

EARLY CHRISTIAN READINGS OF PAUL ON MORAL REGENERATION

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Long Abstract

Since God will judge everyone according to their deeds (Rom 2:6, 1 Cor 3:13, 4:5, 2 Cor 5:10, Col 3:25), Paul regards the cultivation of moral conduct as a crucial task. This raises an important question because sin once reigned over believers and dwelled in them (Rom 3:9, 23, 5:12, 21, 7:8, 11, 20, Eph 2:1) and could reign over them again (Rom 6:12, 16): does their past subjection to sin affect their ability to produce the righteous conduct which is expected of them? Conversely, because Paul speaks of believers as freed from sin under grace (Rom 6:4, 14, 7:5-6) and created anew to produce good works (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10) so that they might enjoy newness of life (Rom 6:4), could they legitimately hope for some practical success in resisting sin and producing righteousness which they might not attribute to God only but also properly to themselves? Still further, what if any substantial regrowth of their ethical capacities, which we shall term “moral regeneration,” might they hope for from being under grace?

Our study joins an existing and lively scholarly discussion among those who identify various forms of ethical renewal in Paul. Therefore, this study adopts three key terms: “ethical renewal” as a generic term for the behavioural improvement which believers experience; the “perspectival view” of ethical renewal as that reading of Paul which proposes that believers’ ethical is the self-willed result of the divine contribution made to believers’ capacities, which remain otherwise unaffected; and, the “substantial view” of ethical renewal, interchangeable with the term “moral regeneration,” as the ongoing reordering and regrowth of believers’ very moral faculties themselves under divine grace.

The scholarly deadlock on whether there is moral regeneration in Paul may arise from the biblical texts themselves. We see scholarly divergence on these weighty questions concerning believers’ moral experience in Paul when we focus on a single passage, Romans 6:1-14, one of the most contested texts in establishing his hamartiology and soteriology. In fact, every aspect of Romans 6:1-14 remains contested, even the extent of the pericope. Consensus over a neat division within chapter six proves elusive because of the uncertainty concerning where the hortatory material belongs (Rom 6:12-14). This struggle reveals both the unity of the entire chapter and the deeper problems associated with this passage, such as working out how much of the text is parenetic and what the basis for the exhortations is. A cross-section of scholarly views shows the persistent disagreement on whether the basis for these exhortations includes substantial change in believers themselves from which this righteous conduct comes. Scholars like Douglas Moo and Michael Wolter see divine life overlaid believers’ experience to produce righteous conduct, while others like N.T. Wright and Robert Jewett see divine life reordering and perfecting believers’ ethical faculties over time.

Since the question of whether Paul envisages believers' substantial renewal and moral regeneration remains fraught, this study engages with Romans 6:1-14 and its earliest reception up to the death of Origen. Against the postmodern privileging of the autonomous reader, we may regard early Christian communities as observable readers whose applied exegesis of Paul constitutes one common object for the critical study of biblical texts. We justify the critical adduction of the exegetical foreground into the analysis of texts by noting the presence of implied readers in the texts themselves. Paul certainly speaks to the community from without; we have his second-person plural forms in the parenetic section (Rom 6:11-14). However, he also speaks from within this same community. Indeed, the foundation for the parenesis is Paul's identification with the community which he is addressing, witnessed by the inclusive, first-person forms that we find at the head of the passage. Those who recognise themselves in Paul's identity markers share the "one gospel faith" and thus have readings which are of exegetical relevance because they find themselves both addressed by the text and situated within it.

We analyse "direct citations" from Romans 6:1-14 among all possible Pauline references in the early Christian literature; direct citations are identified both by authorial intention to cite Paul, which is manifested by an attribution signal, and by a very high degree of literality. Thus, we ask in this study: what, if any, continuing relationship with sin do the early readers of Romans 6:1-14 see believers having? To what, if any, substantial regrowth of the believers' ethical capacities do their readings of Paul bear witness?

In Chapter Two, we analyse Irenaeus' citations of Romans 6:3-4, 9, and 12-13 in his great work, *Against Heresies*. Adjudging that his opponents offer highly selective and restrictive readings of Scripture, Irenaeus offers a matrix of biblical citations to cover what he believes to be all of Scripture in order to arrive at his normative doctrinal position. That matrix includes Paul, whom Irenaeus draws on for a collection of edited proof-texts. Thus, we do not find engagement with Paul's argument, but merely his language, which becomes useful for debate with his opponents. Nonetheless, Irenaeus' handling of Paul reveals his high regard for the Apostle as a voice of Christian orthodoxy. Firstly, combatting the opponents' Docetism in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9, he cites Romans 6:3-4 in order to show that the Apostle speaks of "Christ Jesus" as one person, and Romans 6:9 in order to demonstrate how their erroneous division of Christ makes baptism redundant because it separates his death in which believers participate by baptism from the resurrection for which they hope. Secondly, arguing for the salvageability of the flesh in *Against Heresies* 5.9.3, he cites Romans 6:4 again in order to witness to the capacity of the flesh to bear spiritual gifts before and after death. When the Spirit meets this capacity of the flesh for perfection, the result is "newness of life", which is understood as an ethical concept that refers to the gradual transformation of believers over time.

Thirdly, in *Against Heresies* 5.14.4, he cites Romans 6:12-13 in order to distinguish between the unredeemable fleshly deeds and the redeemable flesh, and thus to underline personal responsibility for moral conduct.

In Chapter Three, we consider the four citations of Paul in Clement of Alexandria's work, the *Stromateis*. We find Romans 6:2, 6-13, and 14 deployed as proof-texts in the contest for the true meaning of Paul with the Basilideans and the Valentinians. In *Stromateis* 2.64.4 and 3.61.1, Clement engages with the opponents' exegesis of Romans 6:14 in order to show how "under grace" does not mean that believers are immune to any guilt for sinful conduct. Instead of espousing such moral indifferentism, Clement clarifies that the Apostle calls only involuntary misdeeds "sin", which differ from acts of "voluntary malice", which are inadmissible and for which believers remain culpable. We also find in *Stromateis* 3.75.2-3 a citation of Romans 6:2 and 6:6-13, a citation that is peculiar for its abridgement, which he uses to warn believers that wrongdoing will inevitably follow unless they exercise personal vigilance against inordinate desires. Finally, in the face of so many failed martyrdoms, Clement presents Romans 6:6 in *Stromateis* 4.51.1 in order to identify the only kind of martyrdom which "true gnostics" may legitimately seek. For Clement, the Apostle counsels all believers to unite themselves to Christ's death, which he understands to mean death to sin, and thus vigorously to pursue righteous conduct.

In Chapter Four, we move on to Tertullian's two extended and highly edited citations. He levels Paul at his opponents in the treatises *On the Resurrection* and *On Modesty*, which take the form of extended addresses for a sympathetic audience. In the treatise *On the Resurrection*, he argues for a fleshly resurrection against the spiritual one claimed by the Valentinians. As Tertullian works through Romans 5-8 in reverse in *On the Resurrection* 47, he shows by his commentary on piecemeal citations of Romans 6:3-6, 8, 11, 12-13 (and 19-23) that, by the phrase "old self crucified with Christ" (Rom 6:6), Paul means a new morality, and not the denigration of the flesh. In his treatise *On Modesty*, Tertullian employs various scriptural authorities, including Paul, in order to support the New Prophets' rigorous position on the forgiveness of baptized adulterers against the more forbearing contemporary bishop. Lest the Church tolerate sin and thus abandon holiness, he lays out Romans 6:1-6, 8-11 in *On Modesty* 17, the longest of all his Pauline citations, in order to show how the Apostle expects that all sinning should come to an end as believers fulfil the obligation of moral propriety which their baptism entails.

Chapter Five treats Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, and especially 5.7-6.1, the section of that voluminous work which he dedicates to Romans 6:1-14. After contact with the position of "heretics", whom he accuses of exploiting ambiguities in the text in order to promote moral

determinism, he takes to the text of Romans in order to clarify what the Apostle is saying. His attack against the determinist hermeneutic of the “heretics” gives rise to his own voluntarist one. We therefore find a defence of free will and moral responsibility in his readings of each verse of our passage, except Romans 6:7, which he altogether omits. As Origen tells us himself, he often returns to what Paul means by living and dying in Christ, namely the ongoing pursuit of self-restraint after the formal renunciation of sin. Ultimately, his tripartite anthropology allows him to say that sin comes about because the soul freely unites itself to the desires of the flesh, whereas holiness comes about when the soul unites itself to the newly infused desires of the Spirit.

We dedicate Chapter Six to an analysis of the citations of Romans 6:1-14 in Origen’s other works. Through these works, all of which can be dated to the Caesarean phase of Origen’s career, he demonstrates his considerable skill as apologist, preacher, and commentator on Paul. The proof-texts that he offers allow him to delineate four different meanings for death, which he uses both to face down deniers of Christ’s historical death and to propose that believers ought to die to sin in general, and thus, to particular sins. Much more often than in the *Commentary*, Origen’s other works reflect his deep engagement with a range of symbolic readings, especially for the term “sin”, which he interprets symbolically as a wicked king and the devil. This provides him with further opportunity to attribute desires to sin itself, and thus the better to exhort his audience actively to resist its incursions in the mortal body.

The study makes three principal findings in relation to ethical renewal in early Christian readings of Paul.

Firstly, we find ample evidence for the perspectival view of ethical renewal in the early Christian readings of Romans 6:1-14. This view reaches its height in the works of Tertullian, who certainly sustains the hortative reading of Paul, although he does not answer the challenge which post-baptismal sin presents the Church with exhortation to believers but with the expulsion of baptized recidivists. Clement and Origen, however, present believers in a different light. No doubt they have the same propensity to sin as they had prior to their initiation, although they have access to different kinds of help: whereas Clement concludes that believers are exonerated for involuntary misdeeds because they are “under grace”, Origen envisages them strengthened against all misdeeds when they continually pursue what is praiseworthy.

Secondly, however much he espouses the perspectival view, Origen also shows moral regeneration as he sees believers invested with a second set of desires, which may win out, should they appeal to the Lord’s cross. Similarly, Irenaeus envisages new moral outcomes from the abiding presence of the Spirit in believers who wisely refrain from sin. Thus, the cumulative weight of evidence from our

early readers suggests that there is opportunity for both views of ethical renewal to be found in Romans 6:1-14.

Thirdly, a noted feature of Tertullian and, even more so, Origen's accounts of ethical renewal is their witness to the moral degeneration of recidivist believers. Origen's facility with exploring symbolic readings of Scripture also leads him to conceive of a situation in which "sin" symbolically understood recaptures those it once ruled. For Origen, it is not just the power that sin inherently has which leads him to see it "reigning" in Romans 6:12. It is also the devil, the author and "king of sin", who can be found in Paul's writings. Thus, by his exploration of the symbolic nature of Paul's language, Origen contributes a notion of the possibility of moral degeneration to modern readers' views of ethical renewal.

Thus, our study offers additional exegetical data relevant to reading Paul which has not hitherto been considered by modern readers. Doing so, we discover that modern readers find support for their view in their earliest counterparts, because Clement, Tertullian, and Origen witness to perspectival renewal, and Irenaeus and Origen also to moral regeneration.

Short Abstract

Since God judges everyone according to their deeds, Paul regards the cultivation of moral conduct as a crucial task. Responding to the scholarly deadlock on whether believers' ethical capacities are themselves regenerated or simply overlaid with divine power and otherwise unchanged, we engage with Romans 6:1-14 and its direct citations up to the death of Origen, where direct citations are identified by an attribution signal and literality. We ask whether moral regeneration is present in the early readings of Romans 6:1-14. Irenaeus' three citations argue for the unity of Christ, the salvageability of the flesh, and a distinction between fleshly deeds and the flesh itself.

Understanding the Spirit as formative of those whom he indwells, Irenaeus cites Romans 6:4 in order to demonstrate believers' moral regeneration if they continue in the Spirit. Clement of Alexandria's four citations are proof-texts against the Basilideans and the Valentinians. Clement's Apostle signals believers' exoneration for involuntary misdeeds because he says that they are "under grace".

Tertullian adapts two extended citations to his sympathetic audience in order to argue for the salvageability of the flesh and for the exclusion of recidivist baptized adulterers from the Church.

Tertullian's Apostle expects that all wrongdoing comes to an end with baptism. Origen adopts a voluntarist hermeneutic in his *Commentary on Romans* against opponents who promoted moral determinism. Thus, we find his strong witness to personal responsibility for moral action. His *Commentary* also contains his deduction from Romans 6:12 that the desires of the Spirit overlay the desires of sin, which believers still have. Origen's other works contain proof-texts from our passage which display symbolic readings of "sin" and moral degeneration in recidivists; these too mainly make the case for personal responsibility. Thus, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen witness to perspectival renewal, and Irenaeus and Origen also to moral regeneration.

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The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

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List of Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
<i>Alleg. Interp.</i>	Philo, <i>Allegorical Interpretation</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	Tertullian, <i>The Apology</i>
ATT	Ancient Texts in Translation
<i>Bapt.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Baptism</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Ben. Mos.</i>	Ps.-Hippolytus, <i>Benedictions of Moses</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium
CA	Christianisme Antique
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>Carn. Chr.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Flesh of Christ</i>
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
<i>Cels.</i>	Origen, <i>Against Celsus</i>
Church Hist.	Church History
CJR	Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations
<i>Comm. Jo.</i>	Origen, <i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Comm. Rom.</i>	Origen, <i>Commentary on Romans</i>
<i>Cor.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Military Garland</i>
CPHST	Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology
CTC	Christian Theology in Context
CUA	Catholic University of America
CUP	Cambridge University Press
<i>Det.</i>	Philo, <i>How the Worse Attacks the Better</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Origen, <i>Dialogue with Heraclides</i>
DMT	Directions in Modern Theology
EC	Early Christianity
<i>Eccl. Hist.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Eccl. Theol.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical Theology</i>
ECF	Early Church Fathers
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Epid.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i>
<i>Exc.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Excerpts of Theodotus</i>

<i>Exh.Cast.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Exhortation to Chastity</i>
ExpTim	Expository Times
FC	Fathers of the Church
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen und Dogmengeschichte
<i>Flor.</i>	Ptolemy, <i>Letter to Flora</i>
<i>Fr.Ezech.</i>	Origen, <i>Fragments on Ezekiel</i>
<i>Frg.</i>	Fragment
<i>Fug.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Flight in Persecution</i>
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
<i>Gos.Phil.</i>	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Hom.Gen.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Genesis</i>
<i>Hom.Ezech.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Ezekiel</i>
<i>Hom.Isa.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Isaiah</i>
<i>Hom.Jer.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i>
<i>Hom.Jes.Nav.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Joshua</i>
<i>Hom.Judic.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Judges</i>
<i>Hom.Luc.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i>
<i>Hom.Ps.</i>	Origen, <i>Homilies on the Psalms</i>
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
<i>Jejun.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Fasting/Against the Psychics</i>
JR	Journal of Religion
JTI	Journal of Theological Interpretation
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>Marc.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Against Marcion</i>
<i>Mart.</i>	Tertullian, <i>To the Martyrs</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Life of Moses</i>
NBS	Numen Book Series
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	A New History of the Sermon
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible

NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
<i>Or.</i>	Origen, <i>On Prayer</i>
<i>Orig.Comm.Rom.</i>	Rufinus, <i>Commentary on Romans of Origen</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>Paed.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Christ the Educator</i>
<i>Paen.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Repentance</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Panarion</i>
<i>Pasch.</i>	Origen, <i>On the Pasch</i>
<i>Pat.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Patience</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMS	Patristic Monograph Series
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
<i>P.Oxy.</i>	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
<i>Praescr.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Prescription of Heretics</i>
<i>Prax.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Against Praxeas</i>
<i>Pref.</i>	Preface
<i>Princ.</i>	Origen, <i>On First Principles</i>
ProEccl	Pro Ecclesia
<i>Protr.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Exhortation to the Greeks</i>
Ps.	Pseudo
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
<i>Pud.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On Modesty</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>
<i>Res.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Resurrection</i>
SBR	Studies of the Bible and its Reception
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
<i>Scorp.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Scorpiace</i>
SecCent	The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology

SP	Studia Patristica
<i>Spect.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Games</i>
SPhAMA	Studies in Philo and Mediterranean Antiquity
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TorTheol	Toronto Journal of Theology
<i>Trad.Ap.</i>	Ps.-Hippolytus, <i>The Apostolic Tradition</i>
<i>Treat.Res.</i>	<i>Treatise on the Resurrection</i>
TS	Texts and Studies
UPA	University Press of America
<i>Ux.</i>	Tertullian, <i>To My Wife</i>
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
VCSup	Vigiliae Christianae Supplements
<i>Virg.</i>	Tertullian, <i>On the Vesture of Virgins</i>
<i>Vit.Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Life of Apollonius</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WDU	Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Since God will judge everyone according to their deeds (Rom 2:6, 1 Cor 3:13, 4:5, 2 Cor 5:10, Col 3:25), Paul regards cultivation of moral conduct as a crucial task. This then raises an important question because sin once reigned over believers and dwelled in them (Rom 3:9, 23, 5:12, 21, 7:8, 11, 20, Eph 2:1) and could reign over them again (Rom 6:12, 16, 2 Tim 3:6): does their past subjection to sin affect their ability to produce the righteous conduct which is expected of them? Conversely, because Paul speaks of believers as freed from sin under grace (Rom 6:4, 14, 7:5-6), created anew to produce good works (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10) so that they might enjoy newness of life (Rom 6:4), could they legitimately hope for some practical success in resisting sin and producing righteousness which they might not attribute to God only but also properly to themselves? Still further, what if any substantial regrowth of their ethical capacities, which we shall term “moral regeneration,” might they hope for from being under grace?

We see scholarly divergence on these weighty questions of believers’ moral experience in Paul when we focus on a single passage, Romans 6:1-14, one of the most contested texts in establishing his hamartiology and soteriology. The Apostle’s argument that living again to sin is unthinkable for those who have died to it mentions both the power sin once had over believers and their personal responsibility under the freedom of grace to refrain from further sinful misdeeds: broad agreement has long been had on these preliminaries.¹ A select cross-section of scholarly views shows the persistent disagreement on whether the basis for these exhortations includes substantial change in believers themselves from which this righteous conduct comes.

On one side of the ethical question, scholars are divided on sin’s continuing influence over believers. For scholars such as Douglas Moo, the totality of sin is “rendered impotent” by the “participation of our old man in the crucifixion of Christ”:² “the real, though forensic, inclusion of the believer with Christ in his crucifixion means that our solidarity with, and dominance by, Adam, through whom we are bound to the nexus of sin and death, has ended.”³ The ethical experience of the believer is altered by their self-willed following of Christ in a process of mortification and vivification.⁴

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans : 1: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 295.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 375.

³ Moo, *Romans*, 376.

⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 367.

Throughout this process, believers remain “particularly susceptible to, and easily dominated by, sin”,⁵ they are therefore exhorted not to let the “influences of this age” hold sway against themselves.⁶ Others, like Michael Wolter, would not much disagree with Moo, but would add that believers are changed insofar as they enjoy freedom from their former compulsion to sin: “The baptized are freed from the dominion of sin and thus also from the compulsion to sin [*vom Zwang zum Sündigen befreit*].”⁷

N.T. Wright agrees with Wolter insofar as believers have been freed from sin and thus “they are free to live under a different lordship”.⁸ However, Wright identifies an apparent inconsistency in accounts like that of Moo and Wolter insofar as believers are said to remain susceptible to a power which has been neutralised. For Wright, Paul’s death and burial imagery means that sin is “abolished ... not simply left to one side without power”.⁹ Thus, believers are still within “the world of two realms, sin and grace”:¹⁰ “Paul is well aware that sin remains powerful and attractive for the most well-trained Christian.”¹¹ Sin continues to exert some but not unrestricted influence over believers: “If it is asked, as well it might be, what chance sin has got to rule, if the Christian has died to it, Paul’s implicit answer here has to do with the sphere over which sin, though no longer enthroned, can exercise powerful attraction: the ‘mortal body’”.¹² But even Wright’s account does not solve the problem he identifies because the realm of sin is said to persist even though believers are no longer subject to it; this seems not to accord with his statement that sin is “abolished”.¹³ Thus, Wright agrees with Moo insofar as the ethical question is answered in terms of a self-willed response to exhortation.

Robert Jewett sustains Wright’s reading of Paul, in that he regards the death which believers suffered with Christ as a “real” one, but he understands that death to be a “singular, punctiliar moment in the life of believers when they appropriated the death of Christ for themselves”.¹⁴ This death altered believers’ constitution, such that now “they belong to [the] class of persons who have

⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 375.

⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 383.

⁷ Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer : 1. Röm 1-8*, EKK (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 384, my translation. See also Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafeman (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 92.

⁸ N.T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *NIB 10* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 540.

⁹ Wright, *Romans*, 539.

¹⁰ Wright, *Romans*, 539.

¹¹ Wright, *Romans*, 541.

¹² Wright, *Romans*, 542.

¹³ Wright, *Romans*, 539.

¹⁴ Robert Jewett and Roy D. Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, Eldon J. Epp (ed.), Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 395.

died to sin ... that is, in relation to the sin that had functioned as a controlling power ever since Adam's fateful deed."¹⁵ Thus, Jewett's analysis finds agreement with that of Wolter and Wright, insofar as there is an emancipation from sin's grasp. However, Jewett goes further because he regards the transition from that life as "definitive"¹⁶ with corresponding ethical consequences for ecclesial cohesion: "Having been set free from the power of sin by the death and resurrection of Christ, believers have the responsibility of refusing sin's further domination ... To obey the ἐπιθυμῖαι ('desires') of the body is to continue to aspire to relationships of domination."¹⁷

Thus, we have two main views on the 'negative' side of the ethical question: we have Moo and Wolter's view of the neutralisation of the power of sin for believers and their responsibility to resist its mindset; and we have Wright and Jewett's view wherein believers are freed from sin but remain susceptible to its incursions through their mortal body, especially for Jewett in ecclesial contexts.

Scholars are also divided on the other side of the ethical question, whether believers experience substantive, positive change in their ethical capacities. Moo proposes that "the believer is, in this life, already benefiting from the power and influence of the resurrection".¹⁸ Righteous conduct flows to believers through their self-willed response to the invitation to live with Christ: "[Christians] are empowered and summoned to live *in* a new kind of life by virtue of their participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ."¹⁹ Therefore, the life of those in Christ and the consequent change in ethical experience can be presented largely in terms of imitation of him: "Because Christ has been raised, we can and should walk in newness of life."²⁰ Wolter clarifies that the "life" in which believers are now summoned to walk is precisely the life which Christ lives: "It is a life which is no longer under the dominion and shadow of death but remains eternal ... It has nothing to do with the everyday notions of 'life'."²¹

Wright agrees with Moo insofar as the question of change in believers' ethical capacities is mainly answered by their recognition of their new identity in Christ: "If [the baptized] are already 'in the Messiah', and if the Messiah has died and been raised, then they must 'calculate themselves' as being raised 'in him' or 'with him' ... Their behaviour must undergo a radical change."²² The basis for believers' new behaviour is their new identity:

¹⁵ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 395.

¹⁶ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399.

¹⁷ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 409.

¹⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 367.

¹⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 367, emphasis added.

²⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 367.

²¹ Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 375, my translation.

²² Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 2013), 1102-1103.

Patterns of behaviour which belong with the old life must simply be killed off. There is a to-and-fro implied here between what is already true at one level and what must become true by sheer, new-creational moral effort. The clear implication is that the latter is possible because the former has happened ... in Romans 6, the reason appears to be baptism.²³

For Wright, believers enjoy a new essence which also entails new conduct: "Those who have been buried with the Messiah must reckon that, as he has been raised, they too are called to 'walk' with a new quality of life."²⁴ That life proceeds from the Spirit, "sustaining Christians in their calling to worship God and reflect his glory to the world".²⁵ Instead of believers transforming themselves into Christ as in Moo and Wolter's account, believers are changed according to Wright by the 'spirit': "The entire Christian life is known to be 'in the Messiah', planted and rooted in his death and resurrection, and enabled by the spirit."²⁶

Both Wright and Jewett see corporate ethical consequences for believers' death to sin. However, Jewett departs from both Moo and Wright inasmuch as he interprets the divine passives of Romans 6:4 and 6 as enabling a "a new form of behaviour [which] is made possible by God through Christ" without direct reference to the Spirit.²⁷ Following Brendan Byrne,²⁸ Jewett sees that God makes a new form of behaviour possible for believers, because their union with the risen Lord brings substantial changes which enable them to meet their moral obligations to him: "That believers are enabled through their burial in Christ's death to 'walk in newness of life' is not an expression of eschatological caution ... A new form of behaviour is made possible by God through Christ."²⁹ This "distinctively Pauline concept" entails a "decisive transition a new lifestyle".³⁰ The death which believers underwent was a "real death" with Christ, through which believers are enabled to "walk in newness of life".³¹ Thus, for Jewett, Paul's language in Romans 6:4 places believers "in the position of having already participated in this new ethic that displays the glory of God".³²

Thus, we also have two main views on the 'positive' side of the ethical question: Moo and Wolter identify Christ's life as that in which believers are engaged for their new behaviour, with Wright

²³ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1103.

²⁴ Wright, *Romans*, 538.

²⁵ Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 22.

²⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 963.

²⁷ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399.

²⁸ Brendan Byrne, *Galatians and Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2010), 101-03; "Living out the Righteousness of God: The Contribution of Rom 6:1-8:13 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Presuppositions," *CBQ* 43, no. 4 (1981): 569.

²⁹ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399.

³⁰ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399, 402.

³¹ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 398-9.

³² Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 400.

offering that the Spirit enables this engagement; and Jewett proposes that there is a new pattern of behaviour specially enabled for believers simply by God's decisive action at a singular point in their lives.

The scholarly deadlock on whether there is moral regeneration in Paul may arise from the biblical texts themselves. In fact, every aspect of Romans 6:1-14 remains contested, even the extent of the pericope. Consensus over a neat division within chapter six proves elusive because of the uncertainty concerning where the hortatory material belongs (Rom 6:12-14).³³ This struggle reveals both the unity of the entire chapter and the deeper problems associated with this passage, such as working out how much of the text is parenetic and what the basis for the exhortations is. Perhaps the problem is with Paul's text itself, as Troels Engberg-Pedersen puts it:

Should we understand [Paul] as referring to some form of substantive event, a real death now (if not yet the corresponding resurrection) and a substantive infusion and takeover by some external agent? Or should we take it that no matter what substantive ideas Paul may also have had, baptism and spirit-infusion were also, and centrally, seen by him as matters of the understanding and of self-identification?³⁴

Since the question of whether Paul envisages believers' substantial renewal and moral regeneration remains fraught, this study seeks to engage with Romans 6:1-14 and its early reception up to the death of Origen. What, if any, continuing relationship with sin do the early readers of Romans 6:1-14 see believers having? To what, if any, substantial regrowth of the believers' ethical capacities do their readings of Paul bear witness? Now that the principal questions have been set down, we must first make the case for the value of the study of reception history for breaking the exegetical deadlock. We shall then review the most recent models of ethical renewal in current scholarship, present our terminology and methodology, and finally, outline the chapters. How will our drawing on early readings of Romans 6:1-14 break the deadlock in modern readings? How might reception history profitably address the contested question of moral regeneration in Paul?

³³ Indeed, the whole of Romans 6-8 has been regarded as entirely parenetic in function. See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 224. Although Romans 6:12-14 stands somewhat apart from 6:1-11, the position of the slender majority may be allowed to prevail here. Romans 6:1-11 and 6:12-14 belong together for three reasons: firstly, the diatribe questions in Romans 6:1-3 and 6:15-16 (cf. Rom 6:21) stand in parallel to form two paragraphs of roughly even length; secondly, two *inclusiones* are formed by the appearance of ἀμαρτία and χάρις together in Romans 6:1 and 6:14, and 6:15 and 6:23; thirdly, the content of Romans 6:14 is rephrased in 6:15 as a diatribe question, thereby signaling a turning point in the development of the same argument as in 6:14 from 6:15 onwards. See Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer*, HNT 8a (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 155; Cranfield, *Romans I-VIII*, 321; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 335; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 351, 355; Andreas Dettwiler, "Enthousiasme religieux dans Rm 6?," in *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Udo Schnelle, BETL 226 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), 281-84; Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 367.

³⁴ Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 224.

1.2 Paul's Early Readers

In his book, *Seeing the Word*, Markus Bockmuehl makes the case for turning to early readers to break exegetical deadlocks. In response to the “extraordinary degree of isolation and fragmentation”³⁵ he observes in critical studies, he urges the identification and adoption of a new, common object of study within our discipline: “The wealth of diversity in the contemporary field of New Testament studies is undeniable. Only by renewing conversation about a common object, however, can the many synchronic and diachronic approaches begin to render account of their intellectual endeavor.”³⁶ For Bockmuehl, the exegetical foreground constitutes one common object for the critical study of biblical texts: “Instead of perpetually going behind the text, the whole battery of historical-critical and synchronic tools could be usefully applied” to a text to uncover the “meaning and function ‘in front of the text’, where it was in fact heard and heeded (or ignored).”³⁷

Bockmuehl justifies the critical adduction of the exegetical foreground into the analysis of texts by noting the presence of implied readers in the texts themselves: “Both in their original setting and in their ongoing stature as authoritative texts, [the New Testament documents] do assume and address a certain kind of audience.”³⁸ Against the postmodern privileging of the “autonomous rational subject,”³⁹ Bockmuehl posits the early Christian community, its “settings, writings, and beliefs,”⁴⁰ as an observable reader. He urges us to revisit the New Testament “afresh in light of the recognition that the text, in its unity and diversity, invariably intends believers’ instruction, encouragement, and hope”.⁴¹

We may identify the implied readers of Romans 6:1-14 through the Apostle’s forms of address. Paul certainly speaks to the community from without; we have his second-person plural forms in the parenetic section (Rom 6:11-14). However, he also speaks from within this same community. Indeed, the foundation for the parenthesis is Paul’s identification with the community he is addressing, witnessed by the inclusive, first-person forms we find at the head of the passage. The community of faith declares itself to be “we who died to sin” (Rom 6:2) and who “were buried therefore with [Christ Jesus] by baptism” (Rom 6:4). What “we know” (Rom 6:6) allows for the community’s

³⁵ Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 33.

³⁶ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 40.

³⁷ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 65.

³⁸ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 68.

³⁹ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 78. See also Lyons: “From the perspective of reception history, scholarship on the Bible today inhabits a situation in which the critical study of biblical texts can no longer be usefully defined in terms of a distinction between original, first-order meanings and subsequent, second-order ones.” William John Lyons, *Joseph of Arimathea: A Study in Reception History* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 2.

⁴⁰ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 106.

⁴¹ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 119.

“consideration” of itself (cf. Rom 6:11). Those who recognise themselves in Paul’s identity markers share the “one gospel faith,”⁴² and thus have readings which are of exegetical relevance because they find themselves both addressed by the text and situated within it.

Which Christian readers, then, should be admitted to our discussion of moral regeneration in Paul? The fathers of reception history, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss, provide no methodological criteria for ascribing value to one particular trajectory of interpretation over another.⁴³ We can foresee that indiscriminate acquisition of the reception of Romans 6:1-14 may add yet another set of readings to an already unwieldy overabundance, a situation Ulrich Luz calls “hopelessly dilettantish”.⁴⁴ There is the danger that presenting its reception will leave unmoved the mass of “conflicting interpretations”.⁴⁵ For example, Rachel Nicholls proposes taking a cross-section of readings of the text at discrete intervals throughout the history of interpretation. Modern interpreters could then “view [the text] from a number of different historical vantage points, provided by a range of its interpreters who belong to different times and places”.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Nicholls offers a critique of her own approach: there would be great “disorientation” arising from this chronological cross-section.⁴⁷ Consequently, we need to identify which set of Christian readers of Romans 6:1-14 will be most useful to the task at hand. To break the deadlock, then, we turn to the early readers of Paul in order to see what the first “lived responses”⁴⁸ to the text were. This thus-far neglected part of the relevant exegetical data on Romans 6:1-14 and ethical renewal “can in turn serve as a valuable guide to the scope of the text’s meaning and truth”.⁴⁹

Two reasons in particular lead us to consider the early readers. Firstly, the early readers of Paul apply his texts to any number of their own concerns but from the perspective of the unity of Scripture and faith, as Ulrich Luz states: “The interpretations of the ancient church ... are of abiding importance, because they always connect an individual biblical text to the entirety and the center of faith.”⁵⁰ Since they approach Paul as a witness to the single truth of all Scripture, they both deploy texts from his letters in order to shed light on persistent problems and obscure texts, and allow

⁴² Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 112.

⁴³ Robert Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jauss in Current Practice*, LNTS 510 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 114.

⁴⁴ Ulrich Luz and James Crouch, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, Helmet Koester (ed.), (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 62.

⁴⁵ Daniel Patte, *Romans: Three Exegetical Interpretations and the History of Reception : 1: Romans 1:1-32* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

⁴⁶ Rachel Nicholls, “Is Wirkungsgeschichte (or Reception History) a Kind of Intellectual Parkour (or Freerunning)?” (paper presented at the British New Testament Conference, September 2005), 10.

⁴⁷ Nicholls, “Wirkungsgeschichte,” 10.

⁴⁸ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 65.

⁴⁹ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 65.

⁵⁰ Luz and Crouch, *Matthew 1-7*, 64.

other texts to illumine his, often by the construction of thematic matrices of texts. This integrated approach to Scripture allows us to see the ways in which Paul has been put to use and thus to see what the range of meaning of our text is in applied settings. Secondly, the early readers' facility with symbolic readings of texts leads us to reappropriate them as a neglected part of the exegetical data in order to widen the range of meaning further. As Daniel Patte puts it, although admittedly about a broader group than simply the early readers: "If we carefully ponder these receptions of Romans, we should not be surprised that they bring to light many textual, theological, and ethical features of Romans that modern exegeses overlook – thereby sharpening or challenging one or another kind of critical interpretation."⁵¹ The personifications Paul uses in our text⁵² lend themselves strongly to such symbolic readings, requiring critical attention to them in order to arrive at a set of meanings the Apostle may have intended.⁵³ The routine exclusion of symbolic readings of the text by modern interpreters⁵⁴ is in sharp contrast to the practice of the early readers. Thus, "to the extent that figurative exegesis is dismissed, on whatever grounds, as 'fanciful', as 'eisegesis', as 'anachronistic', as 'pre-critical', as merely 'cultural revision', and not a true claim on meaning, the canon of Scripture itself is dismissed both as a concept and as a concrete reality."⁵⁵ Reintroducing these symbolic readings into critical exegesis expands our range of meanings for Romans 6:1-14, the better to see whether this text in some aspect or other witnesses to moral regeneration.

In summary, this means that we shall derive from the early readers a set of legitimate and plausible readings of Paul that take into account the whole of Christian faith and Scripture, in which we can see whether moral regeneration is thought to be present. Once we have uncovered the early readers' approaches to Romans 6:1-14, we shall finally have the opportunity to put them into discussion with modern readers on moral regeneration in Paul. Before proceeding any further, however, it is necessary that we now define key terms which appear in this study.

⁵¹ Patte, *Romans: History of Reception*, 1.

⁵² Simon Gathercole, "'Sins' in Paul," *NTS* 64, no. 2 (2018): 154.

⁵³ "No other personification takes up as much space in Paul's letters as Sin, and the majority of Paul's references to sin in general occur in Rom. 5:12-8:11 (42 times). Moreover, surrounding this personification are other important personifications such as Law, Grace and Sin's partner in crime, Death." Joseph R. Dodson, *The 'Powers' of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans*, BZNW 161 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 123.

⁵⁴ See Westerholm for example: "Personifications of patterns of life, not supernatural forces, are in view." Stephen Westerholm, "Paul's Anthropological 'Pessimism' in Its Jewish Context," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon Gathercole (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007), 79.

⁵⁵ John C. Cavadini, "From Letter to Spirit: The Multiple Senses of Scripture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Paul M. Blowers and Peter W. Martens (Oxford: OUP, 2019), 126.

1.3 Terminology

We begin our semantic orientation by adopting “ethical renewal” as a generic term for the behavioural improvement believers experience. Paul’s language of the “new” (καινός and related terms) often refers to or includes ethical renewal. The Apostle envisages an altogether different set of behavioural outcomes for believers: they are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15) and thus have a new, inner self to make their own (2 Cor 4:16, Eph 2:15, 4:24, Col 3:10); they are to acquire a new mind or knowledge (Rom 12:2, Eph 4:23, Col 3:10); their existence is (to be) replete with newness of life or the Spirit (Rom 6:4, 7:6). Paul often brings out this new set of ethical experiences by contrasting them with the old ones, especially with the functional incapacity which believers experienced under sin: an end to believers’ old self (Rom 6:6, Eph 4:22, Col 3:9) with its “leaven” (1 Cor 5:7-8) sees them freed from sin (Rom 6:7, 18, 22, 8:2). Since we are concerned in this study to identify any divine assistance Paul’s early readers see given to believers to produce righteous conduct, our term “ethical renewal” allows us to name their behavioural improvement in a general way without further attribution. We can now distinguish between two scholarly views on Paul, namely the perspectival and the substantial views of ethical renewal.

By the “perspectival view” of ethical renewal we mean that reading of Paul which proposes believers’ ethical renewal proceeds from the self-willed result of the divine contribution overlaid believers’ capacities, which remain otherwise unaffected. Since in Paul, human volition alone does not bring an end to misdeeds because it is hindered by indwelling sin (Rom 7:14-25), it is the initial act of God in Christ which is the indispensable foundation for ethical renewal.⁵⁶ Christ’s death liberates individuals from constraint by the law (Rom 7:6, Gal 3:23), the passions of the flesh (Rom 7:5, 8:5, 8, 12-13, 13:14, Gal 5:16-17, Eph 2:3), or its indulgences (Col 2:23). The initial and indispensable divine action then provides for continuing divine action which enables believers to act in accord with their new standing in Christ.⁵⁷ It is this human action which appropriates the divine one which is the subject of Paul’s exhortations that believers abandon wicked ways and adopt patterns of upright conduct.⁵⁸ Scholars adopting the perspectival view of ethical renewal regard believers as possessing insufficient or full agency to produce righteous conduct: after the initial

⁵⁶ Ernst Käsemann well describes the narrative of perspectival renewal: “For centuries [justification was regarded] as the beginning of the Christian life, which sanctification necessarily must follow and verify.” Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: SCM, 1980), 172.

⁵⁷ Paul’s language concerning the old self is in terms of incapacitation. See Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 658.

⁵⁸ Barclay explains the notion of responsibility after grace is bestowed: “Although not itself an imperative, grace is imperatival: it bears within itself the imperative to obey.” John M.G. Barclay, “Under Grace: The Christ-Gift and the Construction of a Christian Habitus,” in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 60.

liberating action of God, believers entirely draw on his power to produce righteous conduct from their exercise of free volition.⁵⁹ The Apostle thus issues exhortations urging believers not to yield themselves to sin because they consider themselves dead to it (Rom 6:11-13, 19), and not to conform themselves to this world (Rom 12:2) but to do good to all (Rom 12:9-21). He calls on them to remove misdeeds from their lives (Eph 4:22) as old clothing (Col 3:9) and to adopt the new nature (Eph 4:24), which has within it the set of worthy attributes or “Christ” which someone puts on like armour (Rom 13:12-14, Eph 6:10-17). This means that, in effect, perspectival renewal sees God’s saving action as supplanting and supplying believers’ moral action.

We define the “substantial view” of ethical renewal, interchangeable with the term “moral regeneration,” as the ongoing reordering and regrowth of believers’ very moral faculties themselves under divine grace. The substantial view of renewal affirms very much of the perspectival view as regards the initial and continuing divine action to produce righteous conduct. However, it also affirms that the divine action renews and perfects believers’ moral faculties themselves over time, such that the righteous conduct which appears in believers’ lives is to be credited both to themselves and to God.⁶⁰ This view finds scriptural support in Paul’s “purpose” clauses which refer to ongoing ethical renewal: believers were buried with Christ precisely “so that” they “may walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4); their “old self was crucified” with Christ “so that the sinful body might be destroyed and [they] might no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom 6:6); they also “died to the law” “so that” they may “bear fruit for God” and “serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6).⁶¹ Paul’s divine passives also form the basis for the substantial view of ethical renewal.⁶² Believers’ “inner nature”, which Paul prays will be strengthened with might through the divine Spirit (Eph 3:16) is daily “being renewed” (2 Cor 4:16, Col 3:10). Proponents of the substantial view of renewal regard human volition as both compromised by past acquaintance with sin and capable of being strengthened by cooperation with indwelling divine power.⁶³ This leads us also to a set of texts in which Paul references the divine Spirit as the agent of ethical renewal. Believers are

⁵⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 367.

⁶⁰ Peter Ensor argues that Paul’s phrase “we died to sin” (Rom 6:2) requires the reading with the moral sense, which he takes to mean “sin’s power has been brought to an end in us” rather than a forensic sense of a declaration of liberty from the guilt of sin. Peter Ensor, “The Meaning of ‘We ... Died to Sin’ in Romans 6.2,” *ExpTim* 126, no. 5 (2015): 228.

⁶¹ “The new epoch does not mean an end to the old, but neither does its realisation in the lives of believers await the complete end of the old. In this age the outworking of the decisive act of Christ is not yet sinless conduct or deathless life, but morally responsible conduct which expresses the life of Christ beyond death.” Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 315.

⁶² Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399.

⁶³ The formulation in Romans 6:6 with $\mu\eta\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\tau\iota$ and the present tense speaks at least to Dunn of how “the possibility of the believer’s continuing to serve sin is very real. The aorist identification with Christ in his death therefore provides the enabling to live under the lordship of grace (Rom 5:21) but does not prevent the believer from succumbing once again to sin at any particular point.” Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 320.

led by the Spirit who intercedes for them (Rom 8:14, 27) to pray as they ought (Rom 8:26, Gal 4:6) and to produce “fruits” evident in personal conduct (Gal 5:22). The same Spirit given to all empowers each one differently for service of the community (1 Cor 12:4, 7, 11) and also Paul himself in his mission (1 Cor 2:4, 1 Thess 1:5). In these references, we note how the divine action accompanies, empowers, and enriches human action. Hence, the substantial view sees God’s action as realising and cultivating believers’ own moral action.

We therefore have three key terms in hand: ethical renewal, the perspectival view, and the substantial view (which is “moral regeneration”). Although consensus remains elusive on which of the latter two Paul espouses, we can observe points of complementarity between them. Firstly, both principal views of ethical renewal read Paul as saying believers require some divine action for their righteous conduct. It is not the case that one simply envisages divine action and the other does not. Both require God to act so that believers may do so too. However, it is the question of the fate of believers’ ethical faculties that facilitates our distinction between them: righteous conduct is not necessarily thought to be believers’ own but rather God’s in the perspectival view; conversely, righteous conduct is indeed thought to be believers’ own precisely because of the divine action affecting their ethical faculties in the substantial view. Secondly, both accounts of ethical renewal find a place for free volition. Neither the perspectival view nor the substantial one sees believers displaying improved behaviour without themselves so willing it. The two views differ on whether believers’ volition itself is renewed from the ongoing benefits of God’s working in their lives.

Having defined the principal terms we use in this study, we proceed now to consider three available models of ethical renewal in Paul, the better to situate our study in the existing scholarship.

1.4 Models of Ethical Renewal in Paul

Our study joins an existing and lively scholarly discussion among those who identify forms of ethical renewal in Paul. As we shall see, there are a number of scholars who accept that Paul speaks of the ethical renewal of believers, but who differ on what its exegetical basis and content is. In recent years, various models of such renewal have appeared, each constructed from findings made by critical engagement with select texts and their background. Our critical appraisal of each available model will better enable us to situate our study within current scholarship. Volker Rabens takes 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 8:12-17 to articulate a model of ethical renewal following Spirit-enabled transformation. We also have theories of ethical renewal proceeding from cognitive conversion from N.T. Wright, Samuli Siikavirta, Craig S. Keener, and John Barclay. Finally, Teresa

Morgan offers a model of personal renewal which specifies its purpose as service by Christ's "eincheiristicism" of believers, that is, under his protective power (literally, taken in hand by Christ), by consideration of the texts containing ἐν Χριστῷ and related terms. At this early stage in our critical appraisal of each model, we note that no existing model of ethical renewal gives sustained attention to the early reception of Pauline texts.

1.4.1 Spirit-Enabled Conduct

The first model of ethical renewal we shall consider is that of Volker Rabens, who argues from 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 8:12-17 that Paul's concept of the indwelling Spirit's transformative work is the basis for his ethics. Rabens' focus on the role of the Spirit in the renewal of persons is designed to overcome the dichotomy of "substantial and relational" categories of renewal.⁶⁴ Instead of believers merely exercising self-control,⁶⁵ the Spirit "continually transforms and empowers [them] for ethical conduct by enlivening and even intensifying these intimate relationships"⁶⁶ between God and believers, and among believers themselves.

Rabens begins with revisiting the question of whether Paul is indebted to Hellenistic and Jewish sources for this concept. As regards the former, he finds that there is no direct appearance in Paul of the Stoic notion of the Spirit, that is, of a material substance diffused through all living things: "We can merely confirm that Stoicism provided a number of rudimental presuppositions" for the commonly-held theory that Hellenism is the breeding ground of infusion-transformation.⁶⁷ Had it made such an appearance, Paul may have been speaking of conduct resulting from the awakening or strengthening of the Spirit already inhabiting persons. Instead, Paul's Spirit-language merely "evoked associations of Stoic pneumatology in Paul's audience" rather than being strictly indebted to it.⁶⁸ Indeed, for the latter, Rabens concludes from his analysis of the Hebrew Bible, Qumran texts, and the Hellenistic romance *Joseph and Aseneth* as well as Philo that these Jewish sources witness not to the Spirit's physical substance but to its abiding presence and working in human lives, and that this working is not linked to the production of conduct.⁶⁹ Finding therefore that Paul's ethics has a novel pneumatological basis when compared with available Hellenistic and Jewish literature,

⁶⁴ Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*, 2nd revised ed., WUNT 2/283 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), vii.

⁶⁵ Volker Rabens, "The Faithfulness of God and Its Effects on Faithful Living: A Critical Analysis of Tom Wright's Faithfulness to Paul's Ethics," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul*, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, WUNT 2/413 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 563.

⁶⁶ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 173.

⁶⁷ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 35.

⁶⁸ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 120.

⁶⁹ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 79.

Rabens proceeds to consider two passages in which Paul speaks of effects of the infused Spirit's transformation, namely 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 8:12-17.

In Rabens' view, 2 Corinthians 3:18 with its divine passive (μεταμορφούμεθα) witnesses to two Spirit-enabled transformations of persons: the unveiling of faces and the beholding of the Lord's glory. "Unveiled faces" has two aspects: the Spirit bestows proper understanding of the Gospel and intimacy with God.⁷⁰ Similarly, "beholding the Lord's glory" has three aspects: the Spirit imparts the capacity to receive revelation, to encounter God, and to contemplate him.⁷¹ Thus, Rabens reads 2 Corinthians 3:18 as speaking not of a physical transformation of believers as with Moses or in the resurrection, but of the Spirit's gradual manifestation of the "life and death of Christ" in them (cf. Col 4:6, 16),⁷² a process which "evidently encompasses enabling for religious-ethical life".⁷³ We might question whether any ethical content of this text is as "evident" as Rabens claims, since, as Paul Duff states, "this verse is full of exegetical problems."⁷⁴ It remains hotly contested whether believers who undergo the Spirit-enabled transformation of which this text speaks become an image of the glorified Christ as Rabens claims, or an abiding and greater version of Moses who beheld the divine glory.⁷⁵ Such a transformation need not, and more importantly, might not, be collapsed into ethical categories, as Rabens' dialogue partner Back confirms.⁷⁶ The choice of 2 Corinthians 3:18 for Rabens' study therefore seems to be ill-advised because its witness is not as clear as it needs to be for the case he is making for the ethical effects of divine transformation wrought by the Spirit. Nevertheless, the divine contribution to personal conduct, especially where it may be signalled by divine passives, remains a vitally important question, not least because of God's judgment according to works (Rom 2:6), as we pointed out in the beginning of this study. To address this question, it would be important to turn instead to a passage such as Romans 6:1-14 in which Paul distinguishes between the past, present, and future experience of someone's life in Christ.

