the created subject remains somewhat obscured and the diversity of subjective activity that deified souls undertake and the mediatory activity they assume is under-recognised. Our study has added this perspective by examining how the created soul – incapable by its own means – ascends from faithlessness through simple faith, through to understanding and wisdom and how this determines their qualities, the role they play in society, and the position they take within the broader arc of the divine economy. Taking as our starting place the soul’s interaction with the physical media of revelation – Christ’s Incarnate body, the physical Scriptures and their obvious, ‘bodily’ interpretation, and the simple message of Christ and his crucifixion – we have seen in greater detail the impediments put before the rational creature’s spiritual development: spiritual battle with enemies; the allure of the body and of the physical veils that mediate the Son’s presence and the noetic realities that he contains; and the impotent enticement of supposed wisdoms that reach for profound understanding without being founded upon sure footing of moral uprightness and faith. On the other side, a basis in moral education, in understanding of the cosmos, in knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ascetic practices which prefigure the eschatological condition of the resurrected soul are all necessary conditions upon which the highest form of revelation and the virtue of wisdom depend. We have seen how, through a process of education and spiritual development drawn from secular philosophical practices, Origen formulated these into a vision of the Christian life in pursuit of an ever-increasing understanding of the variegated revelation of the Son.

On account of the intellectualist tenor of his theological outlook and the importance he placed upon contemplative virtues such as wisdom, ideas of pedagogy and education have been demonstrated to be central to his entire project. The importance of pedagogy in Origen’s theological system has been noted by a number of scholars including Torjesen, with a focus on the pedagogical role of Origen’s

Christ; Martens, who outlines the manner in which the inspired exegete interprets the sacred Scriptures for the Church; and Trigg, with an emphasis on Origen's conception of the charismatic teacher. However, by outlining the importance of pedagogical activity in the deification of the mature Christian soul and the role this deified sage, pedagogue, and exegete plays in the economy of salvation, this thesis has shed new light on this important aspect of Origen's thought. Educative and interpretative undertakings are not only viewed as valuable in the formation of the soul or the Church but are acts of imitation of the divine Pedagogue and his diverse economy of revelation. *Kenosis* in this view is understood in large part as an act of pedagogic condescension. More than the humiliation of the body and of the Passion, Origen foregrounds the epistemic aspect of the Son's self-emptying, in harmony with the tendency we have noted throughout his work. Taking a mediatory position not entirely unlike that of the Son vis-à-vis the Father and the cosmos, the Christian pedagogue mediates their own intimacy with the Son to the rest of rational creation, ascending to the heavenly mode of being of the Son and then mirroring his divine *kenosis* and condescending to the educational needs of less deified souls. The Christian sage and teacher, therefore, appears almost as another of the many media of revelation utilised by the Son, though ones imbued with free will and capable of interpreting those other media. Therefore, the Christian sage plays an important role within the economy of salvation, channelling the Son's Logos and Wisdom further to the cosmos and drawing other rational creatures back into deeper understanding of and intimacy with God. They are an important intersection through which God's economy draws the cosmos back to himself, through which he fulfils the *telos* for which the world was created. I believe this aspect above all demonstrates the importance and centrality Origen gave to the concepts of wisdom and of the Christian sage in his theological system.

4. Further Questions

In spite of the wide range of connections drawn and subjects examined within this study of Origen's sophiology, there are still areas that have unfortunately been insufficiently investigated due to the constraints of time and space placed upon this research. First of all, Origen's understanding of wisdom would be better understood if contextualised alongside extensive examination of related concepts such as *episteme* and *phronesis*, detailing in greater depth the subtleties of meaning ascribed to these important concepts.

Additionally, this thesis has for the most part limited itself to a study of those primary sources that can be reliably ascribed to Origen. There are, however, pages and pages in the *Patrologia Graeca* series of fragments which have been attributed to Origen, mostly collated from catenae and

containing numerous passages on verses of the Solomonic corpus. Sifting through this vast collection of material – much of it only dubiously accredited to our author – in order to discover which is relevant to this subject and whose authenticity can be reliably asserted was too great a task for this dissertation or perhaps for any monograph. However, focussing upon those passages that cover a few crucial verses from the Solomonic corpus and other Jewish Wisdom literature could cast some more important light on the conception of wisdom exhibited in the extant, authentic evidence.

Perhaps the area most in need of further exploration in this thesis is a focussed study upon the final member of the Holy Trinity. The Spirit has not been entirely passed over and has been touched upon indirectly throughout the thesis when covering the spirit of Scripture, the spirit in the anthropological triad, and the spiritual way of life pursued by the mature Christian. However, Origen's pneumatology is one area that has been tragically understudied in contemporary scholarship. We noted in Chapter One how Origen believed the Spirit to secure within the created soul the gifts of the Son. Further examination of the working of the Spirit in the act of contemplation and deification would be invaluable both to the study of Origen's concept of wisdom and to Patristic scholarship more broadly.

I hope to have demonstrated my deep admiration for and fascination with the ingenuity and originality Origen demonstrated in pioneering a system of Christian philosophical thought. However, even a thinker of such inventiveness and resourcefulness as Origen must be approached in the proper manner of a historian, as one man of a particular period and environment. Throughout my research, I have attempted to contextualise Origen upon a convergence of Jewish and Christian and Greek philosophical influences. The possibility of intellectual exchange with rabbinic Judaism cannot be overlooked on this matter, though I have reserved that possibility for a scholar more adept in Hebrew than myself. Historicising Origen does not only require that we situate him in terms of his influences. Such an innovative figure also cast a long shadow upon Christian thought in the centuries that followed, although the precise nature of his influence on any side of later debates is often difficult to disentangle. With regards to patristic scholarship as a whole, the study of wisdom as a concept has largely been overlooked and where it has received interested, it has largely been confined to the first two centuries of the Church. Given Origen's importance within the history of Christian doctrine, it would be worth consideration how the epistemology and pedagogy outlined within this work was adopted, adapted, or rejected by those Church fathers on whom he exerted especial influence, whether positively or negatively. In particular, the examining how Origen's veneration of the charismatic pedagogue above the institutional ecclesiastical hierarchy may have influenced the Egyptian monastic communities who were at the centre of the first Origenian

controversy and who were certainly highly influenced by his writing would be worth scholarly attention.

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