Rabens also considers whether Romans 8:12-17 witnesses to another Spirit-enabled transformation, namely adoption by God, which he reads "as an empowerment for ethical living".⁷⁷ Instead of the

⁷⁰ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 177.

⁷¹ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 178.

⁷² Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 193.

⁷³ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 203.

⁷⁴ Paul B. Duff, *Moses in Corinth: The Apologetic Context of 2 Corinthians 3*, NovTSup 159 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 200.

⁷⁵ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 227-28; Duff, *Moses in Corinth*, 201.

⁷⁶ Frances Back, *Verwandlung durch Offenbarung bei Paulus: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Untersuchung zu 2 Kor 2,14-4,6*, WUNT 2/153 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 146, 216; Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 179, 196.

⁷⁷ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 203.

constant struggle against themselves, believers enjoy the Spirit's assistance in mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom 6:13): "The contrast that Paul sets up between Romans 7 and 8 conveys that people who have been transferred 'into' (έν) Christ and the Spirit are now able to resist the temptations of the body and the flesh, and they are in a relationship that provides further empowering for such action."⁷⁸ Although the believer possesses the Spirit, they remain distinct subjects: "The new relational realities are established by the Spirit, not by the believer's ethical actions or feelings of being emotionally close to God ... It is the believer who is transformed and empowered"⁷⁹ in the course of their life: thus, "the Spirit enables ethical living by drawing believers into the loving and empowering presence of the divine and the community of faith."⁸⁰ This stable presence of the renewing Spirit is seen in the reference to the "Spirit of adoption" in Romans 8:12-17. Paul's terms έν Χριστῷ and έν πνεύματι speak of "relationships or realms of influence in which people exist and by which they are determined".⁸¹ The choice of Romans 8:12-17 reflects Rabens' stated intention to discover the role of the Spirit. Nevertheless, Paul states that the Spirit only indwells persons after sin, which had previously inhabited them, has been expelled (cf. Rom 7:17, 20 with 8:2, 9). Further, it seems that, sin is only expelled by a combination of divine and human agencies (Rom 6:4, 6, 11-14). This means that Spirit-enabled conduct relies on a foundation of expulsion of sin and entry into relationship with Christ, which Paul articulates earlier than Romans 8. It is therefore the case that, as well-chosen as this text is for Rabens' study, there are texts earlier than Romans 8:12-17 to be investigated such as Romans 6:1-14, which refer to the sin-expulsion and Christ-entry motifs and their consequences for personal conduct without reference to the Spirit.

Our study benefits from that of Rabens insofar as he gives due attention to the divine contribution to believers' personal conduct, especially as it may be suggested by divine passive verbal forms. Our assessment of that contribution, however, will be made by focusing on a single text, namely Romans 6:1-14. This leads us away from considering the Spirit as the primary contributor to personal conduct because of its omission in our passage. Further, because of the controverted meaning of our chosen text, instead of searching through Hellenistic and Jewish sources for its possible background, we shall consider its foreground in the early readers for a range of meanings. We shall therefore arrive at the nature of the divine contribution to personal conduct as it has been and is expected to be seen by Paul's early readers.

⁷⁸ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 213.

⁷⁹ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 250-251.

⁸⁰ Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 251.

⁸¹ Rabens, "The Faithfulness of God and Its Effects on Faithful Living," 561.

1.4.2 Ethical Renewal by Cognition

Cognitive renewal has received quite some scholarly attention in recent years, almost certainly because it can be described under both perspectival and substantial aspects. Cognitive renewal is indeed understood as being part of perspectival renewal by scholars such as Samuli Siikavirta and John Barclay, who see conversion-affirming cognition as an important process for believers to participate in so as to produce upright conduct. Appropriately reminded by Paul of their new identity expressed in baptism, believers over time conform their conduct to Christ who bestowed his identity on them. The same largely holds true for the substantial view. Nevertheless, where it is part of substantial renewal, as in N.T. Wright and Craig S. Keener's view, believers' transformed thinking is also a product of the Spirit's continued work in believers' mortal experience.

N.T. Wright leads the current discussion for ethical renewal by cognition. He reads Romans 5-8 as a Passover story which sees deliverance as God's principal act and remembrance as believers' principal response to it. Believers demonstrate their participation in God's deliverance in baptism, which offers "a direct link to the history of Israel, particularly to the symbol of the exodus and to the use of that symbol in the claims of a new sect; and a gateway into this quasi-sect through which all alike might enter".⁸² This remembrance of God's deliverance of them gives rise to their new self-understanding and conduct moved by the Spirit: "Christian living in the present consists of anticipating this ultimate reality through the Spirit-led, habit-forming, truly human practice of faith, hope, and love, sustaining Christians in their calling to worship God and reflect his glory into the world."⁸³ For Wright, baptism "is inextricably linked with the work of the spirit (sic) through whom the whole church ... commit themselves to living under that lordship and trusting themselves entirely to his saving accomplishment."⁸⁴ Believers understand that they have "left the realm of the *παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος* in baptism",⁸⁵ and therefore proceed in the new realm under their new lord's power as an anticipation of his final revelation: "Just as the life of the age to come is to be seen in advance in the personal and bodily behaviour of believers, so the church as a whole, in its present life, must anticipate the ultimate unity on the basis of what has already been announced in the present verdict 'dikaioi'."⁸⁶ He reads Paul as saying that the resurrection of Christ is a "worldview-marker" by which believers now regard themselves and therefore by which they conduct themselves: "The Messiah is raised; if you are in him you are raised as well; so reckon that it's true and behave accordingly! ...

⁸² Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 464.

⁸³ Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 22.

⁸⁴ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 962.

⁸⁵ Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 195.

⁸⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 962.

[This point] is loud and clear in Romans 6.”⁸⁷ Therefore, Paul is thought to say that upright conduct proceeds from the exercise of personal cognition following the profession of faith.

Similarly, Samuli Siikavirta sees upright conduct produced by believers’ lifelong reflection on their release from sin and death by baptism into Christ:

In Paul’s ethical pattern, Christians have not simply been saved from the rule of sin and eternal death and told the rules of their new Lord, Christ, and expected simply to comply with them – instead, they are constantly reminded of how their old way of life used to be, who it was that saved them from it and whose servants they have now become.⁸⁸

Siikavirta arrives at this conclusion from his analysis of Romans 6-8, with the stated intention to focus on baptism. He chooses this section of Paul’s letter in order to overcome the “indicative-imperative schema” which scholars have made the “core of the relationship between theology and ethics”.⁸⁹ By reminding believers of their “new state in Christ often by cognitive means,” Paul hopes to lead them towards a new, “correct use of the body as well”.⁹⁰ Siikavirta affirms the continuing role of the Spirit of Christ in believers’ lives as the complement of such Pauline exhortation, but seems to collapse the work of the Spirit into believer’s cognition:

Evidently, the Pauline insight, reason, understanding or cognition is not detached from the work of the Spirit (of Christ). However, despite cognition being guided by the indwelling Spirit Paul still resorts to strong, rhetorical and cognition-refreshing reminders and exhortations in his moral teaching. These represent two sides of the same coin, and one must not forget either of them.⁹¹

Thus, without further comment on the indwelling Spirit’s work, Siikavirta regards Paul’s moral exhortation as “needed to strengthen the cognition of one’s baptismal state and identity in Christ amidst on-going temptations of the flesh.”⁹²

This interpretation of Paul is nuanced by John Barclay. Tracing the incongruity of grace through Paul’s letters, Barclay finds that there is such an incongruity in believers’ mortal existence which is being used to produce upright conduct: “This permanent *incongruity* of new life in dying bodies is expressed in the congruity or fit between the new human obedience and the purpose or will of God.”⁹³ In Barclay’s reading of Romans 6:12 and 7:24, this obedience proceeds from the cognitive

⁸⁷ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 807.

⁸⁸ Samuli Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8: Paul’s Ethics Beyond ‘Indicative’ and ‘Imperative’*, WUNT 2/407 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 171.

⁸⁹ Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8*, 1, 3, 6.

⁹⁰ Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8*, 3.

⁹¹ Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8*, 178.

⁹² Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8*, 175.

⁹³ John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 503, his emphasis.

renewal of believers as part of their “rescue” from the deathly life of unbelief: “What is needed is ‘rescue from this body of death’ (Rom 7:24) – a new *φρόνημα* of cognitive and practical schemas operative in physical deportment, corporeal practice, and bodily appetites.”⁹⁴ By means of this new *φρόνημα*, believers appropriate the resurrection into their “still mortal bodies (Rom 6:12)”.⁹⁵ Believers enter into this new *φρόνημα* by baptism into Christ’s death to sin, such that their “allegiances, dispositions, emotions, and actions” are attributed to the risen Christ.⁹⁶ For our purposes, this means that Christ is ever providing believers with an added set of desires,⁹⁷ such that their cognitive processes are newly transformed in the direction of obedience to God: “‘Newness of life’ (cf. Rom 6:4) is established, sustained, and governed not by believers themselves, but by God,” even if “that new life cannot be said to be active *within* believers unless it is demonstrably acted out *by* them”.⁹⁸ Thus, the new *φρόνημα* that is available to believers to draw on is not “an *anthropological* phenomenon,”⁹⁹ and it evidences substantial renewal of believers across the length of their mortal life in Christ.

Craig S. Keener proposes a similar model of cognition producing ethical renewal. He examines Paul’s texts on the mind in order to show how the Apostle “uses cognition” to connect justification and moral transformation.¹⁰⁰ In this, he contrasts the mind which lacks the “direct action of God’s Spirit” (Rom 1:18-32, 7:15-25) with the “positive characterizations of the mind in Christ” (Rom 8:5-6, 12:2).¹⁰¹ Additionally, he shows that the mind in Christ from Romans 8 corresponds with both the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:15-16, Phil 2:1-5, 3:19-21, 4:6-8) and the “heavenly mind” (Col 3:1-2). Through this analysis, Keener finds that failed humanity labours under the effects of its own wisdom and prevailing passions (cf. Rom 1, 7) until Christ frees it, enabling believers to bring the passions under control by their recognition of Christ’s agency in freeing them (Rom 6:1-11).¹⁰² New conduct proceeds from the conversion-affirming mind after the initial reception of Christ’s life.¹⁰³ This affirmation of conversion is “empowered by God’s own activity ... Believers are righted by Christ, not

⁹⁴ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 508.

⁹⁵ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 501.

⁹⁶ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 501.

⁹⁷ Engberg-Pedersen echoes this conclusion: What God has done is “everywhere connected with the purpose of generating knowledge in human beings ... In Paul, divine agency is fundamentally about generating knowledge.” Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Self-Sufficiency and Power: Divine and Human Agency in Epictetus and Paul,” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon Gathercole (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007), 132.

⁹⁸ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 502-03, his emphasis.

⁹⁹ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 501, his emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Craig Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul’s Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), xv.

¹⁰¹ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 253-54.

¹⁰² Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 39.

¹⁰³ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 253-55.

themselves (cf. Rom 3:21-5:11), and this righting includes a new life in union with Christ (Rom 5:12-6:11).¹⁰⁴ Believers depend “on God’s Spirit for being able to appropriate the cognitive moral character consonant with one who is righted. One who behaves by the new identity is thus walking by the Spirit.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, the task of securing such cognition lies with the believer who is in possession of the Spirit: “For Paul, as for some others, *implementing* the change in *practice* requires cognitive recognition of the change.”¹⁰⁶

Despite the intention to overcome the fragmentation of the indicative and imperative, these readers of Paul accentuate the imperatival discourse of Romans 6-8, and so lead us back to the perspectival view of personal renewal. There are aspects of Paul’s texts which do not appear in these models, particularly any witness the divine passives may make to an enabled thinking and acting, Alternatively, the driving force behind such cognition seems to be none other than the believers themselves. It is difficult to see how such cognition is distinct from faith, a problem which Keener himself readily admits.¹⁰⁷ In order to fill out the basis for Paul’s exhortation to righteous conduct, greater attention should be given to the ethical consequences of believers’ transfer from sin’s mastery to that of Christ, as laid out especially in Romans 6. Because Romans 6 remains thus contested, we turn to the early readers for a range of meanings within which we may situate these modern ones.

1.4.3 Eincheiristic Renewal for Service

A recent study of great significance to us is Teresa Morgan’s *Being “in Christ” in the Letters of Paul*.¹⁰⁸ She finds that “participation” is a “notoriously opaque concept” which “proves not the most persuasive interpretation either of individual passages of Paul’s letters or, insofar as we can elicit it, of his thinking as a whole”.¹⁰⁹ Thus, she turns to Paul’s term “in Christ,” as “part of his narrative of God’s intervention in the world through Christ”.¹¹⁰ For Morgan, believers’ entry into Christ is not merely perspectival, but entails substantial change in them: “Release has been made possible by the

¹⁰⁴ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 115.

¹⁰⁶ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 32, his emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Teresa Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul: Saved Through Christ and in His Hands*, WUNT 449 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 248.

¹¹⁰ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 248.

death and resurrection of Christ, and the new existence is not only a matter of imagery or individual experience, but an objective reality.”¹¹¹

Morgan identifies two ways in which Paul uses the participatory term “in Christ”.¹¹² She detects an instrumental usage when he speaks of God’s works for humanity: “[Paul’s] many brief sketches of, and allusions to, the way that, through Christ’s death, God has sanctified, made righteous, or brought to new existence those whom God has called to put their trust in God and Christ”.¹¹³ An “eincheiristic” usage states how believers are now “under Christ’s power, authority, and protection. It is by living in Christ’s hands in the present time that the faithful are strengthened and empowered to remain in right-standing with God until Christ’s return.”¹¹⁴ From this, Morgan can see that Christ is more than an example (cf. Rom 6:11, 1 Thess 3:12) who contributes effective power to believers: “Ultimately, Paul affirms that Christ will be even more than saviour and exemplar. He is the unique being who, uniquely among the divinities, shares his status and identity as God’s son with all those who put their trust in him.”¹¹⁵

The ethical content of such eincheiristic language, in Morgan’s view, is the freedom to serve. Attending closely to the language of emancipation that we have already seen in Romans 6:6-7, Morgan describes the purpose of believers’ being “in Christ”: “They live for God and Christ, freed from sin, the flesh, their old life, or the law, in order to serve God and Christ ... At the same time, the ability to serve is a power which the faithful have been given.”¹¹⁶ This service appears to have both common and particular elements to it. On the one hand, believers are empowered to serve the will of God: “[The value of their lives] is defined by what God and Christ ask of them,” which consists in “service to, and relationship with God and Christ, but which in that service, and that relationship, is uniquely, gloriously, and infinitely precious”.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, believers “have varied and specific forms of work to do, often in fulfilment of gifts they have been given, which they should use for the benefit of everyone”.¹¹⁸

That freedom to serve, however, also entails the responsibility not to lapse or be led astray:

The present is a time of jeopardy, in which the faithful are accountable for their actions and relationships. Paul’s eincheiristic use of *en Christō* draws attention to his sense of

¹¹¹ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 81.

¹¹² Morgan notes that a third way with a locative sense may consist in believers’ standing before Christ (cf. 2 Cor 2:10, 8:21). Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 244.

¹¹³ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 90.

¹¹⁴ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 90.

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 245.

¹¹⁶ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 245.

¹¹⁷ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 55, 245.

¹¹⁸ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 246.

importance, not only of what God has done through Christ and what the faithful hope for, but also of the present and what happens in the present; and not only on the cosmic, but on the human plane.¹¹⁹

For Morgan, then, the will continues to be engaged in believers' work of service: "If God's grace is to receive the fullest possible response, and those who respond are to be saved on Christ's return, then it is vital that the faithful remember that they are living under Christ's authority and protection, and act accordingly".¹²⁰

Morgan's study has common points of interest for our own. Foremost among these is the relative silence on the role of the divine Spirit in believers' lives, whether for identifying the meanings of "in Christ" or of moral regeneration. As Morgan notes: "Life in Christ's hands and life in the spirit remain related ideas, in some ways parallel and in some ways quite distinct."¹²¹ This is because "the idea that the faithful are under Christ's authority and protection, and serve Christ as they serve God, is rather different from the idea that human beings receive the spirit of God and are enabled to do something (such as prophesy)."¹²² Morgan's study makes a convincing case for the ethical renewal of believers principally by identifying its purpose, that is, the service of God, Christ, and the community. Our study will focus on Romans 6:1-14 and its foreground in order to see how this renewed service takes place.

1.4.4 Summary

The above presentation of three existing models of ethical renewal has allowed us to see where our study on moral regeneration may be placed. Firstly, Rabens' study shows us that the notion of substantial ethical renewal has yet to be articulated without reference to the divine Spirit. This moral regeneration may well proceed from believers' entry into Christ achieved at baptism, if we validly press Romans 6:1-14 for its witness, especially through the divine passives. Secondly, Wright, Siikavirta, and Keener show that ethical renewal can proceed by cognition, but they do not explore the possibility that Christ continues to work in believers' lives so that he may assist them in producing the upright conduct required of them. Thirdly, Morgan's study alerts us to service as the purpose of any ongoing work of Christ for the renewal of believers. From this point, we articulate a methodology which will enable us to analyse the neglected foreground of Romans 6:1-14 in order to

¹¹⁹ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 246.

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 246.

¹²¹ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 249.

¹²² Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 249.

see how Paul's early readers might enter into discussion with these modern ones in identifying moral regeneration in his text.

1.5 Direct Citations of Romans 6:1-14

How shall we know whether an early reader draws on Romans 6:1-14 to make their argument? An initial note should be made on terminology because there are numerous proposals for what constitutes evidence of indebtedness to a Pauline text. In the first place, we shall have "reference" or "borrowing" stand as a generic term for when we encounter wording consistent with that of Paul.¹²³ Henceforth, however, it becomes necessary to adopt and define criteria for the purposes of this study, seeing that the classifications which could be used to identify a Pauline reference are so numerous. In this respect, we take Annewies van den Hoek's advice: "The forest of quotations should not be hidden by the trees of classification."¹²⁴ We also need the criteria adopted for this study to have a high degree of objectivity in order to give us a serviceable range of indisputable references of Paul's text so that our conclusions might rest on the surest evidence without being lost in challenges to their provenance.

In distinguishing between a threefold criteria of allusion, adaptation, and citation, Gordon D. Fee enters this serviceable definition for the third category of reference: citations are "those places where [an early writer] is consciously trying to cite, either from memory or by copying, the very words of the biblical text".¹²⁵ Fee's definition finds more recent expression in Steve Moyise's definition of "explicit quotation": "When an author clearly indicates that the words that follow are not his or her own but are taken from another source".¹²⁶ The weakness of Moyise's definition is that it does not have any regard for literality. As van den Hoek states in the case of Clement of Alexandria:

Some borrowings certainly came in a more direct way, namely through first-hand acquaintance with individual authors. Some may initially have come through memory; Clement was highly literate and belonged to a time when memorization was much valued. On the other hand, not all of these "first-hand borrowings" could have been

¹²³ Annewies van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria: A View of Ancient Literary Working Methods," *VC* 50 (1996): 228.

¹²⁴ van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria," 228.

¹²⁵ Gordon D. Fee, "The Text of John in the Jerusalem Bible: A Critique of the Use of Patristic Citations in New Testament Textual Criticism," *JBL* 90, no. 2 (1971): 170.

¹²⁶ Steve Moyise, "Quotations," in *As It is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 15.

memorized.¹²⁷

Because early Christian readers often produce Paul from memory, usually no more than a verse or two at a time, our criteria need to make allowances for the small changes which appear in the writings reflecting that practice. Thus, van den Hoek adds: "Quotations should be defined as having a considerable degree of literality. They need not be verbatim ... but they should follow the source to a considerable extent."¹²⁸ What, then, constitutes a reference in the early Christian readings of Paul?

For the purposes of this study, we analyse only "direct citations" among all possible Pauline references. Direct citations are identified both by authorial intention to cite Paul, which is manifested by an attribution signal, and by a very high degree of literality. In adopting "direct citation," we take note of the definition of "quotation" offered by Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett: "It includes some form of introductory formula, followed by an exact or an approximate quotation of a form of words belonging to the source so introduced."¹²⁹ We therefore expect that the ancient writers give clear indications of their Pauline source by providing some introductory formula for introducing Paul, for example, either mentioning him by name or by announcing him as "the Apostle". In some cases in Origen's Greek, we shall see the particle ὅτι used.¹³⁰ On the question of literality, we may encounter considerable difficulties depending on how we compare source and citation without sufficient methodological humility. The risk of anachronistic exegesis may be high, unless we do no more than note the points of contact and non-contact between the 28th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* of Nestle-Aland (or the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* for the Latin texts)¹³¹ and each citation, and make a close reading of the text as cited.¹³² Insisting on the attribution signal and not only the degree of literality allows for some variation in the texts as they appear in the early writings, especially where it is likely that early writers are referencing from memory. While there may be other ways in which the early Christian writers imported Paul into

¹²⁷ van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria," 224.

¹²⁸ van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria," 228-29.

¹²⁹ Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, "Reflections on Method: What Constitutes the Use of Writings that Later Formed the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers?," in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 66.

¹³⁰ For example, *Cels.* 2.69.

¹³¹ Michael Fieger, Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers, and Andreas Beriger. *Evangelia - Actus Apostolorum - Epistulae Pauli - Epistulae Catholicae - Apocalypsis - Appendix*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.

¹³² Critical editions used in this study include *Christianisme Antique, Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Patrologia Graeca, Patrologia Latina, Patrologia Orientalis*, and *Sources Chrétiennes*. Sources are amended for consistency and inclusive language. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

their writings, the high threshold of direct citation provides us with a “secure, albeit small, sample of assured results”.¹³³ What “direct citation” will not allow is a “slide” into references of weaker strength than itself.¹³⁴

Let us demonstrate how our methodology works to identify a direct citation by considering one set of references which have no bearing on our question about moral regeneration in Paul. We find direct citations from Romans 6:8-9 and 6:10 early on in Ps.-Hippolytus’ *Benedictions of Moses*:¹³⁵

Moreover, the Apostle also says: “He who is dead is dead once for all to sin, and those who live, live for God” (Rom 6:10). And when he says, “he is dead once for all to sin,” this means that, all people being sinners, he who strictly speaking did not conquer death “for us all, died once for all, for those who are living live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them” (2 Cor 5:15). And “if we die under the baptism of Christ, we believe that we also become a participant of his resurrection; knowing well: that Christ, risen from the dead, dies no more, and that death can have no power over him” (Rom 6:8-9).¹³⁶

At first, we may note the author’s “commendable fidelity in transcribing text,”¹³⁷ insofar as his citation of Romans 6:10 corresponds readily with that of Paul. However, we do not see the same degree of literality in the citation of Romans 6:8-9. We note that the text of Romans 6:8-9 seems to interpret the phrase “died with Christ” as a reference to baptism. We also note that the author prefers a more technical sense of “live with him,” naming as it does the “resurrection” in which the baptized person becomes a “participant”. Other differences are of a minor order. Although this second citation from our passage differs on these points, is clear that this is also from Paul from the unambiguous mention of the Apostle at the outset, whose pronoun occurs to introduce 2 Corinthians 5:15 and from which there is no deviation for the citation of Romans 6:8-9 in turn.

Our criteria, therefore, allow us to recognise both citations in Ps.-Hippolytus’ *Benediction of Moses* as belonging to Paul. We have one explicit statement of authorial intention for Romans 6:10, which finds continuation for a further two citations, including Romans 6:8-9. A sufficiently high degree of

¹³³ Gregory and Tuckett, "Reflections on Method," 66.

¹³⁴ cf. Gregory and Tuckett, "Reflections on Method," 64.

¹³⁵ Almost everything associated with Hippolytus has come to be “enigmatic,” including the authorship of the *Benedictions of Moses*. See Gérard Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius* (Waterloo: Wilfrid University Press, 1981), 41; Ronald E. Heine, "Hippolytus, Ps.-Hippolytus and the Early Canons," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 142. It is possible that the *Benedictions of Moses* ought to be attributed to a third-century bishop of the same name. See Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des IIe et IIIe siècles*, *Patristica 2* (Paris: Cerf, 1961), 205.

¹³⁶ *Ben.Mos.*; Louis Mariès, B. C. Mercier, and Maurice Brière, *Hippolyte de Rome : Sur les bénédictions d'Isaac, de Jacob et de Moïse, PO 27/1–2* (Paris: Firmin-Didcot, 1954), 139-40.

¹³⁷ Carroll D. Osburn, "The Text of the Pauline Epistles in Hippolytus of Rome," *SecCent 2*, no. 2 (1982): 99.

literality allows us to affirm that there are two texts from Romans 6:1-14 but also to begin to say how the divergences show the author's particular emphases. These two criteria will serve us well in identifying direct citations for subsequent chapters. Each chapter analyses one early reader's direct citations. When we apply our methodology to all possible references, our earliest reader is Irenaeus, and we close off our analysis with Origen.

1.6 Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two, we analyse Irenaeus' citations of Romans 6:3-4, 9, and 12-13 in his great work, *Against Heresies*. Adjudging that his opponents offer highly selective and restrictive readings of Scripture, Irenaeus offers a matrix of biblical citations to cover what he believes to be all of Scripture in order to arrive at his normative doctrinal position. That matrix includes Paul, whom Irenaeus draws on for a collection of edited proof-texts. Thus, we do not find engagement with Paul's argument, but merely his language, which becomes useful for debate with his opponents. Nonetheless, Irenaeus' handling of Paul reveals his high regard for the Apostle as a voice of Christian orthodoxy. Firstly, combatting the opponents' Docetism in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9, he cites Romans 6:3-4 to show that the Apostle speaks of "Christ Jesus" as one person, and Romans 6:9 to demonstrate how their erroneous division of Christ makes baptism redundant because it separates his death in which believers participate by baptism from the resurrection for which they hope. Secondly, arguing for the salvageability of the flesh in *Against Heresies* 5.9.3, he cites Romans 6:4 again to witness to the capacity of the flesh to bear spiritual gifts before and after death. When the Spirit meets this capacity of the flesh for perfection, the result is "newness of life" understood as an ethical concept referring to the gradual transformation of believers over time. Thirdly in *Against Heresies* 5.14.4 he cites Romans 6:12-13 to distinguish between the unredeemable fleshly deeds and the redeemable flesh, and thus to personal responsibility for moral conduct.

In Chapter Three, we consider the four citations of Paul in Clement of Alexandria's work, the *Stromateis*. We find Romans 6:2, 6-13, and 14 deployed as proof-texts in the contest for the true meaning of Paul with the Basilideans and Valentinians. In *Stromateis* 2.64.4 and 3.61.1, Clement engages with the opponents' exegesis of Romans 6:14 to show how "under grace" does not mean that believers are immune to any guilt for sinful conduct. Instead of espousing such moral indifferentism, Clement clarifies that the Apostle calls only involuntary misdeeds "sin", which differ from acts of "voluntary malice", which are inadmissible and for which believers remain culpable. We also find in *Stromateis* 3.75.2-3 a citation of Romans 6:2 and 6:6-13 peculiar for its abridgement, which he uses to warn believers that wrongdoing will inevitably follow unless they exercise personal

vigilance against inordinate desires. Finally, in the face of so many failed martyrdoms, Clement presents Romans 6:6 in *Stromateis* 4.51.1 to identify the only kind of martyrdom which “true gnostics” may legitimately seek. The Apostle counsels all believers to unite themselves to Christ’s death as precisely a death to sin and so vigorously pursue righteous conduct.

In Chapter Four, we move on to Tertullian’s two extended and highly edited citations. He levels Paul at his opponents in the treatises *On the Resurrection* and *On Modesty*, which take the form of extended addresses for a sympathetic audience. In the treatise, *On the Resurrection*, he argues for a fleshly resurrection against the spiritual one claimed by Valentinians. Working through Romans 5-8 in reverse in *On the Resurrection* 47, Tertullian shows by his commentary on piecemeal citations of Romans 6:3-6, 8, 11, 12-13 (and 19-23) that by the phrase “old self crucified with Christ” (Rom 6:6) Paul means a new morality, and not the denigration of the flesh. In his treatise *On Modesty*, Tertullian brings various scriptural authorities including Paul to support the New Prophets’ rigorous position on the forgiveness of baptized adulterers against the more forbearing contemporary bishop. Lest the Church tolerate sin and thus abandon holiness, he lays out Romans 6:1-6, 8-11 in *On Modesty* 17, the longest of all his Pauline citations, to show how the Apostle expects that all sinning comes to an end by believers fulfilling the obligation of moral propriety which their baptism entails.

Chapter Five treats Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*, and especially 5.7-6.1 in detail, the section of that voluminous work which he dedicates to Romans 6:1-14. After contact with the position of “heretics”, whom he accuses of exploiting ambiguities in the text to promote moral determinism, he takes to the text of Romans to clarify what the Apostle is saying. His attack against the determinist hermeneutic of the “heretics” gives rise to his own voluntarist one. We therefore find a defence of free will and moral responsibility in his readings of each verse of our passage, except Romans 6:7 which he altogether omits. As he tells us himself, he often returns to what Paul means by living and dying in Christ, namely the ongoing pursuit of self-restraint after formal renunciation of sin. Ultimately, his tripartite anthropology allows him to say that sin comes about because the soul freely unites itself to the desires of the flesh, whereas holiness comes about when the soul unites itself to the new desires of the indwelling Spirit.

We dedicate Chapter Six to an analysis of the citations of Romans 6:1-14 in Origen’s other works. Through these works, all of which can be dated to the Caesarean phase of Origen’s career, he demonstrates his considerable skill as apologist, preacher, and commentator on Paul. The proof-texts he offers allow him to delineate four different meanings for death, which he uses both to face down deniers of Christ’s historical death and also propose that believers die to sin in general and to

particular sins. Much more often than in the *Commentary*, Origen's other works reflect his deep engagement with a range of symbolic readings, especially for the term "sin" as a wicked king and the devil. This provides him with further opportunity to attribute desires to sin itself, the better to exhort his hearers and readers actively to resist its disordered incursions in the mortal body.

In Chapter Seven we present the conclusions from this study. Returning to our research questions, we explore how these five chapters of engagement with early Christian readers of Paul brings us closer to breaking the scholarly deadlock on moral regeneration. Bringing early and modern readings of Romans 6:1-14 into discussion, we show how modern readings are anticipated in the early readings, with those of Origen exemplifying how both the perspectival and substantial views of ethical renewal can be held.

CHAPTER TWO: IRENAEUS

2.1 Introduction

With Irenaeus we begin our series of chapters on those early Christian authors who directly cite from Romans 6:1-14 in their writings in order to investigate whether their reading of Paul envisages moral regeneration for those “under grace”. We have four direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 in his treatise, *Against Heresies*.¹³⁸ These citations are part of Irenaeus’ “intensive use”¹³⁹ of Paul: after the Gospels, Irenaeus most often draws on Paul when he provides a scriptural¹⁴⁰ authority in support of his arguments.¹⁴¹ In doing so, he is the first Christian writer to offer an extended exposition of the meaning of Paul’s texts as Scripture.¹⁴²

The perceived misuse of Scripture by the Valentinians is frequently addressed in *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus tells us that there were two sources which contributed to his motivation for writing his treatise *Against Heresies*, namely, commentaries by Valentinus himself and personal conferences with some of his followers:¹⁴³ “Having read so-called commentaries of the disciples of Valentinus, and meeting some of them and gathering their opinions, I have deemed it necessary to manifest to you, dearly beloved, the most portentous and most high mysteries which not all may grasp, for not everyone has the same mind.”¹⁴⁴ He adjudges their use of Scripture to be suspect for its misappropriation:

¹³⁸ Rom 6:3-4 and 6:9 in *Haer.* 3.16.9, Rom 6:4 in *Haer.* 5.9.3, and Rom 6:12-13 in *Haer.* 5.14.4. Thus, while our study will be confined to *Against Heresies*, it will be possible to add in appropriate cross-references to the *Demonstration (Epid.)*. As John Behr notes, although Irenaeus uses scriptural proofs in the *Demonstration*, they are not explicitly used. For example, he calls on Isaiah for the Virgin birth of Jesus and his miracle-working (*Epid.* 53), and Hosea for the trials before Herod and Pilate (*Epid.* 77). John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, OPCS (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 29-30.

¹³⁹ Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 180.

¹⁴⁰ cf. *Haer.* 2.35.4; 4.34.2. Although Irenaeus appears to hold a broad notion of what “Scripture” is, “he maintained a clear bias toward the prophets and apostles” as a foundational and essential witness to his orthodoxy. D. Jeffrey Bingham, “Senses of Scripture in the Second Century: Irenaeus, Scripture, and Noncanonical Christian Texts,” *JR* 97, no. 1 (2017): 27. See also Ben C. Blackwell, “Paul and Irenaeus,” in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, LNTS 412 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 193.

¹⁴¹ Rolf Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret. Zur Rezeption und Wirkung der paulinischen und deuteropaulinischen Briefe im Werk des Irenäus von Lyon*, WUNT 2/66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 531.

¹⁴² Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 189.

¹⁴³ It seems that Irenaeus was in close proximity to his opponents (cf. *Haer.* 4.35.4). Geoffrey S. Smith comments in the light of a possible close combat between the two champions of divergent orthodoxies: “Irenaeus [in Books 2-4] reveals his true assumptions regarding the identity of his so-called Valentinian opponents. They are not philosophers, but fellow members of the church who disagree with him on ecclesial matters.” Geoffrey S. Smith, *Guilt by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity* (New York: OUP, 2015), 164.

¹⁴⁴ *Haer.* 1.pref.2; SC 264:22.

[They] desire to adapt what has been well said to what has been wickedly invented by them. And it is not only from the Gospels and apostolic writings that they try to make perverse interpretations and adulterated expositions, but also from the law and the Prophets. When many parables and allegories are found and many things can be drawn from them, they deceitfully adapt any ambiguities to support their fiction precisely because it can be read in different ways, and thus they lead away from the truth and into captivity those who do not keep firm faith in one God the Father almighty and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God.¹⁴⁵

Of special interest to us in this judgment of Valentinian scriptural deficiency is Irenaeus' mention of "the writings of the evangelists and the apostles" first, even before the "parables and allegories" in the "law and the prophets". This arrangement of scriptural categories signals to us that the principal battle for Irenaeus is the meaning of Christian Scripture. As Irenaeus observes the ecclesial situation, the Valentinians' maladaptation of Scripture to suit their own ends requires his correction.

In the face of perceived Valentinian scriptural selectivity and obscure allegory, Irenaeus opts for coverage of Scripture in his argument for the unity of Christ and the faith. This coverage appears in the matrices of biblical texts which he constructs in support of his position.¹⁴⁶ To modern readers, the apparent heaping up of texts by Irenaeus, chosen perhaps on the strength of a single term or phrase that they contain, may seem to be an inappropriate way of making an argument from Scripture. To Irenaeus, however, because they have the same author and thus enjoy complete harmony with one another, the texts from Paul and other scriptural authors which he draws into these matrices witness to the same singular truth about the Creator and his creatures.¹⁴⁷ Still further, Scripture is the sole way in which mere mortals can possess knowledge of the divine mysteries; thus, he addresses what is possibly the principal charge of the opponents, that the psychics do not know God but merely the Demiurge.¹⁴⁸ Adducing Scripture systematically and judiciously, Irenaeus can arrive at the truth for the sake of the Church: "Selection [like his opponents

¹⁴⁵ *Haer.* 1.3.6; *SC* 264:60-22.

¹⁴⁶ Rodrigues believes that Irenaeus avoids allegory because of its loose controls: "In his anti-Gnostic theology, Irenaeus attempted to provide a hermeneutical method distinct from the allegorical approach, as the allegorical approach does not offer specific parameters to guide/control interpretation." Adriani M. Rodrigues, "Church Authority and Biblical Interpretation: Forms of Authoritative Hermeneutics in Irenaeus and Tertullian," *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016): 19. However, we can add to this that Irenaeus regards Scripture as clear to all on a plain reading because it contains saving truth, which means he need not move into allegory in order to make its teaching evident: "All the Scriptures and Prophets and the Gospels are transparent and without ambiguity, and can be heard in the same way by all even if all do not believe." *Haer.* 2.27.2; *SC* 294:266.

¹⁴⁷ *Haer.* 2.28.2.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, and Legacy*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 139.

do] means abridgement and loss of truth. When one isolates texts from their context, that leads to one-sidedness and error.”¹⁴⁹

Of our four early readers, Irenaeus is the most likely to demonstrate moral regeneration in his readings of Paul because of his belief that God gradually transforms individuals by sharing his glory with them. This regard for an ongoing, substantial change to frail humanity is in stark contrast with the opponents, who, Irenaeus tells us, regard some as saved in a different way because of their superior, spiritual nature.¹⁵⁰ Irenaeus holds that all humanity is imperfect¹⁵¹ and therefore stands in need of divine assistance in order to obey God’s will, and thus to be saved.¹⁵² Absolute perfection is impossible for a creature, because only the Creator is perfect.¹⁵³ Thus, as much as God did not create a perfect humanity, neither did he create a ruinous one. Thankfully, even in their weakness every person has the capacity to receive from God, because it is the property of imperfect humanity to advance towards him.¹⁵⁴ It accomplishes this by receiving from God’s goodness the ability to be made day by day¹⁵⁵ obedient to God’s will.¹⁵⁶

Although Irenaeus envisages this divine assistance being continually bestowed,¹⁵⁷ he does not even remotely suggest that it negates free will nor the need for individuals endowed with it to exercise moral responsibility.¹⁵⁸ Free volition is one of God’s original gifts to humanity:¹⁵⁹ “A God who predetermined the moral life of humanity would make himself powerless and irrelevant, while his ethical robots would gain no virtue.”¹⁶⁰ However, there is a distinction between free volition and freedom: “In the absolute sense, only God possesses sovereign freedom.”¹⁶¹ For Irenaeus, individuals ever possess the faculty of free volition and therefore are morally responsible, although they are not necessarily free to exercise this faculty over each aspect of life because of their mortal frailty. Indeed, freedom of the will is one of the objects of that assistance. However, believers

¹⁴⁹ Norbert Brox, "Irenaeus and the Bible," in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity, Volumes 1-2*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 486.

¹⁵⁰ *Haer.* 1.6.2, cf. *Exc.* 61.8.

¹⁵¹ *Haer.* 4.38.1-2.

¹⁵² *Haer.* 4.14.1

¹⁵³ *Haer.* 4.38.3.

¹⁵⁴ *Haer.* 4.11.2.

¹⁵⁵ *Haer.* 4.38.3.

¹⁵⁶ *Haer.* 4.37.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Haer.* 4.37.1.

¹⁵⁸ Eric Osborn notes the commonality between Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria on the question of moral responsibility, with both possibly indebted to Plato. See Plato *Rep.* 617e; Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 232.

¹⁵⁹ *Haer.* 4.37.1.

¹⁶⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 233.

¹⁶¹ *Haer.* 4.38.3; *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 244.

receive this freedom through Christ, and, through the transformation that his gifts bring, it is possible to display free obedience to God.¹⁶²

For our purposes, this understanding of the incremental growth of individuals that results in their increasing moral obedience constitutes moral regeneration. We shall see whether this substantial renewal is seen in Irenaeus' four direct citations in *Against Heresies*, to which we now turn.

2.2 *Against Heresies* 3.16.9

The first two direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 in *Against Heresies* are found in Book Three. Irenaeus places versions of Romans 6:3-4 and 6:9 alongside other scriptural authorities to argue for the unity of "Christ Jesus" in contrast to his Valentinian opponents who see a duality or multiplicity in Jesus.¹⁶³ In *Against Heresies* 3.16.1, he recounts two positions from the opponents, which regard Jesus as a post-birth union of a spiritual entity and a fleshly creature. The first position held by unnamed opponents proposes that Christ is the immutable one who made use of Jesus, perhaps from the latter's baptism: "There are, however, those who say that Jesus was the vessel of Christ, upon whom Christ descended as a dove from on high, and when he pointed out the unnamable Father, he entered Fullness in an incomprehensible and invisible manner."¹⁶⁴ A little further on, he provides a second position which agrees with the first in essence: "The followers of Valentinus claim that the Jesus of the economy is the one who passed through Mary, and upon Him descended the Saviour from on high, who is also called the All ... So, in words they profess one Christ Jesus, but in doctrine they reveal a division."¹⁶⁵ The added detail of the Valentinian origin of this second position may betray his purpose to associate the Valentinians with a Christology which has already been rejected by the part of the Church to which Irenaeus belongs.

Gathering a sense of exactly what the Valentinian position which Irenaeus is objecting to may be affected by the question of the reliability of extant sources. Although he has been an influential witness to Valentinianism, Irenaeus has long been sharply critiqued for his lack of fidelity to details of his opponents' positions:¹⁶⁶ "Can a prosecution witness speak for the defense?"¹⁶⁷ More recently, Matthew Steenberg arrives at a more favourable assessment of the fidelity of some of Irenaeus'

¹⁶² *Haer.* 4.13.2; *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 244.

¹⁶³ Blackwell, "Paul and Irenaeus," 199.

¹⁶⁴ *Haer.* 3.16.1; Dominic J. Unger, *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book Three*, ACW 64 (New York: Newman, 2012), 77.

¹⁶⁵ *Haer.* 3.16.1; *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 77-78.

¹⁶⁶ Elaine H. Pagels, "Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus," *HTR* 67, no. 1 (1974): 35-36.

¹⁶⁷ Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997), 26.

reports about his opponents: “Irenaeus may not always know his Sethians from his Barbeliotes, but by and large the Nag Hammadi Codices have shown him to possess a fair and broadly representative knowledge of the groups he chooses to address.”¹⁶⁸ Steenberg goes on to argue that Irenaeus intended to recount faithfully his opponents’ positions: “One can distort the teachings of one’s opponents only so far before inciting incredulity in his readership, and distortion of doctrine is among the catalogue of such groups.”¹⁶⁹ However, when we take up extant Valentinian texts which might offer up parallels with Irenaeus’ report of them, we proceed with caution because doubts persist about the former’s provenance and authenticity.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, we may consider the *Excerpts of Theodotus* compiled by Clement of Alexandria as a “primary source”¹⁷¹ of Valentinianism “with only some reservation”,¹⁷² since they are indeed “Clement’s summary of the Valentinian cosmogony”.¹⁷³ The strength of the *Excerpts of Theodotus* for our purposes is that they allow us to see “a set of theories that are substantially different from the ones reported by Irenaeus”;¹⁷⁴ this is to some extent true of Irenaeus’ report in *Against Heresies* 3.16.

Irenaeus’ opponents regard Jesus as bringing in an utterly new revelation which offers “a wholly new understanding of the world, of materiality and the body, of human institutions and practices: a new way of reading the present, burdensome human situation, which promised believers release from anxiety and pain by questioning their lasting reality.”¹⁷⁵ They thought this was reflected especially in the Saviour’s peculiar relationship with the crucified Jesus. Irenaeus’ description of the Valentinian account of the Spirit’s departure from the crucified Jesus, which we saw above in *Against Heresies* 3.16.1, bears quite some resemblance to *Excerpt 61 of Theodotus*:¹⁷⁶

He died when the spirit that had descended upon him at the Jordan departed, not by existing on its own, but by withdrawing, so that death might operate. For how could the body have died with life present in him? For in that case death would have had control over even the savior himself, which is absurd. Instead, death was outwitted through guile. For when the body died and death had control over it, the savior sent forth the ray of power that had come upon him, and he destroyed death, and he raised the mortal body when he had dispersed the passions. Thus, the animate (elements) will be raised

¹⁶⁸ Matthew C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, VCSup 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 27.

¹⁶⁹ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 27-28.

¹⁷⁰ P. L. Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Parenetic Discourse: Determining the Social Function of Moral Exhortation in Valentinian Christianity*, NHMS 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 13.

¹⁷¹ Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Parenetic Discourse*, 16-17.

¹⁷² Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Parenetic Discourse*, 16-17.

¹⁷³ Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 111.

¹⁷⁴ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'*, NHMS 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 28.

¹⁷⁵ Brian E. Daley, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered*, CPHST (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 67.

¹⁷⁶ Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 29.

and saved in this way, but the spiritual (elements) that have faith are saved in a manner surpassing the former, receiving the souls as “wedding garments” (cf. Matt 22:12).¹⁷⁷

We see an explanation offered for the incredible impossibility of suffering by the pre-existent Saviour. It is this Saviour who cannot suffer death who provides himself with a fleshly form through which he may conduct his work: “He was empowered for his mission by a still higher agent, from the realm above matter: united with the aeon or super-terrestrial agent ‘Christ,’ who was the actual Savior and who descended upon him to direct his activity.”¹⁷⁸ This duality in Christ is further reflected in the twofold division in redeemed humanity: on the one hand, there are those “spiritual elements” who are saved alongside the Saviour, and on the other, there are those psychic elements who enjoy the possibility of salvation after the Saviour. Thus, the soteriological consequences of a dualist Christology are readily apparent to the Valentinians.

Irenaeus turns to Christian Scripture to answer the opponents,¹⁷⁹ for in it he finds the witness of the Apostles:

Consequently, we consider it necessary to make use of the entire doctrine of the apostles concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, and to show that they not only did not think anything of the kind about Him, but more yet, that through the Holy Spirit they even pointed out the ones who would in the future teach such things, instigated by Satan to overthrow the faith of some and draw them away from life.¹⁸⁰

From this point, chapter sixteen of Book Three has a straightforward, three-part structure. Firstly, he holds up Christian scriptural texts in which the words “Christ Jesus” appear together, thereby showing the unity of the early Church concerning the person of Christ.¹⁸¹ An impressive array of texts from all four Gospels and a large number of Paul’s letters are assembled in order to show that the “entire mind of the apostles” has settled on the incarnation and human birth of the divine Word, in the person of Christ. Secondly, he proceeds to issue a stern warning to the Church over the aberrant Christology he refutes from Scripture, beginning with the risen Lord’s rebuke of the disbelieving disciples (cf. Lk 24:25, 44). The boldness of Irenaeus’ solemn statement of correction

¹⁷⁷ *Exc.* 61.6-8; Bentley Layton and David Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 522-23.

¹⁷⁸ Daley, *God Visible*, 68.

¹⁷⁹ Scott Moringiello’s tripartite division of Book Three (*Haer.* 3.pref. to 3.8: importance of tradition; *Haer.* 3.9-15: role of the Apostles; and *Haer.* 3.19-25: how Christ’s work appears in Old Covenant prophesy) assigns chapters sixteen to eighteen to an excursus on theological method: “In these chapters Irenaeus offers his readers a method for interpreting the Scriptures so that a reader can recognise the manifestation of God and learn what ought to be interpreted literally and what out to be interpreted metaphorically.” Scott D. Moringiello, *The Rhetoric of Faith: Irenaeus and the Structure of Adversus Haereses* (Washington, DC: CUA, 2019), 95-96.

¹⁸⁰ *Haer.* 3.16.1; Unger, *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 78.

¹⁸¹ *Haer.* 3.16.2-4.

reflects the urgency of his message, namely, that unchecked false teachers will devour the unsuspecting faithful:

All, therefore, are outside of the economy who, under pretext of knowledge, understand Jesus as one person and Christ as another ... Outwardly [they are] sheep, because they employ language similar to ours, and so seem to be like us, saying the same things as we; but inwardly they are wolves.¹⁸²

Thirdly and finally, he returns briefly to Pauline material in order to bear out the soteriological consequences of the orthodox faith in Christ; our two citations are found in this last, short section. Although his primary focus across *Against Heresies* 3.16 remains scriptural witness for the unified Christology that he is proposing against the Valentinians, in this final paragraph Irenaeus also addresses the soteriological significance of this point of Christology just as they do from theirs. Irenaeus introduces the soteriological consequences of the Christology that he is proposing by means of the First Epistle of John, which he finds agrees with Paul:

[John] explains in his letter, “everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God” (1 John 5:1). They know one and the same Jesus Christ, to whom the gates of heaven were opened because of his bodily assumption. He will also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, in order to reveal the glory of the Father.¹⁸³

He imports further scriptural evidence which ties the rewards of faith to his orthodox Christology, since the notion of a “birth of God”, that supernatural life which John identifies with Christian faith and which Irenaeus ties to orthodox Christology, seems to be left hanging. For this scriptural evidence, Irenaeus turns to Paul.

Evoking the Valentinian doctrine of the Spirit’s departure from the composite Saviour which we saw above, Irenaeus mocks his opponents:

Paul, on his part, agrees with these statements when addressing the Romans. He says: “Much more will those who receive the abundance of the grace and ... of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). So he knows nothing of a Christ who flew away from Jesus; nor does he know anything of a Saviour who is on high, whom they assert is impassible.¹⁸⁴

It may seem that this Romans text and the final paragraph of *Against Heresies* 3.16 are an afterthought: no more than an opportunity for Irenaeus to present lately-recalled evidence which weights the case against his opponents in his favour. Perhaps an obvious way to conclude this

¹⁸² *Haer.* 3.16.8; Unger, *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 83.

¹⁸³ *Haer.* 3.16.8; *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 83.

¹⁸⁴ *Haer.* 3.16.9; *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 83.

chapter of Book Three would have been with the solemn pronouncement of orthodoxy which we saw above: "All, therefore, are outside of the economy who, under pretext of knowledge, understand Jesus as one person and Christ as another."¹⁸⁵ This much would have rounded off the scriptural evidence for his Christological unity. However, Irenaeus' Christology, for which he stays close to scriptural texts, has a logical sequence which terminates with the soteriological significance of the unity of Christ. Thus, although Paul enters the argument because of his agreement with John,¹⁸⁶ he is specially chosen to do so because he too draws out the present importance of this faith in the one Christ.

Just as the Valentinians develop a two-stream soteriology from their dualist Christology, so too is Irenaeus identifying a single path to eternal life from his unified one. Continuing on a little further into Romans, he finds further Pauline support in Romans 6:3-4 for the passibility of Christ Jesus:

That the Apostle, however, knew of one Christ Jesus who was born and who suffered, he tells us in the same letter: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? So that, as Christ was raised from the dead we too may walk in the newness of life" (*An ignoratis quoniam quotquot baptizati sumus in Christo Iesu, in morte eius baptizati sumus? Uti quemadmodum resurrexit Christus a mortuis sic et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus*, Rom 6:3-4).¹⁸⁷

Irenaeus' text of Romans 6:3-4 readily corresponds with that of Paul, with the exception of two important omissions. Firstly, he omits the main clause of Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death." The omission serves to put the Apostle's question in Romans 6:3 more directly to the Valentinians before the Church. In effect, he would have the Valentinians answer Paul's question negatively and thus be left to take the first-person plural of Romans 6:3-4 exclusively: the Valentinians are indeed ignorant of the fact that the baptized are immersed in the death of Christ Jesus, and thus the Valentinians are not benefiting from their baptismal union with him whom they believe to be essentially not one but two.

This omission results in a fragmentation: how does the rest of Romans 6:4 cited here fit with the preceding text? If it is intended to fit with Romans 6:3, then either the remaining dependent clause is to be awkwardly pressed into service as a main clause in its own right, or still as a dependent clause somehow attached to Romans 6:3 here. It seems likely that Irenaeus finds that the reference to death in Romans 6:3 is already quite sufficient for his purpose of producing a text which contains the words "Christ Jesus" in it. All that remains to complement it would be some reference to

¹⁸⁵ *Haer.* 3.16.8; *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 83.

¹⁸⁶ Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret*, 132.

¹⁸⁷ *Haer.* 3.16.9; Unger, *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 84.

believers' union with the risen Christ,¹⁸⁸ which the dependent clause of Romans 6:4 provides, albeit, as we shall see, in a novel way. The main clause of Romans 6:4, with its reference to burial, would then be an unnecessary intrusion, interrupting his flow for the argument he is making. Thus, the Apostle identifies the one "who both was born and suffered" with the same person by whom believers are reborn, namely, Christ Jesus.

This would mean that Irenaeus is presenting an abbreviated text to which the troubled fragmentation of Romans 6:4 seen here witnesses. He is then simply drawing in a Pauline notion of union with Christ, whose risen life believers are to embody after their participation in his death in baptism. On first reading, our passage is deployed simply because it is one more of those New Testament passages in which the words "Christ Jesus" appears.¹⁸⁹ More importantly, however, our text is made to witness against the Valentinian teaching of the impassibility of Christ, and thus to the complete, saving union of believers with him even now. It is Paul who can identify Christ Jesus as one person in both his death and resurrection. Hence, the passible Christ and the Spirit-laden Jesus are for Irenaeus' Apostle the same person. Thus, the text of Romans 6:3-4 presented by Irenaeus as a "theologian of unities"¹⁹⁰ is designed to move quickly if uneasily from an expression of union with Christ who died to a union with Christ in his resurrection.

We can nevertheless go further on the significance of the first omission from Romans 6:4 if we consider that the new construction completely deprives Paul's text of its reference to burial. It is not that Irenaeus is denying the burial of Christ altogether.¹⁹¹ On the contrary, there is reason to think that the omission might avoid arousing a Valentinian objection, that ritual "burial" such as Paul speaks of, is for psychics and not for spirituals. In Book One, Irenaeus tells us that his Valentinian opponents make use of a Lucan proof-text to support their identification of a class of person who is unconstrained by mortal life: "The spiritual indeed spoke truly about it: 'Leave the dead to bury their dead (Luke 9:60).'"¹⁹² A Pauline reference to believers' burial with Christ in baptism which also contributes the essential point on the unity of Christ, may inadvertently support the Valentinians' position, that burial is not a consideration for spirituals and thus they benefit from baptism in a

¹⁸⁸ Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret*, 132.

¹⁸⁹ cf. Matt 1:1; *Haer.* 3.16.2.

¹⁹⁰ Daley, *God Visible*, 69.

¹⁹¹ There is ample evidence for Irenaeus's knowledge of Paul's testimony to the burial of Christ also in Book Three, when Irenaeus introduces 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "'For I delivered to you,' he said, 'as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures.' So it is evident that Paul did not know another Christ besides Him alone who suffered and was buried and rose again, who was born, whom he also called man." *Haer.* 3.18.3; Unger, *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 88.

¹⁹² *Haer.* 1.8.3; SC 264:122.

different way, not as a death but as renunciation of evil powers¹⁹³ or evasion of mortality.¹⁹⁴

Mention of the burial of Christ, such as Paul writes of in Romans 6:4, may inadvertently arm the Valentinians against him.

Thus, Irenaeus acting out of an abundance of caution and reserving information concerning the burial of Christ until a more appropriate time may be behind the emendation of Romans 6:4. If this is so, the first omission then attests to that “death” in Irenaeus’ view expresses the entire reality of Paul’s testimony concerning Christ in Romans 6:3-4. He can just as effectively cite Romans 6:3-4 without the main clause of Romans 6:4 with the same outcome of eliminating the perceived Valentinian threat. For us, the omission means that Irenaeus sees the entirety of the short passage as available for theological argumentation concerning the death and rising of believers with Christ. If this is so, Irenaeus here demonstrates how free he is in highlighting only certain aspects of a single text. It seems that the reference to burial in the passage is of less significance to him in this argument than Paul’s witness to the unity of Christ Jesus.

The second omission in Romans 6:4 is of the phrase “by the glory of the Father”. Whether or not this omission is deliberate, or perhaps the fault of memory working at pace or of transmission,¹⁹⁵ this omission removes any distance which the Apostle’s full text may seem to interpose between Christ and believers. Whether the omission is deliberate or not, the unevenness of the parallel in the full text is significant here. For Paul, believers are not raised “by the glory of the Father” when they receive baptism; they are raised insofar as they now walk “in the newness of life” and in hope of the resurrection. Such a distance may not serve Irenaeus’ purpose: he seems to need Paul at this point to witness to the complete union of believers with the one person, Christ Jesus. This means that the dependent clause of Romans 6:4 cited here characterises the present experience of believers as one of “resurrection” in a restricted sense. This is significant for our purposes: it means that Paul is

¹⁹³ cf. *Excerpt 77 of Theodotus*: “Baptism is said to be ‘death’ and ‘the end of the old life,’ because we renounce the evil rulers, but ‘life according to the anointed (Christ),’ because he alone rules.” *Exc. 77.1*; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 526.

¹⁹⁴ cf. *Gospel of Philip*: “Just as Jesus perfected the water of baptism, so too he drew off death. For this reason we go down into the water but not into death, so that we are not poured out into the wind of the world. Whenever the latter blows, winter comes: whenever the holy spirit blows, summer comes.” *Gos.Phil. 92:7-14*; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 493.

¹⁹⁵ The omission of “by the glory of the Father” from Romans 6:4 does not seem to be caused by instability in the text. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 491. Curiously, Tertullian has the same omission in *Res. 47* (see 4.2 below) and *Pud. 17* (see 4.3 below).

thought to be saying that rising with Christ is temporally expressed in believers' walking in the newness of life.¹⁹⁶

The emendations to Romans 6:3-4 show us that Paul's full text witnesses to two realities: believers' union through baptism with Christ who died and rose, and the distance which is in place for now between the risen Christ and baptized believers. For Irenaeus, walking "in newness of life" is not the resurrection in full but certainly points to it and perhaps is a circumlocution for it. It is unclear from Irenaeus whether there is any ethical content to a term such as "newness of life", although the distinction between the present life of the baptized and their final resurrection does not exclude the possibility that there is. This means that Irenaeus' reading of Paul does not foreclose on the opportunity for an expression of the resurrection in believers' moral life.

A little further on in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9, we have a second citation from our passage which also presents a unified Christ in Irenaeus' interpretation of it. Although the citation of Romans 6:9 is thematically united to those of Romans 5:17 and 6:3-4, the scriptural argument for the passibility of Christ and believers' union with him appears to be proceeding through chapters 5 and 6 of Romans. Indeed, he introduces Romans 6:9 with reference to Christ's "suffering":

He most clearly announces that the same one who was captured and suffered and shed His blood for us was Christ, the Son of God, who also rose and was taken up into heaven, just as Paul himself said, "At the same time Christ who died, yes, who was raised ... He who is at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34); and, "For we know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again" (*scientes quoniam Christus resurgens a mortuis iam non moritur*, Rom 6:9).¹⁹⁷

As it appears here, the first half of Romans 6:9 readily corresponds to Paul, although, the omission of the second half of the verse merits our attention: "Death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom 6:9). It seems most likely that the first half of Romans 6:9 only is cited for the reason of brevity: the

¹⁹⁶ Significantly for our purposes, there is an argument to be made for Irenaeus seeing an essential complementarity between catechesis and baptism: "It is through the baptismal water that we receive the Spirit, and the Spirit leads us to understanding of the Word, Jesus Christ, enfleshed and spoken in the scriptures." Alistair Stewart, "'The Rule of Truth ... which he received through Baptism' (*Haer.* 1.9.4): Catechesis, Ritual, and Exegesis in Irenaeus's Gaul," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. Paul Foster and Sara Parvis (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 158. For Irenaeus, the rule of faith which is handed on in baptism is the indispensable principle for scriptural interpretation. Stewart argues that baptism therefore illuminates its recipients to be able to understand Christ through the Holy Spirit. He regards this as made explicit in the *Demonstration*: "Those who bear the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son conveys them to the Father, and the Father grants them incorruptibility. Therefore, it is not possible to behold the Word of God without the Spirit, nor can anyone approach the Father without the Son." *Epid.* 7; SC 406:92. For Stewart, the *baptizandi* receive "the faith as part of the baptismal ritual by being instructed or prompted to make a declaration of faith ... that is Christological." Stewart, "Catechesis, Ritual, and Exegesis in Irenaeus's Gaul," 156. From here, we can say that Irenaeus regards the baptized as united to the one Christ who suffered and died (cf. *Epid.* 31).

¹⁹⁷ *Haer.* 3.16.9; Unger, *Irenaeus: Against the Heresies*, 84; SC 211:324-26.

second half of the verse is unnecessary for an author perhaps concerned with brevity if his purpose for the citation is found in the first half. This would especially apply if he finds in the second half of Romans 6:9 no more than a pronoun for Christ Jesus. Of course, it is not the case that Irenaeus denies the fleshly death of Christ Jesus; indeed, he introduces this direct citation here with his own relevant commentary on the passion, death, and resurrection. The citation of the first half of Romans 6:9, then, works as the Pauline witness to Christ Jesus being beyond the realm of death, to which he truly once succumbed. His resurrection means that he is no longer expected to suffer any kind of mortality. We cannot demonstrate anything more from this citation in relation to the question of the moral regeneration of believers.

From our analysis of these two citations, we may say that Irenaeus primarily deploys Romans 6:3-4 and 6:9 as boundary markers for his orthodoxy. He regards Paul's witness to the unity of Christ in these texts to be unassailably clear; those who adopt a position contrary to them are placing themselves outside of the Christian dispensation. By using Romans 6:3-4 and 6:9, Irenaeus can deal with the Valentinian threat on two fronts: on one level, he seeks to put to flight the thought that Christ and Jesus are two entities, while, on a deeper level he also shows what is at stake if the two are not united, namely the redundancy of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. By calling on Romans 6:3-4 with its emendations, Irenaeus demonstrates the importance of the unity of Christ Jesus for the salvation of believers by baptism. The Apostle's texts, perhaps edited for emphasis but certainly produced with discernible omissions, are Irenaeus' authorities for the unity who is Christ Jesus in his death and resurrection, and thus too for the true participation that believers have in him.¹⁹⁸ For Irenaeus, if Christ Jesus is not one, then the baptism received by his adherents does not join his salvific journey to theirs at the end of his earthly life. Continuity is important, for it follows from the baptismal union of believers with Christ in his death that Irenaeus believes power from the risen Christ Jesus appears in someone's mortal life, although whether there is precisely ethical content to this power at this stage is unclear.

2.3 *Against Heresies* 5.9.3

We proceed now to the two direct citations from our passage in Book Five, the first of which Irenaeus introduces to speak of the divine Spirit as an indwelling source of power for believers' conduct. In contrast to his opponents' dismissal of the flesh as unreformable and irredeemable, Irenaeus exhorts his readers using Romans 6:4 to "obey God" even in their flesh since they have

¹⁹⁸ Daley, *God Visible*, 66.

received in their flesh the vivifying Spirit.¹⁹⁹ He devotes much of Book Five to redressing the opponents' use of 1 Corinthians 15:50 as a proof-text for a fleshless resurrection. Without redress, this passage would seem to give unequivocal witness to the impossibility of a fleshly resurrection. With Paul as scriptural witness, the opponents hold that "flesh and blood" is incapable of receiving vivifying power from God. "All the heretics", he says, use 1 Corinthians 15:50 to support their view: "It is this [text] which all the heretics produce in their folly, and from which they try to show that there is no salvation for the handiwork of God."²⁰⁰ We may take Scott Moringiello's point: "It would not be an exaggeration to say that [1 Corinthians 15:50] is the central scriptural text under dispute between Irenaeus and his opponents. This Pauline passage addresses both the nature of human beings and the nature of salvation."²⁰¹

However, Irenaeus includes scriptural evidence for the capacities of the flesh even prior to death in order that it may contribute to his argument about its final fate. Since the debate with the opponents is one of "realised eschatology",²⁰² he speaks of the imparted Spirit as evidence for God's concern for the flesh even prior to death. Early in Book Five, he presents the life-giving power of the Spirit which comes to mortal humanity in two ways: firstly, the tenacious adherence to truth which the Apostles displayed in their respective weaknesses evidences the divine power under which they lived and worked. He singles Paul out as one who was strengthened by Christ against the "thorn in the flesh" (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). It is significant for our purposes that a notion of divine strength, which comes to the aid of fleshly weakness has ethical content. For Irenaeus, it is precisely the Apostle's conduct in the field of mission which is affected by the bestowal of the Spirit. He draws two principles from the greatness of the Apostle's own suffering, that the Lord both willed this weakness in him and used it to bring him further towards maturity:

What, therefore? Will we say, as some do, that the Lord wished his Apostle should be beaten up and should endure such infirmity? Indeed, for the Word says, "Strength is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9), bettering such a person who through their suffering comes to know the power of God. For how could someone come to learn that they themselves are weak and by nature mortal, and that God is immortal and powerful, unless they had learned by experience what is in both?²⁰³

The mere existence of mortal beings sustained by the Creator signals that their fleshly members are capable of receiving divine power from him before death: "But those things which participate in the

¹⁹⁹ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

²⁰⁰ *Haer.* 5.9.1; *SC* 153:106.

²⁰¹ Moringiello, *The Rhetoric of Faith*, 141-42.

²⁰² Jennifer R. Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers*, SBR 5 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 102.

²⁰³ *Haer.* 5.3.1; *SC* 153:42.

wisdom of God participate also in his power.”²⁰⁴ The weak flesh even now has the capacity to be strengthened by the Spirit: “That the flesh may be a participant of life is seen in that it lives: for it lives as long as God wants it to live. For it is manifest that God has the power to bestow life on it: for we ourselves live because he has bestowed life on us.”²⁰⁵ Both of these experiences of divine power over the flesh prior to death constitute Irenaeus’ scriptural evidence for a reading of 1 Corinthians 15:50 that does not exclude fleshly resurrection: “Since God has the power to give life to what he has made, and the flesh too can be vivified, what else would prevent its participation in incorruption, which is a long life without end provided by God?”²⁰⁶

However, Irenaeus’ argument is not just that divine power courses through mortal bodies in temporal life as well as eternal life.²⁰⁷ Further into Book Five, Irenaeus speaks of the incremental transformation of those who receive the divine Spirit before they die. The role of the Spirit does not only consist of strengthening elect individuals and sustaining mortal humanity, as we saw above, but also of preparing mortal humanity for its final end: “But even now we receive some portion of his Spirit moving us toward perfection and preparing for incorruption, gradually accustoming us to receive and bear God.”²⁰⁸ Believers perceive that power at work in their flesh, which God is gradually bringing to perfection: “A creature can exist in an infinite process of becoming perfect, drawing incrementally closer to the uncreated without ever ceasing to be a creature because it never ceases to be in a state of Becoming.”²⁰⁹ By excluding the capacities of the flesh, then, the opponents exclude from eternal salvation an essential part of the human being which God is continually in the process of making and remaking: “They do not see that there are three things of which, as we have shown, the complete human person is composed: flesh, soul, and spirit.”²¹⁰

When he then proceeds to wrest 1 Corinthians 15:50 back from the opponents, Irenaeus returns to other parts of Scripture in order to put the status of the flesh in stronger terms than his opponents do. By basing his contrary position on a broader selection of New Testament texts than simply 1 Corinthians 15:50, he shows the diverse but united voice of Scripture concerning the flesh. He finds where Scripture says that the flesh is inevitably going to suffer death;²¹¹ it is dead without the divine

²⁰⁴ *Haer.* 5.3.2; *SC* 153:48.

²⁰⁵ *Haer.* 5.3.3; *SC* 153:54.

²⁰⁶ *Haer.* 5.3.3; *SC* 153:54.

²⁰⁷ John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, CTC (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 153.

²⁰⁸ *Haer.* 5.8.1; *SC* 153:92.

²⁰⁹ Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 90.

²¹⁰ *Haer.* 5.9.1; *SC* 153:106. Otherwise, Irenaeus largely adopts a dichotomous anthropology, that is, soul and flesh (cf. *Haer.* 4.pref.3; *Epid.* 1). See also Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, OECS (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 149., n. 4.

²¹¹ cf. Lk 10:60; *Haer.* 5.9.1.

Spirit²¹² and is therefore in a position of weakness.²¹³ Having shown that flesh without the divine Spirit is dead, however, he must then present Scripture which speaks of the revivifying power of the divine Spirit in respect of the flesh. Thus, he adduces a single text around which he can build up his case for the fleshly resurrection, namely the dominical saying: “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41): “If therefore someone mixes the strength of the Spirit into the weakness of the flesh as a sting, what is weak will necessarily be absorbed by the strength of the Spirit.”²¹⁴

Although Irenaeus affirms that mortal flesh retains its inherent weakness, he repeats his earlier point that it remains capable of receiving life from a power greater than itself:

For the power of the Spirit is seen when the weakness of the flesh has been absorbed; and again, when it absorbs weakness, the Spirit possesses the flesh in itself as an inheritance, and from both the living human person is made: living indeed because of its participation in the Spirit, but human because of its fleshly substance.²¹⁵

For Irenaeus, this “strength” is manifested principally in a person’s moral life. The Spirit makes the flesh adopt its own qualities as it possesses the flesh, “to conform to the Word of God”.²¹⁶ The martyrs are given as a special example of those whose frail flesh has been permeated by the supporting Spirit.²¹⁷ For Irenaeus, God comes to the aid of the martyrs to enable them to persevere. The Spirit absorbs fleshly weakness to display its power.²¹⁸ Thus, “the martyr displays the presence of the crucified God.”²¹⁹ In this way, the power of the Spirit is readily perceivable in the lives of those who possess him:

Therefore, as many as fear God and believe in the coming of his Son, and through faith constitute the Spirit of God in their hearts, such people as these are rightly called pure and spiritual and living to God, for they have the Spirit of the Father who purifies human persons and raises them up to the life of God.²²⁰

Having made his argument that the Spirit works even in mortal flesh, he compares the human being with and without the Spirit by means of an exhortation developed from Romans 6:4:

So therefore, [Paul] says, when we were deprived of the celestial Spirit we once lived in the oldness of the flesh, not obeying God, so now having received the Spirit let us walk in newness of life (*in novitate vitae ambulemus*), obeying God (cf. Rom 6:4). Therefore,

²¹² cf. Rom 8:10-11; *Haer.* 5.9.1-2.

²¹³ cf. Matt 26:41; *Haer.* 5.9.2.

²¹⁴ *Haer.* 5.9.2; *SC* 153:110.

²¹⁵ *Haer.* 5.9.2; *SC* 153:112.

²¹⁶ *Haer.* 5.9.3; *SC* 153:114.

²¹⁷ *Haer.* 5.9.2.

²¹⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 241-2.

²¹⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 242.

²²⁰ *Haer.* 5.9.2; *SC* 153:108-110.

since we cannot be saved without the Spirit of God, the Apostle exhorts us through faith and chaste conversation to preserve the Spirit of God, lest we, having ceased to be partakers of the Holy Spirit, lose the kingdom of heaven; and, he exclaims that it is not possible that flesh and blood alone can possess the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:50).²²¹

It seems that Irenaeus is drawing on the language of two or more Pauline texts for this citation, since there is no verbal agreement of the entire complex sentence with a single Pauline text. The flesh and spirit antithesis may come from a passage such as Romans 8:4: “[We] who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Irenaeus’ composition of the antithesis betrays Romans 6:4 as one of his sources: “living” in “the oldness of the flesh” by itself would be an awkward expression were it not for its neat complement which has been brought in from Romans 6:4: “Let us walk in newness of life.”

Citing no more than the terminating phrase of Romans 6:4, Irenaeus shows that he is using only what he needs of Paul’s language to complete his antithesis. Two aspects of this handling of Paul are noteworthy. Firstly, Irenaeus’ citation of Romans 6:4 leaves out the baptismal context of the full verse. This means that he is using Paul to direct his audience’s attention to how their present conduct proceeds from the reception of the Spirit. Secondly, citing only the terminating phrase of Romans 6:4 with its verb in the subjunctive means the cited text becomes an exhortation: “So now having received the Spirit let us walk in newness of life, obeying God.”²²² We can suppose that he is more concerned with the role of the divine Spirit in the life of those who exist in the flesh, since the Spirit is indispensable to the maturation process as he understands it.²²³ He is not always so insensitive to context, however. Indeed, he expresses concern for such questions about the Pauline text.²²⁴ Of interest to us is how Irenaeus’ parallel does not correspond on every point.

He makes “oldness of the flesh” correspond with “newness of life,” when we may have expected “newness of the Spirit”. It is noteworthy that a similar antithesis involving the Spirit in the *Demonstration* is more exact: “In the newness of the Spirit is our vocation, not in the oldness of the letter.”²²⁵ This citation stands out in the way Irenaeus appears not to show the same care with which he handles “flesh” and “Spirit” in comparison to other texts. The main point here is the possibility that believers can lose the Spirit’s presence by faltering in the faith and its mores and thus return to living in the “oldness of the flesh”. Hence, although the divine Spirit is continually available

²²¹ *Haer.* 5.9.3; *SC* 153:114.

²²² *Haer.* 5.9.3; *SC* 153:114.

²²³ Thomas D. McGlothlin, *Resurrection as Salvation: Development and Conflict in Pre-Nicene Paulinism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 72.

²²⁴ *Haer.* 3.7.2.

²²⁵ *Epid.* 90; *SC* 406:204.

to empower their moral conduct, believers are still entirely responsible for acting in accordance with it. Nonetheless, this inexact parallel allows us to draw some conclusions about Irenaeus' handling of Romans 6:4 and "newness of life" in this passage.

Unlike in the citation of Romans 6:4 that we saw in Book Three (see 2.2 above), "newness of life" more certainly appears here as an ethical experience which characterises a person's mortal life after receiving the Holy Spirit. Its ethical meaning is reinforced by the clarifying phrase which he supplies, "obeying God". We are therefore seeing how Irenaeus uses Pauline language for his own end, which, in this case, is to describe obedience to God as the self-willed ethical result of the Spirit's involvement. This, in turn, is to demonstrate that the flesh is reformable and thus capable of resurrection. The exhortation which he also includes here, to "preserve the Spirit of God", brings us back to his view of the Spirit as continually active across the mortal lives of believers but which can be lost by a return to disobedience. We saw above how believers are said to "receive some portion of his Spirit, moving [them] toward perfection and preparing for incorruption, gradually accustoming [them] to receive and bear God."²²⁶ The ethical effect seen here has been called the "maturing trajectory"²²⁷ and "growth principle".²²⁸ The Spirit forms the person, so that the ethical experience which is the "oldness of the flesh" may cease. Thus, although the individual must in fact will to obey God and so live in newness of life, the ongoing, regenerative power of the Spirit is witnessed in the altered personal conduct of its recipient.²²⁹ Nevertheless, the Spirit's intervention and stable presence still leaves its recipients with the responsibility for their "newness of life", that is, to produce the new conduct expected of them. In this way, Irenaeus' use of Romans 6:4 suggests the substantial view of renewal.

²²⁶ *Haer.* 5.8.1; *SC* 153:92.

²²⁷ Gerald Hiestand, "'And behold it was very good': St Irenaeus' Doctrine of Creation," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 6, no. 1 (2019): 20.

²²⁸ McGlothlin, *Resurrection as Salvation*, 58. There is a discordant passivity about Denis Minns' reading of Irenaeus on this point, how a person must simply "relax" into their spiritual development according to the plan of God. This "relaxing" into the divine plan comes because of the narrow definition of "obedience" which he adopts: "Not to accept the truth about oneself and God, not to acknowledge and submit oneself to the divine economy, is to refuse to accept the gifts of God; it is a non-hearing, which is what the word 'disobedience' means." Minns, *Irenaeus*, 77, 154. To some extent Minns is right: the presence of the Holy Spirit, he notes, is maintained "through faith and chaste conversation." *Haer.* 5.9.3; *SC* 153:114. However, to be added to this is Behr's development on this point, that "Irenaeus characterizes this readiness to accept the designs of God for man as faith and subjection, a trusting obedience, and specifies that it is this which man can and must offer." Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 117. This means that whether an individual believer experiences "newness of life" depends on their perseverance in what is right. Hence, Irenaeus adopts Paul's phrase "newness of life" as descriptor for the moral quality of an individual's lived experience, namely, obedience to God.

²²⁹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 86.

In conclusion, Irenaeus' use of Romans 6:4 in Book Five shows that "newness of life" is an ethical concept over which he can lay reference to the Spirit's role without rupturing Paul's text. This ethical experience called "newness of life" proceeds initially by the reception of the Spirit, who enters into the flesh the better to acquaint it with divine power and begin the lifelong process which ends in fleshly resurrection. The insertion of the Spirit into the text of Romans 6:4 therefore amplifies the contrast which he makes with the "oldness of the flesh", and thus renders the meaning of the term "newness of life" to be primarily about the moral conduct now expected of believers because of the Spirit's ongoing empowerment of them.

2.4 *Against Heresies* 5.14.4

The fourth and final direct citation from our passage in the works of Irenaeus is from Romans 6:12-13. It occurs in the last chapter of the first third of Book Five, where he is continuing his assault on the opponents' use of 1 Corinthians 15:50 as a proof-text for a fleshless resurrection.²³⁰ We briefly saw above how he corrects this reading of Paul by stating that "flesh and blood" refers to persons of unreformed morals.²³¹ From this, he makes moral exhortations to his readers and in one case, as if he were the Apostle himself: "It is as if he says, 'Do not err, but if it turns out that you have lived in vain, as if flesh and blood is all that there is, and unless the Word of God dwells within you and the Spirit of the Father is within you, you cannot inherit the kingdom of God.'"²³² Nevertheless, he does not only attend to personal conduct by way of exhortation, but also by description of believers' condition:

When someone is grafted in by faith and receives the Spirit of God, they certainly do not lose the substance of flesh, but the fruit of their works qualitatively changes and they receive another designation, signifying that they have been changed for the better, being now not flesh and blood but a human person existing spiritually, and is called such.²³³

There are elements here of a re-creation of the mores of persons who are possessed by the Spirit: "With the Spirit the flesh *as* flesh becomes like Spirit."²³⁴ With so great a change in the mortal person as to become "spiritual", Irenaeus regards the deeds which correspond to the flesh and the Spirit to be as incompatible as the flesh and Spirit themselves are: "For just as the flesh is capable of corruption, so it is also capable of incorruption; and just as it is capable of death, so it is also capable

²³⁰ Moringiello, *The Rhetoric of Faith*, 142.

²³¹ *Haer.* 5.9.1.

²³² *Haer.* 5.9.4; SC 153:120-122.

²³³ *Haer.* 5.10.2; SC 153:128.

²³⁴ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 148, her emphasis.

of life. These two give way to each other, and both do not remain together in the same place: one is expelled by the other, and the other perishes in the presence of the first.”²³⁵ Having therefore defined that by “flesh and blood” Paul means persons who perform those acts which are solely in accord with the unspiritual flesh, Irenaeus proceeds to develop his account of the conduct which may be expected of those who indeed properly hope for a fleshly resurrection.

Irenaeus’ argument continues to centre on the capacity of the flesh to be renewed, which is now evidenced by Christ himself taking human flesh. On this point, we part ways with Moringiello, who sees the argument turn on God’s power to raise the flesh.²³⁶ It is the language of capacity or incapacity, possibility or impossibility, strength or weakness which dominates the argument that we are examining. Indeed, it is the question of the capacity of the flesh which drives the opponents’ use of the proof-text, “Flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50). Likewise, we supplement the analysis of Mary Ann Donovan, who also does not here address the question of capacity.²³⁷ Irenaeus opens chapter fourteen, in which our direct citation occurs, with a bold claim in respect to Paul’s texts: “But since the Apostle did not say that the substance of flesh and blood itself cannot possess the kingdom of God, the same Apostle has everywhere used flesh and blood constantly to refer to our Lord Jesus Christ.”²³⁸ Irenaeus may mean here that Paul is consistent in his usage of the two main terms. For example, Christ has ancestors according to the “flesh” (cf. Rom 1:3) and poured out his “blood” in sacrifice (cf. Rom 3:25). As he explains, the Apostle uses flesh and blood to refer to Christ:

to establish his human nature, for indeed he spoke of himself as the Son of man, and also that he might confirm the salvation of our flesh: for if the flesh cannot be saved, neither would the Word have become flesh; and if the blood of the righteous could not have been sought, neither would the blood of the Lord be sought.²³⁹

He draws out the meaning of the incarnation by speaking of the solidarity which the incarnate Christ has with sinful humanity: “But since it was humanity which was lost, it is humanity itself which was saved by the Word, effecting both communion with it by what he himself was, and the quest for its salvation.”²⁴⁰

²³⁵ *Haer.* 5.12.1; *SC* 153:140.

²³⁶ Moringiello, *The Rhetoric of Faith*, 147, 53.

²³⁷ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 150.

²³⁸ *Haer.* 5.14.1; *SC* 153:182.

²³⁹ *Haer.* 5.14.1; *SC* 153:182.

²⁴⁰ *Haer.* 5.14.2; *SC* 153:186.

However, this raises a foreseeable objection, that the flesh of the sinless Christ was of a different substance to fallen humanity and therefore could not save it. Thus, he inserts a distinction between the Saviour's likeness to fallen humanity and the Saviour's partaking of the fallenness of humanity:

If therefore someone should say that the flesh of the Lord was different from our flesh, because he did not sin, nor was deceit found in his soul, but in us sinners it was found, they speak truly. But if someone should join a different substance of the flesh to the Lord, the word of reconciliation will not apply to them.²⁴¹

From this, Irenaeus heads off the objection about the impossibility of salvation by the Saviour's flesh, by saying that only human flesh can save human flesh, although this flesh must be sinless in order to achieve salvation for others:

But if the Lord obtained flesh from a different substance, then it was no longer reconciled to God as an enemy made by transgression. But now by means of communion with himself, the Lord has reconciled humanity to God the Father, reconciling us to himself by the body of his flesh and his blood which redeems us.²⁴²

The righteousness of the Saviour in true mortal flesh opens the way for all humanity also to live in righteousness in the flesh: "In the body, he says, our flesh is reconciled, for that righteous flesh reconciled flesh which was being detained in sin and conducted it into friendship with God."²⁴³ Following his own argument through, he can now state openly that "flesh and blood" are not only morally unreformed persons, but also Christ's own flesh and blood, and that these constitute indispensable instruments for human salvation: "Flesh and blood are those things which grant us life."²⁴⁴

The mortal body is the point of commonality between the saving Christ and mortal humanity, the site wherein "the power of God is at work in human persons."²⁴⁵ The link between the incarnation and Romans 6 is found in the mortal body, to which he refers via Paul:

Therefore, he himself had flesh and blood, recapitulating in himself not some other, but the principal handiwork of the Father, seeking that which was lost. And because of this, the Apostle says in Colossians: "And you who were once alienated and enemies in his sight by evil works, have now been reconciled in the body of his flesh through his death, to present yourselves holy and chaste and without fault in his sight" (Col 1:21-22).²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ *Haer.* 5.14.3; *SC* 153:188-190.

²⁴² *Haer.* 5.14.3; *SC* 153:190.

²⁴³ *Haer.* 5.14.2; *SC* 153:188.

²⁴⁴ *Haer.* 5.14.4; *SC* 153:192. cf. *Haer.* 5.14.1.

²⁴⁵ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 103.

²⁴⁶ *Haer.* 5.14.2; *SC* 153:188.

And thus he says:

If therefore flesh and blood are that which give us life, it is not properly said of flesh and blood that they cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, but of the aforementioned fleshly deeds which, turning a person to sin, deprive them of life. And this is why he says in the letter to the Romans: "Do not therefore let sin reign in your mortal body to obey it; neither present your members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God, as those living from the dead, and your members to God as weapons of righteousness" (*Non ergo regnet peccatum in corpore mortali vestro ad obediendum ei; neque exhibeatis membra vestra arma iniustitiae peccato; sed exhibete vosmetipsos Deo, velut a mortuis viventes, et membra vestra arma justitiae Deo*, Rom 6:12-13).²⁴⁷

In the main, Irenaeus' text corresponds readily to Paul's. All but one of the differences which we observe are no more than benign variations of expression or are due to the production of a Latin translation. The significant variant is that his text of Romans 6:12 lacks the phrase "its desires" and appearing a pronoun in the dative singular, agreeing with either "sin" or "your mortal body", appears in its stead. If he intends the pronoun to agree with "sin", relying perhaps even on a symbolic reading of "sin",²⁴⁸ then sin appears in the mortal body as a foreign element which induces believers to take up that which they have abandoned: "Freedom, therefore, along with temporality, is a pre-condition for creatures to be capable of becoming 'other' than what they were created: for creatures to enter into communion with God, and so be transfigured."²⁴⁹ With the body's moral neutrality thus secured, Paul here provides further scriptural support for Irenaeus' argument for the redeemability and reformability of the physical aspect of a person. Likewise, mortal persons may be thus exhorted by Paul to refrain from misdeeds precisely because of their capacity for personal reform. Having initially defined "flesh and blood" as the morally unreformed person,²⁵⁰ this reading, with the pronoun taken for "sin", shows that Irenaeus hopes to preserve moral neutrality with respect to the mortal body. Therefore, his attribution of misdeeds sometimes seen in the moral lives of believers to "sin" rather than to the "mortal body" leaves the body free for redemption and reform.

The text of Romans 6:12-13 otherwise easily conforms to that of Paul and allows Irenaeus to make the link between present moral action and the possibility of fleshly resurrection. Those who carry on in their mortal existence merely as "flesh and blood" do not see life because they are performing "fleshly deeds". Thus, it is by misdeeds that even spiritual persons find themselves under the dominion of sin, in which there is no eternal life. The inverse is also true according to Irenaeus:

²⁴⁷ *Haer.* 5.14.4; *SC* 153:192.

²⁴⁸ As Brox notes, "He never calls it allegory, but treats his results as the literal meaning of the texts." Brox, "Irenaeus and the Bible," 490.

²⁴⁹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 44.

²⁵⁰ *Haer.* 5.9.1 (see 2.3 above).

believers continue in Christ's communion of life with humanity by their righteous deeds, and thus they are those who are "alive from the dead". Crucially for us, Irenaeus' reading of Romans 6:12-13 means that believers are primarily responsible for their conduct and the divine contribution to that conduct appears to be minimal; this reading clearly tends towards the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

Irenaeus further confirms his perspectival reading of Romans 6:12-13 by stopping short of saying that the resurrection is underway in those who perform righteous deeds. Perhaps this is because of the Apostle's own reticence to do so: Paul's phrase "as those" (Rom 6:13) effectively brings in the resurrection to inspire a person to produce upright conduct. For our purposes, it is a person's self-reconsideration as already risen with Christ which inspires righteous deeds. However, it is likely the case that the claims of his opponents for a fleshless resurrection would also make Irenaeus reluctant to go further on this point. As he reads Paul, Irenaeus is concerned to preserve the distinctive reality which is the final resurrection, that is, the resurrection of the flesh. On this score, bodily continuity is all-important. The "same members" which once served sin are designed now to serve righteousness: "Therefore, in those members in which we served sin and yielded death, he wishes that those same members serve righteousness, to yield life."²⁵¹ Irenaeus' reading therefore contains an exhortation to believers to act in accord with their new "spiritual" existence.

In conclusion, Irenaeus calls on Paul as his witness to the link he himself wishes to make between righteous conduct and the final resurrection. Those who do what is right are those who yield themselves to God "as those living from the dead (Rom 6:13)",²⁵² and thus find themselves enjoying that communion of life which continues into eternal life with Christ. Righteous conduct is therefore primarily the responsibility of moral agents themselves. The accent in this perspectival reading falls on the hortative. Thus, free from the dominion of sin, "God does not force us to choose the good, but exhorts us to choose it. It is in our power to obey the exhortation or not."²⁵³

2.5 Irenaeus' Use of Romans 6:1-14

Having seen all four of Irenaeus' direct citations from Romans 6:1-14, we can now make some concluding observations about his use of our passage. The full extent of Irenaeus' direct citations from our passage is confined to Romans 6:3-4, 9, and 12-13.

²⁵¹ *Haer.* 5.14.4; *SC* 153:192-194.

²⁵² *Haer.* 5.14.4; *SC* 153:192.

²⁵³ Minns, *Irenaeus*, 81.

Firstly, Irenaeus presents a judicious selection of the desired scriptural material from Paul governed by the rule of faith.²⁵⁴ His choice of text from Romans 6 always seems to be his own; he is inspired by the acute need for scriptural support to make his argument. For example, he does not omit the first half of Romans 6:4 in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9 because he rejects the burial of Christ as his opponents do, but rather because the text which he cites is sufficient to make his argument. From this, we can say that Irenaeus simply draws in as much of the text as he needs: in this case, “newness of life” (Rom 6:4) is synonymous with moral obedience,²⁵⁵ and the entire verse to which it belongs can be rephrased and developed into a moral exhortation.²⁵⁶

Secondly, it seems Irenaeus uses a Pauline text in two ways: he provides us with a text which both contains the key concept under discussion and demonstrates the soteriological significance of that concept. For example, Romans 6:3-4 appears in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9 because it mentions both “Christ Jesus” for his argument concerning the unity of Christ and the soteriological significance of this point of his orthodoxy for believers. It is particularly telling that we have a citation of Romans 6:4 in *Against Heresies* 5.9.3 which he develops by adding a reference to the Holy Spirit, the reception of whom he regards as essential for eternal life. In this way, he causes Paul to contribute both to the Christological and soteriological aspects of the argument which he is making for his intended audience.

Thirdly, Irenaeus feels himself quite free to provide Pauline texts which contain some small changes either because of his argument or because of inaccurate memory. He does indeed say that Scripture is not to be even slightly altered: “There will be no little punishment for whoever adds or subtracts from Scripture.”²⁵⁷ Yet, we have seen omissions from Romans 6:4, such as the omissions of the first half of the verse²⁵⁸ and the phrase “by the glory of the Father”.²⁵⁹ However, most revealing for our purposes is the variant reading of Romans 6:12 with the pronoun which likely agrees with “sin”.²⁶⁰ The small changes which he makes to Paul’s language do not only speak of the argument but also of his prevailing assumptions: “Like all literary borrowings, borrowings from Scripture too were subjected to minor modification to fit the quoting author’s context, or perhaps to highlight a point

²⁵⁴ Jouette M. Bassler, “A Response to Jeffrey Bingham and Susan Graham,” in *Early Patristic Readings of Romans*, ed. Kathy L. Gaca and L. L. Welborn (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 137.

²⁵⁵ *Haer.* 3.16.9.

²⁵⁶ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

²⁵⁷ *Haer.* 5.30.1; *SC* 153:374.

²⁵⁸ *Haer.* 3.16.9.

²⁵⁹ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

²⁶⁰ *Haer.* 5.14.4.

the quoting author thought was latent in the text."²⁶¹ Irenaeus would regard himself as faithful to the text, even if these emendations were unintentional, because he enhances its existing features or situates it in the broader offering of Scripture. Remarkable, then, is his use of Romans 6:4, especially in *Against Heresies* 5.9.3: the development of the Apostle's text into an antithesis based in old, fleshly disobedience and new, "spiritual" obedience, demonstrates Irenaeus' creativity at work.

2.6 Conclusion: Moral Regeneration in Irenaeus?

We are now able to draw together some conclusions on whether Irenaeus' readings of Romans 6:1-14 envisages moral regeneration for believers.

The perspectival view of ethical renewal is clearly seen in Irenaeus' use of Romans 6:12-13 in Book Five when he speaks of the kind of moral reform which believers are to undergo if they are no longer to be merely "flesh and blood". For Irenaeus, the Apostle's exhortations in this text are made on the strength of Christ's intervention in believers' lives, as witnessed by the adjacent citation of Colossians 1:21-22. This moral reform is all the more pressing on believers when we consider that Irenaeus does not attribute responsibility for sinful desires to "your mortal body" but to "sin", as seen in the pronoun in Romans 6:12. The responsible use of the body fulfills the Apostle's exhortation. Since the mortal body has a neutral moral status and thus has the possibility of renewal, Irenaeus shows us that believers have sufficient agency to avoid sin and do good. The accent on its hortative content relies on believers' being convinced that the fleshly resurrection will take place, and to act accordingly, that is, to act "as those living from the dead" (Rom 6:13).

However, Irenaeus does not only provide us with the perspectival view of ethical renewal; we also have the substantial view in his reading of Romans 6:4 in Book Five. At this point, we reiterate the conclusion which we reached regarding Romans 6:4 at the end of Book Three, that it is unclear to us whether Irenaeus envisages ethical content as part of the "newness of life". When it appears in Book Five, however, "newness of life" is the result of two converging realities: the Spirit's continuing presence in the lives of believers and, consequently, their exercise of responsibility for their moral conduct. As we have seen, the omission of the phrase, "by the glory of the Father" from Romans 6:4 in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9 removes any distance between Christ and believers such that "newness of life" comes to believers as a participation in the resurrection of Christ. Further, by means of a neat development of Paul along the lines of other texts (such as Romans 8:4), Irenaeus can put forth a

²⁶¹ Charles E. Hill, "Irenaeus, the Scribes, and the Scriptures: Papyrological and Theological Observations from P.Oxy. 405," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 119.

contrast between the past experience and present moral conduct of believers: they no longer “live” in the “oldness of the flesh” but “walk in newness of life” in the Spirit.²⁶² For Irenaeus, the source of this moral obedience is the Spirit, who abides in the flesh the better to acquaint it with divine power and begin the lifelong process of transformation. Therefore, although the term “newness of life” as it appears in *Against Heresies* 5.9.3 describes the resulting experience of believers’ cooperation with the indwelling Spirit, it witnesses to the substantial ethical renewal of believers by the continuing presence of the Spirit, and thus is moral regeneration.

²⁶² *Haer.* 5.9.3.

CHAPTER THREE: CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

3.1 Introduction

We proceed now to Clement of Alexandria, who regards the “divine Apostle”²⁶³ Paul as the best of teachers and wisest of guides. He frequently borrows from Pauline texts for his works, more than twice as often as he does from his next most popular author, Philo.²⁶⁴ This impressive knowledge of Paul is also seen in the variety of the arguments in which he is invoked as an authority. The direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 alone help him to make his case for believers’ diminished culpability for minor faults,²⁶⁵ the continuing inadmissibility of more serious sins for them,²⁶⁶ their self-control,²⁶⁷ and their personal growth in moral conduct in contrast with voluntary martyrdom.²⁶⁸ These usages of Paul show us that Clement mainly uses texts from Romans 6:1-14 to build up his portrait of the Christian gnostic, the “true gnostic”.²⁶⁹

Clement’s positive use of the term “gnostic” contrasts with that of the heresiologist, Irenaeus. Certainly, and with Irenaeus, Clement condemns those who would pit knowledge and faith against each other. He resists the view of Basilides, whom he says sees faith as no more than a “natural disposition” by which persons make discoveries “by an intellectual apprehension without demonstration”,²⁷⁰ that is, without appeal to first principles or deduced realities. He also rejects the view of the Valentinians, whom he says “attribute faith to us in our simplicity, but arrogate knowledge to themselves as saved by nature.”²⁷¹ The danger for Clement in the Basilidean and Valentinian views of faith is that they absolve individuals from all guilt for sin and responsibility for moral action: “The person without faith is not responsible and will not meet [any] just consequences; the person with faith is not responsible ... What has happened to repentance for previous lack of faith, leading to remission of sins? The result is this: no baptismal boon from the Word.”²⁷² However, Clement is also careful to appropriate the term “gnostic” for his audience. Christians legitimately aspire to an authentic form of gnosticism which harmonises with all the

²⁶³ *Strom.* 2.8.4.

²⁶⁴ van den Hoek, "Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria," 237.

²⁶⁵ Rom 6:14 in *Strom.* 2.64.4.

²⁶⁶ Rom 6:14 in *Strom.* 3.61.1.

²⁶⁷ Rom 6:2, 6-13 in *Strom.* 3.75.2-3.

²⁶⁸ Rom 6:6 in *Strom.* 4.51.1.

²⁶⁹ *Strom.* 2.31.3.

²⁷⁰ *Strom.* 2.10.1; John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria: Stromateis, Books 1-3*, FC 85 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1991), 163.

²⁷¹ *Strom.* 2.10.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 163-64.

²⁷² *Strom.* 2.11.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 164.

sources of wisdom and with faith and knowledge above all.²⁷³ This does not mean that believers act without reason: they must still exercise the power of rational judgment.²⁷⁴ For Clement, however, it is a life lived by both faith and knowledge which unites a person to God:

Knowledge is light, for it dispels the darkness of ignorance and endows us with keenness of vision. The very act of expelling things that are bad reveals what is good. To be sure, the things that ignorance restricts, to our harm, knowledge sets free, for our good. The quickest way to loose those bonds is to make use of [individual] faith, and God's grace, for sins are forgiven through the one divine remedy, baptism in the Word.²⁷⁵

Thus, faith is central to Clement's vision of the moral life. Believers have taken an indispensable way of becoming wise the better to produce right action, as he says: "Faith is the supreme mother of the virtues."²⁷⁶

This effective faith is also necessary for a right reading of Scripture. The Basilideans and Valentinians have taken to Scripture just as Clement has, but have arrived at erroneous positions precisely because of their peculiar faith. Clement points out that Scripture itself bears witness to this using a citation from Isaiah 7:9 on four occasions: "If you will not believe, you will not understand" (Isa 7:9).²⁷⁷ Thus, faith grants sufficient capacity for the acquisition of knowledge, including the faithful reading of Scripture. It is in the context of an external source of knowledge that Clement applies one of the metaphors he and Theodotus²⁷⁸ likely adopted from Plato, the "divine spark".²⁷⁹ By encountering Scripture in faith, the individual soul receives the initial spark of goodness which sets the soul alight: "Scripture helps to kindle the fire [or spark] in our soul, it directs our natural sight to contemplation, it is swift to implant something new (like a farmer grafting), it rouses to new life our natural endowment."²⁸⁰ For Clement, the Scriptures are therefore one way, indeed the pre-eminent way, in which the divine Word communicates to believers the illuminating truth about itself.

²⁷³ *Strom.* 1.58.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 65.

²⁷⁴ Thomas Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1995), 130.

²⁷⁵ *Paed.* 1.29; Simon P. Wood, *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator*, FC 23 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1954), 29-30.

²⁷⁶ *Strom.* 2.23.5; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 173.

²⁷⁷ *Strom.* 1.8.2; 2.8.2; 4.17.4; 4.134.4.

²⁷⁸ Clement shows how Theodotus employs the notion of the "divine spark": "When the savior came, therefore, he awakened the soul but kindled the spark. For the words of the lord are power. This is why he said, 'Let your light shine before human beings' (Matt 5:16). And after the resurrection, when he breathed the Spirit into the apostles, he blew away 'the dust' like ash and separated it, but he kindled the spark and made it alive." *Exc.* 3.1-2; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 506-7.

²⁷⁹ The fire, or better spark, "is to be understood in its Gnostic context derived from Plato". Andrew C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, VCSup 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 124-5.

²⁸⁰ *Strom.* 1.10.4; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 29.

This means that Clement's engagement with Scripture is more likely to produce the perspectival view of ethical renewal in his use of texts from Romans 6:1-14. His reading of Scripture is framed by the same appeal to an initial encounter with the divine to produce a spark in the soul which arouses moral conduct. Believers' ethical experience is shaped mainly by believers themselves after they have received the divine spark of illumination.²⁸¹ In this, Paul witnesses par excellence to believers' responsibility to pursue moral excellence: "He sees Paul as a consummate teacher of virtue, who has knowledge of Greek learning and urges his readers to war against the enslaving passions and instructs them to cultivate the virtues, especially justice and love."²⁸² As Thomas Torrance notes: "Clement bends all the teaching of the Scriptures, all the worship of the Church, all the discipline of godliness, to the achievement of a moral purity of soul and a power of insight through which it will reach the final vision of God."²⁸³ Believers hear the voice of God in the Scriptures, which sets them on the path towards self-directed ethical renewal, true Gnosticism.

As all four of our direct citations occur in the *Stromateis*, it seems opportune to introduce this complex collection of works. Clement states at the beginning of his *Paedagogus* that he intends to write a trilogy which addresses the three branches of human experience: a hortative treatise on character (*Protrepticus*), a practical treatise on action (*Paedagogus*), and an instructional treatise on emotion.²⁸⁴ As we have no work which corresponds to the third, we are left to wonder whether the *Stromateis* might be the notebook of "miscellanies" for it.²⁸⁵ Certainly, the earlier books of the *Stromateis* are a systematic collection of early Christian ideas; Alain Le Boulluec sees thematic disintegration of the collection by Book Seven.²⁸⁶ To the contrary, Andrew Itter proposes that the *Stromateis* appears exactly as Clement intends it to with the purpose of initiating souls:²⁸⁷ "The *Stromateis* act as a clearing of obstacles to make the soul of the initiate ready to receive the greater mysteries. Ethically speaking this implies that the clearing aside of certain subjects is a purificatory process that demonstrates that the gnostic is truly pious."²⁸⁸ Like Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, Clement's *Stromateis* takes up the self-appointed task of opposing "that sombre and repellent

²⁸¹ *Paed.* 1.98.2; Henny Fiskå Hägg, "Baptism in Clement of Alexandria," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm, et al., BZNW 176/1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 983-84.

²⁸² Judith L. Kovacs, "Reading the 'Divinely Inspired' Paul: Clement of Alexandria in Conversation with 'Heterodox' Christians, Simple Believers, and Greek Philosophers" (paper presented at the Second Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria, 29-31 May 2014, Olomouc, 2014), 342.

²⁸³ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 166.

²⁸⁴ *Paed.* 1.1.

²⁸⁵ Catherine Osborn, "Clement of Alexandria," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 275.

²⁸⁶ Alain Le Boulluec, *Clément d'Alexandrie : Les Stromates, Stromate VII*, SC 428 (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 9-10.

²⁸⁷ Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis*, 74.

²⁸⁸ Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis*, 75.

theosophy".²⁸⁹ However, he is not strictly speaking an heresiologist, insofar as he is not intending to put forth a comprehensive refutation of all heresies. Instead, in the *Stromateis* as in his other works, he is forming true gnostics, whom he calls to simple obedience to the saving Word.²⁹⁰

3.2 *Stromateis* 2.64.4

As we have seen above, Clement revisits his argument for individual responsibility for moral action throughout the *Stromateis*. In Book Two in particular, having demonstrated the necessity of faith, he explores the role that repentance plays in the moral lives of believers, his "true gnostics". According to Clement, faith is not simply a single attribute of believers which stands isolated from other attributes. Rather, faith shows that it is a "more fundamental element"²⁹¹ and therefore intimately related to other attributes in its production of other acts of persons: "fear, hope, and penitence ... in association with self-control and patience."²⁹² It is in his treatment of repentance as the result of faith that we find a direct citation of Paul. As we shall see, by means of Romans 6:14, Clement defines the limits of believers' responsibility for wrongdoing, and thus what they ought to be repentant for.

Clement begins by distinguishing between different kinds of wrongdoing, and believers' respective responsibility for them and by acknowledging that only some people have the capacity to answer the call of the divine Word. These he likens to fertile soil and dry tinder:

So earth, when fertile, cooperates with the planting of seeds. There is no benefit in the best instruction if the learner is not ready to receive it, or prophecy for that matter, or preaching, if the hearers are not open to persuasion. Dry sticks are ready to receive the power of ignition and are easily kindled.²⁹³

This division in humanity between those who can and cannot hear is certainly envisaged by the divine Word himself.²⁹⁴ Although Clement remains insistent that each person has the capacity to choose for themselves how they will respond to such a call, he nevertheless concedes that the Word himself only holds those responsible who will not answer to a certain extent: "Because we have the power to respond positively or negatively, and so that no one may produce the pretext of ignorance, he has made a summons full of righteousness, and demands of each only that of which each is

²⁸⁹ Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 1966), 7.

²⁹⁰ *Protr.* 9, *Paed.* 1.7, *Strom.* 2.2.

²⁹¹ *Strom.* 2.31.3; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 179.

²⁹² *Strom.* 2.31.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 179.

²⁹³ *Strom.* 2.26.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 175.

²⁹⁴ *Strom.* 2.26.3.

capable.”²⁹⁵ The distinction between those who will and will not answer is made on the basis of their relative freedom to make it rather than on a person’s decision in itself: “There is one group for whom the capacity accompanies the will; they have developed this by practice; they have purified themselves. There is another, who may not yet have the capacity, but do already have the desire.”²⁹⁶ This accounting for individual circumstances forms the basis for judging the morality of human action and therefore the extent of culpability.

Clement notes that judgment of the morality of human acts does not depend solely on the outcome: “You also judge them by the motive in each case. Was the choice easy? Was there repentance for past mistakes? Was there understanding of the occasion of stumbling? Did they have afterthoughts, i.e., did they think straight, after the event?”²⁹⁷ He goes on to write of two paths by which believers might discern the relative righteousness of moral acts: “Repentance is a slow form of knowledge. Knowledge is the first stage without sin.”²⁹⁸ These are the criteria by which believers are to judge the relative morality of human action.

It is noteworthy that, from what we have seen, Clement has special regard for the condition of the individual moral agent. This condition may be affected by individuals’ relative moral freedom, their knowledge of the past and present circumstances, and their capacity for self-critical reflection in assessing the righteousness of human acts. We are seeing here Clement laying the groundwork for his eventual statement that individuals are culpable only for that which they are truly free to do. This he does further in Book Two.

Writing of the possibility of repentance, Clement comments on the generous mercy of God towards recidivists:

In his great mercy he gave yet another chance of repentance to those who, despite their faith, fall into some form of disharmony, so that if anyone should after their calling fall into temptation, and be forced or tricked into sin, they may have one more chance of “a repentance which brings no regret” (cf. 2 Cor 7:10).²⁹⁹

Of interest to us is Clement’s statement that repentance is possible for those believers who are “forced or tricked into sin”. Those who freely committed sin can receive no such mercy. Recidivists are as bad, in Clement’s view, as apostates: “Continual and repeated repentance for sins is no different from those who have once and for all turned away from faith, except alone in the

²⁹⁵ *Strom.* 2.26.3; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 175.

²⁹⁶ *Strom.* 2.26.4; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 175-76.

²⁹⁷ *Strom.* 2.26.5; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 176.

²⁹⁸ *Strom.* 2.26.5; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 176.

²⁹⁹ *Strom.* 2.57.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 197.

consciousness of sin. I do not know which is worse: deliberate sin, or, after repentance for sin, offending again.”³⁰⁰ Further, Clement scolds those who do not exercise self-discipline in matters of sin: “To be repeatedly requesting forgiveness for offences repeatedly committed is not repentance, only its appearance.”³⁰¹ In this grave assessment by Clement, we note his consistency on the matter of moral responsibility: those with the capacity for moral judgment will be held responsible for their sins. But how can those who have certain knowledge of sinful action because of their past avoid stern condemnation from God? Clement provides a satisfying answer via the Apostle.

Crucially, Clement makes a set of distinctions between sins. Clement flatly declares that everything contrary to right reason is sin.³⁰² There are nevertheless some bad acts which are those for which repentance is not possible and others which have other, less detrimental, effects. Far be it from Clement to make this vital distinction for himself; to this end, Clement calls on the Apostle:

Even though a mistake (ἀτύχημα) is a sin (ἁμαρτία) and so contrary to reason, sin (ἡ ἁμαρτία) is an involuntary misdeed (ἀκούσιος ἀδικία), a misdeed (ἀδικία) being voluntary malice (ἐκούσιος κακία). So, sin (ἡ ἁμαρτία) is my involuntary act. This is why it is said: “Sin will not rule you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ χάριν, Rom 6:14), saying to those who already believe, “that by his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). While a mistake (ἀτυχία) is an involuntary action of another against me, only a misdeed (ἡ ἀδικία μόνη) appears to be voluntary on my part or on that of another.³⁰³

Clement’s text conforms itself easily to that of Paul: the nouns remain anarthrous and the verb appears in the simple future. Despite the close conformity of Clement’s text, his reading of “sin” in it is quite narrow. He only allows “sin” to be read as one kind of bad act among other bad acts. Whereas Paul makes no distinction in Romans 6:14 between different kinds of bad acts, Clement has him call involuntary wrongdoing “sin”. By his insistence on culpability for voluntary wrongdoing which we saw earlier, and by his identification of injustice (ἀδικία) as the gravest evil, he is left with a set of moral acts which he needs to account for, namely, involuntary wrongdoing. Through Paul, Clement can therefore say that persons are not culpable for these unwilled bad acts because they are “under grace”. Thus, there is a scale of gravity according to Clement: misdeeds come in two kinds, sin (which is involuntary) and malice (which is voluntary). However, Paul does not distinguish between different kinds of actions, nor does he classify only some of them as “sin”, as Clement does here.

³⁰⁰ *Strom.* 2.57.3; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 197.

³⁰¹ *Strom.* 2.59.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 198.

³⁰² *Paed.* 1.5.2.

³⁰³ *Strom.* 2.64.4; GCS 52:147.

Crucially for our purposes, Clement's understanding of "under grace" assigns a limit to believers' culpability to commit involuntary sins rather than to their capacity for them. He sees believers as free to persevering in divine favour unless they turn their wills against God and follow where their desires might lead. Otherwise, those who are "under grace" enjoy God's mercy towards them, such that only the worst kind of misdeed prevent it. Those who commit misdeeds "under grace" continue to enjoy freedom from guilt when there is no intention to have committed them, especially if they do not have the capacity to answer the call of the Word but only the desire to do so. They are guilty of no more than a "mistake"; there is no change in them or in their capacity to produce such bad acts.

In conclusion, Clement here displays a somewhat pessimistic view of ethical renewal. By a neat distinction between different kinds of bad acts, Clement sees that certain objectively wrong acts will continue to be committed by believers and only the stable condition of divine grace will relieve them of culpability for them. Although he lays responsibility for wrongdoing squarely with moral agents themselves, they continue to enjoy freedom from sin because of God's favour towards them. Hence, through Paul, Clement curtails his insistence on personal culpability for wrongdoing but leaves intact his teaching on moral responsibility.

3.3 *Stromateis* 3.61.1

In addition to personal responsibility and the capacity for rightful action, Clement's vision of the "true gnostic" is also concerned with adherence to the moral law. This related aspect of his vision developed through his response to his opponents, whom he regarded as morally dissolute. As each of our early readers does at some level, Clement engages Paul in response to his opponents' use of the Apostle's letters. He notes that they fall into one of two groups, either callous laxity or excessive rigor: "Either they teach a way of life which makes no distinction between right and wrong or their hymn is too highly strung and they acclaim asceticism out of a spirit of irreligious quarrelsomeness."³⁰⁴ In this we see a positive attitude towards sects which sees them as incomplete rather than completely defective.³⁰⁵ In Book Three of the *Stromateis*, he directly cites from Romans 6 twice, indeed within just a few chapters of each other,³⁰⁶ to arbitrate a moderate ethical course. We find that the first of these citations was made to correct the perceived imbalance in the opponents' reading of Romans 6:14. This response constitutes something of a contest for Paul, in

³⁰⁴ *Strom.* 3.40.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 280.

³⁰⁵ Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 223.

³⁰⁶ *Strom.* 3.61.1 and 75.2-3.

this instance, around which aspects might appear in a coherent Christian morality. Clement does not find Christianity to be not as extreme as his opponents do; its sacred authors are more moderate in their teaching about wrongdoing.

Clement compares his position with others which also make use of Scripture to support their definitions of right and wrong:

Those who drag in a doctrine of moral indifference do violence to some few passages of Scripture, thinking that they support their own love of pleasure; in particular, the passage "Sin shall have no authority over you; for you are not subject to law but to grace" (ἀμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ χάριν, Rom 6:14) and others like this.³⁰⁷

The key for us is Clement's witness to how they regard themselves: the difference between right and wrong does not exist for them because they are no longer "under law". Unfortunately, we have no direct citation of Romans 6:14 in the extant literature of Clement's opponents. However, the Pauline concepts of sin, law, and grace, do appear in some Valentinian documents, which may provide some direction for more closely identifying his opponents' position. Before we analyse the direct citation above, we shall briefly consider what Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* (ca. 136-180)³⁰⁸ may offer about these key related themes.

Ptolemy writes to his charge Flora that it was the Demiurge which ordained the law. Knowledge that the law has its original concept in an imperfect cosmic author leads him to the conclusion that it need not be followed in full, especially, if a higher law from a more perfect source can be identified. It is not only Valentinian cosmogony which leads Ptolemy to this conclusion; Paul is also one of the driving forces behind this pursuit of the highest, purest law.³⁰⁹ The respect and even reverence Ptolemy has for the Apostle is as the revealer of his school's doctrine, the one who "made these teachings known."³¹⁰ For Ptolemy, it is Paul who enables the separation of the holy part of the law from the rest:

³⁰⁷ *Strom.* 3.61.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 294; *GCS* 52:24.

³⁰⁸ The dating of Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* is typically set to the time of his flourishing in the Western Roman Empire, perhaps even Rome itself, ca. 136-180. Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 437.

³⁰⁹ As Epiphanius preserves it in *Pan.* 33.3.1-33.7.10, Ptolemy the Valentinian provides instruction in "one of the burning issues faced by Christianity in the second century" on the value of the Jewish Bible and the law. Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 436. As a document, the *Letter to Flora* lacks the internal structure of a letter (prescript, *proemium*, and ending) even if Epiphanius has excised the stylistic features for the sake of brevity. Christoph Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," *ZAC* 4 (2000): 228. There is the likelihood that the *Letter to Flora* is an eisagogical treatise designed for small scale circulation, not just for one of Ptolemy's spiritual protégées named Flora. Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," 231.

³¹⁰ *Flor.* 33.6.6; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 445.

The part consisting of a law interwoven with injustice, he made known by speaking of “abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances” (cf. Eph 2:15); and the part not interwoven with the inferior, when he says, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12).³¹¹

The Apostle’s affirmation of the law’s goodness, righteousness, and holiness opens the way for Ptolemy to develop a threefold distinction among Jewish laws on the basis of the original author: the laws of God, Moses, and the elders.³¹² A further threefold division of God’s laws into the pure and good (Decalogue), the good interwoven with evil (laws of retribution), and the ritual laws (no longer to be interpreted literally) presents us with the part of the law which Ptolemy regards as enduring. In his view, God’s pure and perfected law is the Decalogue as interpreted by the Saviour: the prohibition of anger fulfils the commandment not to kill, lustful glances the commandment against adultery, and not swearing at all against swearing falsely.³¹³ This means that a Valentinian adherent following Ptolemy’s distinctions would take “law” in Romans 6:14 to mean either the concept of law which the Demiurge ordained or those laws which proceed from a source inferior to the one, supreme God. In either case, Ptolemy and his adherents would narrowly define what is meant by “law”. Those who accept this distinction and seek to explain it by means of Scripture may well turn to Paul and claim that they are not “under law but under grace” (Rom 6:14) by their obedience only to the highest law from the purest source, that is, the Decalogue.³¹⁴ For Clement, this dissolution of Valentinian adherents from obedience to certain laws constitutes a particular threat precisely because in his view they misread the Apostle.

Clement’s report on the opponents’ use of Paul in *Stromateis* 3.61 witnesses that they often use Romans 6:14 and less often many other texts. It also shows us that his writing, or at least his thinking, would be available to his opponents: the battle for Paul is fought at close range. Among our direct citations from Clement, this one therefore stands out because the opponents are thought to be using it “very often” and misusing it when they do. Even the way he introduces the text suggests that Clement is resolved that the opponents are ignorant of Scripture: they bring “some Scripture passages” into debate, “very often the one, ‘For sin shall not rule you, for you are not under law, but under grace.’” As a proof-text for their position, this moves him to engage with Romans 6 directly, even if there were other texts that they were also deploying.

³¹¹ *Flor.* 33.6.6; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 445.

³¹² *Flor.* 33.5.1-2.

³¹³ *Flor.* 33.6.1; cf. Matt 5:21, 27, 33.

³¹⁴ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992), 30-31.

Clement makes two moves against the opponents. Firstly, he presents another proof-text to answer the one produced by his opponents:

Let me quickly cut through their attempt. The admirable Apostle in person will refute their charge in the words with which he continues the previous quotation: “Well then! Shall we sin because we are no longer under law but under grace? God forbid!” (Rom 6:15). With these inspired prophetic words, at a single stroke he undoes the sophistical skill at the service of pleasure.³¹⁵

If Clement’s rather high view of the Apostle’s communication is further evidence for the proximity of the opponents, it is Clement who is setting Paul up to face the opponents: “The admirable Apostle in person will refute their charge.” If the opponents are ignorant of Paul, as Clement seems to think they are, then it is Paul’s own intervention which he hopes will correct the situation and restore the moral order. Thus, Clement engages no further in the debate about the meaning of Romans 6:14 than presenting 6:15 as a counter proof-text. We may detect some irony in Clement’s deploying a Pauline proof-text after he has scolded his opponents for the same practice. In juxtaposing the two Pauline texts, he expects that the meaning of Romans 6:14 will neatly follow for his audience: sin as defined by the moral law broadly understood is inadmissible, but if sin arises in personal experience, it will not rule the sinner.

Secondly, he presents a string of four references from 2 Corinthians 5-7; all but one of these is focused on the inadmissibility of sinful conduct. Taking Romans 6:14-15 as a discrete unified text, the passage opens the door for Clement to make a connection with 2 Corinthians, which for him functions the same way as Rom 6:14-15; they witness to the newness of the believers in Christ as well as the ethical obligations incumbent on them. The only passage which he presents which may be of further interest to us because of Clement’s gloss is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “‘So that, if a person is in Christ, they are recreated’ (2 Cor 5:17) in a way no longer subject to sin (οὐκέτι ἁμαρτητική).”³¹⁶ Clement’s expansion on 2 Corinthians 5:17 is revealing, because it is an attempt by him to identify more closely how believers are situated in respect to sin. However, the qualification inserted here may refer either to the inclination to sin, the desire for it, or the guilt for it: of these, perhaps only the last of these should be entertained, given Clement’s insistence in other texts on free volition and sinful inclination.

For our purposes, Clement’s Apostle sees wrongdoing as an inadmissible possibility for believers, although a possibility nonetheless: inadmissible because even those “under grace” are still subject to the moral law broadly understood, but possible because of free volition. Clement invokes the

³¹⁵ *Strom.* 3.61.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 294.

³¹⁶ *Strom.* 3.62.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 294; *GCS* 52:24.

Apostle once again to enjoin moral propriety, refrainment from wrongdoing, and the pursuit of righteous living on his morally responsible audience. As such, there is no mitigation of the law as his opponents claim, but rather the acceptance of a life which now must be free from wrongdoing. In this, Clement may be open to an accusation of not addressing the precise nature of the opponents' doctrine. They do not seem to have believed that sinful acts are admissible, but that the notion of sin itself is now different for those in Christ. Indeed, we have already seen in Book Two how Clement himself adopts a narrow and well-nuanced position on what sin is (see 3.2 above). It is important to Clement that he states clearly that there is no sense in which moral categories of right and wrong have so shifted so as to be effectively dissolved for those in Christ. On the contrary, believers are to maintain the delicate balance of elements: neither so lax that any new behaviour is tolerated, nor so rigorist that sin lies everywhere.

In summary, Romans 6:14-15 is Clement's narrow field of engagement, a small target which allows him to maintain the focus of both opponent and "true gnostic" alike on the Apostle's witness: what is at stake is not only morality, but also the appropriate reading of Scripture. Further, Clement considers that a correct reading of Rom 6:14 is both an important task and an easy one for him to complete: "The admirable Apostle in person will refute their charge."³¹⁷ The meaning of Rom 6:14, he believes, is not difficult to establish if the reader pays appropriate attention to the next verse, Rom 6:15. These two verses read together, in Clement's view, establish the true meaning of Paul, that sinful acts remain wrong even for those "under grace", whose volition and capacity for right action appear to be unaffected by the transfer.

3.4 *Stromateis* 3.75.2-3

Not long after he addresses the perceived "moral indifference" which we have just considered, Clement again cites from Romans 6:1-14 in countering another threat, this time one which has a rigorist tone. We have a direct citation of Romans 6:2, 6-13 as part of Clement's assembly of Scripture which witnesses to the capacity and expectation made of individuals to exercise self-control in matters of morality, and thus to the legitimacy of "marriage under the Logos".³¹⁸ In Clement's view, "those who reject marriage because they consider only total abstention acceptable ... [have] a misguided concept of the body and the created order."³¹⁹ This extensive discussion is a

³¹⁷ *Strom.* 3.61.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 294.

³¹⁸ *Strom.* 3.67.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 297.

³¹⁹ Gretchen J. Reydam-Schils, "Clement of Alexandria on Woman and Marriage in the Light of the New Testament Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Culture and the New Testament: Studies Commemorating the*

response to a text he has come across which regards marriage as no more than a concession to concupiscence in the face of an incapacity for self-mastery:

Those who attack God's creation under the pious name of self-control quote the words spoken to Salome, which we have mentioned previously. I fancy the passage comes from the Gospel according to the Egyptians. They maintain that the Saviour personally said, "I am come to destroy the works of the female." "Female" refers to sexual desire, and its works are birth and decay.³²⁰

This text is not preserved in the gospel of the same name, which has been preserved in the Nag Hammadi Library.³²¹ But it does agree with that found in *Excerpt 67 of Theodotus*. The text receives Clement's special attention not only because of his interest in the question of whether everyone should live in continence, but also because it seems to preserve sayings from the Saviour. This may be an example of Clement's attention to the sources that witness to the oral tradition about Jesus.³²² From this, Francis Watson suggests that Clement approaches this text as he would Scripture.³²³ Indeed, Clement shows his predilection for this text by citing it on three occasions in Book Three.³²⁴ As we have already seen before, Clement consistently holds to personal responsibility for moral action, the foundation of which is the enduring ethical capacity for individual action. For Clement, Christianity resolutely opposes the idea that desires are uncontrollable. He goes so far as to propose that inordinate desires can only be eliminated by divine power:

Human self-control (I am referring to the views of the Greek philosophers) professes to counter desire rather than minister to it, with a view to praxis. Our idea of self-control is freedom from desire. It is not a matter of having desires and holding out against them, but actually of mastering desire by self-control. It is not possible to acquire this form of self-control except by the grace of God.³²⁵

When Clement returns to the dialogue between Salome and the Saviour later in Book Three, as already seen above, he first responds to the content of the text itself by showing how it contradicts accepted teaching on the capacity for self-discipline. He then proceeds to make the case for his own view drawn from Scripture: "Now I propose to establish the Scriptures which refute these heretical sophists and expound the norm of self-discipline which we keep in following the Logos."³²⁶ As he

Centennial of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, ed. David Edward Aune and Frederick Brenk (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 116.

³²⁰ *Strom.* 3.63.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 295.

³²¹ Paul Foster, *The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 55.

³²² cf. David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 184, 228.

³²³ Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 425-27.

³²⁴ *Strom.* 3.45.3, 63.1-2, and 93.2.

³²⁵ *Strom.* 3.57.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 291.

³²⁶ *Strom.* 3.71.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 300.

embarks on his presentation of Scripture in favour of the capacity for self-discipline, he remarks that he is assembling these passages for the benefit of his readers' own engagement with the opponents: "The person of understanding will think out the passage of Scripture that is appropriate to challenge each of the heresies and use it at the apposite moment to refute those who set their dogmas against the commandments."³²⁷

Clement therefore turns to Scripture for authorities who say that believers are entirely capable of continence and therefore responsible for acquiring it. Among these authorities who witness to the capacity for self-control is Peter, whom Clement pairs with parts of Romans 6:

So that admirable man Peter says, "Beloved, I urge you, as temporary residents in an alien land, to abstain from physical desires. They are marshalled against your soul. See that your behavior is such that the pagans can look up to you. This is God's will. You are to muzzle the activity of those without understanding by the quality of your actions. Live as free people, not as though your freedom were a cover-up for vice, but as slaves in God's service" (1 Pet 2:11-12, 15-16).³²⁸

Then Clement adds his direct citation of Paul:

Similarly, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul writes [of the Scripture text]: "We are dead to sin: how can we continue to live in it? Our old humanity was crucified with him, so as to destroy the very body of sin" (οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ; ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας, Rom 6:2, 6) down to "Do not present the parts of your body to sin to be instruments of vice" (μηδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ, Rom 6:13).³²⁹

The extent of Clement's emendation of the Pauline text amounts to no more than deletions. From Romans 6:2 he omits the response to the questions posed in the diatribe of 6:1; this omission is of no consequence for the argument at hand. From Romans 6:6 he omits two phrases, "Knowing this" (τοῦτο γινώσκοντες) and "we no longer serve sin" (τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ); the first of these omissions is also of no consequence here.

The second is of interest to us, however, given the possibility that Clement intends that the main clause "we no longer serve sin" (τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ) not be called to the minds of his audience members because he does not believe this to be evidenced in people's conduct. When he engages the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, Clement displays this pessimism about the cessation of sin in believers' lives which is becoming familiar to us: "Has this world order been undone? They

³²⁷ *Strom.* 3.71.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 300.

³²⁸ *Strom.* 3.75.1-2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 302.

³²⁹ *Strom.* 3.75.3; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 302; *GCS* 52:229.

could never say so. The universe remains in the same condition.”³³⁰ It appears, then, that Clement at least unintentionally omits the main clause “we no longer serve sin” (τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) lest it undo the argument for self-control that he is making. He needs Paul only to show that the desires which continence and marriage address can be mastered, and thus both forms of life are open to all.

From Romans 6:13 he omits everything following “sin” (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ), namely: “But present yourselves to God as those living from the dead and your bodily members to God as instruments of righteousness” (ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ὡσεὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶντας καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὄπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ). Again, there is some reason to think that Clement ends his citation at “sin” (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) for more than simply mere dramatic effect. The Petrine text preceding this one contains the exhortation to “muzzle” objectionable activity. The full text of Romans 6:13, with its exhortation to repurpose one’s bodily members, potentially distracts Clement’s audience from his argument for the possibility and necessity of exercising self-restraint. Clement’s emphasis is on the ever-present dangers associated with corrupt desires.

This Pauline citation is unusual for its selectivity and abbreviation in the light of the fact that our three other citations by Clement are a single verse used as a proof-text. Concerning Clement’s practice of selective citation, he makes Romans 6:6 follow 6:2. If Clement is not working from memory, he is perhaps working at some speed to produce this work as an *aide-mémoire* for his audience, as we noted above.³³¹ Further on his practice of selective citation, his placing Romans 6:6 adjacent to 6:13 confirms the rationale that Clement is using for drawing Paul into his argument: the text as Clement provides it is united by a reference to an initial end of sin some time ago for believers. The body of sin was crucified before with Christ when they died to sin (Rom 6:2, 6), which means the bodily members are not to be turned over again to sinful acts (Rom 6:13). Concerning the abridged nature of the text at hand, Clement’s leap from Romans 6:6 to 6:13 (“as far as”) may mean that he intends to cite a larger section. However, since he has joined Romans 6:6 to 6:2, it is unclear whether he intends to cite Romans 6:2-13 or just Romans 6:2, 6-13. Nevertheless, Clement is showing us his perspectival view of ethical renewal: he sees that believers are released from past sin, which means that they can return to moral propriety using their otherwise unaffected ethical capacity.

This, then, is the most pessimistic witness to Clement’s reading of Paul on moral regeneration that we have seen thus far. The emendations to the Pauline text, which in all likelihood are deliberate,

³³⁰ *Strom.* 3.63.2; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 295.

³³¹ Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 229.

given how the Petrine text leads the Pauline one to make the scriptural argument for self-restraint, reflect an unwillingness to credit believers with any change in their approach to sin and righteous conduct after baptism. Instead, Clement's Apostle witnesses to the full moral agency of individuals to pursue their desires, even if that leads them to wrongdoing.

3.5 *Stromateis* 4.51.1

Clement makes a direct citation from Romans 6:6 in Book Four of the *Stromateis*, in which he is entering an existing ecclesial debate over the appropriateness of Christians pursuing martyrdom. He knows of some in his day who laugh off the suggestion that one can profess faith in death:

But some of the heretics, who have misunderstood the Lord, have a love of life that is both ungodly and cowardly, saying that true martyrdom is the knowledge of the only true God (with which we agree), but they add that someone who confesses by their death is a murder of self and a suicide, and they peddle other such cowardly sophisms.³³²

These "heretics" are Basilides and Valentinus, who are named respectively in *Stromateis* 4.81.1 and 4.89.2. Clement extensively quoting from the lost work *Exegetica* in order to demonstrate Basilides' teaching that, through the kindness of God who sends the martyrs to suffering and death, the martyrs are punished for their other sins and offences.³³³ This means that, according to Basilides, even Jesus would have been a sinner because he experienced a martyr's death.³³⁴ For his part, Valentinus is said to praise a class of persons who dispose of death without reference to the Saviour: "From the beginning you are immortal, and you are children of eternal life, and you wished to disseminate death among yourselves to expend it and exhaust it, that death should die in you and through you."³³⁵ Indeed, Clement also corrects the attitude which the "heretics" condemn. He partially agrees with the view that abandonment of life for martyrdom does not proceed from virtue or a new-found love of one's identity, but from hatred of God because they have no regard for their bodies:³³⁶

But we also say that those who rush to their death – for there are some who are not with us, but who have the same name as we do, and who are in haste to give themselves up in hatred of the Creator – we say these do themselves in without bearing witness, even though they are officially punished. For being ignorant of the true God, they do not preserve the mark characteristic of martyrs for the faith, and they give

³³² *Strom.* 4.16.3; SC 463:82-84.

³³³ *Strom.* 4.81.2.

³³⁴ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 50.

³³⁵ *Strom.* 4.89.2; SC 463:202.

³³⁶ Reydams-Schils, "Clement of Alexandria on Woman and Marriage," 116.

themselves up to a vain death, like the Indian Gymnosophists do in a useless fire.³³⁷

On why martyrdom should not be pursued, Clement does not proceed from a low regard for faith as the “heretics” do, but from observation of the callous disposition that he has seen in some of the would-be martyrs. The “rush towards life”³³⁸ is a prodigality seen everywhere: “Most people have an unstable and flighty character, like that of storms.”³³⁹ Consequently, he presents a bipartite anthropology of body and soul and attributes the higher human faculties which moderate behaviour to the soul in order to show how the cavaliers are in fact giving in to their base desires:

In my opinion, [the human person] resembles the invention of the Thessalians, the Centaur, composed of a rational part and an irrational part, of soul and body: the body works the earth and is inclined towards it, but the soul when it is trained in the true philosophy is raised towards God, hastens to its celestial kindred, turning away from the passions of the body, and, what is more, suffering and fear.³⁴⁰

At this point it is possible to read Clement as not answering but rather adding to the argument of the cavaliers. Clement’s statement, “hastens to its celestial kindred”, for example, could be taken as a reference to the innate desire a true believer has to rejoin those who preceded them; this would compromise Clement’s praise of the higher powers of the human soul. He is in fact able to propose an anticipated union of the person with “celestial kindred” precisely through the kind of “true philosophy” he is espousing. Indeed, if secured in life, this higher union by “true philosophy” provides the power for martyrdom to be willingly received. In other words, someone ought not to run off to be martyred to rise to God when they must be self-restrained and contemplative. The true accomplishment is not to have oneself slain for the cause, but to remain, to stay the course of virtue, and to remain in control of oneself to the very end, however such an end may come; true gnostics should always be progressing in their journey towards wisdom and the likeness of God.³⁴¹

In constructing his response to the cavaliers’ practice, Clement turns their argument against them almost from the outset: they cannot do good by doing evil. He notes: “Distrusting truth brings death, just as believing in it brings life; believing lies and disbelieving truth hastens perdition. The same is true of self-restraint and licentiousness: refraining from doing good is vice, but abstaining from injustice is the beginning of salvation.”³⁴² In Clement’s view, then, the one who is aware of the

³³⁷ *Strom.* 4.17.1-3; *SC* 463:84-86.

³³⁸ Paul Middleton, “Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: A Statement for the Defence,” *JTS* 64, no. 2 (2013): 560.

³³⁹ *Strom.* 4.8.1; *SC* 463:66.

³⁴⁰ *Strom.* 4.9.4-5; *SC* 463:70.

³⁴¹ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 2.

³⁴² *Strom.* 4.8.4-5; *SC* 463:68.

possibility of martyrdom but who actively avoids it is beginning truly to save themselves. Lest Clement be accused of degrading the martyrs themselves, he clearly states that if martyrdom cannot be avoided, the “true gnostic” has the responsibility to give themselves willingly to it: “When summoned, the gnostic easily obeys within reason, and willingly they give up their body to the one who asks for it.”³⁴³ Such a fate, if it simply cannot be avoided, is laudable:

With good courage, then, [the gnostic] goes to the Lord, their friend, for whom they freely gave up their body and, as their judges hoped, their soul, hearing then the sweet-sounding words of the Saviour: “Dear brother,” because of the resemblance of their life to his. We call martyrdom perfection, not as others do because someone comes to the end of their life, but because they displayed the perfect work of love.³⁴⁴

Here Clement proposes that the martyrs’ resemblance to Christ is not because of their death but because of how they lived their life.³⁴⁵ Praising the martyrs’ “perfect work of love” broadens the scope for martyrdom to allow another form of martyrdom: “He does not mean just simple martyrdom, but the gnostic martyrdom, of those who for love of the Lord have acted according to the rule of the Gospel ... leaving earthly kindred, wealth, and every possession, to live free from passion.”³⁴⁶ Instead of a hasty self-immolation, Clement urges the careful, sober movement of Christians towards their spiritual end. This movement is, in Clement’s account, focused on the moral situation of believers, their virtue and their conduct.

The key to this movement is reverence for the body. For Clement, the body is the locus of human action which secures knowledge: “But since these falsely named people slander the body, let them learn that the harmony of the body contributes to the thinking which produces godness of disposition ... It is to eternity that the one who devoted themselves to the good life in the body goes.”³⁴⁷ Clement also downplays, if not disparages, the inordinate attention some are paying to bodily needs: “[Pains and poverty] are refrained from, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the body, and the body is cared for because of the soul to which it is committed.”³⁴⁸ The pursuit of the spiritual end therefore occurs through careful cultivation of the virtues of the soul precisely through the body, which, in turn, receives due but not excessive attention.

³⁴³ *Strom.* 4.13.1; *SC* 463:76.

³⁴⁴ *Strom.* 4.14.2-3; *SC* 463:78.

³⁴⁵ “For Clement, martyrdom is overlaid by the discourse of perfection.” Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 147.

³⁴⁶ *Strom.* 4.15.4-5; *SC* 463:82.

³⁴⁷ *Strom.* 4.17.4, 4.18.3; *SC* 463:84-86.

³⁴⁸ *Strom.* 4.22.1; *SC* 463:92.

Thus, Clement deploys Paul in this context for the right understanding of martyrdom. He shows his true concern, that the cavaliers have abandoned Christ at the moment of trial: instead of a person hastening to their death, Clement urges caution across their life, expressed precisely in the body which would be the object of martyrdom. Although this way of conduct is unglamorous and laborious, it is the form of martyrdom which the Christian minority may seek:

To the multitude, then, this vain labour is overthrown. But to us the Apostle says, “We know this, that our old self was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Τοῦτο δὲ γινώσκομεν, ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος ἡμῶν συνεσταύρωται, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, Rom 6:6).³⁴⁹

Without significant difficulty, Clement’s text of Romans 6:6 appears here to make two important points about cavaliers seeking voluntary martyrdom. Firstly, the cavaliers have already undergone a far more significant death by being united with Christ. Paul’s text in Clement’s argument allows him to say that the Apostolic teaching on martyrdom pertains primarily to Christ himself: at best, Christian martyrs are “crucified with him” (Rom 6:6). Clement’s exclusion of any baptismal context in the citation at this point strongly suggests that he only has Christ’s own crucifixion in mind, and not necessarily believers’ initiation. Of course, initiation is how the crucifixion with Christ occurred for Clement’s Christian audience, but this is not being emphasised here. Rather, the emphasis falls on union with Christ, in whom all believers are. In this respect, his use of Paul before the cavaliers casts Christ as the true witness alongside whom all others may make their testimony:

Now, it was the Lord alone who, for the folly of those who conspired against him and the purification of unbelievers, drank the cup. And the Apostles, imitating him, that they might be truly gnostic and perfect, suffered for the churches they founded. So also, those who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles must without sin be gnostics, and for love of the Lord must also love their neighbour; so that, if the occasion should call, enduring afflictions for the Church without stumbling, they also drink the cup.³⁵⁰

Secondly, since Christ’s death has preceded all others, the death Christians may now seek and should indeed be seeking is the refusal to serve sin. Instead of putting their own interests first, here given as vainglory from a sought-out martyrdom, believers notably “die” when they make efforts to end their service of sin. Since the true martyr is Christ and his final victory is assured, Clement argues that the “true gnostic” who comes after him, will always be in possession of happiness and beatitude because they are dying to sin. Since Paul allows Clement to say that the death of Christ has priority above all else and that believers’ death to sin occurs because of it, we may conclude that

³⁴⁹ *Strom.* 4.51.1; *GCS* 52:272.

³⁵⁰ *Strom.* 4.75.1-2; *SC* 463:178.

divinely originating faith is more likely to precede even repentance. This is because Clement's Apostle sees the death of Christ as the principal event on which Christian believers depend for their dignity. For our purposes, this means that Paul's text in Romans 6:6 witnesses to the ongoing conversion of life which believers are to be undergoing.

For us, this means that Clement's citation of Paul is a proof-text for "gnostic martyrdom", the long service of Christ instead of sin. The text is made to point to the reality of an altogether new life in contrast with the old but which seems to exist alongside it.³⁵¹ This new life requires individuals to live a sinless life. In this, Clement's reserve about any substantial change is seen again: those who wisely eschew the cavaliers' example are in effect taking up a new self-conception, just as those who died with Christ and now live in a new way. Hence, the Apostle's text reminds the cavaliers of their far greater undertaking, that is, the work that Christian faith requires, which they have disparaged by the hasty pursuit of martyrdom.

3.6 Clement's Use of Romans 6:1-14

From what we have seen, Clement's citation from our passage is limited to Romans 6:2 and 6-14. Firstly, we should note Clement's impressive fidelity to Paul's wording. When he makes a citation from our passage, Clement's wording is typically exact. He does not present significant variants which show his emphases. The possible exception is the abridgement of the full text to Romans 6:2, 6-13. In this case (see 3.4 above), Clement may intend to use just the three verses which he provides, perhaps like parentheses, to indicate the passage that he wishes to bring to his audience's attention. Even then, the text which he provides has a very high degree of literality. Secondly, we note how he is typically reluctant to engage with a symbolic reading of Paul. For Clement, the plain reading itself conveys the full extent of the Apostle's meaning.

Clement's citations from our passage reflect his understanding that believers are capable of avoiding sin and thus are morally responsible. The direct citation of Romans 6:2 (followed by 6:6-13) reflects this hermeneutic. For Clement, Romans 6:2 witnesses to how sin is unthinkable for believers; this is confirmed by the abridged citation of Romans 6:6-13. Further, since Clement cites Romans 6:2 without 6:3-5, a phrase like "death to sin" appears detached from the context of ritual initiation. For Clement, "death to sin" does not necessarily look back to a singular moment in which believers put an end to their former sinning but to the identity of those who are working towards self-discipline.

³⁵¹ Pamela Reaves, "Gnosis, Witness, and Early Christian Identities: The "True" Martyr in Clement of Alexandria and Gnostic Traditions" (Doctoral diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013), 179.

Clement's Apostle simply shows that believers have the capacity and responsibility to put their bodily members to good use because they have died to sin.

We see this same hermeneutic of moral responsibility applied to Clement's reading of Romans 6:6. He uses this text to remind his audience that all believers already participate in one, meaningful death, namely the death of Christ, whether they suffer martyrdom or not. For Clement, Paul is central for seeing how the supreme witness of Christ is to be allowed to have its effects over the moral lives of all persons, that is, in their seeking no more than "gnostic martyrdom".³⁵²

In effect, we have two direct citations of Romans 6:14. When Clement first uses Romans 6:14, he defines "sin" narrowly so that it only refers to involuntary wrongdoing. By means of this narrow reading of "sin" in Romans 6:14, Clement demonstrates that believers remain capable of wrongdoing but are not culpable for it. However, this seems to run contrary to the Apostle's use of the term "sin", as Paul does not so distinguish between different kinds of wrongdoing in Romans 6:14. If Clement is proof-texting here, it is ironic that he does so because he later condemns his opponents for engaging in such a practice. The second time that Romans 6:14 appears in Clement is when he reports on the opponents' use of Paul to support their "doctrine of moral indifference". Nonetheless, he believes it is the plain reading of Romans 6:15 which helps to discover the true meaning of Romans 6:14, namely, that Paul says wrongdoing is unthinkable for believers even if they are no longer held down by it.

This leads us to Clement's principal contribution to our exegetical investigation, concerning recidivism. By "sin", Clement believes that Paul does not mean the totality of sin. Rather, Clement's Apostle finds that sin is simply one set of bad acts which no longer rules those who involuntarily engage in it. This nuance then sheds further light on what "under grace" means (Rom 6:14): it is a favourable disposition of God which enables a believer who has engaged in a bad act to escape the condemnation which would otherwise ordinarily be bound to that act.

3.7 Conclusion: Moral Regeneration in Clement of Alexandria?

At the beginning of this chapter, we saw that Clement's view of faith and Scripture has led us to suspect that he largely adopts the perspectival view of ethical renewal. Certainly, all the evidence we have from Clement's readings of Romans 6:1-14 supports this assessment.

³⁵² *Strom.* 4.15.4.

Firstly, in Clement's readings of Romans 6:1-14, there does not appear to be any change in believers arising from their faith to suggest that they now share responsibility with God for producing right conduct. Thus, Clement hardly deviates from his argument for the moral responsibility of believers. The fullest extent of such a deviation is when he uses Romans 6:14 to articulate those deeds for which believers are culpable, namely, voluntary wrongdoing. Clement's primary reason for deploying Paul in his debates and argument is to have him witness to the propensity to sin, which all people, including believers, still possess and against which they must strive.

Secondly, forms of wrongdoing appear to be inevitable in Clement's view. Given that Clement narrowly defines sin as unintended wrongdoing, it seems that he thinks believers inevitably persist in some forms of wrongdoing despite the Apostle's repeated exhortations to refrain from sin, with which Clement is familiar and in agreement, as witnessed by his use of Romans 6:2, 6-13. We might therefore ask whether anyone is truly able to escape the dominion of sin, except with respect to guilt. Although he is at pains to point out the ways in which the soul might be affected by faith and Scripture, Clement does not envisage moral change in believers through any ongoing contribution made by God which might alter the production of wrongdoing as such. Sinful acts continue but the guilt for them subsides for those "under grace".

Therefore, we are led to our principal finding, that Clement's use of Paul reflects his pessimism about any moral regeneration of believers. His readings of "under grace" as the disposition arising from divine favour does not see an end to wrongdoing but an end to their unmitigated culpability for it. Clement therefore foresees an undesirable but divinely foreseen situation: a person who is in Christ continues to experience the universal inclination to do wrong and fails to resist it, but because of their standing "under grace" they are excused from all but those faults which they freely willed. In this, he understands that Paul is simply exhorting the believer to resist the inclination. This means that Clement's proposal of "gnostic martyrdom" answers the likelihood, perhaps even the inevitability, of believers' sin.

CHAPTER FOUR: TERTULLIAN

4.1 Introduction

Our next early Pauline reader is Tertullian, whose genius as an exegete has long been appreciated for his close reading of Paul,³⁵³ although a diligent reader of Tertullian's works will quickly notice that he makes use of Paul's writings in a different way than the other early Christian readers whom we have seen thus far. Whereas Irenaeus judiciously selects texts to build his matrices in order to counter his opponents' reading of Scripture, Tertullian takes large portions of Pauline texts which he also amends in order to demonstrate how they support the position of the New Prophecy.³⁵⁴ Whereas Clement of Alexandria is unwilling to "equip a pirate ship" by citing passages which his opponents, who are close-at-hand, may then also use to their advantage,³⁵⁵ Tertullian is more than willing and indeed eager to show his somewhat segregated audience that all of the Apostle's writings confirm their position. Curiously, he regards as indecorous the practice of heaping up Scripture references to contradict one's opponent in argument.³⁵⁶ In his cataloguing scriptural authorities against opponents, "Tertullian did not finally heed his own advice."³⁵⁷ Although

³⁵³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: OUP, 2003), 238.

³⁵⁴ Tertullian's adherence to the New Prophecy is placed ca.206/7. This allows for sufficient time for those works to appear which show no signs of Montanist influence. Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 9, 212. This raises the question of Tertullian's overall connection to the New Prophecy. We certainly have the evidence of the two treatises which contain direct citations from Romans 6:11-14 that he had strong affinity with the movement (*Res.* 11, 12, 26, 63, *Pud.* 12.1, 21.7-8). David Rankin proposes that Tertullian belonged to an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* which drew its inspiration from Montanism. David Ivan Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 41. David Wilhite echoes such a position, affirming that Tertullian was not part of a "schismatic movement within the Christian community at Carthage". David E. Wilhite, "Introduction: Reading Tertullian Reading Paul," in *Tertullian and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), xix. Tertullian was a lay leader (*Exh.Cast.* 7.3) of what is thought to have been a "house church" which strove "to secure the official recognition of that New Prophecy which they themselves obeyed". Douglas Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," *VC* 29 (1975): 38. It can be summarised as "an innovative prophetic movement intent on bringing Christianity into line with what it believed to be the ultimate ethical revelation of the Holy Spirit through the New Prophets." William Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism*, *VCSup* 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 131, 424. See also William Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins," *SP* 36 (2001): 385.

³⁵⁵ *Strom.* 3.61.1; Ferguson, *Clement: Stromateis*, 294.

³⁵⁶ "It is not proper any longer, however, where there is question of scriptural authority, to pull alternately in opposite directions on a rope of contention such as this, so that the latter texts seem to tighten the reins of discipline while the former loosen them as if it were something uncertain, the former prostituting the remedy of penance through leniency, the latter excluding it completely through severity." *Pud.* 2; William P. Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, *ACW* 28 (New York: Newman, 1959), 58-59.

³⁵⁷ Judith M. Lieu, "'As much my apostle as Christ is mine': The Dispute Over Paul Between Tertullian and Marcion," *EC* 1 (2010): 42.

Tertullian does not set out to define a Paulinism as such, he relies on the “inspired”³⁵⁸ Apostle together with other scriptural witnesses to deal with perceived threats from different parts of the Church; his is not the method of the systematic theologian but of the “literary artist and the master of rhetoric.”³⁵⁹ His crafted citations are designed to place Paul “in the canonical witness and catholic context of the early Church’s faith”.³⁶⁰ As many as half of the scriptural borrowings in his writings are from Paul;³⁶¹ among them, we find two direct citations³⁶¹ from Romans 6:1-14 in *On the Resurrection* 47 and *On Modesty* 17.

Tertullian certainly prefers the plain reading of Scripture to a symbolic one. He believed that the widespread practice of allegorical reading of Scripture among Marcionites and Valentinians leads to a grave distortion of it and to some “unreal signification”.³⁶² He therefore supposes that he has to rediscover the plain reading, since allegory is to be found “neither always nor in all places, but sometimes and in some places.”³⁶³ We shall therefore see that he also robustly pursues the plain reading of Romans 6.

However, the problems which the plain reading of Scripture presents Tertullian still require resolution, and the dangers of vain speculation and heresy are ever present to him.³⁶⁴ Scripture leaves lacunae which need to be filled by proscriptions which are consistent with it.³⁶⁵ It is the utterances of the New Prophecy which come to his aid as a determined plain reader of Scripture. Since it is the voice of the Holy Spirit,³⁶⁶ Scripture is to be interpreted by the Paraclete himself, who issues interpretive clarifications through the New Prophets.³⁶⁷ Thus, it is the New Prophecy which ensures that the voice of the Holy Spirit, who is speaking in Scripture, is not misheard: “He has, by the New Prophecy pouring in from the Paraclete, dispelled all former ambiguities, and what they will have it are parables, by an open and clear preaching of the whole mystery: and if you drink his

³⁵⁸ *Jejun.* 15.1, *Marc.* 5.7.1-3, *Pat.* 7.7, 12.8, *Ux.* 2.2.4-5, *Virg.* 4.2-3.

³⁵⁹ Robert D. Sider, “Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian,” in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 100.

³⁶⁰ Michael F. Bird, “Paul, Tertullian, and the God of the Christians: A Response to Andrew B. McGowan,” in *Tertullian and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 18.

³⁶¹ Everett Ferguson, “Tertullian, Scripture, Rule of Faith, and Paul,” in *Tertullian and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 23.

³⁶² *Res.* 19; Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection* (London: SPCK, 1960), 53.

³⁶³ *Res.* 20; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 57.

³⁶⁴ For example, he seems particularly troubled by the ambiguity which Paul himself has built into the text of 2 Corinthians 4:4, to which Marcion had also given some attention. *Marc.* 5.11; T.P. O'Malley, *Tertullian and the Bible: Language, Imagery, Exegesis* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1967), 140.

³⁶⁵ Dennis E. Groh, “Utterance and Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Montanist Crisis,” in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders*, ed. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett (Lanham: UPA, 1985), 89.

³⁶⁶ *Idol.* 4.

³⁶⁷ *Res.* 63.7-10.

fountain, you will be athirst for no doctrine, no heat of questionings will scorch you.”³⁶⁸ This means that Tertullian applies the moral rigorism of the New Prophecy to his reading of Paul.³⁶⁹ Both of the citations from Romans 6:1-14 are used in a context in which he defines aspects of the Christian moral life. In *On the Resurrection* 47, Tertullian begins with Romans 6 by defining “the old self” crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) as amendment of life. In *On Modesty* 17, he regards adultery as an unforgivable misdeed, in part because he believes that Romans 6:2-13 shows that any sin after the profession of faith is unthinkable. For our purposes, this means that we expect to see appeals made to the Apostle in order to exhort Tertullian’s audience to the high standard of moral propriety taught by the New Prophecy, which, in turn, is readily compatible with the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

Tertullian also finds that his opponents are selective in their use of Scripture: “But it is the practice of perverse and ignorant heretics, yes and of [*psychici*] generally, to arm themselves, as occasion offers, with some ambiguous text opposing a whole host of definite declarations found throughout Sacred Scripture.”³⁷⁰ In contrast to his opponents’ adjudged mishandling of the sacred text,³⁷¹ Tertullian sets out to provide his own audience³⁷² with an orderly coverage of the disputed positions³⁷³ by a comprehensive treatment of Scripture: it is this pursuit of a fitting use of Scripture which makes its exposition his “favourite mode of argument”.³⁷⁴ Scripture provides the *regula fidei* from which his opponents stray to their eternal peril.³⁷⁵ To contradict the inspired text in the slightest way is to put oneself beyond salvation.³⁷⁶

Thus, Tertullian’s extensive list of scriptural authorities, which support his position, is an act of gathering together the various utterances of the Holy Spirit, who teaches in accord with the *regula fidei*.³⁷⁷ He begins with the assumption that the oracular authority and Scripture witness to the same position. However, simple repetition of the texts alone does not serve his purposes. As will be seen, he also amends the Pauline texts in order to make his case swiftly and to address thoroughly the errors he sees in a Christianity which does not adhere to the rigors of the New Prophecy. Not all

³⁶⁸ *Res.* 63; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 187.

³⁶⁹ Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 52, 130-31.

³⁷⁰ *Pud.* 16; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 102.

³⁷¹ Tertullian regards the presence of heresies in the Church as inevitable. See *Res.* 40.1; cf. 1 Cor 11:19.

³⁷² P.I. Kaufman, “Tertullian on Heresy, History, and the Reappropriation of Revelation,” *Church Hist.* 60 (1991): 169.

³⁷³ Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, ix.

³⁷⁴ Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 127.

³⁷⁵ *Praescr.* 13.2-5, *Prax.* 2.1.

³⁷⁶ Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, ECF (London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

³⁷⁷ Tabbernee, “To Pardon or not to Pardon?,” 382-83.

of these emendations can be explained by Tertullian's own manner of translating Paul afresh into Latin from various Greek versions.³⁷⁸ Nor can they be justified by Tertullian's role as a pioneer of the Christian Latin vocabulary, who is faced "with the challenge of translating Greek terms which had a special Christian significance".³⁷⁹ We may conclude, then, that, although Tertullian pursues the plain meaning of those parts of Romans 6 which he cites, he makes minor modifications to them, in order to gain better leverage for refutation. In the pursuit of this sustained argument for a more rigorist form of Christianity, he often displays intolerance and ridicule.³⁸⁰ This means that, in the confusion of differing interpretations of Scripture, the charismatic exegesis of the New Prophecy is made in order to guarantee adherents that the reading which they are receiving is that of the Holy Spirit himself.³⁸¹ The New Prophecy ensures that neither the frailties of "human transmission or exegetical dilemma" will be allowed to interfere with the divinely-ordered reading of Scripture.³⁸²

Unsurprisingly, Tertullian's exclusive pursuit of the plain reading of Scripture and his stacking up amended texts suited to his argument make him partisan in the view of some modern readers: his theology is certainly shaped by the exegetical orientation which the New Prophets provided.³⁸³ Nevertheless, his genius is still available to us, even with the interpretive lenses which he adopts, for three reasons. Firstly, as Andrew Bain notes, "Tertullian uses these texts carefully, pointedly, and at times in quite a sophisticated manner to build up subsidiary evidence for his argument."³⁸⁴ Secondly, although he weaponises Paul against his opponents, Tertullian provides us with a helpful set of plain readings of our text.³⁸⁵ Thirdly, the argument which he makes with amended texts will also reveal how he forecloses on the meaning of the unamended text: this he avoids because the will of Scripture's author, the Paraclete, is primary.³⁸⁶ Thus, "one of the most volatile intellects of the early Christian period"³⁸⁷ searches Scripture and amends it in order to provide authorities which align with the position of the New Prophecy. Although his "rhetoric borders at times on the

³⁷⁸ H. A. G. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to Its Early History, Texts, and Manuscripts* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 6.

³⁷⁹ Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, 7.

³⁸⁰ Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 23.

³⁸¹ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 210.

³⁸² Groh, "Utterance and Exegesis" 90.

³⁸³ Dunn, *Tertullian*, 9-10.

³⁸⁴ Andrew M. Bain, "Tertullian: Paul as Teacher of the Gentile Churches," in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, LNTS 412 (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 216.

³⁸⁵ Kaufman, "Tertullian on Heresy, History, and the Reappropriation of Revelation," 175.

³⁸⁶ Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon?," 382-83.

³⁸⁷ Willemien Otten, "Tertullian's Rhetoric of Redemption: Flesh and Embodiment in *De Carne Christi* and *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*," *SP* 65, no. 13 (2013): 331.

outrageous,³⁸⁸ Tertullian remains an important, early witness to the plain reading of the Apostle's texts and the mores expected of believers.

4.2 On the Resurrection 47

Tertullian cites from Romans 6:3-6, 8, and 11-13 in his second treatise on the flesh,³⁸⁹ *On the Resurrection*.³⁹⁰ Following *On the Flesh of Christ*, he writes *On the Resurrection* in order to reassure his fellow adherents of the New Prophecy that their belief in the fleshly resurrection is the one which conforms to Scripture, and not that of his opponents.³⁹¹ The opponents are the Valentinians, whose movement Tertullian regards as a daughter of Marcion's heresy.³⁹² However, it is Marcion who is accorded first place over Valentinus, who all along has been leading his pupils into forbidding the salvation of the flesh.³⁹³ Nonetheless, if Tertullian recognises Marcion as the first threat, he finds the later Valentinus to be the more serious one. With savage irony, he exclaims that Marcion is the lesser of two evils: "Is it not better ... for Marcion to be brought to life again instead of Valentinus?"³⁹⁴

³⁸⁸ Otten, "Tertullian's Rhetoric of Redemption," 331.

³⁸⁹ The end of *On the Flesh of Christ* announces the subject matter of his next treatise: "But, that the conclusion of my argument may recall its preamble, the resurrection of our flesh, which I shall have to defend under a different brief, will here be found to have had its foundation laid, it being manifest now, if not before, what sort of thing that was which rose again in Christ." *Carn. Chr.* 25; Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), 81.

³⁹⁰ *On the Resurrection* has been dated to the later phase of Tertullian's writing career, perhaps ca. 206/7. The date 206/7 reflects the close association of *On the Resurrection* with his other works. It is referred to in his treatises *On the Soul* and *Against the Valentinians*, which can also be dated to 206-7. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 47. *On the Resurrection* certainly follows *On the Flesh of Christ*, which may have been written some years earlier. Barnes, "Tertullian's Scorpiace," *JTS* 20 (1969): 115, 208. In terms of its form, *On the Resurrection* bears little resemblance to a piece of polished oratory as *On the Flesh of Christ* does. Neither of the two treatises have asides or an adversary present, but both have exclusive first-person plurals. These features suggest that the treatises are for an audience who can interject for clarification during its *in camera* delivery. Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, xvi. In this, it is "almost a sermon". Cahal B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1993), 81.

³⁹¹ Wolfram Kinzig, *Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der alten Kirche bis Eusebius*, FKDG 58 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 266.

³⁹² It is unlikely that the dispute between Marcion and Tertullian was in any way direct: simple chronology places Marcion's death before Tertullian's writing. Outi Lehtipuu, "'Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God': The Transformation of the Flesh in the Early Christian Debates Concerning Resurrection," in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body, and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity*, ed. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 152. Lieu, "As much my apostle as Christ is mine," 41. The opponents are united by his "fiction" that two of Marcion's disciples, Apelles and Valentinus, absconded from their docetic master's school and founded their own. *Carn. Chr.* 1.2, cf. *Res.* 2.3; Barnes, *Tertullian*, 125.

³⁹³ *Res.* 2.4.

³⁹⁴ *Res.* 56; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 168.

Tertullian finds that Valentinus' disciples only accept "half a resurrection".³⁹⁵ Among the extant sources which may assist us in identifying their position is the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. The Valentinian author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* distinguishes between "internal" and "external members", such that only the internal members are subject to the resurrection from the dead: "Let no one doubt concerning this ... Indeed, the visible members which are dead shall not be saved, for (only) the living [members] which exist within them would arise."³⁹⁶ When a person succumbs to natural death, the inward and outward members separate from one another and thus spiritual resurrection consists in the ascendant release of the inward members, not the creation of a new material entity. The resurrection, then, can and indeed must be acquired in this mortal life by moral transformation:³⁹⁷ "The morally transformed Christian life *is* resurrection. Whatever it is that will happen to Christians after death, the important point from the *Treatise's* perspective is that it will be revelatory. Therefore, and no less importantly, the revelatory life of the Christian *now* is resurrection."³⁹⁸ It is precisely the salvation from one's members, not in them, to which Tertullian objects in his treatises on the flesh. He regards them as even worse than the Marcionites for this position; they are the new "Sadducees".³⁹⁹ Tertullian therefore combats both together in the twin treatises, since the denial of the resurrection goes with the denial of Christ's fleshly existence.

Tertullian's treatise witnesses "some very poor writing",⁴⁰⁰ but also his rhetorical artistry. For example, his treatment of the witness of the canonical prophets has received harsh scholarly critique:⁴⁰¹ "He is on the wrong side of the argument and hurries to an end as soon as possible."⁴⁰² The artisan's skill can nevertheless be seen in how he presents material from the Pauline letters: he positions the evidence from 2 Corinthians⁴⁰³ and 1 Corinthians⁴⁰⁴ as parentheses around the other Pauline material⁴⁰⁵ so as to reserve 1 Cor 15:50 for the climax of his argument. Moreover, when he works from Romans in *On the Resurrection* 45-47, he largely works from Romans 5-8 in reverse, for

³⁹⁵ *Res. 2*; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 7.

³⁹⁶ *Treat. Res.* 47.30-48.2; Malcolm L. Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection I,4: 42.35-50.18," in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 153.

³⁹⁷ McGlothlin, *Resurrection as Salvation*, 135.

³⁹⁸ McGlothlin, *Resurrection as Salvation*, 147, his emphases.

³⁹⁹ *Res. 2*, 36, 39.

⁴⁰⁰ Robert D. Sider, "Structure and Design in the 'De Resurrectione Mortuorum' of Tertullian," *VC* 23, no. 3 (1969): 196.

⁴⁰¹ *Res.* 29-32.

⁴⁰² Sider, "Structure and Design in the 'De Resurrectione Mortuorum' of Tertullian," 187.

⁴⁰³ *Res.* 40-44.

⁴⁰⁴ *Res.* 48-51.

⁴⁰⁵ *Res.* 40-51.

starting from Romans 8 gives prominence to the general resurrection and sets up Romans 5-7 as its ethical consequences.⁴⁰⁶

Tertullian carves up the chapter into four sets of texts from Romans 6 which he will present to make his argument for the neutrality of the flesh, and thus its salvageability.⁴⁰⁷ It appears that the primary reason for his engagement with Romans 6 is because this text is one instance in which the Apostle speaks of the resurrection and esteems fleshly existence:

Thus while throughout this whole sequence of thoughts he dissevers our members from unrighteousness and transgression and conjoins them to righteousness and holiness, transferring them also from the wages which is death to the gratuity which is life eternal, he evidently promises the flesh the recompense of salvation.⁴⁰⁸

He introduces the first set of texts by announcing the interpretation which he finds across the chapter. Paul's death to life sequence in Romans 6 is not about a spiritual resurrection of believers but about their new morality:

It will be this worldly living which he calls the old self, who he says was crucified together with Christ (*quam veterem hominem dicit confixum esse Christo*, Rom 6:6), not a corporal constitution but a moral character. Otherwise, if we do not so take it, our corporal constitution has not been crucified together, nor has our flesh suffered the cross of Christ; but as he has added, "That the body of transgression may be made void" (*ut evacuetur corpus delinquentiae*, Rom 6:6), by amendment of life, not by destruction of its substance, even so he says, "That henceforth we may not be in bondage to transgression, so that, having on this reckoning also died together with Christ, we may believe that we shall also be alive along with him" (*uti hactenus delinquentiae serviamus ut et hac ratione commortui in Christo credamus, quod etiam convivemus illi*, Rom 6:6, 8).⁴⁰⁹

The citation of the first third of Romans 6:6 appears as a repetition of Paul's words within Tertullian's sentence; this explains the appearance of the accusative forms. There is one minor omission of note here, namely, the possessive adjective in the first-person plural (*noster*). Otherwise, the text readily agrees with that of Paul. Here Tertullian ridicules the plain reading of this first third of Romans 6:6 which would say that believers suffered an historical crucifixion with Christ, a reading for which there is no evidence that his opponents adopted. If such a reading were followed, Scripture would be proved untrue: "Otherwise, if we do not so take it, our corporal constitution has not been crucified together, nor has our flesh suffered the cross of Christ."⁴¹⁰ This

⁴⁰⁶ Sider, "Structure and Design in the 'De Resurrectione Mortuorum' of Tertullian," 191.

⁴⁰⁷ Sider, "Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian," 111.

⁴⁰⁸ *Res. 47*; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 134-35.

⁴⁰⁹ *Res. 47*; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 132-33.

⁴¹⁰ *Res. 47*; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 133.

plain reading thus exhausted, he shows that there is sufficient exegetical space for another plain reading of Paul which he wishes to take, one which allows for the neutrality of the flesh and thus allows for the possibility of its resurrection. With the reading of “old self” as “worldly living”, then, he presents “amendment of life” as the way in which the new self emerges.

The citation of the second third of Romans 6:6 has one important variation. Tertullian’s text of Paul has the verb *evacuetur*, which has the legal sense of cancellation or annulment rather than outright destruction.⁴¹¹ It is possible that that by “body of transgression” Paul means the physical body which commits wrongdoing and which is consequently excluded from the resurrection. Because he is defending fleshly resurrection, *evacuetur* is to be preferred, which speaks of the abrogation of the bulk of wrongdoing, and thus excludes any implied reference to the fate of mortal flesh.

The third citation is a composite of the last third of Romans 6:6 with 6:8. We have no citation of Romans 6:7 here; the omission of this otherwise stable text⁴¹² also occurs in *On Modesty* (see 4.3 below) and in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* (see 5.9 below). This means that none of our early readers directly cites Romans 6:7, even if Origen shows familiarity with its wording (see 5.10 below). The omission is curious because Tertullian and Origen usually provide exhaustive accounts of the Apostle’s teaching, especially if opponents are being engaged. Christina Kreinecker proposes that the omission of Romans 6:7 in general is the result of the eye of an early scribe skipping from one of the two appearances of “sin” in Romans 6:6 to the one at the end of Romans 6:7.⁴¹³ However, because the omission occurs in both Greek and Latin works, she concludes that it is more plausible that the text was altogether absent in Origen’s work than that it was excised by his Latin translator, Rufinus.⁴¹⁴ It seems that Tertullian and Origen are simply unfamiliar with this verse.

If the omission of Romans 6:7 from *On the Resurrection* is not deliberate by Tertullian, such as we suggest, then the Apostle presents faith in the general resurrection as a consequence of voiding transgressions – a most amenable consequence for Tertullian as he argues for the fleshly resurrection. Thus, Tertullian emphasises the link which the Apostle makes between the moral life and the life to come. However, we could also explore the possibility that the omission of Romans 6:7 is deliberate. If it is indeed deliberate, Tertullian would be preventing his audience from

⁴¹¹ The appearance of *evacuetur* here witnesses to Tertullian’s familiarity with legal terminology. For a discussion of Tertullian’s possible legal background and knowledge, see Ian L. S. Balfour, “Tertullian and Roman Law - What Do We (Not) Know?,” *SP* 94 (2017).

⁴¹² *Nestle-Aland* 28, 492.

⁴¹³ Christina M. Kreinecker, “Rufinus’ Translation of Origen’s Commentary on Romans,” in *Commentaries, Catenae, and Biblical Tradition*, ed. H. A. G. Houghton, TS 3/13 (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2016), 238. For a well nuanced discussion on this point, see also John Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2 vols., vol. 1, OECT (Oxford: OUP, 2017), xxiii.

⁴¹⁴ Kreinecker, “Rufinus’ Translation of Origen’s Commentary on Romans,” 239.

associating the initial cancellation of wrongdoing referred to in the second third of Romans 6:6 above with the immunity of believers from guilt for sin, such as Romans 6:7 could be read as saying. Romans 6:7, then, does not appear lest believers find in it any license for returning to wrongdoing without impunity and thus obtain the resurrection without regard for moral conduct. This would be the case if the omission were deliberate, although we suggest that it is not.

We have thus far seen that Tertullian cites Romans 6:6 and 6:8 to make the point that Paul regards the end of the “old self” as amendment of life, leaving the flesh free as it were to be saved in the general resurrection. It is not the flesh which is condemned but wrongdoing, even if it is in the flesh that wrongdoing happens. As we shall see, he deploys more of Romans 6 to make this argument. From what we have already seen, however, we can make a preliminary observation about his reading of Paul in relation to ethical renewal: Tertullian’s reading of Romans 6:6 and 6:8 witnesses no substantial change to believers themselves in their coming to faith. The fullest extent of a change in them is the cancellation of the bulk of wrongdoing. This lends itself well to the perspectival view of ethical renewal. In Tertullian’s reading of Paul, believers are distanced from their past bad acts with no thought given to any continuing relationship with sin, other than that they are to avoid it altogether in the future because their “old self” was crucified with Christ.

As he proceeds with his argument to the second set of texts from Romans 6:11-13, we next find Tertullian elaborating on the experience of the believers prior to death. The lifelong nature of shedding one’s “old self”, precisely understood as mores, is sustained here: the members are to be saved, and thus they are to be put to righteous service even before death and resurrection. He proceeds with his argument thus:

For he says, “Even so ye, reckon ye yourselves dead indeed” (*et vos reputate mortuos quidem vos*, Rom 6:11): to what? to the flesh? No, but “to transgression” (*delinquentiae*, Rom 6:11). Consequently they will be saved to the flesh, “but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (*viventes autem Deo in Christo Iesu*, Rom 6:11), by means of the flesh surely to which they will not be dead, seeing they are dead to transgression, not to the flesh. For he adds yet once more, “Let not therefore transgression reign in your mortal body for you to obey it and to present your members to transgression as weapons of unrighteousness: but present yourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead” (*Ne ergo regnaverit in corpore vestro mortali delinquentia ad obaudiendum illi et ad exhibendum membra vestra arma iniustitiae delinquentiae: sed exhibete vosmetipsos Deo velut ex mortuis vivos*, Rom 6:12-13) – not “as those alive” but “as those alive from the dead” – and your members as weapons of righteousness (*et membra vestra arma iustitiae*, Rom 6:13).⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ Res. 47; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 132-33.

The first citation is from Romans 6:11, which corresponds well with Paul's text. Its separation from the terminating phrase, "and alive to God in Christ Jesus", speaks to Tertullian's focus on what it is that believers have died to. If he is translating afresh from the Greek, the choice of the imperative *reputate* instead of the indicative, with its preceding personal pronoun retained for emphasis, witnesses how much responsibility he places at the feet of believers. In this way, we see how the consequences of there being a bodily resurrection are temporal and ethical.⁴¹⁶

The second citation is from Romans 6:12 and the first parts of 6:13, which contains three principal variants that warrant our closer attention. Firstly, the verb *ne regnaverit* in the perfect subjunctive adopts the general resurrection as the Apostle's vantage point on believers' present lives. Although Ernest Evans translates it as if Paul is giving a straightforward command, Tertullian's choice of the perfect tense adds the perspective of the resurrection to that command. The Apostle's exhortation from "hindsight" urges believers to have risen above their old selves, which were left behind in their mortal life. Secondly, this same verb *ne regnaverit* governs two actions, namely, obedience to transgression and presentation of the bodily members to it. This somewhat awkward construction abridges the Pauline parallelism, and thus probably makes the two actions synonymous with each other. If a person has allowed transgression to reign in their mortal body, they have both obeyed transgression and in so doing presented their members for its use as weapons of unrighteousness. Thirdly, Tertullian's text of Romans 6:12 has a singular pronoun agreeing with "mortal body" or "transgression". It seems unlikely that Paul would be saying here that the mortal body should obey itself. We are therefore left with Tertullian's Apostle saying that if believers return to the practice of transgression they will be offering their obedience to transgression itself. This appears to be an uncharacteristic indulgence of the symbolic reading for *delinquentia*, although one which would allow for the dominance of believers once again by this power. This variant therefore does not attribute wrongful desires to the mortal body, and thus admits sufficient neutrality for its salvageability and resurrection. For our purposes, the cumulative effect of these variants signals Tertullian's concern for individual responsibility precisely in preparation for the fleshly resurrection. This moral responsibility does not appear to be affected by any external power, that is, until a person submits again to the domination by *delinquentia*. Therefore, with the exception of this possible instance of moral degeneration, this citation of Romans 6:12 readily accords with the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

⁴¹⁶ Carly Daniel-Hughes, *The Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for the Resurrection* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

The third citation is the remainder of Romans 6:13, which readily agrees with Paul's text, except that it omits *Deo* as the terminal noun. If this is an intended variant, it would be either because Tertullian regards the earlier appearance of the noun in the same verse as sufficient, or, less likely, he is leaving the accent to fall on the new description of bodily members, that is, as "weapons of righteousness".

In all, this citation of an edited version of Romans 6:11-13 presents the mortal body as morally neutral and therefore salvageable for the resurrection. Tertullian achieves this by demonstrating how the Apostle, from the vantage point of the future, makes the responsible use of the body an imperative to secure the resurrection: "Thus while throughout this whole sequence of thoughts he dissevers our members from unrighteousness and transgression and conjoins them to righteousness and holiness ... he evidently promises the flesh the recompense of salvation."⁴¹⁷ Seeing that believers are not ostensibly dominated by transgression, Tertullian's Apostle shows that they could indeed be thus dominated if they should once again return to the practice of wrongdoing; this would constitute an example of moral degeneration in Tertullian.

Tertullian, then, presents believers as having a somewhat different ethical experience than before they came to faith. They are now living after a death of sorts, and thus live albeit symbolically in the resurrection. Thus, we see here that, for Tertullian, renunciation of sin commences a death-to-life sequence which engages one's bodily members, that is, in their self-directed righteous use.

Tertullian's deployment of Romans 6:12-13 to say that believers conceiving of themselves "as those alive from the dead" witnesses the responsibility believers have for this renewed ethical experience, on which subject he does not elaborate here. Perhaps if Tertullian had elaborated on Romans 6:11 here, he might have filled out for us more of what "living to God" might have meant for the New Prophecy. We must therefore conclude with Outi Lehtipuu: "In what way the transformation of the living flesh can be called a resurrection is something Tertullian does not explain any further."⁴¹⁸ For our purposes, however, it suffices to say that an experience of "resurrection" is included in his deployment of Romans 6:12-13, and specifically in the self-directed service of righteousness, which envisages no substantial renewal of individuals to produce it.

After briefly interrupting his sequence with a short discussion of Romans 6:19-23, which lies outside the scope of this study, Tertullian returns to his presentation of Romans 6 in reverse. He takes up his fourth and final set of texts from Romans 6 to explore further the Apostle's witness against an inaugurated or completed resurrection:

⁴¹⁷ *Res. 47*; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 134-35.

⁴¹⁸ Lehtipuu, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," 161.

It would on no account have been fitting to demand of [the flesh] any discipline of its own in holiness and righteousness unless to it also had pertained the prize of the discipline, nor for baptism itself to be entrusted to it if it were not also by means of regeneration being set on the way towards restitution: for the Apostle makes this point as well, "Know ye not that whosoever we are that have been baptized into Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried together with him by means of baptism into death, so that even as Christ hath risen from the dead so we also should proceed in newness of life" (*An ignoratis, quod quicumque in Iesum tincti sumus, in mortem eius tincti sumus?*⁴¹⁹ *Consepulti ergo illi sumus per baptismum in mortem, uti, quemadmodum surrexit Christus a mortuis, ita et nos in novitate vitae incedamus*, Rom 6:3-4). And lest you should think that that is spoken only of this life which, starting from faith, must after baptism be lived in newness, with great precaution he adds, "For if we have been planted together by a likeness of Christ's death, we shall also belong to the resurrection" (*Si enim consati sumus simulacro mortis Christi, sed et resurrectionis erimus*, Rom 6:5). For by a likeness we die, in baptism; but in actuality we rise again, in the flesh, as Christ also did.⁴²⁰

A further insight into Tertullian's reading of Paul may come from close attention to the significant variant in the text, which otherwise displays a high degree of literality. Tertullian's text of Romans 6:4 here lacks the phrase "by the glory of the Father", which does not seem to be associated with a textual variant.⁴²¹ The safest explanation may be that this omission is the result of memory working at pace or the transmission of the biblical manuscript.⁴²² If it is the case that the omission is inadvertent, it may be possible to say that Tertullian's "memory, and his translation, are accurate enough."⁴²³ However, we proceed to investigate further because this text with this omission touches on our question. The text as it appears here more closely aligns believers' new ethical experience and refrainment from sin with Christ's own resurrection. Moreover, this new experience does not appear to be specially connected with baptism: Tertullian prefaces his citation by saying that "regeneration" in baptism sets its recipient on the course "towards restitution"⁴²⁴ in the resurrection rather than towards righteous conduct.⁴²⁵ Thus, the body of wrongdoing is cancelled through self-renunciation and amendment of life, and not primarily through the ritual of baptism. Tertullian observes that this conduct does not seem to proceed from any divine contribution or

⁴¹⁹ Tertullian is consistent with translating βαπτίζεω as *tinguere* in Romans 6:3-4 (cf. *Res.* 47 and *Pud.* 17), perhaps because of liturgical reasons. See Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, 7.

⁴²⁰ *Res.* 47; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 134-35.

⁴²¹ Nestle-Aland 28, 491. We noted that Irenaeus has the same omission from the text in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9 (see 2.2 above).

⁴²² Gordon D. Fee, "The Use of Greek Patristic Citations in New Testament Textual Criticism: The State of the Question," in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 344, 354.

⁴²³ Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 306.

⁴²⁴ *Res.* 47; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 135.

⁴²⁵ This echoes what we find in his treatise *On Baptism*, in which the ritual does not impart but merely prepares for the reception of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Bapt.* 6).

substantial change to believers by his introduction to the citation. Therefore, this citation adheres to the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

Tertullian's brief mention of the notion of "newness" (Rom 6:4) requires a close reading. Significantly for us, he also finds "newness" in the present experience of life, after believers have adopted that morality which is fully embraced from the time of baptism: "That life is spoken of which is lived in newness from faith after baptism".⁴²⁶ Here he attempts to thwart a radicalised notion of newness in Christ.⁴²⁷ In this treatment of "newness" (Rom 6:4), he may well have in mind the same kind of attention which the Valentinians paid to the term. In their *Treatise on the Resurrection*, we find that "newness" is set entirely in the present precisely as a person's share in the resurrection: "But the resurrection does not have this [inconstant] character, for it is the truth which stands firm. It is the revelation of what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness ... flee from divisions and the fetters, and already you have the resurrection."⁴²⁸ As the Valentinians did before him, Tertullian finds that "newness" results from the abandonment of fleshly ways.⁴²⁹ For Tertullian, however, "newness" is simply a feature of the moral life which is to follow baptism; it has little to do with a spiritual resurrection. Thus, he shows that a mortal life lived in faith is itself replete with "newness" by believers who have ended their association with sin.

In conclusion, Tertullian's argument for the salvageability of the flesh leads him to argue for its moral neutrality from Romans 6. He achieves this principally by interpreting the "old self" as the worldly way of life which is loaded up with the bulk of transgression. This hermeneutic appears to be reflected in the small emendations which appear in Tertullian's translation of Paul. He inserts a pronoun where "its desires" otherwise appears in Romans 6:12, thereby not attributing sinful desires to the mortal body but to transgression itself. Together with the imperative *reputate* in Romans 6:11, this variant heightens the sense of personal responsibility which individuals have for amending their lives. However, this variant also has the corresponding effect of admitting a symbolic reading, which is uncharacteristic of Tertullian. When "transgression" once again reigns over recidivists, they sink into moral degeneration as "transgression" takes over the bodily members and makes them serve as weapons of unrighteousness. Otherwise, Tertullian envisages no moral regeneration for believers. They have full responsibility for their personal conduct with no assistance from God in fulfilling this responsibility after he initially abrogates all transgressions. This simple break from the past reflects the voluntarism of the perspectival view of ethical renewal and

⁴²⁶ *Res.* 47; Evans, *Tertullian: On the Resurrection*, 135.

⁴²⁷ cf. Lieu, "As much my apostle as Christ is mine," 49.

⁴²⁸ *Treat. Res.* 48.30-37, 49.13-15; Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection I,4: 42.35-50.18," 155.

⁴²⁹ *Treat. Res.* 49.9-15.

thus leaves any sort of experience akin to Christ's resurrection to be the self-directed, ethical use of one's members. That much alone, for Tertullian, constitutes "newness" of life (Rom 6:4).

4.3 On Modesty 17

Tertullian cites edited parts of Romans 6:1-11 in his treatise, *On Modesty*,⁴³⁰ in which he argues that a contemporary bishop's edict to reconcile recidivist adulterers exceeds his power to forgive sins through the Church.⁴³¹ Although its title suggests that it is an encomium for "the flower of virtue ... the foundation stone of sanctity",⁴³² it is mainly concerned with the readmission of baptized adulterers to the Church.⁴³³ *On Modesty* is one the last⁴³⁴ of Tertullian's extant works on morality,⁴³⁵ written during that later phase of his writing career when he moved towards the New Prophecy and had little sympathy for alternative positions.⁴³⁶ The treatise evidences both Tertullian's orderly refutation of opponents and rigorous pursuit of holiness. This rigorism dominates his thought by this time, having holiness as its stated pursuit⁴³⁷, and flows from an "exclusivist-perfectionist" view of the Church.⁴³⁸ Thus, we find that Tertullian engages in "a passionate, bigoted and yet utterly sincere attack" on the bishop⁴³⁹ and offers "the most strident abuse of those who do not support Montanism".⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁰ Dating the treatise ca. 210/211 situates its author with the New Prophecy but before the movement completely segregated itself. See Barnes, *Tertullian*, 47; Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon?," 376. For us, this means that its audience may well be a mixed group of New Prophecy adherents and non-adherents, and its author is working hard to stave off the threat which the bishop's edict represents for the sake of Church unity.

⁴³¹ *Pud.* 1, 21. Liesbeth Van Der Sypt observes that it may be a sign of these times that *On Modesty* has received recent scholarly attention for its view of fornication as being of greater gravity than murder and adultery (*Pud.* 5.1-15). Liesbeth van der Sypt, "The Use of 1 Cor 7:36-38 in Early Christian Asceticism," in *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourses*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, NTOA 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 152-53.

⁴³² *Pud.* 1; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 53.

⁴³³ That Tertullian has specifically baptized adulterers in mind is evident from the references to baptism in the treatise (cf. *Pud.* 6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 19). He uses "*post fidem*" (*Pud.* 1, 13, 17, 18, 19) and "*post lavacrum*" (*Pud.* 18) as shorthand for Christian initiation, which includes both believing and baptism; for example: "[The Apostle] shows that the penance which the Lord chooses is that which is preferred to the death of the sinner before he embraces the faith and before he is baptized. He must be washed once for all by the grace of Christ, who once for all died for our sins." *Pud.* 18; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 109.

⁴³⁴ Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 41.

⁴³⁵ These works on morality are: *Exhortation to Chastity, On the Dress of Women, On Fasting, On Flight in Persecution, On the Games, On Modesty, On Monogamy, On Patience, On Repentance, On the Vesture of Virgins, To My Wife*.

⁴³⁶ Dunn, *Tertullian*, 7, 55.

⁴³⁷ Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 3.

⁴³⁸ Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 92.

⁴³⁹ Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 41.

⁴⁴⁰ Dunn, *Tertullian*, 8.

The controversy in Carthage is all the more bitter because it involves a change in Church policy, from official exclusion of recidivists against *pudicitia* to tolerance of them.⁴⁴¹ Tertullian is adamant that the distinction between sins which the Church can and cannot remit must be clearly articulated: "The sins which are cleansed are those committed against a brother or sister, not against God; for in our prayer we declare that we will forgive our debtors."⁴⁴² If grave sinners will be forgiven, they will be forgiven by God alone.⁴⁴³ For Tertullian, the bishop's edict arrogates to himself the power to forgive those sins which only God can remit,⁴⁴⁴ and thus introduces a tolerance for wrongdoing which can only end in indifference to it.⁴⁴⁵ As a result, Tertullian sees that sin is depleting the holiness of the Church because of episcopal presumptions of divine power.⁴⁴⁶ However, it is not only the practice of granting ecclesiastical communion to grave sinners which so enrages Tertullian; the edict is the rotten fruit of the general decline in *pudicitia* which he has been observing.⁴⁴⁷ Baptized recidivists were given one further opportunity for readmission into the Church, namely *exomologesis*.⁴⁴⁸ This singular rite of reconciliation involved public confession of sins, humiliation in posture and garb, fasting, and prayer.⁴⁴⁹ He perceives the bishop's edict as a threat which will undermine the singularity of baptism and the delicate balance between the justice and mercy which *exomologesis* provides.⁴⁵⁰ Above all, in *On Modesty*, Tertullian makes little provision for the Church herself to deal directly with sins which have been committed after coming to faith. There can be no "normal abnormalities" in the Church.⁴⁵¹

Tertullian's response to the episcopal edict is driven by the New Prophecy, which is in possession of an oracle from its prophets: "'But the Church,' you say, 'has power to forgive sins.' I know this better than you do and I regulate it better, because I have the Paraclete Himself saying in the person of the new prophets: 'The Church can forgive sin, but I will not do it lest others also sin.'"⁴⁵² This may signal that he himself ordered the oracle,⁴⁵³ even if he is unlikely to have invented it himself.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴¹ F. E. Vokes, "Penitential Discipline in Montanism," *SP* 14, no. 3 (1976): 64.

⁴⁴² *Pud.* 2; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 58.

⁴⁴³ *Pud.* 1.20-21.

⁴⁴⁴ *Pud.* 18.

⁴⁴⁵ *Pud.* 1.

⁴⁴⁶ *Pud.* 1.

⁴⁴⁷ *Pud.* 1.3; cf. *Apol.* 20.

⁴⁴⁸ *Paen.* 7.10; Heine, "The Beginnings of Latin Christian Literature," 137.

⁴⁴⁹ *Paen.* 9.1-6.

⁴⁵⁰ Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon?," 375.

⁴⁵¹ Fritz Stolz, *Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 80-89.

⁴⁵² *Pud.* 21; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 119-20.

⁴⁵³ Anne Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 150.

⁴⁵⁴ Weight may be added to the proposal that Tertullian himself sought out the oracle if *On Modesty* serves to answer the episcopate as a perceived threat to the New Prophecy, especially if such oracles were known to cause annoyance to various Church and civic authorities. Trevett, *Montanism*, 117. See also Rex

In either case, he “welcomed an opportunity to defend tradition and the practice of the apostolic age against innovations introduced by those who would not admit the New Prophecy.”⁴⁵⁵

Tertullian’s chosen battleground is Scripture, against which he believes that the “psychics”⁴⁵⁶ have set themselves. Thus, he follows the major sections of the canon in order, not to provide reinforcement from clinching witnesses, but to present an inventory of the scriptural evidence against his opponents’ position which he regards as non-scriptural. We therefore find citations from the Decalogue,⁴⁵⁷ the prophets,⁴⁵⁸ the Parables of Jesus,⁴⁵⁹ many of the other New Testament authors,⁴⁶⁰ including Paul,⁴⁶¹ and especially 1 and 2 Corinthians.⁴⁶² These all witness to and safeguard, in Tertullian’s view, the highly-prized virtue of *pudicitia*: “Christian purity ... draws from heaven all that it has – its nature from the laver of regeneration, its schooling from the ministry of preaching, its rigor from the verdicts pronounced in both Testaments, firmly sanctioned by the fear of an eternal fire and the desire of an eternal kingdom.”⁴⁶³

In *On Modesty* 17, Tertullian draws on five Pauline epistles in a short space: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, and finally Colossians. Of these, Romans receives the greater share of Tertullian’s attention, including the citation from Romans 6:1-6 and 6:8-11 (as well as Rom 7:18, 8:2-5, 8),⁴⁶⁴ whereas the references to other epistles are no more than a sentence each. However, Tertullian does not dispassionately introduce Paul. He makes the Apostle, “the unshakeable pillar of virtue”,⁴⁶⁵ come across as an “intense, severe, and unyielding man.”⁴⁶⁶ Thus, Paul is in every way presented as a militant scriptural authority against the bishop’s edict: “Challenge the forces of the

Butler, *The New Prophecy and “New Visions”: Evidence of Montanism in the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, PMS 18 (Washington, DC: CUA, 2006), 31. His positive use of the term *amentia* (usually translated as “madness”) to name the prophecy or ecstasy of the New Prophets certainly helps to mark the identity of his community as truly spiritual against the *animales* and *psychici*. Res. 22.1. Laura Nasrallah, “An Ecstasy of Folly”: *Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, HTS 52 (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-43.

⁴⁵⁵ Barnes suggests that Tertullian “resented the strengthening of episcopal control, which was partly designed to defend the Church against Montanism”: the “episcopal Church” enjoyed the advantage in talent and numbers in the generation after Irenaeus. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 140-41. M. J. Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 76.

⁴⁵⁶ *Pud.* 1, 6, 10, 16, 18, 21.

⁴⁵⁷ *Pud.* 5.

⁴⁵⁸ *Pud.* 6.

⁴⁵⁹ *Pud.* 7-12.

⁴⁶⁰ *Pud.* 7-21.

⁴⁶¹ *Pud.* 13-17.

⁴⁶² *Pud.* 13-16. Across the Tertullianic corpus, we find borrowings from 1 Corinthians more than any other Pauline letter, and at least twice as often as Romans. Matthew Novenson, “The Pauline Epistles in Tertullian’s Bible,” *SJT* 68, no. 4 (2015): 476.

⁴⁶³ *Pud.* 1; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 54.

⁴⁶⁴ *Pud.* 17.4-9.

⁴⁶⁵ *Pud.* 16; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 99.

⁴⁶⁶ Sider, “Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian,” 112-13.

Apostle. Look at his epistles. They all do battle for purity, for chastity, for sanctity. They all assail the works of lust, lechery, and licentiousness."⁴⁶⁷ We find Romans 6:1-6 and 8-11 cited without the interspersed commentary which we saw in his citation from our passage in *On the Resurrection* (see 4.2 above). For the sake of convenience, however, we shall analyse the passage in three sections: Romans 6:1-4, 6:5-6 and 6:8-9, and 6:10-11.

Tertullian introduces the direct citation with the argument that the Romans receive the same moral teaching as the other Pauline churches do: "And the Romans – is any lesson impressed upon them more than that a person should not sin after Baptism (*post fidem*)?"⁴⁶⁸ This introductory remark sets forth the hermeneutic through which the citation is to be read. When believers professed faith in the Lord, they completely separated themselves from all wrongdoing; those believers who sin against *prudicia*, however, are forsaking the Lord.⁴⁶⁹ This evocative expression brings the audience to remember fondly the full set of ethical consequences of their profession of Christian faith. Adulterers, however penitent they may be, are wilfully going back on their original confession before the Lord, which requires perseverance and is achieved, it seems, through one's own efforts.

Thus, he continues with the citation:

What, therefore, do we say? Do we persevere in sin so that grace may abound? By no means. We who are dead to sin, how shall we still live in it? Do you not know that we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? For we were buried with Him by means of Baptism into death so that just as Christ has arisen from the dead, so also we may walk in newness of life (*Quid ergo dicimus? Perseveremus in delinquentia, ut superet gratia? Absit. Qui mortui sumus delinquentiae, quomodo vivemus in ea adhuc? An ignoratis, quod, qui tincti sumus in Christo, in mortem eius sumus tincti? Consepulti ergo illi sumus per baptismum in mortem, ut, sicut Christus resurrexit a mortuis, ita et nos in novitate vitae incedamus*, Rom 6:1-4).⁴⁷⁰

The only significant variant in Tertullian's text is the omission of the phrase, "by the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4), just as he does in *On the Resurrection* (see 4.2 above); we noted earlier that there is no evidence of a textual variant which may explain this omission.⁴⁷¹ If Tertullian deliberately omits

⁴⁶⁷ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 102-03.

⁴⁶⁸ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 103; *CCSL* 2:1315.

⁴⁶⁹ "Forsaking the Lord" may be a reference to Isaiah 1:4, which Tertullian references more fully in his earlier presentation of the Parable of the Two Sons (*Pud.* 8). He rejects the opponents' interpretation of the Parable which was used to justify the bishop's edict. In his view, the persevering, elder son cannot be symbolic of Jews because they have not obeyed the law and thus have "forsaken the Lord", and thus neither can the younger son be exclusively symbolic of penitent Christians guilty of sins against *prudicia*; therefore, the bishop is wrong to attempt to reconcile them to the Church. Thus, it seems likely that "forsaking the Lord" here in *On Modesty* 17 has the sense of wilful disobedience to God and his law.

⁴⁷⁰ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 103; *CCSL* 2:1315.

⁴⁷¹ *Nestle-Aland* 28, 491. Irenaeus has the same omission from the text in *Against Heresies* 3.16.9 (see 2.2 above).

the phrase “by the glory of the Father”, it may be because he regards it as an unwelcome or unnecessary intrusion. It would only serve to put some distance between the baptized who must still suffer common death and Christ who was raised from it; this distance would undermine his point, that the Apostle teaches that the baptized cannot return to wrongdoing because they have taken on the new life of the risen Christ. Whether or not the omission is deliberate, it certainly makes the parallel in Romans 6:4-5 between Christ and the baptized more exact: with the omission, the life of the baptized is equated with the life of the risen Christ. No wrongdoing which characterised their former life, especially the gravest of sins like those against *pudicitia*, will be tolerated because believers already participate in the same resurrection as Christ.

Tertullian’s rhetoric largely ignores any distinction between the present life in Christ and future life in the resurrection, as Lehtipuu observes: “For Tertullian, baptism has to do with both the present and the future aspect of resurrection, but here again it is the future aspect that dominates.”⁴⁷² Indeed, it must be allowed to dominate, lest the definitive break with sin in baptism be diminished by undue attention being paid to the circumstances of the present, including temptation to sins against *pudicitia*. Therefore, this citation strongly witnesses to the perspectival view of ethical renewal. Here we see baptism presented as a threshold which believers cross, from which point they take on responsibility for producing the conduct associated with the resurrection. Thus, moral agency is solely and completely attributed to the baptized, who have already accepted Christ’s death and resurrection by baptism. We find no witness here to any divine power available to believers to enable them to display this conduct: “The connection of resurrection to moral transformation remains at the level of making rewards and punishments possible.”⁴⁷³ Tertullian therefore regards the entire content of the Apostle’s statement as an exhortation to believers to display moral conduct corresponding with their baptism.

We continue with the next few verses of the citation:

For if we have been buried together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self has been crucified with Him. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, risen from the dead, dies now no more and death no more has dominion over Him (*Si enim consepulti sumus simulacro mortis eius, sed et resurrectionis erimus, hoc scientes quod vetus homo noster confixus est illi. Si autem mortui sumus cum Christo, credimus quod et iam non moriatur, mors non iam dominetur eius, Rom 6:5-6, 8-9*).⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection*, 197.

⁴⁷³ McGlothlin, *Resurrection as Salvation*, 125.

⁴⁷⁴ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 103; CCSL 2:1315.

Firstly, Tertullian's text is missing the termination of Romans 6:6: "So that the body of wrongdoing might be cancelled, that henceforth we might no longer serve wrongdoing" (Rom 6:6). We know that Tertullian is familiar with this text because he cites it in *On the Resurrection* (see 4.2 above). Given that his argument here centres on the ethical consequences of dying with Christ in baptism, this omission might focus his audience's attention on "death" in baptism as the formal renunciation of wrongdoing. This would be consistent with Tertullian's accent throughout this treatise on the moral responsibility of the baptized.

Secondly, if the absence of Romans 6:7 here happens to be an editorial decision by Tertullian, which we suggest it is not (see 4.2 above), it speaks of the contradiction which he finds in Paul's text. On the one hand, Paul seems to say that believers are already in possession of freedom from sin (Rom 6:7), and on the other, he says that they are to secure that freedom for themselves (Rom 6:11). In this way, an editorial omission by Tertullian of Romans 6:7 would serve to keep the Apostle's imperative foremost in the minds of his audience (Rom 6:11). In either case, the omission of text from Romans 6:6-7 leaves the Apostle's text in *On Modesty* without any reference to believers' freedom from sin as a new experience following from their baptism. This conforms readily to Tertullian's argument for believers' enduring moral responsibility which is unaffected by any external reality. This view aligns easily with the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

The omission of text from Romans 6:8-9 is not particularly significant except insofar as Tertullian is keeping his audience focused on "death" in baptism as the end of wrongdoing for them. If this is the case, he is not allowing Pauline references to Christ's resurrection to distract them from his argument.

Finally, we have Romans 6:10-12:

For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives unto God. Thus do you, also, consider yourselves (*vos reputate*) as dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (*Quod enim mortuus est delinquentiae, mortuus est semel. Quod autem vivit, Deo vivit. Ita et vos reputate vosmetipsos mortuos quidem delinquentiae, viventes autem Deo per Christum Iesum*, Rom 6:10-11). Therefore since Christ is dead, once for all, no one who follows after Christ in death can ever again live to sin, especially to a sin so great. Else, if fornication and adultery can be forgiven a second time, so also will Christ be able to die again. The Apostle continues, then, with the command that sin should not reign in our mortal body (*Instat autem apostolus prohibens regnare delinquentiam in corpore nostro mortali*, Rom 6:12). Well did he know the weakness of the flesh.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 103-04; CCSL 2:1315.

Tertullian's accent on moral responsibility is once again seen here in his choice of the imperative over the indicative in Romans 6:11. We also have a citation of Romans 6:12 which is incorporated into his own sentence; otherwise, his text readily corresponds to that of Paul.

It is significant that Tertullian breaks off the main part of his citation at the end of Romans 6:11, and only after a short commentary introduces Paul's "command that sin should not reign in our mortal body" (Rom 6:12).⁴⁷⁶ The significance lies in his invoking the singularity of Christ's death as the reason why grave sin is inadmissible for the baptized and why the bishop is wrong in attempting to reconcile recidivist adulterers. For Tertullian, the baptized have truly embarked on a new life, with the "death" of the baptism which they have received as evidence of it. His intolerance of post-baptismal sin is born of his twin conviction that baptism always goes with acquired virtue, and sanctity with membership of the Church.⁴⁷⁷ Hence, he regards the baptized as having left their old lives behind by their entry into ecclesiastical communion, and that this departure is to be evidenced by their right conduct. The prospect of returning to the practice of sin is as ridiculous to him as Christ's suffering another death. However, the fact that Tertullian's Apostle gives extensive teaching about believers' returning to the practice of sin and weakness of the flesh is sufficient witness to the possibility that they may do so. This is likely the purpose of the lone citation of Romans 6:12.

Tertullian's use of Romans 6:1-6, 8-12 in his treatise *On Modesty* therefore witnesses to believers' continuing faculty to commit wrongdoing; this is seen especially by the evocative and compelling tone of his exhortation. Even though they have renounced sin in baptism, believers may indeed take up wrongdoing again, and this is evidenced by the very fact of the recidivism in Carthage and the Apostle's exhortations. Since baptism functions to effect the removal of guilt for past wrongdoing and secure a new religious identity,⁴⁷⁸ and since it does not alter ethical capacity at all, Tertullian therefore requires believers to be vigilant. For our purposes, Tertullian forecloses on any discussion of moral regeneration because he regards them as not substantially different from their pre-baptismal state.

This means that the full extent of believers' dying to sin in baptism is formal renunciation. Continuity is therefore to be seen between the past and present lives of the baptized. This might be surprising to us, given Tertullian's insistence that there is to be radical discontinuity in the baptized between their historical wrongdoing and present lives of holiness: "Is any lesson impressed upon

⁴⁷⁶ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 104; CCSL 2:1315.

⁴⁷⁷ Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Guy G. Stroumsa, "From Repentance to Penance in Early Christianity: Tertullian's 'De Paenitentia' in Context," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy Stroumsa, NBS 83 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 172.

them more than that a person should not sin after Baptism (*post fidem*)?"⁴⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the difference between the past and present lives of the baptized lies in their conduct, and not in their ethical capacity. Thus, he is ready to find the baptized guilty of any wrongdoing as they were before their initiation. From this, we can say that Tertullian entirely excludes any possibility of substantial renewal in his use of Romans 6:1-14.

4.4 Tertullian's Use of Romans 6:1-14

We are now in a position to consider the features of Tertullian's use of texts from Romans 6:1-14 in the two treatises in which he cites them. At the outset, we observe that Tertullian directly cites Romans 6:1-6 and 8-13. We have no citation of Romans 6:7, and this may be due to a scribal error; inexplicably, neither do we have a citation of Romans 6:14.

Firstly, there are significant emendations which Tertullian makes to the texts as he cites them. These emendations direct the audience to the argument which he is making. For example, he seems to be aware of two versions of Romans 6:5. When he is speaking about the possibility of fleshly resurrection, he uses the verb *consati sumus* (we were sown), which may heighten the sense of expectation which he believes flows from baptism. Conversely, when he is speaking about the finality of the death to sin which believers accept in baptism, he gives *consepulti sumus* (we were buried). We have also seen him omit from Romans 6:6 in *On Modesty* any reference to the cancellation of the body of transgression, which he includes in *On the Resurrection*. This is perhaps because, if he had included it, the very concept of transgression itself may be called into question, which would have undone his argument for moral propriety. In these two examples, we note how Tertullian shapes Paul to suit his argument.

Secondly, these deliberate emendations may also show us Tertullian's assessment that Paul's own wording is too risky for him to use: the unamended texts distract his audience from the argument that he is making, a situation which can be easily managed by excising the offending clauses. However, we should also take note that Tertullian sustains the plain reading of our passage, and largely so because the text as he presents it makes the argument that he wishes to make without resorting to allegory, of which as a rule he makes sparing use.

Thirdly, if Tertullian translated Paul from Greek into Latin for his treatises, he is responsible for the exceptional Christian vocabulary which appears therein. Some of these choices appear to be made

⁴⁷⁹ *Pud.* 17; Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 103; *CCSL* 2:1315.

because of his knowledge of the liturgy or law. For example, we saw him translate βαπτίζειν in Romans 6:4 as *tinguere*, perhaps to soften the imagery when speaking of how baptism works on the body as the object of resurrection.⁴⁸⁰ Legal overtones in the translation are possibly detected in a choice such as *evacuetur* for “nullify” or “destroy” in Romans 6:6, and *delinquentia* for “sin” everywhere. These translation choices may reflect his deposits of knowledge. It is also possible that these choices are designed to mark out the New Prophecy even by the Christian vocabulary its adherents use among themselves.

4.5 Conclusion: Moral Regeneration in Tertullian?

Returning now to our question about the moral regeneration of believers, we make several findings based on Tertullian’s two citations from Romans 6:1-14. Firstly, the two citations show us that our passage is Tertullian’s Pauline basis for the conversion required of Christians according to the New Prophecy. He does this in part by taking every opportunity to heighten the sense in which the baptized have full moral responsibility for their actions, whether it is by retaining the personal pronoun when he takes the imperative in his citation of Romans 6:11 or by presenting sin in evocative terms as abandonment of the Lord. Thus, any change which believers experience in their moral life will be completely self-directed.

Secondly, the Apostle is therefore Tertullian’s strong witness to the unchanged nature of believers’ moral agency. As is evident from the experience of the Church at Carthage and the set of pastoral problems it presents, the baptized are still as capable of sinning and not sinning as before. In the face of no substantial change in the baptized, Paul’s urging becomes even more insistent.

Tertullian’s Apostle depicts the cessation of wrongdoing as a “death” in order to show how stark the contrast is between the old and new. The old and new self are as radically different from one another as the death and resurrection of Christ are (cf. Rom 6:4-5): believers cannot stray into sin, not only because grave sins such as those against *pudicitia* cannot be remitted by the Church, but also because they have ended their former lives in baptism and are now on course for fleshly resurrection. Thus, we see close correspondence between Tertullian and the voluntarism of the perspectival view of ethical renewal, with baptism as a threshold through which believers pass to die to their old life and take on the new.

⁴⁸⁰ Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, 7.

Thirdly, this strong emphasis on personal responsibility comes from the New Prophecy: the Paraclete has condemned pastoral provisions which, in his view, effectively encourage sin,⁴⁸¹ and revealed this to a group which is highly sensitive to moral questions because they relate to holiness. Tertullian's reading of Paul is therefore entirely shaped by the morality of the movement, possibly even so far as to help determine the Latin vocabulary which he adopts in translating his texts. Perhaps ironically, the Spirit's oracles in the New Prophets are themselves the divine assistance which moves the baptized towards right moral action. These do not constitute a substantial change in individuals; instead, Tertullian regards them as a spiritual power working in the Church precisely to facilitate the obedience which is required of the baptized, not by indwelling, but by inculcating.

Fourthly, Tertullian is rather reluctant to say that believers find themselves "under sin" in any way except in the form of condemnation for past wrongdoing. We have seen that he omits crucial parts of Romans 6:6, and the entirety of Romans 6:7 and 6:14, which together may have shaped his hamartiology. Instead, the baptized are finished with wrongdoing not because they are now able to use ethical faculties formerly inhibited, but because they continue to abstain from sin in accordance with their formal renunciation of it in baptism. It is quite likely that Tertullian finds the notion of a rule by sin unhelpful or obfuscating when he addresses the mores of the baptized; it is even possible that he altogether disagrees with the Apostle on this point. Hence, Tertullian's readings of our passage allow us to conclude that he does not envisage new moral conditions for the baptized. Indeed, evidence to the contrary abounds: the baptized are to produce upright conduct under the same conditions under which they were prior to initiation.

⁴⁸¹ *Pud.* 21.

CHAPTER FIVE: ORIGEN'S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

5.1 Introduction to Origen

At long last we arrive at Origen, the last of our early readers in our scope, although the first of them who routinely explores symbolic readings of Scripture. By attending to the symbolic meaning of “an expression or narration designated to signify things different (and more sublime) from its literal purport,”⁴⁸² he may present the full range of possible meanings of a text. From the beginning of his writing career, he possesses an understanding of Scripture as more than the words of the sacred page, which otherwise may lead to denials of Christ and adoption of false doctrines:

The reason, in all the cases mentioned [of readings by Jews and ‘heretics’], for the false beliefs and impious or ignorant assertions about God appears to be nothing else than Scripture not being understood according to its spiritual sense, but taken as regarding the bare letter ... And to whom of those skilled in investigating words would the epistles of the Apostles seem to be plain and easily understood, since there are in them thousands of passages providing, as if through a lattice, a narrow opening to the greatest and deepest thoughts?⁴⁸³

If a person, then, is to have the fullness of right faith, they must arrive at the whole meaning of Scripture, which is like a body in its fleshly and spiritual parts: “Just as the human being consists of body and soul and spirit, in the same way so also does Scripture, arranged by God to be given for the salvation of human beings.”⁴⁸⁴ It is in this task that he uncovers the significance of historical passages for the salvation of his audience:

He rarely settled solely for an interpretation [according to historical narrative], since the goal of the interpreter was to discover how Scripture’s historical narratives, that on their surface often appeared to contain pointless details, symbolically conveyed teachings that were edifying or useful for “humanity’s salvation.”⁴⁸⁵

He acquired this technique while as a student, teacher, and catechist in Alexandria,⁴⁸⁶ a place known for its indebtedness to Philonic exegesis. Origen’s indebtedness to Philo takes the form of commitment to the symbolic reading of Scripture, especially as a way of dealing with the

⁴⁸² Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy and History of Eschatology*, VC 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 26.

⁴⁸³ *Princ.* 4.2.2-3; John Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2 vols., vol. 2, OECT (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 489, 95.

⁴⁸⁴ *Princ.* 4.2.4; *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 499.

⁴⁸⁵ Peter W. Martens, “Origen Against History? Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory,” in *Heaven on Earth? Theological Interpretation in Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, DMT (Somerset: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 63.

⁴⁸⁶ Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, CTC (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 62.

anthropomorphic behaviour of God: “Not only hands, shoulders, and the like, but also anger, punishment and threats are applied to the divinity. All of these expressions, both Philo and Origen maintained, have a didactic purpose and must not be taken at face value, but rather must be interpreted allegorically.”⁴⁸⁷ This proved useful to Origen also in dealing with opponents whose exegesis he regarded as defective. An example of this sharp critique is found in *Homily 5* on Psalm 36 (37). Here he condemns the “heretics” for having fashioned for themselves “another kind of god above God the Creator,” because they can only see the plain meaning of the law⁴⁸⁸ while ignoring the symbolic meaning which Philo discovered before them.⁴⁸⁹

They fabricate stories in opposition to God the Creator of all things, because understanding the law only in a literal way and ignoring the fact that it is spiritual, they are deceived in their own thoughts ... What should I “pass by”? If I pass by the literal level, if I pass beyond the surface of the story and I reach the spiritual meaning – for the law is spiritual – if I explain in terms of the spiritual meaning all those things in which they err and deceive themselves, their impious and wicked dogmas will no longer exist.⁴⁹⁰

Origen never criticises the Platonising Philo, and thus seems to regard himself as in the same tradition.⁴⁹¹ Further, his exegetical engagement with Scripture deepens as a homilist after he leaves Egypt⁴⁹² and is ordained presbyter in Caesarea⁴⁹³ against the will of the Alexandrian bishop, Demetrius.⁴⁹⁴ However, once a presbyter in Caesarea from about 232 onwards,⁴⁹⁵ he preaches liturgically through much of the Hebrew Bible and almost every book of the New Testament and he is exceedingly industrious in producing scholarly treatises and exegetical commentaries. In all this, he remains keenly aware of the need to form his audience in the right disposition towards Scripture, especially its symbolic reading: “Spiritual interpretation is for one who is able to show of what heavenly realities the Jews according to the flesh serve the pattern and shadow, and of what good things to come the law has a shadow.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁸⁷ Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Philo as Origen’s Declared Model: Allegorical and Historical Exegesis of Scripture,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 7 (2012): 6.

⁴⁸⁸ Ramelli, “Philo as Origen’s Declared Model,” 16.

⁴⁸⁹ *Mos.* 2.13, 34; John W. Martens, *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law*, SPhAMA 2 (Boston: Brill, 2003), 98.

⁴⁹⁰ *Hom.Ps.36* 5.5; Michael Heintz, *The Pedagogy of the Soul: Origen’s Homilies on the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 212.

⁴⁹¹ Heine, *Origen*, 31.

⁴⁹² *Eccl.Hist.* 6.19.

⁴⁹³ *Eccl.Hist.* 6.5.

⁴⁹⁴ *Eccl.Hist.* 6.8.

⁴⁹⁵ Heine, *Origen*, 1.

⁴⁹⁶ *Princ.* 4.2.6; Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 505.

Yet, for the creativity in bringing Philonic exegesis to the New Testament in pursuit of incontrovertible truth contained in Scripture, Origen did encounter opposition during his lifetime. He is often in contact with his opponents' positions, at least indirectly. With the exception of *Against Celsus*, Origen does not write apologies like Tertullian or possibly even Clement of Alexandria before him. He does, however, engage opponents in the course of his own work on Scripture. There is no doubt that one source of his knowledge of "heretics"⁴⁹⁷ was the Valentinian adherent whom he converted at Alexandria, Ambrose by name, who became his patron.⁴⁹⁸ Origen finds his symbolic readings opposed by the "triumvirate" of Valentinus, Basilides, and Marcion,⁴⁹⁹ the "friends of the letter":

I too shall begin to discuss the words of the ancients and to seek in them a spiritual meaning ... but immediately the friends of the letter will stir up malicious charges against me and will lie in ambush for me. They will contrive hostilities immediately and persecutions, denying that the truth can stand except upon earth.⁵⁰⁰

As has been seen, Origen's pursuit of the full meaning of Scripture is made in a dynamic and volatile exegetical environment. However much rebuke he receives from opponents, the direction of critique also goes the other way. Often enough, Origen's works reveal his concern for addressing a perceived misuse of Scripture. Indeed, as we shall now see, Origen wrote his *Commentary* to address the perceived threat presented by his opponents' readings.⁵⁰¹

5.2 Introduction to the *Commentary on Romans*

Origen's *Commentary on Romans* is the first commentary on Romans in Christian history and one of the last of Origen's works, written about 246 in Caesarea.⁵⁰² Although it was abridged by about half by Rufinus in the Latin translation,⁵⁰³ the *Commentary* is the only one of Origen's exegetical works

⁴⁹⁷ For example, see *Comm.Rom.* pref.1; Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Books 1-5*, FC 103 (Washington, DC: CUA, 2001), 53.

⁴⁹⁸ Joseph T. Lienhard, *Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke*, FC 94 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1996), xvii.

⁴⁹⁹ Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, OECS (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 111.

⁵⁰⁰ *Hom.Gen.* 13.3; Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FC 71 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1982), 189.

⁵⁰¹ *Comm.Rom.* pref.1.

⁵⁰² Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 1.

⁵⁰³ "I am supposed to abridge this entire fifteen-volume work, a Greek text which has reached the length of some forty thousand lines or more, and, if possible, compress it to half the space." *Orig.Comm.Rom.* 2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 52. This perhaps also evidences Rufinus' more "interventionist" approach to translation. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, 35.

which has come down to us in its entirety.⁵⁰⁴ This rich trove will provide us with a range of meanings for almost the entirety of Romans 6:1-14. The only text missing from our passage in the *Commentary* is Romans 6:7, which none of our early readers directly cites.⁵⁰⁵ The exegetical material includes both his treatment of the passage in the *Commentary* at 5.7-6.1, and a number of other citations found elsewhere in the *Commentary* which engage Romans 6:4-6 and 10-12. With so much material available to us, we have the opportunity to be selective in our analysis to pursue our questions concerning post-baptismal sin and moral regeneration.

Origen singles out Romans for special attention because it is the most difficult of all of Paul's letters to understand.⁵⁰⁶ Not only does the Apostle adopt a "lofty and eminent"⁵⁰⁷ expression in Romans relative to his other letters, he also presents a letter which generates two related difficulties among Origen's contemporaries:

First, because [Paul] makes use of expressions which sometimes are confused and insufficiently explicit. Second, because he stirs up very many questions in the letter and the heretics, especially propping themselves up on these, are accustomed to add that the cause of each person's actions is not to be attributed to one's own purpose but to different kinds of natures.⁵⁰⁸

Initially, he admits that Paul's letter itself contains texts in need of clarification. That they are "confused and insufficiently explicit" means that other, clearer parts of Scripture will need to be employed in order to arrive at the Apostle's meaning. Still further, it proves intolerable for Origen that these ambiguities and other questions in Romans are being exploited by "heretics" to attribute responsibility for moral action not to a person's exercise of their free will but simply to their nature: "From a handful of words from this letter they attempt to subvert the meaning of the whole of Scripture, which teaches that God has given humanity freedom of will."⁵⁰⁹ The determinist hermeneutic Origen observes in the opponents' scriptural readings attributes responsibility for personal conduct to a person's nature rather than to oneself: "Anyone who seeks to blame an external force destroys the freedom of the human will by reducing it to circumstances when there is no force acting on a person but their own will – a rare occurrence."⁵¹⁰ Although the question of

⁵⁰⁴ Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 1.

⁵⁰⁵ There are two possible citations of Romans 6:7, both of which are in the *Commentary on Romans: Comm.Rom.* 6.1.6 on Romans 6:12 and *Comm.Rom.* 6.6.7 on Rom 6:23. We analyse these later (see 5.10 below).

⁵⁰⁶ *Comm.Rom.* pref.1, 3.

⁵⁰⁷ *Comm.Rom.* pref.6; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 56.

⁵⁰⁸ *Comm.Rom.* pref.1; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 53.

⁵⁰⁹ *Comm.Rom.* pref.1; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 53.

⁵¹⁰ Matthew Knell, *Sin, Grace, and Free Will: A Historical Survey of Christian Thought*, vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers to Augustine (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2017), 78.

whether the “heretics” in fact claimed to be “saved by nature”⁵¹¹ has been further investigated and nuanced,⁵¹² their position as Origen has received it nonetheless witnesses to a doctrine of immutable natures.

From early on in his writing career and consistently thereafter, Origen adopts the position that personal responsibility for moral action proceeds from the creaturely faculty of free will, the exercise of which forms the basis for personal judgement. When he articulates his position on free will in full, as in *On First Principles*, he derives his position from both observation and Scripture. In observation, he finds that human beings as “rational” creatures move by themselves in pursuit of their desires: they are “able to judge and discern between the natural movements, disapproving of and rejecting some and approving of and accepting others.”⁵¹³ This means that the purpose of free will is not the arbitrary pursuit of the desires of “nature,” but rather the reasoned choice of what is praiseworthy: “By the judgement of this reason the movements of human beings may be directed and governed towards a commendable life.”⁵¹⁴

Origen’s observation of nature is confirmed by Scripture because it recounts commandments that the prophets and the Saviour gave. More than witnessing to the existence of free will in human creation, however, the commandments recounted in Scripture form the basis for personal judgement by God: “When [the Saviour gives commandments], what else does he indicate but that it is in our power to observe what is commanded, and that for this reason we are rightly rendered liable for judgement if we transgress that which we are certainly able to keep?”⁵¹⁵ Nevertheless, when he turns to consider the evidence from Paul for his doctrine of free will, he only presents Romans 2:4-10 in *On First Principles*:

Let us see how the Apostle Paul also addresses us as having power over our will and as having within ourselves the causes either of our salvation or destruction: “... God ... will render to everyone according to their works: to those who, by patience in doing good, seek for glory and honour and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those who are factious and obey not the truth, but obey iniquity, wrath and anger” (Rom 2:6-8).⁵¹⁶

This text makes explicit the connection he sees between moral conduct and personal judgement. Thomas Scheck rightly notes the relationship between moral freedom and personal judgment: “For Origen, the freedom of creatures and the corresponding merit and demerit of works is an inference

⁵¹¹ Exc. 56.3; Layton and Brakke, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 520.

⁵¹² See for example, Jean-Daniel Dubois, “Once Again, the Valentinian Expression ‘Saved by Nature,’” in *Valentinianism: New Studies*, ed. Einar Thomassen and Christoph Marksches, NHMS 96 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁵¹³ *Princ.* 3.1.3; Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 289.

⁵¹⁴ *Princ.* 3.1.3; Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 289.

⁵¹⁵ *Princ.* 3.1.6; Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 299.

⁵¹⁶ *Princ.* 3.1.6; Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2, 301.

from the doctrine of judgement. In order for God's judgement to be just, it must be exercised on responsible creatures."⁵¹⁷ In Origen's assessment of their position, the "heretics" repudiate the connection between conduct and judgement and, thus, in his view, misread the Apostle. When he addresses the same text in the *Commentary*, Romans 2:6, he makes special mention of "heretics" who ignore this vital text: "In the first place let the heretics who claim that the natures of human souls are either good or evil be shut out. Let them hear that God pays back to each one not on account of their nature but on account of his works."⁵¹⁸

It has become clear that Origen's stated purpose in writing the *Commentary* is to bring clarity to Paul's "more perfect" letter⁵¹⁹ and to deprive the opponents of the ambiguities of which they are taking advantage. In so doing, he will also avail himself of opportunities to refute them and to demonstrate his doctrine of moral freedom and personal responsibility. Origen's principal concern is to provide a careful exposition of each verse of Romans and thus to deprive the opponents of the ambiguities in the text. It also seems that the *Commentary* fills out the Pauline evidence for his position which was so briefly laid out in *On First Principles* 3.1.6. However, Origen's opposition to the determinist hermeneutic of the "heretics" in effect generates a voluntarist one. In order to face down the moral determinism of the "heretics", Origen accentuates personal responsibility in his readings of Romans. Hence, Origen's *Commentary* is more likely to offer readings of Romans which advance responsible use of free will and thus to attribute personal reform largely to the individual themselves; this attribution tends strongly towards the perspectival accounts of ethical renewal that we are encountering.

We find an additional key to Origen's approach to Romans in his comments on the confluence of believers with Christ (Rom 14:7-9). He notes the regard that believers must have for the will of God and for how they are to live and die: "For no one provides a pattern of death for himself, but he takes it up from Christ, who alone has died to sin, so that he too, by imitation of him, can become estranged from sin and dead to it."⁵²⁰ We may briefly note at this point that this comment witnesses to Origen's pessimism concerning believers' acquaintance with sin: since it is Christ "who alone died to sin," we may conclude that others who have entered into his death have not died to sin to the extent that they are completely estranged from it. Hence, we have some support here for our preliminary assessment, that Origen's prevailing concern for freedom of the will against the

⁵¹⁷ Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 21.

⁵¹⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 2.4.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 111.

⁵¹⁹ *Comm.Rom.* pref.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 53.

⁵²⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Books 6-10*, FC 104 (Washington, DC: CUA, 2002), 239.

determinism of the “heretics” guides him in the *Commentary* towards perspectival accounts of renewal. Significantly also, he tells us at this point that the premises for this reading of Romans 14:7-9 reach back to our passage, and from there through the entire letter:

In the exposition of this epistle, we have repeatedly spoken about what it means to live in Christ and what it means to die in Christ. We did this especially in that passage where we attempted to explain the Apostle’s words in which he says, “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with him” (Rom 6:8).⁵²¹

Origen is not saying that Romans 6:8 is the heart of the letter or even its principal point. He would not be so reductionist as that. He is, however, reflecting here on how his writing of the *Commentary* is unfolding up to this point: he finds himself regularly returning to the notion of living and dying in Christ. It is this notion which he specially expounds in his comments on Romans 6:8. Thus, in addition to the apologetic quality of his writing and, promoting voluntarism against the threat of moral determinism of the “heretics”, the *Commentary* also lays out in many places what “life” and “death” look like for those in Christ. This means that we have seen two hermeneutical keys Origen adopts for reading Romans: the apology for voluntarism against the threat presented by the opponents’ determinism and the frequent exposition of what living and dying means for those in Christ. At this point, we may say that the two keys are not so unrelated from one another. If Paul in Romans witnesses to personal responsibility and free will, then the consequent questions are about how a person who has formally died to sin conceives of their daily life. Once again, this means we expect to see much in the way of perspectival accounts of moral regeneration in Origen’s reading of Paul. Similarly, it may mean that those instances in which he does offer a substantial view of moral regeneration more clearly stand out in relief from the rest of the material.

Before we begin, a brief note on the text of Romans as it appears in the *Commentary* is in order. Its translator, Rufinus of Aquileia, used an Old Latin version of Romans for the *lemmata* but made fresh translations from the Greek in the body of Origen’s text.⁵²² This means that we need not concern ourselves with the relative accuracy of the *lemmata*, because these do not belong to Origen but to Rufinus. We shall concern ourselves primarily with the biblical text which Rufinus freshly translated within Origen’s own text.

⁵²¹ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 238-39.

⁵²² Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 15.

5.3 *Commentary on Romans 4.12.5*

We have a direct citation from our passage in Book Four when Origen is commenting on Romans 5:10-11. He makes a citation from Romans 6:10 serve as a proof-text in order to demonstrate the universal nature of God's work of reconciliation and salvation in Christ. Thus, Origen argues against the position of Marcion and Valentinus, who he reports regard some part of humanity as inherently hostile towards God:

When [the Apostle] says, "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God" (Rom 5:10), he plainly shows that there is no substance which, in accordance with Marcion's or Valentinus' definition, is naturally hostile to God. Otherwise, if it were hostile by nature and not by its will, it would assuredly not receive reconciliation.⁵²³

For Origen, Paul exposes the incoherence of the opponents' position. God's universal reconciliation with his enemies demonstrates that it is impossible that some part of humanity is naturally hostile towards God. By "substance" here, Origen appears to refer to either aspect of human nature which Marcion and Valentinus reject. Elsewhere he names Marcion as the one who, "by different kinds of fictional constructions, introduce the concept of different kinds of natures of souls."⁵²⁴ For Origen, Paul himself corrects Marcion's error: "It is revealed that each person must be judged not by the privilege of possessing a certain nature, but by their own thoughts, accused or defended by the testimony of their own conscience."⁵²⁵ He also names Valentinus and Basilides⁵²⁶ as teachers of the doctrine that "there is a nature of souls that would always be saved and never perish, and another that would always perish and never be saved."⁵²⁷ Therefore, in this excerpt, "substance" means one kind of soul according to Marcion and the fleshly part of human nature according to Valentinus. Thus, it appears that Origen is refuting two different doctrines about the divisions within humanity with the same Pauline text.

The earlier hostility towards God to which Paul witnesses in Romans 5:10-11 requires explanation. Origen's voluntarist hermeneutic leads him to affirm that the basis of this hostility is bad action:

⁵²³ *Comm.Rom. 4.12.1*; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 299.

⁵²⁴ *Comm.Rom. 2.10.2*; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 135.

⁵²⁵ *Comm.Rom. 2.10.2*; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 135.

⁵²⁶ Origen critiques Basilides' reading of the text, "I was once alive apart from the law" (Rom 7:9), as referring to the transmigration of souls, a position which readily corresponds with the doctrine of the natural hostility to God of one part of humanity and which is mentioned in the excerpt from Book Four that we are analyzing: "Now Basilides, failing to observe that these things ought to be understood of natural law, drags the Apostle's discourse down into senseless and godless fables and attempts to build out of this utterance of the Apostle the doctrine called μετενσωμάτωσις, i.e., that souls are transferred into one body after another." *Comm.Rom. 5.1.27*; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 318-19.

⁵²⁷ *Comm.Rom. 8.11.2*; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 176.

When some enemy becomes a friend, it is certain that so long as they does the works which God does not love, they are is God's enemy. And each person becomes as bad and as detestable an enemy of God as much as they multiplies deeds which merit enmity. So then there are certain degrees and grades, distinguished according to the quality and quantity of the sins committed among those who are God's enemies.⁵²⁸

Thus, Origen inserts a distinction: Marcion and Valentinus are correct insofar as there are divisions in humanity, but incorrect insofar as they regard human nature as the basis for them rather than the exercise of the will. He does not see Paul indiscriminately referring here to all humanity. The divisions within humanity are fluid inasmuch as they are formed on the basis of the righteousness of personal conduct. Thus, Origen exclusively takes the first-person forms of Romans 5:10-11 just as Marcion and Valentinus would have done, although on a different basis. "We were reconciled" (Rom 5:10) does not refer to that part of humanity which is naturally amenable to God, but only to believers, who have professed faith and who have begun to exercise the will in order to bring forth right conduct: "It is certain that those who have been reconciled through the death of his Son are deemed to be friends. Thus someone is a friend in the way Moses was called a friend of God, and also those to whom the Saviour said, 'No longer do I call you slaves but friends.'"⁵²⁹

Origen's argument against Marcion and Valentinus, that Paul teaches that hostility towards God is on the basis of conduct rather than on the basis of nature, runs through the rest of his comments on Romans 5:10-11 and includes a direct citation from Romans 6:10. After casting doubt on the salvation of disbelievers on the basis of their perseverance in bad acts which cause enmity with God,⁵³⁰ he proceeds to reflect on Ephesians 2:11-18 and the ongoing assistance which Christ offers to believers who strive to produce upright conduct: "It seems to me that [Christ] breaks down the [hostility] in those who are still carrying on the struggle against sin and who fight against it with all their might; but he puts it to death in those who no longer admit any sin whatsoever, but all their members are entirely dead to sin."⁵³¹ It is significant for our purposes that Christ assists believers by breaking down the hostility towards God rather than in avoiding the bad acts which generate it. He explains this assistance by means of Paul's balanced phrase in Romans 6:10, as he distinguishes between reconciliation and salvation:

His death inflicted death to the hostility which was between us and God. This was the beginning of reconciliation. His resurrection and life, however, conferred salvation to believers, as the Apostle says elsewhere about Christ, "For in that which he died, he died to sin once and for all; but what he lives he lives to God" (*Quod enim mortuus est*

⁵²⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.1; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 299.

⁵²⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 299.

⁵³⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.3.

⁵³¹ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 301.

*peccato mortuus est semel, quod autem vivit vivit Deo, Rom 6:10).*⁵³²

Origen's text readily conforms to that of Paul. He sees a rewording of Romans 5:10 in Romans 6:10 insofar as Paul's distinction between the effects of Christ's death and resurrection are different. Christ's death brings an end to hostility because it is a death to the acts which generate it. However, the effects of Christ's "resurrection and life" cannot be as easily derived from Romans 6:10 as those of his death. Indeed, Origen appears to compensate for this unevenness in the texts, which he brings together, by reflecting on the present moral experience of believers: "He did this to show that boasting about the knowledge of God and the reformation of our lives and the correction of our errors is granted to us not only in the future but even in the present."⁵³³ He advances his description of the present life as "more virtuous and free from faults".⁵³⁴ Thus, after first having been reconciled to God by the death of Christ, believers participate in the "resurrection and life" of Christ by their work of moral reform.

For our purposes, this means that Romans 6:10 as it appears here in the *Commentary* on Romans 5:10-11 witnesses to the moral responsibility which believers have. After Christ's death has assisted them by removing the former hostility which they had towards God on account of their bad acts, believers now appear to be free and responsible to conduct themselves in such a way as to honour the gift of reconciliation which they have received:

Where such a reconciliation has occurred, where not the word of a suppliant but the blood of a mediator has removed the hostilities between God and men, how great is the disgrace for us to return again to the state of hostility and do the things which he hates, the one whom no one, other than the shedding of his holy blood, reconciled for us.⁵³⁵

Thus, in their moral conduct, believers receive from God a new beginning, which they enact by their free decision. In this way, Origen shows that reconciled humanity cannot be saved in spite of itself, as the opponents held, but precisely through it, and more precisely, through the ongoing, responsible exercise of free will.

5.4 *Commentary on Romans 5.1.37*

We see Romans 6:12 used early in Book Five in order to exhort believers to avoid wrongdoing and thus evade falling into death's dominion. "Death" in Romans 5:14 is not common death but the

⁵³² *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 301; SC 539:340.

⁵³³ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 302.

⁵³⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 302.

⁵³⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 300.

result of Adam's sin: "It entered, [the Apostle] says, at that time when the first man transgressed. He has also told us how it entered. He says, 'through sin'."⁵³⁶ From Paul's notion of death's "entry" into the human experience, Origen develops a pattern of behaviour for "death" in order to account for what believers observe and experience. He identifies aspects of a tyrant's behaviour in the death which "exercised dominion from Adam to Moses":⁵³⁷

The Apostle is describing death as if the hostile entrance of some tyrant who wanted to invade the dominions of a rightful king ... Then he would attempt to turn the hearts of everyone in the kingdom to himself and, for the most part, he would succeed. In this way he would lay claim to a kingdom not his own.⁵³⁸

Origen goes on from this to identify a division in humanity on the basis of personal conduct. Those who were faithful to the Mosaic law and who offered the sacrifices he ordered evaded death's dominion:

By an order of the king, first of all he instituted sacrifices, by means of which, when they are offered according to certain formalities, he could say, 'and their sin shall be forgiven them' (cf. Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35). So it was only then that a certain part of mankind began to be liberated from the kingdom of sin and death.⁵³⁹

Further on from this, Origen notes that this tyrant is defeated by the resurrection of Christ.⁵⁴⁰

However, a question arises: how should Origen account for the current behaviour of this tyrant who is defeated but not destroyed? The earlier division in humanity between those who received forgiveness of sins through the old sacrifices and those who did not persists in Christ. Recalling that "death" in Romans 5:14 is not common death but death due to sin, it seems to Origen that death exploits the division in humanity between those who perform good and bad acts. In this way, death does not exercise dominion over all humanity, but only over those willing individuals who stray from God. This leads him to cite Romans 6:12 as a proof-text in order to warn believers of the dangers of maleficence:

We see him even now, I do not say reigning so much as robbing. Having been expelled from his kingdom, we see him going around through deserts and wastelands seeking to gather to himself a band of unbelievers. That is why the Apostle cries out, "Therefore do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies any longer, to make you obey its desires" (*Non ergo iam regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore ad oboediendum*

⁵³⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.30; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 321.

⁵³⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.30; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 321.

⁵³⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.31; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 321.

⁵³⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.31; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 321.

⁵⁴⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.37; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 325.

desideriis eius, Rom 6:12).⁵⁴¹

Origen's text corresponds well with that of Paul. The two texts intersect on the language of "reigning" of an evil power: "death" in Romans 5:14 and "sin" in Romans 6:12. However, Origen does not see a difference between them: the tyrant who universally "reigned from Adam to Moses" is the same one who now reigns over a "band of unbelievers". Of interest to us is that death now engages "disbelievers". It is they who are gathered under death's dominion. We have seen earlier that Origen believes that the dominion of death is expanded by malefaction. Thus, Origen here identifies malefaction with unbelief and right conduct with belief. This means that Origen's Apostle now warns believers that, by wrongdoing, they may fall back into the same dominion as unbelievers and thus fail to win Christ's resurrection for themselves.

Therefore, this citation displays the perspectival view of ethical renewal. Origen notes the initial intervention by God in Christ's death and resurrection in order to rescue believers from the "dominion of death". In this, believers are the fulfilment of the Israelites who were distinguished from the rest of humanity by seeking and obtaining forgiveness for their past sins. Now that Christ has delivered them from the dominion of death, they have the responsibility to continue to evade it by refraining from wrongdoing. In this way, the initial intervention allows believers freely to form their own allegiance, either with death or with the living Christ. Thus, the Apostle's "cry" serves to highlight the importance of their refraining from wrongdoing.

5.5 Commentary on Romans 5.6.6-7

Just before his extensive treatment of our passage, Origen provides direct citations from Romans 6:12-13 in order to explore what Paul means by the "superabundance" of grace (Rom 5:20). By means of these two verses, Origen shows how opposition to sin by grace means that the practice of misdeeds is incompatible with a life of faith. To do this, he considers the interior life of individuals as the place where the abundance of sin and superabundance of grace might be seen. Thus, he presents sin and grace as two kingdoms and each individual as having the choice of which kingdom they will allow to inhabit them:

If in fact [the Apostle] wants to show that there are two kingdoms in persons – one by which sin exercised dominion in death, the other by which grace would reign through righteousness in life – then it is grace which ejected and expelled sin from its own kingdom, that is, from our members, since death necessarily was equally expelled with

⁵⁴¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.37; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 325; SC 539:396.

it.⁵⁴²

For Origen, the likeness of sin or grace to a kingdom is seen in the power which either one has to bring on its desired end in persons: for sin, it is their death; for grace, it is their righteousness in life. The power of sin or grace to rule persons to the exclusion of the other and wrought by its indwelling them leads Origen to the language of “dominion” in Romans 6:12 and “weapons” in Romans 6:13:

Not until then would grace lay claim to a kingdom for itself in us through righteousness; and where death had been, eternal life took up residence. This is what the Apostle also says elsewhere, “Therefore, do not let sin reign any longer in your mortal bodies” (*Non ergo iam regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore*, Rom 6:12); and again in another passage, “For just as you presented your members as instruments of wickedness to sin, so now present your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (*Sicut enim exhibite membra vestra arma iniquitatis peccato ita nunc exhibite membra vestra arma iustitiae Deo*, Rom 6:13).⁵⁴³

It should also be noted that Origen does not seem to remember that the second text, which he produces, follows the first. His introduction to Romans 6:13, “and again in another passage”, suggests a memory working at pace. However, in the main, Origen’s text of Romans 6:12-13 corresponds well with that of Paul. Origen’s text of Romans 6:12 omits the terminating phrase, “to make you obey its desires”. As we shall see, it is more often the case that he leaves it out, which causes us no difficulty here. If there is theological significance in the omission, it would lie in Origen’s voluntarism: the terminating phrase that is included here might obscure the principal point which arises from his anti-determinist hermeneutic, that persons are free and responsible for their actions.⁵⁴⁴ Such an inference would be counterbalanced by evidence of Origen’s close reflection on the terminating phrase which is found later in the *Commentary* (see 6.1 below). Origen’s text of Romans 6:13 omits “yourselves to God as those living from the dead” (*vos Deo tamquam ex mortuis viventes*). Again, Origen’s voluntarist hermeneutic may be responsible for this, insofar as his fast-working memory does not recall that the Apostle urges the reader to consider the resurrection as the motivation for upright conduct.

For our purposes, Origen uses Romans 6:12-13 in order to describe how grace initially works to expel sin and thus how it bestows responsibility on believers for their further resistance to it. This accords well with the perspectival view of ethical renewal. People receive agency to dispense with sin only once they enter into righteousness: “It is grace which ejected and expelled sin from its own kingdom, that is, from our members ... Not until then would grace lay claim to a kingdom for itself in us

⁵⁴² *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.6; *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 347-48.

⁵⁴³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.6; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 347-48; SC 539:450.

⁵⁴⁴ *Comm.Rom.* pref.1.

through righteousness."⁵⁴⁵ Thus, there does not seem to be any continued working by God in order to secure the righteous conduct which he expects of believers.

Origen continues with his reading of Romans 5:20-21 by considering who the originators of sin and grace are. Since Paul himself identifies the originator of righteousness as Jesus Christ (Rom 5:21), Origen lists the ways in which he is known: "Christ is indeed one in essence but may be designated in many ways according to his virtues and operations (for example he is understood to be grace itself, as well as righteousness, peace, life, truth, the Word)."⁵⁴⁶ However, in order to discover the corresponding originator of sin, Origen relies on a symbolic reading of three texts, namely, 1 Corinthians 15:26, Ezekiel 28:19, and Romans 6:12:

Perhaps also the devil can himself be understood by various designations. For he should be thought of as the sin which is said to exercise dominion. Also one has to believe that he is that death of which it is said, "For the last enemy, death, will be destroyed" (1 Cor 15:26). Moreover, he is understood to be a desolation according to what has been spoken by the prophet, "You have become a desolation and you will not exist in eternal time" (Ezek 28:19). Furthermore I think that what the Apostle says, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies" (*Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore*, Rom 6:12) could be said even more about the devil. For he is the author of sin and death and desolation, and the author of an invention is logically named after the things he has invented.⁵⁴⁷

Origen's text of the first half of Romans 6:12 appears without variation. The symbolic reading of the first two proof-texts from 1 Corinthians and Ezekiel demonstrate the end of the devil's reign. Thus, Origen witnesses to the devil's annihilation at the end of time. However, the symbolic reading of the third text, Romans 6:12, speaks to the resistance which believers must offer to sin and therefore also to its originator. Therefore, the force of the Apostle's exhortation speaks to believers' responsibility for personal conduct. There is no evidence here that Origen regards believers as now recapacitated so that they may resist sin, or continually engaged by God to produce righteous conduct.

5.6 **Commentary on Romans 5.7 (Rom 6:1-2)**

Origen's defence of voluntarism is seen in his comments on the first verses of our passage. He begins by establishing an initial principle, that a dead person cannot sin: "Those persons in whom grace abounded are dead to sin. Now it is certain that one who is dead is not able to sin; therefore

⁵⁴⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.6; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 348.

⁵⁴⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 348.

⁵⁴⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 348-49; SC 539:452.

one who has died to sin cannot continue in sin.”⁵⁴⁸ It is curious that Origen provides the general principle that the dead do not sin, although he never cites Romans 6:7 in which it is also found. If his text lacked Romans 6:7, it could be argued that he had to establish the principle himself in order to make perfect sense of the incongruity Paul saw of sinning by those who have died to sin. We shall return to the question of Origen’s knowledge of Romans 6:7 later (see 5.9 below). At this point, however, we should interpret Origen’s “cannot continue in sin” to refer to its inadmissibility rather than its complete impossibility: at issue here is the unconscionable introduction of misdeeds into the daily life of one who has formally died to sin. In order to explain what “living to sin” might mean, he explores the converse:

Just as a person is said to live to God who lives in accordance with the will of God, so also one is said to live to sin who lives in accordance with the will of sin. This is what the same Apostle makes known when he says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies to obey its desires” (*Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore ad oboediendum desideriis eius*, Rom 6:12). By this he is showing that to live to sin means to obey sin’s desires.⁵⁴⁹

Origen introduces a direct citation of Romans 6:12 to interpret Romans 6:1-2 on the question of what it means to live and die to sin (cf. Rom 6:2). The citation itself corresponds well with the Vulgate. There does not appear to be sufficient difference between Origen’s *ad oboediendum desideriis eius* and the Vulgate’s *ut oboediatis concupiscentiis eius* to warrant closer examination. Since this is one of the rare occasions on which Origen cited Romans 6:12 with both principal and concluding phrases,⁵⁵⁰ we can be assured that he knew the entire verse, at least by the time he wrote the *Commentary*. The cross-reference to Romans 6:12 facilitates a symbolic reading of “sin” as an agent opposed to God with its own “desires” to be met. The term “desires” of sin may be a Pauline way of naming what Origen calls “impulses” elsewhere.⁵⁵¹ For Origen, however, dying to sin is not simply a matter of personal resolution. The person is compromised by the continual presence of sin in the body, hence why the Apostle exhorts believers not to give it power over them: “The Apostle says, however, that sin has, so to speak, established a throne and a seat of its dominion in our body. For that part of human substance is more familiar to it and [forms] a kind of friendly association with the pleasure of the flesh.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 349.

⁵⁴⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 349; *SC* 539:454.

⁵⁵⁰ cf. εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτῆς (*Or.* 25.1, see 6.2.1 below) and *ad oboediendum ei* (*Hom.Jesu.Nav.* 15.4, see 6.3.5 below).

⁵⁵¹ *Princ.* 3.1.4.

⁵⁵² *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

For our purposes, this means that the body is the site of contest. As Bagby notes, “True spirituality does not preclude bodily existence. It is instead intimately bound up with spiritual progress.”⁵⁵³ A person’s spiritual life is fought for with weapons which affect the body. It also means that dying to sin ultimately proves somewhat ineffective for now, insofar as sin is not expelled entirely but merely subdued: the individual refuses to give the ever-present tyrant sin lordship over them. When a person does submit to sin, however, the consequences are indeed grave: “From this bond of friendship [between the body and sin], while employing the opportunities given to it [the body] by nature’s inducement, by means of a small detour [sin] turns the order of nature over the precipice of death.”⁵⁵⁴ Hence, Origen’s readers “have no recourse to moral complacency.”⁵⁵⁵ He clarifies that sin attaches itself to the natural desires for “food and drink which need to be kept within certain limits of satisfaction.”⁵⁵⁶ It is those who do not keep to nature’s proportions who serve sin.

He gives two examples. A person who is enticed by sin to exceed the natural limits of the body for food and drink no longer desires nourishment but the misdeeds of “excess and drunkenness.”⁵⁵⁷ Another person may serve sin by going outside the law to indulge the natural desires of the body for sexual union. In this, we note the alliance of the body with sinful desire, which is continually present and available to the individual, even one who has “died to sin.” Much then depends on a person’s resistance to sin and obedience to God.

Origen, then, offers a portrait of the one who is dead to sin:

Therefore, suppose someone, admonished by the death of Christ, who died for the ungodly, repents of all these things and he expels the one exercising dominion in their flesh like an extremely wicked king, and estranges themselves to its desires and commands. Then someone will truly be said to have died to sin through the death of Christ.⁵⁵⁸

Of interest to us is an apparent contradiction in the situation of sin. Only in the previous paragraph of the *Commentary* we read that sin appears to be ever-present to individuals because the Apostle witnesses through Romans 6:12 to its seat in the body. That now contrasts with what we find here, that the individual may “[expel] the one exercising dominion in their flesh.” The language of “expulsion” here may simply fit with the vivid imagery that casts sin as “an extremely wicked king.” If that is the case, then the original point about sin’s permanent indwelling of the body may be

⁵⁵³ Stephen Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), 101.

⁵⁵⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁵⁵⁵ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 73.

⁵⁵⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁵⁵⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁵⁵⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

allowed to stand, such that sin is ever-present even to those who “die” to it. Consequently, Origen’s accent on voluntarism also through Romans 6:1-2 excludes any consideration of substantial moral renewal on this point. However, if the apparent contradiction cannot be resolved by appeal to rhetorical flourish and imagery, then we may have two competing accounts of moral renewal following repentance. On the one hand, there is the renewal brought about by a person’s continuing resistance to ever-present sin, and on the other, there is the renewal brought about by their expulsion of that evil power. Both present us with the perspectival view of ethical renewal: once sin is ejected by the repentant believer, they may look forward to a free obedience to the desires and commands of God. Origen’s reading of Paul therefore suggests that any improvement in someone’s moral experience proceeds from the responsible exercise of free will and from respecting nature’s limits.⁵⁵⁹

Further, the phrase “the one exercising dominion in his flesh” is ready for Origen’s symbolic reading of “sin” as the devil. Of special interest to us is that this symbolic reading of “sin” proceeds from two places in our passage, namely, from his comments on Romans 6:1 and 6:12, the latter of which Origen cites in his comments on 6:1: “This is what the same Apostle makes known when he says, ‘Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies to obey its desires’” (Rom 6:12).⁵⁶⁰ This statement from Origen runs contrary to the opinion of Maximos Constas, who sees mainly plain readings in the *Commentary*: “Though generally categorized as a thoroughgoing allegorist, Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* is a largely *literal* exposition of Paul’s letter from beginning to end ... It is not that Origen’s methods change when he expounds Paul’s letters, but rather that the material is different.”⁵⁶¹ It is therefore not surprising that “sin” here also has a plain reading: “The Apostle says, however, that sin has, so to speak, established a throne and a seat of its dominion in our body. For that part of a person’s substance is more familiar to it and [forms] a kind of friendly association with the pleasure of the flesh.”⁵⁶² Thus, we have plain and symbolic readings of Romans 6:1 available to us: the plain reading says that the individual resists a reality which is present within them, namely sin, and the symbolic reading says that such resistance is offered to a reality which is outside the individual, namely the devil.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ See *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁵⁶⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 349.

⁵⁶¹ Maximos Constas, “The Reception of Saint Paul and Pauline Theology in the Byzantine Period,” in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016), 150.

⁵⁶² *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁵⁶³ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 72.

It is noteworthy at this point that Origen omits reference to baptism as part of the repentance necessary for dying to sin. This may be because baptism requires moral conversion to be received. Benjamin Edsall notes the precondition of moral purity for baptism: “Baptism does not itself confer moral purity, as Origen shows with reference to Simon Magus elsewhere, but rather it presupposes a certain moral purity.”⁵⁶⁴ Instead, repentance follows admonishment, then comes expulsion of “the one exercising dominion in their flesh,” which includes estrangement to its wishes. In this we note how willfully engaged the person is after the initial movement of “admonishment”, which in itself is insufficiently accounted for: it may proceed as grace from God or simply from the individual. In either case, the next steps are certainly self-directed. This is why Origen is so graphic in his description of the recidivist:

Now indeed it does occasionally happen that a person ceases to continue in sin, but after desisting from it, returns again to his own vomit and becomes infinitely wretched so that, after having expelled from himself the kingdom of sin and death and after having received the kingdom of life and righteousness, the person surrenders himself all over again to the tyranny of sin and death. The Apostle calls this the shipwreck of one’s faith.⁵⁶⁵

Here Origen explores what “continuation in sin” may mean for those who died to it (cf. Rom 6:1). It certainly confirms our earlier finding, that he does not envisage a permanent estrangement from sin for believers. The exploration appears to proceed from his knowledge of certain persons who return to their former ways after initiation: “Indeed it does occasionally happen...” Of interest to us is how strongly agency is attributed to the individual: they discontinue to sin and desist from it, even as they expelled the former kingdom, and then they are also the ones who readmit it. Origen’s voluntarism is readily apparent in this set of actions. The only exception to this human agency in the recidivist’s experience is the divine agency in granting the repentant individual the kingdom. They are said to “[receive] the kingdom of life and righteousness,” presumably “from God”. For us, this means that a person’s initial efforts to do away with sin are confirmed and rewarded by God with the bestowal of his kingdom in their mortal life. As Joseph Trigg notes, “[Origen] argues that Paul is not denying human agency but appropriately indicating that God’s share in our salvation far exceeds ours.”⁵⁶⁶ God’s meeting the original efforts of the penitent slightly nuances the pure voluntarism we have otherwise been seeing from Origen. It is perhaps in this light that we can understand Origen’s final point on Romans 6:1-2, that recidivism with contempt is presumption: “We should not expect that we who re-crucify to ourselves the Son of God and hold him up to contempt shall be restored

⁵⁶⁴ Benjamin Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation: History and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019), 159.

⁵⁶⁵ *Comm. Rom.* 5.7.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 351-2.

⁵⁶⁶ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, ECF (London: Routledge, 1998), 29.

again to repentance after falling away. But may the kingdom of righteousness become in us an eternal kingdom.”⁵⁶⁷ The danger of not finding their way back to “repentance” after turning again to sin is too great for a person to consider. Hence, the Apostle warns believers not to continue in sin, even if they have the good intention to have grace abound.

5.7 *Commentary on Romans 5.8 (Rom 6:3-4)*

Origen’s insistence on reading “dying to sin” as conversion of moral life appears again in his comments on Romans 6:3:

If someone has first died to sin, they have necessarily been buried with Christ in baptism. But if the person does not die to sin beforehand, they cannot be buried with Christ. For no one who is still alive is ever buried. But if one is not buried with Christ, they are not validly baptized (*nec legitime baptizatur*).⁵⁶⁸

In his reading of Romans 6:3, baptism is the complement to a person’s dying to sin, as we suggested before with Edsall (see 5.6 above): those who have died to sin are “necessarily” buried with Christ through the ritual of baptism. However, that necessity also works in the converse: a person who has not died to sin must necessarily not present themselves for baptism. In the latter case, such a baptism is unlawful (cf. *legitime*). Participation in the ritual is lawful only for those who have brought an end to the practice of sin. We therefore have a reading of Romans 6:3 which has self-effected death to sin as a precondition for a person’s participation in the baptism ritual. This means that baptism does not of itself effect one’s death to sin; on the contrary, baptism has the power to express it, since it leaves the old self buried in Christ’s old tomb.⁵⁶⁹ The benefit a person may receive from submitting to baptism accrues only to those who have already brought about their own moral conversion. For our purposes, this means that Origen’s reading of Romans 6:3 does not envisage moral regeneration as proceeding from baptism itself. Instead, we see a soundly perspectival account of renewal, which sees ethical renewal coming in proportion to the believer’s effective willingness to obtain it.

We find further development of moral conversion as a precondition for baptism in Origen’s attention to the old and new motif in Romans 6:3-4. It is simply impossible for the old self to

⁵⁶⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 352-53.

⁵⁶⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 354; *SC* 539:466..

⁵⁶⁹ Origen does not diminish the efficacy of baptism in itself. A little later, he notes the Apostle’s wording, “Are you ignorant...?” reflects the likelihood that “not only was the form of the mysteries given to those who were baptized, as we see happening in the present time, but also their effective power and meaning were imparted.” *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.8; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 357.

possess newness of life: “If you are still living to sin, you cannot be buried with Christ or be placed in his new tomb, since your old self is still alive and cannot walk in newness of life.”⁵⁷⁰ For Origen, the entire purpose of the Saviour being buried in a brand new tomb is to witness symbolically to believers’ complete separation from their past life:

This is why it was important to the Holy Spirit to hand down in the Scriptures even the fact that it was a new tomb in which Jesus was buried, and that he was wrapped in clean linen so that everyone who wants to be buried with Christ through baptism might know that nothing of the old should be laid in the new tomb and nothing unclean should be brought to a clean linen.⁵⁷¹

The incongruity of a person persisting in sin after having entered into a death like Christ’s, which is replete with newness down to the fine details of the tomb and burial cloths, reinforces his point that those who die to sin are to do so completely. This reflection on the newness associated with Jesus’ death allows Origen to introduce the distinction he makes between different kinds of death. Not only is there creaturely mortality, but there is also a “blessed” death which identifies with Christ’s death:

This, then, is that blessed death of which the Apostle says, “We always carry around the death of Jesus Christ in our body” (2 Cor 4:10); and again, “I die daily” (1 Cor 15:31). Moreover he lists this death by which we die to sin and are buried with Christ when he says the following, “All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or this world or life or death” (1 Cor 3:21-22).⁵⁷²

This short catena of texts explains how a certain kind of death can be found all through a person’s life. By appealing to the experience of the Apostle himself, Origen can show how dying to sin is a different kind of death from common death, which is a singular, unrepeatable act. Since it can be entered into again and again, dying to sin is a death of an altogether different order. It should therefore characterise the entirety of a believer’s new life in Christ, even if it is initially expressed in their baptism. Once again, Origen’s accent on voluntarism leads him to articulate a self-directed account of personal renewal witnessed in the daily habit of dying to sin.

Origen continues with the self-directed account of personal reform through dying to sin when he compares Christ’s burial with that of believers in baptism. The parallel of the two burials at first seems to him to be inexact because believers did not spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Symbolically, however, a person spends the value of that time in their coming to knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: “Consider whether we can spend three days

⁵⁷⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 355.

⁵⁷¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 355.

⁵⁷² *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 355.

buried together with Christ when we receive complete knowledge of the Trinity. For the Father is light and in his light, which is the Son, we see the light of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷³ This new knowledge of the inner life of God is closely related to the use of the Trinitarian formula in baptism, on which Origen insists: "It should not be deemed a legitimate baptism unless it is in the name of the Trinity."⁵⁷⁴ Similarly, believers symbolically spend the three days in burial when they confront the unholy three: "We spend three nights when we destroy the father of darkness and ignorance together with the lie which is born from him ... and, in the third place, the spirit of error ... For we destroy these things and trample upon them if we have been buried with Christ."⁵⁷⁵ There are two complementary accounts of personal agency here. On the one hand, there is the reception by the believer of knowledge of the Trinity, and on the other, there is the destruction of the unholy three. We may note a substantial change which goes on in the individual who is buried with Christ in baptism. The baptized believer is given knowledge of God's inner life which they would not otherwise have, and sets about destroying the father of lies and ignorance and his lies and errors. For us, we note that substantial change does not impact moral conduct directly, but rather affects one's own intellectual life: those who know God dispel error and ignorance.

We see another example of Origen's accent on voluntarism in his comments on Romans 6:4, in which he is quick to identify "newness of life" with reform of life:

Newness of life is when we lay aside the old self with their deeds and put on the new, who has been created according to God and who is being renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created them. For you must not imagine that the renewing of the life, which is said to have been done once, suffices. On the contrary, at all times and daily, this newness must, if it can be said, be renewed.⁵⁷⁶

Of interest to us is how Origen does not attend here to the purpose clause of Romans 6:4: "so that we may walk in newness of life." Instead, we find him contrasting newness of life with the deeds of the old self, which are to be laid aside as part of a self-directed programme of personal reform: "Newness of life is when we lay aside the old self with their deeds." Although we have no direct citation, here he introduces the old self in terms consistent with Colossians 3:9-10. This other Pauline text furnishes Origen with the old and new motif cast in a way which is coupled with ongoing renewal. Whereas the text of Romans 6:4 might suggest that the gateway to personal renewal is singular and total, with the wording we see in Colossians brought to bear, he now affirms the constant nature of the work of renewal: "For you must not imagine that the renewing of the life,

⁵⁷³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 357.

⁵⁷⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 356.

⁵⁷⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 357-58.

⁵⁷⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.12-13; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 359.

which is said to have been done once, suffices. On the contrary at all times and daily, this newness must, if it can be said, be renewed."⁵⁷⁷ For Origen, then, it is not so much that newness of life may now result from a person's burial with Christ. Rather, newness of life may be had as dying to sin continues in the person: "As the soul advances spiritually, it slowly strips away layers of sin and evil, leading to progressively higher states of virtue and enlightenment. The acclivity of the soul occurs gradually, in a series of stages, in this life and in the afterlife."⁵⁷⁸ The inward moral renewal proceeds in inverse proportion to the outward decay: "For just as the old is constantly aging and from day to day becoming older, so also this new one is constantly being renewed and there is never a time when his renewing is not increasing."⁵⁷⁹ Also of note is that this newness of life consists not only of righteous conduct, but also of "knowledge of God". Since newness of life therefore does not proceed from baptism, an unrepeatable ritual, but from personal resolve, it is renewed "at all times and daily" by one's own efforts.

Origen's imperative that newness of life itself should be constantly renewed is nonetheless itself tempered by his observation of the difference between the growth of the inner self and the decline of the outer self:

This is what the Apostle says, "Even if he who is our outer self is being corrupted, but the inner is being renewed from day to day" (2 Cor 4:16). For just as the old is constantly aging and from day to day becoming older, so also this new one is constantly being renewed and there is never a time when their renewing is not increasing. Just consider those who are making progress in the faith and who daily shine forth in the virtues, how they are always adding better things to their good works and eagerly searching for more noble things to add to their noble deeds, how they grow rich in understanding, in knowledge, and in wisdom.⁵⁸⁰

As we saw with the Colossians text, his adduction of 2 Corinthians 4:16 is designed to witness to the ongoing nature of personal renewal. In this case, the Corinthians text contributes the notion of simultaneous change in both the inner and outer natures of the person. As the destiny to mortality comes to be fulfilled in a believer's outer nature, the inner nature is continually being renewed thanks to their walking in newness of life. On an initial reading, it may seem that the passives which Origen offers are divine ones, such that the inward renewal is being brought about by God himself: "This new one is constantly being renewed." Certainly, this could be the sense of the Corinthians text on its own. Here, however, as he couples it with a voluntarist reading of Romans 6:4 which sees renewal as the result of daily resolve, the passive forms suggest a demonstrative description of the

⁵⁷⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.13; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 359.

⁵⁷⁸ Mark S.M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 101-02.

⁵⁷⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.13; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 359-60.

⁵⁸⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.13; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 359-60.

overall process. This is confirmed by Origen's pointing to those who successfully engage in the process of personal reform, that is, to those who add new good works and nobler deeds to their already virtuous lives. For our purposes, this means that the newness of life which is to be sought can be measured to an extent by the moral outcomes which a person secures for themselves. Virtue, good works, and noble deeds all speak to the achievement of the renewal that Origen's Apostle is calling for.

5.8 **Commentary on Romans 5.9 (Rom 6:5-6)**

At the beginning of his comments on Romans 6:5-6, Origen tells us that Paul has had the same concern since Romans 5:20: "All these things have in view his original question, lest he seem to grant room for sinning, in the place where he says, 'But where sin abounded, grace superabounded.' (Rom 5:2)"⁵⁸¹ This statement may serve as a reminder of Origen's voluntarist hermeneutic in reading Romans: Origen's Apostle excludes the possibility that some people may employ sin to obtain grace for others, since none are immune to the incursions and consequences of sin. As such, he first turns his mind to what the "old self" means (Rom 6:6). Even before he concerns himself with Romans 6:5, he offers an interpretation of Paul's term, which will allow him to make the appropriate contrast between old and new, past and present: "Our old self should be understood to refer to our previous life which we led in sins."⁵⁸²

Since the old self is taken to mean a form of life, the existence of the old self ends when a person takes on a new form of life, namely, the life of faith in Christ. He describes the old self as the one "whose end and destruction, so to speak, we fashioned (*cuius finem et introitus quendam facimus*) when we received within ourselves the faith of the cross of Christ, through which the body of sin is destroyed in such a way that our members which were enslaved to sin should no longer serve it but God."⁵⁸³ We note the circumspect way in which Origen says believers have cast off the old self. The masculine singular *quendam* (translated here as "so to speak") agrees with the verbal noun *interitum* ("destruction"). Faith in the crucified Christ, then, brings a true end to the existence of the old self, and thus also its destruction. This destruction is not so complete that those who have died to sin cannot sin ever again. This is only possible for Christ, in whom there has never been any sin: "Christ has died to sin once and for all in such a way that he committed absolutely no sin whatsoever nor

⁵⁸¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 361.

⁵⁸² *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 361.

⁵⁸³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 361; SC 539:484.

was deceit found in his mouth.”⁵⁸⁴ Since believers are indeed acquainted with sin, he says that their death to it is by a “likeness” of Christ’s death:

It is not possible for us to die that same death which Jesus died to sin, so that we would be completely unacquainted with sin. However it is possible for us to possess the likeness so that, by imitating him and following in his footsteps, we may keep ourselves from sin.⁵⁸⁵

This means that believers receive only that which they are capable of receiving, namely a “likeness” of Christ’s death. They are incapable of that higher form of death to sin which Christ alone suffered, death to sin as one who himself is sinless: “To be absolutely and entirely unacquainted with sin belongs to Christ alone.”⁵⁸⁶ Thus, the question of securing this “likeness” of Christ’s death consists primarily of believers’ ongoing imitation of the sinless Christ: “This is something, therefore, which human nature is capable of receiving: It may become in the likeness of his death, when by imitating him it does not sin.”⁵⁸⁷

Origen’s reading of the crucifixion of the “old self” (Rom 6:6) therefore witnesses to a largely perspectival account of personal renewal. The “old self” is destroyed only insofar as that form of life has come to an end. Since believers were once acquainted with sin when they lived as the “old self”, they can never completely rid themselves of the capacity for sin. Only Christ remains free from acquaintance with sin. In Origen’s view, the most believers can hope for is to keep sin at bay by the ongoing imitation of Christ, ever conscious that their dying to sin did not affect their propensity to sin.

Moving further into Romans 6:6, Origen sees that Paul’s phrase, “the body of sin”, can be read in two ways, either as sin’s own body or as the mortal body under sin: “A double understanding seems to be given here: either ... our body is the body of sin, or ... sin itself has its own certain body which must be destroyed in those who ought no longer to be enslaved to sin. Because both meanings can be admitted in this passage.”⁵⁸⁸ He takes the latter first. Just as Christ is the head of his body of many members, so it is with sin. He draws in a text from 1 Corinthians to show how individuals enjoy membership with their corresponding head: “Just as it was said of those who have been restored in the new man, ‘You are the body of Christ and members individually’ (1 Cor 12:27), so it can be said of those who have not yet crucified the old man that they are the body and members of

⁵⁸⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 362.

⁵⁸⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 362.

⁵⁸⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 362.

⁵⁸⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 362.

⁵⁸⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 365.

sin.”⁵⁸⁹ The head of the body of sin is the devil, whose members he says are given by the Apostle as “fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, greed, contention, wrath, deceits, quarrels, dissensions, heresies, envy, revuls, and similar things” (cf. Rom 1:29-31, Gal 5:19-21, Col 3:5).⁵⁹⁰ This is sin’s body which is to be destroyed in each person. Alternatively, “the body of sin” could be the physical body, since Scripture contains examples of those who confess the sinful weakness of their mortal body, including David (cf. Ps 51:5) and Paul himself: “The Apostle himself says elsewhere, ‘Who will rescue me from the body of this death?’ (Rom 7:24) and again he calls our body ‘the body of lowliness’ (Phil 3:21).”⁵⁹¹ Having offered an explanation of both possibilities, Origen uncharacteristically leaves the final interpretation to others: “But which explanation of the two may agree with the apostolic meaning, or if it be neither, let the reader examine.”⁵⁹²

This twofold interpretation of “the body of sin” shows us how deeply concerned Origen remains for the voluntarist reading of Romans. He attributes responsibility for this destruction entirely to the believer themselves, with no further foreseeable change in the individual following that destruction. The destruction of the body of sin, whether sins or the physical form in which sins are committed, remains the responsibility of the individual. Still further, he does not appear to attend to the significance of the purpose clause of Romans 6:6, with the result that any discussion of the ethical possibilities arising from a person’s dying to sin with Christ is overlooked. In conclusion, this means that we should continue to read Romans 6:5-6 with Origen as proposing a perspectival view of personal renewal.

5.9 **Commentary on Romans 5.10 (Rom 6:8-11)**

As we begin our next section in the *Commentary*, we note that we might have expected comments on Romans 6:7 at this point, but sadly it lacks any mention of the verse. The omission may be a deficiency in the text which Origen is using, an omission that we have already seen in both of Tertullian’s treatises (see 4.2-3 above).⁵⁹³ However, we do have wording consistent with this verse in his treatment of Romans 6:12 and 6:23, although there is nothing further to be added here

⁵⁸⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 365.

⁵⁹⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 365.

⁵⁹¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.10; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 366.

⁵⁹² *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.11; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 367.

⁵⁹³ Kreinecker, "Rufinus' Translation of Origen's Commentary on Romans," 238-39; Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbrieftext des Rufin und seine Origenes-Übersetzung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 199-200.

because we have nothing on Romans 6:7 between the *Commentary on Romans* 5.9 and 10 on Romans 6:5-6 and 8-11 respectively.

In the main, Origen finds that Romans 6:8-10 pertains to the future resurrection and thus his comments on these verses principally address that subject: "In the present text the Apostle draws the conclusion to everything he had asserted above and says, 'But if we have died with Christ' – namely through the things we have pointed out above – 'we believe that we will also live with him.'"⁵⁹⁴ Origen mainly concerns himself with the life to come in his comments on Romans 6:8-11. Nonetheless, a number of features in the presentation of these verses contribute valuable points to our analysis. The first of these is a curious statement that he makes as part of the introductory summary on the foregoing verses of our passage:

Christ has died for our sins according to the Scriptures and by his own death has freely bestowed his death of sin as if a certain reward of faith to every believer, namely to those who believe that they have died with him and have been crucified and buried together with him. And through these things sin is not able to operate (*non potest operari*) in them who are, as it were, dead persons, and thus they are said to be dead to sin.⁵⁹⁵

There is, of course, nothing controversial about describing Christ's death to sin as a "reward of faith to every believer." They enjoy the benefits of Christ's death to sin, which they have imitated as by a likeness. We see here further witness to Origen's perspectival view of personal renewal, that death of sin belongs to those who "believe they have died with him." Only those believers who possess such faith enjoy its reward. The notion which we see here, that sin "cannot operate" in the lives of believers is indeed a puzzling one, especially given his repeated insistence that believers can live again to sin because it has established itself in their mortal bodies. There are two possibilities for what this may mean.

Firstly, this may be a much-abbreviated way of speaking about the power which sin formerly had over believers to bring about their common death. He states that sin held sway over the old self, "over whom the death of sin exercised lordship."⁵⁹⁶ Sin, then, cannot bring about death in those who are already dead to it, and thus could be described under these circumstances as powerless. This view of sin's incapacity still leaves in tact its power to bring about further misdeeds should believers so will it. Here, we see not substantial moral renewal but testament to the power of Christ to raise up believers: in the end, sin cannot defeat those who live with the risen Christ by faith.

⁵⁹⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 368-69.

⁵⁹⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 368; SC 539:02.

⁵⁹⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.8; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 364.

Secondly, and alternatively, the phrase “sin cannot operate” may refer to the prevention of sin’s works as we saw in his discussion of “the body of sin,” listed from a cross-reference to Paul’s vice lists: those dead to sin are no longer available to sin to produce its many and varied kinds of misdeeds as they once did. If this is what Origen means by the phrase “sin cannot operate,” he proposes that the works of sin are inhibited by Christ’s death to sin in which believers participate by a likeness. Even this much witnesses to the moral regeneration of believers, insofar as the inevitable production of further misdeeds ceases with their participation by faith in Christ’s death to sin. If this is so, Origen is somewhat inconsistent about the future of sin in believers’ lives. On the one hand, sin is an ever-present reality inhabiting their mortal bodies, and on the other, sin no longer turns them aside to misdeeds and thus ceases to work. This apparent contradiction makes us tend more towards the former reading of the phrase, even if we might wish for greater clarity on this point. Origen’s well-established position on voluntarism and the capacity for further sin by believers should win out when we come across stray phrases such as this one.

Because the stakes are high concerning a proper understanding of Paul’s doctrine that a person must die to sin in order to live forever with Christ, Origen offers a short guide on how a person might manifest such a death in his comments on Romans 6:8-10. He presents three steps for imitating Christ’s death to sin, which he makes correspond to each of the three days of Christ’s Passion, namely, death, burial, and resurrection. Firstly, a person confesses Christ with their voice, since the Apostle teaches “with the heart one believes and with the mouth confession is made leading to salvation” (Rom 10:10).⁵⁹⁷ This aligns with the first “day of death”, on which a person renounces the world. Just as Christ quit the world when he died, so too do believers disavow their former ways. Secondly, a person dies to sin as Christ did by mortifying their fleshly members, because “we always carry about the death of Christ in our body” (cf. 2 Cor 4:10) and this kind of “death is at work in us” (2 Cor 4:12).⁵⁹⁸ This coincides with the second “day of death”, which relates to believers’ repudiation of the vices of the flesh. Just as Christ lay dead in the tomb, so also do believers appear dead to their former selves. Finally, and crucially for our purposes, he says a person manifests Christ’s death “when we are now resurrected from the dead and walk in newness of life.”⁵⁹⁹ The third “day” is the “day of resurrection” when they obtain “the fullness of perfection in the light of wisdom.”⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 369.

⁵⁹⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 369.

⁵⁹⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 369.

⁶⁰⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 369.

The first two steps readily agree with Origen's perspectival view of personal renewal: the active agent in both steps is the individual themselves. The same must be said of the third step "on the day of resurrection", even though we find the particle *iam* used in a temporal sense ("now"): *Tertio vero cum iam resurgimus a mortuis et in novitate vitae ambulemus*.⁶⁰¹ We can be sure that this is not a reference to an inaugurated resurrection because we have seen that he interprets "newness of life" largely as the reformed conduct required of believers. The third step therefore consists of a person's adoption of reformed morals after the old life has been cleared away. This means that Origen's perspectival view of personal renewal also consists in the three-step procedure of conforming one's moral life to the new standard required of those in Christ.

We noted above how Christ's death is the only complete death to sin because there was no sin in him to begin with.⁶⁰² When Origen comments on the significance of Christ's unrepeatable death to sin for believers (Rom 6:10), we find references to sin being constrained for them. The first is the power of Christ's cross: "We certainly do not deny that free will always will remain in rational natures, but we affirm that the power of the cross of Christ ... is so great that it suffices for the healing and restoration not only of the present and the future but also for the past ages."⁶⁰³ By this he means to show that in every stage of human life, the power of the cross suffices to achieve God's purposes for it. Believers need not therefore have any fear that their continual acquaintance with sin, which is a feature of their mortal existence, will win out over the kingdom of Christ: "Where there is sickness a physician will be needed, for according to the voice of the Savior himself, 'There is need of a physician for those who are sick' (Matt 9:12)."⁶⁰⁴ Of interest to us is his comment that the power of the cross works "healing and restoration"⁶⁰⁵ in believers. This description of the power of the cross is somewhat opaque if it is read in isolation. Fortunately for us, he clarifies what this means with reference to the ongoing exercise of free will:

Precisely what it is that would restrain the freedom of will in the future ages to keep it from falling again into sin, the Apostle teaches us with a brief statement, saying, "Love never falls away" (1 Cor 13:8). For this is why love is said to be greater than faith and hope, because it will be the only thing through which it will no longer be possible to sin. For if the soul shall have ascended to this state of perfection, so that it loves God with all its heart and with all its mind and with all its strength, and loves its neighbor as itself, what room will there be for sin?⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰¹ SC 539:504.

⁶⁰² *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2.

⁶⁰³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.14; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 375-76.

⁶⁰⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.13; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 375.

⁶⁰⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.14; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 376.

⁶⁰⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.15; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 376.

Of special importance for us is the fact that Origen identifies a particular human action which banishes sin: the act of loving God. When performed by the exercise of free will, Origen notices that “there is a marked difference in the ability of the will before and after conversion.”⁶⁰⁷ Once performed, however, love appears to take up all the available ethical “space” that sinful misdeeds would normally occupy. In this way, Origen demonstrates the foundational role of free will in his account of personal renewal: the regenerative power of God to deal with sin comes to the aid of the individual because they themselves resolve and act to obtain it.

It is nevertheless unusual in Origen’s treatment of our passage that he comments on the next verse of the passage without a *lemma*. When he introduces Romans 6:11, he is explaining what “living to God” means:

To live to God should be understood by this being fulfilled, that he who was in the form of God emptied himself and took the form of a slave and became obedient unto death, as if he must again continue in the form of God, equal to the Father. Thus it is fitting that he records in what follows, “So you also must consider yourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:11).”⁶⁰⁸

On Romans 6:11, Origen offers a combination of moral and existential teachings from Paul: “This means of course that we should die to sin in imitation of Christ, having become estranged from it; and we should live to God by being yoked together with him and by becoming one spirit with him.”⁶⁰⁹ On the negative side, we see reference to the forgoing discussion of how a person dies to sin, principally by forsaking the old form of life they had. On the positive side, however, this moral aspect has its complement in the existential aspect, in which a person lives to God by union with Christ. We consider this to be consistent with the perspectival view of renewal, insofar as the responsibility for both outcomes, namely, reform of moral life and acquisition of Christ’s life, falls to the individual. There does not appear to be, even in this admittedly summative statement of the content of Romans 6:11, any ongoing contribution made by God to the mortal life of a believer.

As we are seeing, Origen’s voluntarist hermeneutic in Romans produces the perspectival view of ethical renewal. This stress on the perspectival seems to increase when we bring Origen’s comments to bear on the famous problem of whether to adopt the indicative or imperative reading of λογίζεσθε. For Origen, there is only the imperative: “‘Consider yourselves to be dead to sin’ (Rom 6:11), which is rendered better in Greek, ‘Think yourselves to be dead to sin.’ For the essence of this expression consists more in thinking and reason, because a death of this sort will be experienced not

⁶⁰⁷ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 142.

⁶⁰⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 377-78.

⁶⁰⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

in fact but in thought.”⁶¹⁰ That he situates death to sin in a person’s “thinking and reason” buttresses our finding, that renewal for him is a matter of their self-understanding. However, Origen takes a strange turn in his penultimate comments on how “thinking” oneself as dead to sin might work in practice on Romans 6:11.

He gives examples of how a person may disentangle themselves from temptations to lust or greed solely by renewed thinking: “Whoever thinks and considers within themselves that they are dead does not sin ... If I should put it into my heart that I have died with Christ and I should think about death, immediately the desire is extinguished and sin flees.”⁶¹¹ He puts forth another example of a person dealing with temptation to hatred and anger: “If I should consider myself to be dead with Christ and I put thoughts of death into my mind, doubtless the rage is extinguished, the anger ceases, the hatred dies down, and no room is given to sin.”⁶¹² Whereas before, a person was enslaved into membership of the body of sin to produce its works, they are now freely joined to Christ as one of his members and thus find that the former inevitability of sinful misdeeds is lifted away. The ethical renewal for which believers have become responsible comes about by cognition.

In Origen’s final summative comments on Romans 6:11, at the end of Book Five of the *Commentary*, he elaborates on what it means for a person to be “alive to God”: “Nor do [Paul’s] additional words, ‘alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 6:11), seem to me to be superfluous. For in my opinion it is just as if he had said, ‘alive to God in wisdom, in peace, in righteousness, in sanctification, all of which are Christ.’”⁶¹³ In this way, he defines the characteristics of the mortal lives of those who are dead to sin and alive to God. More than this, however, he argues that these characteristics are only present in those who are in Christ: “But if no one is alive to God without righteousness, without peace, without sanctification, and without the rest of the virtues, it is certain that no one may live to God except in Christ Jesus. Amen.”⁶¹⁴ This means that death to sin and life in Christ make a life with certain good attributes possible. Believers achieve and maintain death to sin by a continual, formal renunciation of sin throughout their life, to which are added these attributes which newly proceed from their union with Christ.

⁶¹⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

⁶¹¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

⁶¹² *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

⁶¹³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.18; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

⁶¹⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.18; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 378.

5.10 *Commentary on Romans 6.1 (Rom 6:12-14)*

As Origen begins Book Six of the *Commentary*, he first reflects on the Apostle's exhortation to believers not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies (Rom 6:12). For Origen, Paul's exhortation itself shows that sin is situated in the mortal body: "By this he is teaching that sin has a certain seat and kingdom in the body."⁶¹⁵ Since Paul says sin can have such a place in the mortal body, he deduces that all misdeeds are in fact works of the flesh, which he names using Paul's vice lists (cf. Gal 5:19-21, Col 3:5): "The Apostle declares that all sins are the works of the flesh, which he says are 'fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, unchasteness, idolatry, evil deeds, enmity, rivalries, jealousy, rage, contention, dissensions, heresies, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.'"⁶¹⁶ Seeing that there are so many kinds of misdeeds that work together under the name of "sin", Origen likens them to "a kind of army, conducting military operations under their king of sin and subject to its law, which is written in the members of the flesh."⁶¹⁷ Thus far, this shows us the ever-present danger that sin presents to the individual believer: the possibility and prospect of sin always marks the ethical experience of believers, who by their death to sin have no more than formally renounced it.

For all the mighty campaigns that sin carries out against its host, however, the presence of the Apostle's "command" shows who is ultimately responsible for whether it wins out: "Notice that when the Apostle gives the command, saying, 'Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal body, to make you obey its desires,' he is showing that the matter lies within our power, that sin should not exercise dominion in our body."⁶¹⁸ It is hardly surprising that at this early point in Book Six Origen would turn his attention to reflect on the Apostle's exhortation. The remote cause for this pressing attention to the "command" is his ongoing defence of free will and concern for individual moral responsibility against the determinist threat of the opponents: "The imperatives of Scripture are rendered superfluous if our condition is fated."⁶¹⁹ We recall that the perceived threat of the doctrine of immutable natures "undermines any basis for ethics and runs counter to Origen's understanding of free will, sin, and grace."⁶²⁰ Crucially for our purposes, the Apostle's exhortation presumes the capacity for sin in believers and their faculty of free will to choose it: the possibility of a free choice for sinful misdeeds or righteous conduct "demonstrates ... that God's creation, in and

⁶¹⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 1.

⁶¹⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 1.

⁶¹⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.3; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 1-2.

⁶¹⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 2.

⁶¹⁹ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 95.

⁶²⁰ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 94.

of itself, is not corrupt” against the opponents’ “low view” of it.⁶²¹ In Origen’s presentation of the Apostle’s exhortation, there does not appear to be any change in that capacity for sin and free will. On the contrary, it remains entirely a matter for the individual believer to determine for themselves: “Unless it were in our power that sin should not exercise dominion in us, he would not have given the command at all.”⁶²²

By means of two cross-references from Paul, Origen proposes the way a person rejects the reign of sin in their mortal body: “So how is it possible for sin not to exercise dominion in our flesh? If we do what the Apostle himself says, ‘Put to death your members that are earthly’ (Col 3:5) and if ‘we always carry around in our body the death of Christ’ (2 Cor 4:10).”⁶²³ The cross-references are united by the notion of persons making their bodies a vessel either for dominating sin to be expelled (cf. Rom 6:12, Col 3:5) or for the death of Christ to be absorbed (2 Cor 4:10). He continues further down this line of thought by explaining what happens when a person resists the reign of sin by the mental appropriation of the instrument of Christ’s death, his cross:

The power of the cross of Christ is so great that when it is placed before the eyes and when it is faithfully retained in one’s mind so that the attentive eye of the mind should be fastened on the death of Christ, no [sinful] desire, no lust, no feeling of rage, no sin of envy will be able to get the upper hand (*superare possit*); in its presence the entire army of sin and the flesh, which we enumerated above, is at once put to flight.⁶²⁴

This comment counterweighs those others that we have seen which support a largely perspectival account of moral renewal. Instead of active resistance to sin as the sole responsibility of individuals, here they appear to enjoy a greatly altered ethical experience achieved by the introduction of an additional element, the image of the cross, which has been placed in the mind. This ethical experience consists of being untroubled by the many and varied fleshly desires. Not only is the believer unconquered by such desires, but they have also successfully resisted and routed the “entire army of sin”. Indeed, we find nothing in this excerpt to contradict directly what he says about the ongoing nature of a person’s death to sin. We continue, then, to find that Origen also presents a largely perspectival view of personal renewal which he occasionally overlays with points of substantial renewal such as this one. In practice, this means that a believer who continues to renounce sin by having faith in the power of his cross finds sin in all its forms defeated.

⁶²¹ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 94-95.

⁶²² *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 2.

⁶²³ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 2.

⁶²⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 2; SC 543:90.

The regenerative effect of the cross appears to endure even if believers should feel themselves drawn to sin. This is evidenced by the overlapping of opposing desires in believers' moral experience: "There is within us both the desire of sin, which has a kingdom in the flesh, and there is also the Spirit's desire, which has a kingdom in the mind."⁶²⁵ Origen repeats his usage of "kingdom" which we saw at the beginning of Book Six, that is, as a permanent situation of an entity within an aspect of a person: in the case of sin, it is the mortal body. He thus speaks of a state of affairs for the believer in which there is not one set of desires but two: sin's desires in the flesh and the Spirit's desires in the mind. The regenerative power of the cross creates a situation in which the desire of sin in one's flesh is overlaid with the desire of the Spirit in one's mind. The effect of this in practice is that the individual freely sways to one or other set of desires. Although the desire of sin never leaves a person, they have the means to be able to choose one or the other.⁶²⁶ For our purposes, the introduction of a second set of desires constitutes a further point of substantial personal renewal. This aspect of moral regeneration relies on the continuation of a person's death to sin, for which they are entirely responsible as endowed with free will. However, for as long as a person remains dead to sin, the Spirit's desires are made available to them in their minds, even as sin's desires persist in their flesh.

By means of an unflattering image taken from 1 Corinthians, Origen provides us with a representation of how this twofold set of desires works in practice:

And so, it seems that the soul is a mean, as it were, between the flesh and the Spirit. And certainly, if it unites itself with the flesh to obey the desires of sin, it becomes one body with it; but if it unites itself with the Lord it becomes one spirit with him, according to what has been said, "For whoever unites himself with a prostitute, he is one body; but whoever unites himself with the Lord he is one spirit" (1 Cor 6:16-17). You should not be surprised that he calls the flesh a prostitute, who is subject to all the vices and sins we have enumerated above, as if to the most shameless lovers.⁶²⁷

We might note how readily available the flesh and the Spirit are to the soul. There seems to be no inhibition of its union to either entity. Believers therefore have the task of responsibly using their free will: "The soul must adjudicate between opposing moral paths, and these paths are often understood through our own tripartite makeup, that is, the soul chooses between flesh and spirit."⁶²⁸ Furthermore, the image of the prostitute certainly brings out the undesirability of such a union with the sin-saddled flesh. However, it also speaks of the temporary nature of such a union. The soul of one who is dead to sin is not "married" to the flesh or to the Spirit, but simply comes

⁶²⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 2.

⁶²⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4.

⁶²⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 3.

⁶²⁸ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 106.

together with either one depending on the nature of the action. Hence, responsibility for the soul's union, which ever results in the production of the desires of the entity to which it is joined, still appears to lie entirely with the individual. It could be said that the desires of the Spirit and the mind it inhabits are of a higher order in Origen's tripartite anthropology than the desires of sin and the flesh it inhabits.⁶²⁹ There is nonetheless no mention of such special moral leverage granted to the Spirit for its union with the soul. Hence, this aspect of his account of personal renewal tends towards the perspectival insofar as personal action is the result of free will, but with the additional feature that union with the Lord to produce the desires of the Spirit becomes a possibility. As Scott notes, believers can overcome sin "through the responsible employment of freedom ... The soul eliminates the very evil it originates through its misuse of freedom. The entire process, however, occurs within the context of God's providential care for the soul."⁶³⁰

We might also briefly note the appearance of wording consistent with Romans 6:7 in the interpretation of Romans 6:12. Commenting on the significance of the adjective "mortal" in relation to the body, Origen says:

If we realize that our body can be put to death and become dead to sin, then it can come to pass that sin would not exercise dominion in it. For in accordance with this, anyone who dies is said to be justified from sin (*qui mortuus est iustificatus dicitur a peccato*, cf. Rom 6:7). For a dead man does not lust or become angry or rage or rob what belongs to others.⁶³¹

The attribution signal *dicitur* is unusually opaque for Origen. We are more accustomed to his referencing Paul in more specific terms. We find a similarly opaque attribution associated with wording similar to this in his comments on Romans 6:23:

We are said to be baptized into Christ's death, doubtless, into that death in which he died to sin once and for all, so that we also might be separated from sin and live to God. For the one who dies by a death of this sort is said to be justified from sin (*qui moritur iustificatus esse dicitur a peccato*, cf. Rom 6:7).⁶³²

Again, the attribution signal *dicitur* does little to assist us in identifying Origen's source. Given that we have no extensive comments on Romans 6:7 between the *Commentary on Romans* 5.9 and 10, we might be concerned that Origen is unfamiliar with this verse and that this text appears as the introduction of no more than a well-known proverb.

⁶²⁹ Bagby, *Sin in Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 97.

⁶³⁰ Scott, *Journey Back to God*, 102.

⁶³¹ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.6; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 3; SC 543:92.

⁶³² *Comm.Rom.* 6.6.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 19; SC 543:132.

Yet, if we take both possible borrowings as indeed Romans 6:7, Origen means to show how final a person's death to sin is. The first possible borrowing from Romans 6:7 provides him with wording to clarify the Apostle's adjective "mortal" in Romans 6:12 as referring to a body which is capable of taking in death; this intake of death in the case of a living person is death to sin. Hence, when living believers take death into their mortal bodies, they cease committing misdeeds. The second possible borrowing from Romans 6:7 again allows Origen to speak of the finality of death to sin, in this case, Christ's death. Believers are baptized into Christ's death, by which he finished with sin, so that they themselves might also dispense with sinful practices. For our purposes, this means that Romans 6:7 witnesses to the complete break with sin that believers ought to make. Consequently, although Romans 6:7 appears to witness to absolute finality about sinful conduct, it speaks to Origen of the strength or conviction associated with believers' formal renunciation of sin, and thus to a perspectival view of personal renewal.

Moving on to Romans 6:13, Origen describes how a person's members are put to appropriate use: "If we put to death the desire of sin in our mortal body and if we labour in the doing of righteousness and render service to righteousness with all our members, we become like those who are alive from the dead; that is to say, dead to sin and alive to righteousness."⁶³³ We note again that individuals possess agency for turning from sin and producing righteous works. The active verbal forms coming in quick succession (*mortificemus, laboremus, ministremus*) give a strong sense that responsibility for new life lies with the individual.⁶³⁴ However, beyond confirming this voluntarist reading of Roman 6:13, he does not provide any further indication of what "weapons of righteousness" might look like in practice.

We therefore find an abrupt transition to his brief comments on Romans 6:14, about which he says that a person is under grace because they have ended their practice of sin: "It was not fitting to be said about us: 'Death will not exercise dominion over you' – for that is something we cannot avoid – but, 'Sin will not exercise dominion over you,' sin that, doubtless, he knew we are able to avoid, according to what we have said above."⁶³⁵ This short excerpt provides a summative comment on how it is for believers: although death characterises a person's life, sin need not because they are endowed with free will and have the power of Christ's cross to avoid it.

⁶³³ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.8; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 4.

⁶³⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.8; SC 543:94.

⁶³⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.9; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 5.

5.11 *Commentary on Romans 7.12.4*

In Book Seven, Origen identifies a fourth kind of “death” when he comments on Romans 8:38-39. As we shall see, he identifies three kinds of deaths in the *Dialogue with Heraclides*: namely, death to sin, death to God in sin, and common death (see 6.2.2 below). It seems possible that the two works are contemporaneous,⁶³⁶ and thus we may be seeing Origen as he develops his position from the *Dialogue with Heraclides*.

Origen makes use of two proof texts, 1 Corinthians 15:26 and Romans 6:2-4, in order to explore what Paul might mean by “death” in Romans 8:38. The first of these leads him to discover that, by “death”, Paul also means the last enemy:

The “death” which he speaks of is to be understood to be called that which, as we have explained above, is the last enemy of Christ to be destroyed. It is assuredly called “death” from the fact that, just as the common death separates the soul from the body, so also it strives to separate the soul from the love of God; and this surely is the death of the soul. It is possible, then, that there may also be from part of the soul another “life” that acts with it in order to separate us from the love of God. This is the life of sin. For unless this life were evil, the Apostle would never have urged us to die to sin and be baptized into the death of Christ and be buried together with him (*moreremur peccato et in morte Christi baptizaremur et consepeliremur ei*, Rom 6:2-4).⁶³⁷

Origen’s sentence structure and abridgement accounts for the variation from the full text which we see here. Instead of extensive quotation, he draws on Paul’s language for both proof-texts, 1 Corinthians 15:26 and Romans 6:2-4. Nevertheless, the appearance of the passive forms here confirm that he intends to cite Romans 6:2-4. For Origen, a fourth kind of “death” emerges from his reading of Romans 8:38 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:26, namely, the last enemy to be destroyed. Thus, “death of the soul” may have two aspects to it: the consequence of the practice of sin and the last enemy.

Two points of interest arise about this citation from our passage in the *Commentary*. Firstly, the Apostle is said to urge believers to be baptized and thus to be buried with Christ. The hortative value of Romans 6:2-4 is apparent to Origen, as a call to moral propriety. Secondly, he entirely omits the resurrection “side” of Romans 6:4, and thus offers no reflection on how believers’ life to God occurs, apart from the self-direction which is expected in upright conduct. The principal purpose for Origen’s importing a text from Romans 6:2-4 is to articulate how a person separates

⁶³⁶ Jean Scherer, *Origène : Entretien d’Origène avec Héraclide*, SC 67 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 44.

⁶³⁷ cf. Rom 6:2-4; *Comm.Rom.* 7.12.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 101; SC 543:346.

themselves from sin; this readily corresponds with Origen's first kind of death in the *Dialogue with Heraclides*.

Therefore, this citation is evidence for Origen's perspectival view of ethical renewal. The Apostle urges believers to abandon sin through death with Christ from the moment of baptism so that sin's "life" might no longer have any effect on them. As Origen himself says, this alone demonstrates the capacity which humanity has naturally to engage in the project of ethical reform, and thus to exercise personal responsibility for moral conduct.

5.12 *Commentary on Romans 9.39.2*

Finally, we have two citations from our passage close together in Book Nine, in which Origen is commenting on Romans 14:7-9 and on what it means to live and die for the Lord. We have already encountered the first of these citations, from Romans 6:8, in our introduction to the *Commentary on Romans* (see 5.2 above) and in our analysis of his comments on that verse (see 5.10 above).

Therefore, it suffices to note that when he arrives at Romans 14:7-9, he reflects that, over the course of the *Commentary*, he finds himself regularly returning to the notion of living and dying in Christ and that he has especially expounded this notion in his comments on Romans 6:8:

In the exposition of this epistle, we have repeatedly spoken about what it means to live in Christ and what it means to die in Christ. We did this especially in that passage where we attempted to explain the Apostle's words in which he says, "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with him" (*Si autem mortui sumus cum Christo, credimus quia et convivemus ei*, Rom 6:8).⁶³⁸

Apart from noting that Origen's text of Romans 6:8 here is faithful to Paul, there is little else to be said about this direct citation. However, we also have a citation a little further on in his comments on Romans 14:7-9, and this time from Romans 6:4, which he employs in order to explain further what Paul means by living and dying with Christ. Here, Origen lays out the pattern of believers' lives:

We do not have the pattern of life (*vitae exemplum*) from ourselves, but we have received it from the resurrection of Christ, as the same Apostle says, "In order that, as Christ rose again from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also you might walk in newness of life" (*Ut sicut Christus resurrexit a mortuis per gloriam Patris, ita et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus*, Rom 6:4). So then, the newness of life by which we live in Christ through faith in his resurrection is attributed to the Lord, since it receives a

⁶³⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 238-39; PL 14:1238.

commencement from him, not from us.⁶³⁹

Origen's text corresponds well with that of Paul. He uses it to affirm that the "pattern of life" which believers have does not begin from them but from Christ. In other words, the form of believers' current life is of supernatural rather than natural origin. Much seems to ride on what *vitae exemplum* might mean here; it seems most likely that Origen means that believers have received from Christ an example to follow in their personal conduct. It cannot be demonstrated that this pattern of life is taken up or received in baptism because Origen omits the first part of Romans 6:4. Nor can it be demonstrated that by *vitae exemplum* he means a divine life with ongoing moral effects in the lives of its recipients. The purpose of the citation is simply to attribute believers' current life and its experiences to Christ. In that sense, this citation does not contain ethical content relevant to our study. However, there may be a point of contact between this citation and the perspectival view of ethical renewal insofar as the life, which believers enjoy, "receives a commencement" from Christ, that is, from a particular point in their own lives. More than this cannot be demonstrated from this citation.

5.13 Origen's Use of Romans 6:1-14 in the *Commentary on Romans*

Origen's voluntarist reading of Romans leads him, as he himself says, to return "repeatedly" to what it means to die to sin and live to God.⁶⁴⁰ Opposing the determinist readings of the "heretics" who, he believes, exploit ambiguities in Paul's text, means providing the alternative of moral responsibility by the exercise of free will: "Origen frequently contended that for interpreters to glean knowledge from Scripture, they first had to evince a robust commitment to the moral standards advocated in Christianity. Such commitment was not merely useful, but actually necessary for the interpreter's exegetical success."⁶⁴¹ Since it is unthinkable that believers would return to the practice of sin after dying to it (cf. Rom 6:1-2), they must heed the Apostle's exhortation and desist from it, because simply a larger number of sinful acts does not elicit more grace. A weaker point in Origen's *Commentary* and indeed missing altogether from his use of our passage is some reflection on the Apostle's diatribe (cf. Rom 6:1-3). However, by means of cross-referencing Romans 6:1-2 with 6:12, Origen believes that he can show that sin is an ever-present reality which is seeking dominion over believers by establishing its "seat and kingdom" in their

⁶³⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 239; *PL* 14:1238-39.

⁶⁴⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2.

⁶⁴¹ Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 163.

mortal bodies.⁶⁴² In this way, he undermines the determinist threat by showing that it is not immunity to sin which the elect have but intimate proximity to it. Thus, he acknowledges by exploring the converse of what the Apostle proposes in Romans 6:1-2 that some believers do live again to sin.⁶⁴³ For Origen, then, it is self-control in matters of pleasure which staves off sin.⁶⁴⁴

Origen regards baptism without moral conversion as unlawful, a practice which the determinist opposition effectively endorses.⁶⁴⁵ This is because baptism is the complement to a person's death to sin, expressing and effecting their burial with Christ in his death to sin (cf. Rom 6:3-4). Since a person's death to sin is not momentary but continual, so too will their experience of newness of life be (cf. Rom 6:4). He interprets "newness of life" (Rom 6:4) solely as a reformed pattern of personal conduct, and thus overlooks the possibility that Paul's purpose clause in Romans 6:4 indicates new ethical possibilities. With sinful misdeeds ever a possibility for believers to commit, then, the crucifixion of the old self (cf. Rom 6:6) entirely depends on their perseverance in dying to sin. It is noteworthy that Origen again does not consider the significance of the purpose clause of Romans 6:6. Instead, he regards the destruction of the "sinful body" as a matter of the exercise of free will, whether that means sin's body or a person's mortal body plagued by sin.

We have noted that Origen does not provide comments on Romans 6:7 in Book Five of the *Commentary*. At best, we have possible borrowings in his comments on Romans 6:13 and 23. We found that he deploys this wording, whether Paul's or merely proverbial, to speak of the finality of death to sin. At this point, we might wonder at the effect that Romans 6:7 might have on Origen's reading of our passage with his voluntarist hermeneutic. If a person can be finished with sin by dying (Rom 6:7), and believers truly die to sin by estranging themselves to "its desires and commands",⁶⁴⁶ then Origen may have surmised that the future of sin must be rather bleak, leaving believers untroubled by its incursions.

In his reading of Romans 6:8, Origen identifies one particular point of how sin works after common death. We see sin hindered after believers enter into Christ's resurrection. Otherwise, his attention to Romans 6:8-10 is turned towards what a future resurrection with Christ looks like. However, even in the course of such treatment, he still takes the opportunity to describe how believers imitate Christ's three-day death, burial, and resurrection: they die to sin and live to God by confessing faith in Christ, they mortify the vices of the flesh, and they adopt of a new form of life.

⁶⁴² *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 1.

⁶⁴³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 351-2.

⁶⁴⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.4; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

⁶⁴⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 354; *SC* 539:466.

⁶⁴⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.5; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 350.

This voluntarist reading of believers' dying and rising with Christ has its continuation in his comments on Romans 6:11. Taking the imperative reading, Origen requires believers to adopt the kind of thinking which will facilitate the exercise of the free will to die to sin and live for God.

Origen uses Romans 6:12-13 to account for sin's seat in the mortal body and thus regards all sin as proceeding from the flesh. The Apostle's exhortation signals to believers that sin is ever-present in their mortal life. Nevertheless, Origen's reading also requires him to say that the very fact of the Apostle's exhortation makes adherence to it a matter of exercising the will. He offers no practical wisdom on how believers' members become weapons of righteousness (cf. Rom 6:13), nor does he bring Romans 6:14 to bear on the Apostle's exhortation, except to say that death cannot finally have its way with those who die to sin because they are "under grace".

5.14 Conclusion: Moral Regeneration in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*?

Origen's voluntarist hermeneutic so dominates his reading of Romans 6:1-14 in the *Commentary* that we mainly find the perspectival view of ethical renewal. Beginning this part of the *Commentary* with Paul's own principle, that sinful misdeeds are inadmissible for those who have died to it (Rom 6:1-2), he presents us with a model of what "death to sin" and "life to God" look like.⁶⁴⁷ Believers die to sin in a continual process rather than in a single moment because sin is ever-present, even to believers, since it has established for itself a "seat and kingdom" in the mortal body.⁶⁴⁸ This means that no one except Christ ever dies to sin in such a way that it is completely alien to them.⁶⁴⁹ Not even baptism appears to have this effect: the ritual simply expresses what it signifies, the burial of the individual with Christ.⁶⁵⁰ Only Christ's death to sin was complete.⁶⁵¹ For everyone else, familiarity as such with sin continues unabated, and thus formal renunciation is the fullest extent of dying to it. This means that Clement, Tertullian, and Origen agree that responsibility for dealing with the looming threat of sin lies with believers. Their ethical experience is entirely determined by the exercise of free will. Since the desires of ever-present sin coupled with unimpeded free will renders recidivism possible, continual vigilance against one's base desires is still called for: "[The kingdom] is being prepared by means of war."⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.2.

⁶⁴⁸ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3.

⁶⁴⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4.

⁶⁵⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.2.

⁶⁵¹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.9.4.

⁶⁵² *Comm.Rom.* 5.3.8; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 339.

There are two points of substantial moral renewal which we should consider for Origen's exegetical preference for the perspectival account of renewal.

The first point pertains to how believers deal with temptations to sinful misdeeds. When Origen presents Romans 6:11, he adopts the imperative reading of λογίζεσθε. Believers are to "consider" or "think" themselves as dead to sin and alive to God.⁶⁵³ However, once this responsibility to die to sin has been fulfilled, believers enjoy a life which is "in opposition [to] and much greater" than sin: this life is not simply the alternative to the past form of life, but itself fortifies the believer against future sins.⁶⁵⁴ In this respect, Origen is unique among our ancient readers. We see this fortification in relation to Origen's reading of Romans 6:11. Of particular interest to us is how Origen proposes that believers should do this in practice. He suggests that when temptations come, believers should contemplate the cross of Christ.⁶⁵⁵ We might detect an inconsistency in Origen's reading of Romans 6:11: Origen breaks the Apostle's circle of self-consideration by inviting consideration of the cross. Following the imperative reading, Origen's Apostle calls believers to consider themselves in their new way, but this reading suggests that believers ought not to consider themselves but an external entity, the cross. When they are tempted and think of the cross, believers find that all thoughts of possible misdeeds disappear. We make the finding that moral regeneration in Origen's reading of Paul proceeds from believers' consideration of the cross, which dissipates temptations when believers call it to mind. Origen himself is indeed consistent: it is not the case that believers are now rendered incapable of sinful misdeeds, but that their free will has been strengthened to make the free choice to do what is right by recourse to a divine power, which comes from the cross. We also find that on this point Origen runs with a model which sees free will as foundational for moral regeneration. We see this in the perspectival renewal of believers who may be tempted to sin: they can freely contemplate the Lord's cross. The essential foundation for what follows remains the ongoing renunciation of sin. Added to this, however, is the substantial renewal which comes in the form of alteration to the will itself which removes the temptation. Believers need not entirely contend with sin's desires if they reach out to the cross for help from the Lord: "Origen did not think that the virtuous life that led to salvation was achieved by one's own power alone. It could not be achieved, however, without one's own efforts."⁶⁵⁶ It is in this light that we read about the destruction of the members of the "sinful body" (cf. Rom 6:6), understood as the particular sins which may appear in the ethical experience of believers. Those who crucify the sinful body also put

⁶⁵³ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.17.

⁶⁵⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.5.

⁶⁵⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 5.10.14.

⁶⁵⁶ Heine, *Origen*, 237.

to death even the mere consideration of those misdeeds, and thus are no longer enslaved to sin but free from it.

The second point of substantial moral renewal concerns believers' very desire to carry out righteous deeds. Origen accounts for the mixture of sinful misdeeds and righteous conduct in believers by attributing to them two sets of desires. Again, Origen has no peer among our ancient readers on this point. The soul attaching itself to either one of those desires brings forth the fruit which corresponds to it. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Origen takes the hortatory material to its limits, seen especially in his omissions and adaptations of the Pauline text, and in the symbolic reading for "sin" in Romans 6:12. Those who commit sinful acts return to the dominion of sin. Origen warns against the particular sins which one had committed in past life and which will regain their former possessions if believers voluntarily betray themselves to them. The inauguration of a second set of desires from the Spirit constitutes another point of moral regeneration in Origen. The supernatural desires of the Spirit placed in the mind counteracts the desire for sin present in the mortal body. It is still the case, however, that the desires of the Spirit do not displace the desires of sin from the mortal body but leave them intact; sin still has its "seat and kingdom" there. Rather, because they are found in the mind, the desires of the Spirit provide an alternative to sin's desires. In practice, this means a person turns their will towards one or the other set of desires to produce the acts associated with that entity, whether the Spirit or sin. Thus, the fixing of a new, second set of desires in the mind of believers which furnishes them with a programme of righteous moral action constitutes moral regeneration in Origen.

In this way, Origen is consistent when he speaks of the general resurrection as an event which lies entirely in the future: "In this real historical present, we already live in the air of 'the restoration of the world and the renovation of the entire creation that has been re-established through the resurrection of the Lord.'"⁶⁵⁷ Believers do not share in the resurrection yet, since this comes after they succumb to common death. They do, however, have a form of life which proceeds from Christ's resurrection. In this, transformation comes about by continual conformity to the death and burial of Christ: "For Origen justification is more than a non-imputation of past sins. It is an effectual and progressive sanctification in which sin is expelled and grace, in all its aspects, is established in the believer's soul."⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 4.5.3; Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 346.

⁶⁵⁸ Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 52.

CHAPTER SIX: ORIGEN'S OTHER WORKS

6.1 Introduction to Origen's Other Works

The high regard that Origen has for Paul and his letter to the Romans is seen not only in the extensive treatment of the letter in the *Commentary*, but also in the direct citations of Romans 6:1-14 in twelve of his other works, namely, in the treatises, homilies, and commentaries.⁶⁵⁹ Most of these references are no more than a proof-text providing a scriptural authority for his argument; this use of Paul resembles that of Irenaeus and Clement, and to some extent Tertullian. In this, he appears to be imitating the Apostle himself: "One should keep in mind the Apostle's custom in other places, that when he cites the Scriptures, he does not always cite the complete wording of the text as it is found in the original passage, but he takes only as much as is called for by his current argument."⁶⁶⁰ The uniqueness of Origen is especially apparent in his striving to receive the full testimony of the Apostle:⁶⁶¹ "Paul spoke and wrote *the* gospel, the same gospel proclaimed by all the other apostles and hidden in the Old Testament."⁶⁶²

However, Origen's occasional deployment of Paul is not without discernible hermeneutical emphases. Of interest to us is how often he uses Paul to propose to his audiences the unity of God and equality among persons.⁶⁶³ In the face of the perceived threat of Marcionite reductions of Scripture, Origen applies Paul to bring "the events of the Bible to higher, heavenly realities."⁶⁶⁴ This "verticality" in Origen's symbolic reading overcomes the defective readings (*defectus litterae*) produced by the plain reading; these stumbling blocks have been set in place by the Holy Spirit precisely to foster symbolic reading.⁶⁶⁵ In this way, "Origen accomplished a true and timely hermeneutical task by making the Bible speak meaningfully to the Greco-Roman world."⁶⁶⁶ He also cites Paul to address Valentinian determinism in order to show the equality among persons. This

⁶⁵⁹ It seems that all of these other works date from the Caesarean phase, with the possible exception of the *Dialogue with Heraclides*. With almost nothing entering our analysis from the Alexandrian phase, it will not be possible here to test Heine's suggestion that there is a "young Origen and old Origen." Heine, *Origen*, viii.

⁶⁶⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.7; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 1-5*, 357.

⁶⁶¹ Mark W. Elliott, "The Triumph of Paulinism by the Mid-Third Century," in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, LNTS 412 (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 253.

⁶⁶² Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation*, 128, his emphasis.

⁶⁶³ Emanuela Prinzivalli, "Origen," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 288.

⁶⁶⁴ Prinzivalli, "Origen," 290.

⁶⁶⁵ *Princ.* 4.2.9; Prinzivalli, "Origen," 290.

⁶⁶⁶ Matthew W.I. Dunn, "Origen Reconsidered as an Exegete of Scripture," *TorTheol* 21, no. 2 (2005): 154.

equality consists of creaturely mortality in the first place, and includes the need for moral strengthening in the face of such human frailty. The fact that we find as many as six plain and symbolic readings of Romans 6:12, Paul's exhortation to believers not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies, reveals his emphasis on the frailty of persons. Through his use of this and other texts from our passage, Origen shows not only how susceptible persons are to temptation, sin, and death, but also how capable they are of resisting all three as alien to the dignity of believers.

In all, we have 22 direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 in four treatises, seven homilies, and the *Commentary on John*. We shall arrange our presentation according to the type of work for the sake of good order, and then, as far as possible, by the order in which they may have been written.

6.2 Treatises

We begin our treatment of the works of Origen with the treatises in which citations of Romans 6:4, 6, 10, and 12 are deployed as proof-texts. For the most part, Origen receives some inspiration for the choice of the subject for the treatises from opposition or his patrons, Ambrose and Tatiana. Even though *Against Celsus* is strictly speaking the only formal *apologia* among them, all of the treatises all have an apologetic tone; even *On Prayer* is written against the claim that the reality of the divine will nullifies the usefulness of prayer. As we shall see, Origen uses Paul to explore the fuller significance of the point of theology that he is developing.

We present these works here according to the order in which the treatises were probably written, thus: *On Prayer*, the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, *On the Pasch*, and *Against Celsus*.⁶⁶⁷

6.2.1 *On Prayer* 25

In the treatise *On Prayer*, Origen cites Romans 6:12 in his comments on the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come" (cf. Matt 6:9). It is likely that *On Prayer* is the earliest of Origen's works in which a citation from Romans 6:1-14 is found. The treatise was composed in 233 or 234, soon after his arrival at Caesarea and immediately before the outbreak of the persecution by

⁶⁶⁷ Since the dates of the *Dialogue with Heraclides* and *On the Pasch* are unknown, we place these two (likely Caesarean) treatises between *On Prayer* and *Against Celsus*, the latter being one of the last of Origen's works. We note the opinion of Henry Chadwick, that the *Dialogue with Heraclides* could have appeared as early as 230, which would place its author in Alexandria at the time of its writing. J. E. L. Oulton and Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen with Introductions and Notes* (London: SCM, 1954), 432. See also Heine, *Origen*, 84.

Maximinus Thrax.⁶⁶⁸ At this time, Origen and his benefactors, Ambrose and Tatiana,⁶⁶⁹ are in contact with those who think that the reality of the divine will nullifies the usefulness of prayer.⁶⁷⁰ His answers to Ambrose and Tatiana's questions form the first part of the treatise;⁶⁷¹ these answers are followed by a commentary on the Lord's Prayer⁶⁷² and a supplementary section on the mechanics of praying.⁶⁷³

He begins his exposition of the second petition by recalling the scriptural witnesses concerning the subtle indwelling of the kingdom:

Thy kingdom come. If the kingdom of God, according to the word of our Lord and Saviour, comes not with observation; and neither shall they say: Behold here, or behold there – but the kingdom of God is within us (cf. Luke 17:20-21), for the word is very near to us, in our mouth and in our heart – then it is clear that those who pray for the kingdom of God rightly pray that the kingdom of God might be established, and bear fruit and be perfected in themselves.⁶⁷⁴

Here Origen diverts us away from any conception of an earthly kingdom.⁶⁷⁵ The kingdom comes into the interior life of the individual; it does not come with outward signs but only with indwelling. According to his symbolic reading, the "kingdom of God" means the fruit of beatitude which flows from reason and wisdom.⁶⁷⁶

The presence of the kingdom by indwelling leads Origen to give his attention from this point on to the qualities and condition of the individuals who are to receive the kingdom. Two texts assist his reflection: John 14:23, with respect to saints, and Romans 6:12, with respect to sinners. Since they receive the kingdom, saints are ruled by God and obey his laws; they have the Father present to them and Christ ruling within them (cf. John 14:23).⁶⁷⁷ By contrast, sinners are under the prince of this world and are obedient to sin:

⁶⁶⁸ This date of composition may be deduced from the fact that he never mentions the persecution in the treatise. Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John. Books 13-32*, FC 89 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1993), 14.

⁶⁶⁹ *Or.* 2.

⁶⁷⁰ John J. O'Meara, *Origen: Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, ACW 19 (Westminster: Newman, 1954), 8.

⁶⁷¹ *Or.* 1-17.

⁶⁷² *Or.* 18-30.

⁶⁷³ *Or.* 31-34. An internal structure of the first and third parts has yet to be discerned, and thus both appear as a *stromateis* or tapestry on the theme of praying. Gilles Dorival, "Chapter 22: Origen," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 626.

⁶⁷⁴ *Or.* 25.1; O'Meara, *Origen: Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 84-85.

⁶⁷⁵ John Solheid, "The Grammar of Prayer According to Origen: On Prayer as *Technê Askêtikê*," *Spiritus* 19, no. 2 (2019): 293.

⁶⁷⁶ *Or.* 25.1.

⁶⁷⁷ *Or.* 25.1

Every sinner is subject to tyranny under the prince of this world, since every sinner is a slave to this present wicked world in not giving themselves over to him who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present wicked world, and might deliver us according to the will of God and our Father – as is said in the epistle to the Galatians (cf. Gal 1:4). Whoever is subject to the tyranny of the prince of this world is also under the reign of sin because they have sinned voluntarily. Hence Paul bids us not to submit to sin that would rule over us; and we are told this as follows: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof” (μη οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ἡμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτῆς, Rom 6:12).⁶⁷⁸

Origen’s text of Romans 6:12 contains an important variant: the possessive adjective in the terminating phrase agrees not with the neuter “mortal body” but with the feminine “sin”, thus giving: “Do not therefore let sin reign in our mortal body to obey its [i.e., sin’s] passions.” His text aligns with P46, and the Latin texts of Irenaeus and Tertullian, among others.⁶⁷⁹ Origen, then, while writing *On Prayer*, may have used a Greek version of Romans that contained this variant.⁶⁸⁰ It is also possible that he has amended the text for dramatic effect, or that this is simply an unintended deviation from the text, perhaps the fault of memory while working at pace. Nevertheless, if the text is accepted as it appears, there are two factors worthy of consideration.

Firstly, Origen’s variant reading puts some distance between sinful desires and the mortal body. Indeed, sinful desires do not seem to belong to the believer or their body, but to sin itself, which is seeking to regain its former possessions. This text of Romans 6:12 envisages neutrality for the mortal body, since inordinate desires are attributable to sin. Ultimately, this means that the body can be controlled and “voluntarily” oriented towards either God or sin, depending on which dominion a person is under. We have seen a similar notion in the *Commentary* (see 5.10 above): Origen notes that the soul is like a prostitute, which can be united with the flesh or with the Spirit.⁶⁸¹ Precisely to which dominion a believer belongs depends on their free action: for Origen, believers are not ruled by sin until they “voluntarily” exercise their will in such a way that they fall under its tyranny. This is confirmed by Origen’s application of Paul’s vocabulary of dominion to those who come under the kingdom of God. He finds that they have hope of experiencing rebirth and

⁶⁷⁸ *Or.* 25.1; O'Meara, *Origen: Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 85; *PG* 11:496-97.

⁶⁷⁹ *Nestle-Aland 28*, 492.

⁶⁸⁰ Employing a broader criterion for identifying references, Matthew Steinfeld suggests that Origen has two versions of Romans 6:12, which are identifiable by this pronoun in its terminating phrase: αὐτοῦ (*Comm.Matt.* 14.3.8, *Frg.Rom.A* 31, *Frg.Rom.D* 6) and αὐτῆς (*Or.* 25). Matthew Richard Steinfeld, "The Text of Romans, Second Corinthians, and Galatians in the Writings of Origen of Alexandria" (Doctoral diss., University of Birmingham, 2015), 361.

⁶⁸¹ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.5.

revivification: “God will be reigning in us, and we shall already enjoy the benefits of regeneration and resurrection.”⁶⁸²

Secondly, Origen’s text with the variant foreshadows his full characterisation of sin in his later works, which is allowed to remain somewhat opaque here: “Whoever is subject to the tyranny of the prince of this world is also under the reign of sin because they have sinned voluntarily.”⁶⁸³ Thus, Romans 6:12 is Origen’s scriptural authority for the capacity that believers have to submit either to God or to sin. This capacity, in Origen’s account, seems not to be (or have been) affected in any way; indeed, believers have such competence that they can “voluntarily” turn either to a wicked or to a good cause.

For our purposes, this means that renewal according to Origen’s application of Romans 6:12 tends strongly towards the perspectival, with the believer themselves determining to which moral power they will further submit and therefore which power will reign over them. Thus, someone evades the dominion of sin by the proper use of the will; this interpretation runs contrary to the position of Origen’s opponents. The will of believers is unimpeded and there is little here to suggest that the will was ever prevented from righteous conduct. Although we do not see moral regeneration as such here, we see instead moral degeneration in those believers who allow sin to reign in their mortal bodies. The believers who are failing to evade the “prince of this world” are ruled by sin and so submit to its desires.

6.2.2 *Dialogue with Heraclides* 25.9

Origen presents a citation from Romans 6:10 in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* to identify one of three meanings of “death” during a synod-like meeting on the unity of God and the nature of the soul. The *Dialogue with Heraclides*, unique in the Origenic corpus for being the only stenographic report of synodal proceedings,⁶⁸⁴ is mostly Origen himself speaking. In this “staged” dialogue,⁶⁸⁵ Origen, through his interlocutors, leads the people to an acceptable position of faith on Christ’s incarnation and also the human soul. The work is divided into three sections: an exchange with Heraclides and

⁶⁸² Or. 25.3; O’Meara, *Origen: Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 87.

⁶⁸³ Or. 25.1; O’Meara, *Origen: Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 85; PG 11:496-97.

⁶⁸⁴ Scherer, *Origène : Entretien d’Origène avec Héraclide*, 13; Robert J. Daly, *Origen: Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on the Father, the Son, and the Soul*, ACW 54 (New York: Paulist, 1992), 20.

⁶⁸⁵ Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 21.

Maximus begins the work,⁶⁸⁶ after which comes the question of what the soul is,⁶⁸⁷ and finally whether it is immortal.⁶⁸⁸ Our direct citations are found in the last section.

The last section begins with the entrance of Bishop Philip, whom Bishop Demetrius brings up to speed on the proceedings of the synod: “Our brother Origen is teaching that the soul is immortal.”⁶⁸⁹ This is the announcement of or pretext for Origen’s extensive review of human mortality despite the soul’s immortality. By means of a distinction between different kinds of death, along much the same lines as in the *Commentary on Romans* 5.8.4 (see 5.7 above), he first lays out how it can be that the soul is immortal even though all persons die: “I will reply that the soul is both immortal and not immortal. First, let us define the word ‘death’ and all the meanings that come from the term ‘death.’”⁶⁹⁰ Since he takes “death” as a homonym,⁶⁹¹ Origen finds a range of meanings for it. One of these meanings provides him with a way of speaking about the immortality of the soul:

I know of three deaths. What are these three deaths? Someone may live for God and have died to sin (Ζῆ τις τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ἀπέθανεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ), according to the Apostle (cf. Rom 6:10). This death is a blessed one: one dies to sin. This is the death which my Lord died: “For the death he died he died to sin” (Ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέ[θ]ανεν, Rom 6:10). I also know another death by which one dies to God. About this death it is said: “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezek 18:4). And I know a third death according to which we ordinarily consider that those who have left their body are dead. For Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and he died (cf. Gen 5:5).⁶⁹²

We have here two citations from Romans 6:10. The first citation is a much-abbreviated version of the text. That this is Romans 6:10 and not 6:11 is seen in the verbal parallels: we find the verb ἀπέθανεν (rather than the adjective νεκρούς in 6:11), and the verb ζῆ in the present indicative (rather than its participial form ζῶντας in 6:11). Origen initially applies Paul’s text not to Christ as the Apostle does but to a generic person, τις “someone”. Thus, this first citation is Origen’s proof-text for the first kind of death: Paul speaks of a true death which is not the death to God or to mortal life, but only to sin. He directs us to its meaning by two examples from Scripture, Christ and Balaam. Firstly, he clarifies by means of the second citation of Romans 6:10 that the historical death of Christ is also a death to sin, as we have seen above in the other, more exact citation: “This is the death

⁶⁸⁶ *Dial.* 1.5-10.17.

⁶⁸⁷ *Dial.* 10.20-24.24.

⁶⁸⁸ *Dial.* 24.24-28.23.

⁶⁸⁹ *Dial.* 24.25-27; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 76.

⁶⁹⁰ *Dial.* 25.1-6; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 76.

⁶⁹¹ Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 223.

⁶⁹² *Dial.* 25.9; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 76, SC 67:104.

which my Lord died: 'For the death he died he died to sin' ('Ο γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ ἀπέ[θ]ανεν).⁶⁹³ Secondly, he offers the example of Balaam, who was resolved not to sin:

The soul is mortal and blessed if it dies to sin. This is the death that Balaam was talking about in his prophecy, praying in the divine Spirit: "Let my soul die among the souls of the just!" (Num 23:10). It was about this death that Balaam made his astonishing prophecy and, in the word of God, prayed the most beautiful of prayers for himself; for he prayed to die to sin in order to live to God.⁶⁹⁴

These two examples show us that believers who have "died to sin" (Rom 6:10) have not entered a permanent state but rather may live again to sin in their moral conduct. This is particularly evidenced by the omission of the adverb ἐφάπαξ from the citations. Even though he uses "death" with its sense of finality, he explains that the second kind of death entails an avoidable living again to sin: "There is another death, in regard to which we are not immortal; but it is possible for us, through vigilance, not to die this death ... To the extent that it allows itself to commit such a sin that it becomes a soul that sins which itself will die, the soul is mortal for a real death."⁶⁹⁵ This means that "death to sin" here is presented primarily as formal renunciation of sin.

Crucially for our purposes, believers bear primary responsibility for remaining dead to sin. There is the suggestion that believers may pray to God as Balaam did: "He prayed to die to sin in order to live to God."⁶⁹⁶ However, Origen does not comment further on whether or how that prayer was answered. In this respect, the prayer of Balaam does not appear as a petition to God, which believers are to make their own, but only as a desire to preserve his life. Origen's openness to the possibility of future wrongdoing explains why he has included an extended exhortation following his distinction between the three kinds of death and why he concludes the *Dialogue* thus: "It is for us to stretch forth our hands by performing good deeds and lay hold of life and deposit it in our soul."⁶⁹⁷ For Origen, believers may certainly live again to sin, and, in so doing, will suffer the second of the three kinds of death, namely, death to God.

In conclusion, we have seen Origen use Romans 6:10 to witness to the possibility that believers may suffer that particular kind of death which is death to God by living again to sin. The capacity to enter recidivism seems to be unaffected by a person's coming to faith or initiation. The achievement of not returning to that "evil" life is entirely self-directed. Thus, he repeatedly exhorts believers to make a formal renunciation of sin, which for him is the fulfilment of what it means to die to sin.

⁶⁹³ Rom 6:10 in *Dial.* 25.17-19; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 76.

⁶⁹⁴ *Dial.* 26.13-22; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 77.

⁶⁹⁵ *Dial.* 26.25-28, 30-35; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 77.

⁶⁹⁶ *Dial.* 26.13-22; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 77.

⁶⁹⁷ *Dial.* 27.17-20; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 78.

Therefore, as with what we have seen in the *Dialogue* above, Origen's use of Paul here confirms perspectival understandings of personal renewal.

6.2.3 *On the Pasch* 6.19-20

Origen directly cites from Romans 6:6 in *On the Pasch*, a treatise which he wrote for fellow Christians in order to counter earlier symbolic readings of Exodus 12 and Passover.⁶⁹⁸ He argues against early writers such as Melito of Sardis⁶⁹⁹ and Ps.-Hippolytus,⁷⁰⁰ who identified Passover (πάσχα) with the Lord's Passion (πάθος, said to be related to πάσχειν, to suffer). He regards this explanation as defective because it is not grounded in the Hebrew: "Should one of us in conversation with Hebrew people too rashly mention that the Passover takes its name from the suffering of the Saviour, they would be ridiculed by them as one totally ignorant of the meaning of the word."⁷⁰¹ He also notes the popularity of this view, that this erroneous etymology has been adopted by "most of the brethren, indeed perhaps all."⁷⁰² For Origen, however, any symbolic reading must be "consistent with the mystery of Christ."⁷⁰³

Origen's search for a more appropriate symbolic fulfilment of Passover concludes with the discovery of Christ's passage to the Father (διάβασις, which Origen traces to the Hebrew :תפס "But when Christ came not to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them (cf. Matt 5:17), he showed us what the true Passover is, the true 'passage' (διάβασις) out of Egypt."⁷⁰⁴ He therefore finds it necessary to revisit the subject with careful plain and symbolic readings of Exodus 12, the text in which the Passover features: "We come now to an examination of the text itself, knowing that the Passover (πάσχα) means passage (διάβασις)."⁷⁰⁵

This notion of Passover as "passage" also becomes the hermeneutical key for opening the text of Exodus 12:1-2 in its plain and symbolic readings: "God says to Moses and Aaron that this month is the beginning of months and is also the first month of the year for them when they leave Egypt."⁷⁰⁶

⁶⁹⁸ Ruth Anne Clements, "Peri Pascha: Passover and the Displacement of Jewish Interpretation within Origen's Exegesis" (Doctoral diss., Harvard University, 1997), 243; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 4, 9, 15-16.

⁶⁹⁹ Melito, *Peri Pascha*, 46.

⁷⁰⁰ Ps.-Hippolytus, *In Sanctum Pascha*, 11.

⁷⁰¹ *Pasch.* 1.32-2.1; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 27.

⁷⁰² *Pasch.* 1.5; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 27.

⁷⁰³ Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 6.

⁷⁰⁴ *Pasch.* 4.15-20; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 29.

⁷⁰⁵ *Pasch.* 2.16-18; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 28.

⁷⁰⁶ *Pasch.* 4.1-5; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 29.

He observes that the term “passage” includes a dramatic change in persons from one condition to another, and thus orients the Christian reader of Exodus 12 towards the ritual of baptism:

A new way of life begins for the one who leaves behind the darkness and comes to the light – to speak in a manner proper to the sacrament (σύμβολον) through water given to those who have hoped in Christ, which is called the washing of regeneration. For what does rebirth signify if not the beginning of another birth?⁷⁰⁷

Origen then states that it was only to Moses and Aaron that the Lord spoke these words: “For it is not written: ‘And God said to the people: This month is for you the beginning of months; it is the first month of the year for you.’ Rather, it is written: ‘The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: This month is for you the beginning of months.’”⁷⁰⁸ With this restrictive reading of “for you” in Exodus 12:2 in hand, he proceeds to expound this plain reading further by distinguishing between those who are able to hear God’s words (Moses and Aaron) and those who cannot (the people). Hearing God’s word requires much of the individual: “One must enter into a perfect state of life and a perfect love in order to be able to hear, while still in this present world, the words: ‘This month is for you the beginning of months.’”⁷⁰⁹

Origen says that God chose Moses and Aaron to celebrate the first of months because only they had changed themselves by a moral renunciation: “It is necessary to have completely renounced creation and this world to understand that one has become almost other than what they were in order to be able to hear.”⁷¹⁰ The perfect person, then, is someone who has undergone a death to self and an awakening to the voice of God. This includes the Christian believer:

The fact that the perfect person has the beginning of another birth and becomes other than what they were, this is what the Apostle is teaching us when he says: “The old self in us was crucified with Christ” (Ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συ[νεσταυρώθη τῷ Χ(ριστ)ῷ], Rom 6:6), and again: “If we have died with him we shall also live with him” (2 Tim 2:11; cf. Gal 2:10), and then speaking boldly of himself: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20); these are the kinds of people who can, while still in the world, hear that the first month and the beginning of months have come to pass for them.”⁷¹¹

Origen’s text lacks the terminating phrase, “so that the body of sin might be destroyed and that we might no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom 6:6). Nevertheless, what has been cited here witnesses to Origen’s principal point, namely, that the radical separation from the old life has been made by

⁷⁰⁷ *Pasch.* 4.25-36; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 29.

⁷⁰⁸ *Pasch.* 5.5-19; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 29-30.

⁷⁰⁹ *Pasch.* 4.39-5.5; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 29.

⁷¹⁰ *Pasch.* 6.7-11; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 30.

⁷¹¹ *Pasch.* 6.15-30; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 30; CA 2:164.

those who have become one with Christ: "It is only those who have had this experience of transformation and new life, who can hear that the first month and the beginning of months have come about for them."⁷¹² Thus, self-directed moral renewal is needed to hear God's words. This is confirmed by the fact that Romans 6:6 stands at the head of a short string of Pauline texts, including 2 Timothy 2:11 and Galatians 2:19-20, which show how the old humanity was put to death with Christ, and which, already renewed, now lives with him.

In this, we may note the parallel that Origen wishes to draw between Christ and his members: just as Christ made his passage to the Father, so too do Christians transform themselves in order to receive God's "promises and blessings".⁷¹³ The bestowal of new names on Abram, Jacob, Simon, and James and John, the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), further witnesses to this change: "No matter where we look, we find things of this kind everywhere in the Scriptures pointing out that those who have been made perfect have new names because they are no longer the same but have become other than what they were."⁷¹⁴

For our purposes, this direct citation from Romans 6:6 witnesses to the complete break which believers must themselves make in their "new birth" with the death of their old selves. Their new selves are as different from their old selves as Moses and Aaron are from the people; as in Origen's reading of Exodus 12 in the light of Romans 6:6, they can hear God's words addressed to them. This citation, then, tends strongly towards a reading of Paul as displaying perspectival renewal. Those who become the "perfect person" and who have "the beginning of another birth and [become] other than what they were," in Origen's reading, are those who have "crucified [themselves] with Christ."⁷¹⁵ The only condition for this renewal is that it remains self-directed; the "perfect person" emerges having freely embraced that death of self which enables the new to come to birth.

6.2.4 *Against Celsus* 2.69

Direct citations of Romans 6:4 and 10 are found in Book Two of *Against Celsus*, when Origen addresses Celsus' claim that Jesus' death and divinity are mutually opposed. *Against Celsus* occupies an important place in the Origenic corpus as the only time that we know of when Origen engages a non-Christian opponent in writing, largely at the instigation of his benefactor, Ambrose.⁷¹⁶ The work

⁷¹² Clements, "Peri Pascha: Passover and the Displacement of Jewish Interpretation within Origen's Exegesis," 279-80.

⁷¹³ *Pasch.* 6.34-35; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 30.

⁷¹⁴ *Pasch.* 7.9-13; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 31.

⁷¹⁵ *Pasch.* 6.15-20; Daly, *Origen: On the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, 30.

⁷¹⁶ *Cels.* pref.1.

is written for Origen's benefactor, Ambrose, and those Christians who are encountering criticism for having abandoned the faith of the gods and having believed in a dead man who rose and is said to be immortal.⁷¹⁷

Celsus' objection, as Origen recounts it, states: "But if [Christ] really was so great, he ought, in order to display his divinity, to have disappeared suddenly from the cross."⁷¹⁸ This objection does not originate from Celsus; it corresponds with Porphyry, who asked why Jesus did not disappear before his captors like Apollonius of Tyra did before Domitian.⁷¹⁹ Origen argues that Jesus' death is necessary because it meets the purposes of the Incarnation, although he does so after he explores the Lucan account of Jesus' disappearance during the supper at Emmaus.⁷²⁰

Origen introduces his principal argument by addressing how historical evidence from Scripture ought to be handled:

We want to show that it was not to the greater advantage of the whole purpose of the incarnation that he should have suddenly disappeared physically from the cross. The truth of the events recorded to have happened to Jesus cannot be fully seen in the mere text and historical narrative; for each event to those who read the Bible more intelligently is clearly a symbol of something as well.⁷²¹

For Origen, Christian Scripture requires symbolic reading. This is the only way to see the significance of the events they recount,⁷²² even if this leaves him exposed to a charge by later readers of having disembodied history.⁷²³ By itself, the death of Christ is but history: "He had been killed as a man and had died as a man."⁷²⁴ For the symbolic reading, however, Origen turns to a scriptural witness, Paul. Indeed, Origen draws on Paul for scriptural support across the entire apology slightly more often than he does the Gospels.⁷²⁵ Thus, Origen incorporates as many as six Pauline references into his reply to Celsus' objection:

His crucifixion contains the truth indicated by the words, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20), and by the sense of the words, "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14). His death was necessary because "in that he died, he died unto sin

⁷¹⁷ Michael Frede, "Origen's Treatise Against Celsus," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, ed. Mark J. Edwards, et al. (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 154.

⁷¹⁸ *Cels.* 2.68; Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 118.

⁷¹⁹ Porphyry, *Frg.* 63; cf. *Vit. Apoll.* 8.5. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 118.

⁷²⁰ *Cels.* 2.68; cf. Luke 24:30-31.

⁷²¹ *Cels.* 2.69; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 118.

⁷²² Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 64.

⁷²³ Daniel Boyarin, "Philo, Origen, and the Rabbis," in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context*, ed. James E. Goehring and Janet A. Timbie (Washington, DC: CUA, 2008), 128.

⁷²⁴ *Cels.* 2.69; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 119.

⁷²⁵ Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 525-31.

once” (τὸ ὃ γὰρ ἀπέθανε, τῆ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ, Rom 6:10), and because the righteous man says that he is “being conformed unto his death” (Phil 3:10), and “for if we die with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tim 2:11). So also his burial extends to those who are conformed to his death and crucified with him and dying with him, as Paul also says: “For we are buried together with him by baptism and we have risen together with him” (τὸ συνετάφημεν γὰρ αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος, συνανέστημεν αὐτῷ, cf. Rom 6:4).⁷²⁶

We have two references from our passage here: Romans 6:10, followed by 6:4. That we have a direct citation of Romans 6:10 is evidenced by Origen’s introduction of the reference with the neuter article τὸ, just as he does before the references from 2 Timothy and Romans 6:4. The closely-worded citation of Romans 6:10 at this point functions as a proof-text for two key realities: firstly, the death of Christ was more than simply an historical event, since it entailed death also to the reality of sin; and secondly, such a death had an unrepeatable nature. Tzamalikos draws our attention to the significance that Origen sees in the word “once” (ἐφάπαξ) in Romans 6:10: “This is one specific point in the whole of time, between the beginning and the end of the world, loaded with a decisive eschatological purpose.”⁷²⁷ Thus, the citation of Romans 6:10 is designed to show that the crucifixion which the Gospels relate is not only the death of the man, Jesus, but also his decisive ending of the reign of sin for all.

The text of the first half of Romans 6:4 appears without much to trouble us. The only cause for concern may lie in whether the inclusion of the phrase “and we have risen together with him” (συνανέστημεν αὐτῷ) means that Origen does not intend to cite Romans 6:4 but another Pauline text in which the Apostle speaks of the resurrection as already in hand. As it appears here in *Against Celsus*, Origen’s wording may have its foundation in the phrase “you have been raised” (συνηγέρθητε) of Colossians 2:12 or 3:1; if this is so, Origen could be accused of blending biblical texts. This addition certainly fits Origen’s purpose, of showing Ambrose how the death and burial of the now-risen Christ are incorporative of believers. Of the six Pauline passages seen here, Origen only extrapolates like this on this one; the others are faithfully recounted. We shall see this extrapolation again when he cites Romans 6:4 in *Homily 2 on Ezekiel* and in the *Commentary on John*.

The peculiar phrase “we have risen with him” therefore appears with the first half of Romans 6:4 as an abbreviation of how Paul points to believers’ union with Christ even in his resurrection. Since his focus in *Against Celsus* 2.69 is on how the composite person Christ could have suffered death, we should see in the replacement of the second half of Romans 6:4 with the phrase “we have risen with

⁷²⁶ *Cels.* 2.69; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 118-19, SC 132:446.

⁷²⁷ Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 73.

him” Origen overlooking or perhaps even de-emphasising the reference to altered conduct for the time being. However, he simply does not at this point consider whether in Romans 6:4 there are moral consequences proceeding from the resurrection. Rather, his attention is drawn to the significance of the death of Christ and thus an abbreviated form of Paul’s text apparently taken from memory sufficiently answers Celsus’ objection. Beyond this, there is no further comment for our study.

6.2.5 Summary

These four treatises allow us to see Origen at his most generous, in making the questions of his contemporaries his own. They also show that Paul was a prominent scriptural authority for Origen as he contributed to the development of Christian theology or as he answered the challenges to its development. It is Paul who demonstrates for Origen’s audience how believers are free to place themselves under the dominion either of God or of sin, which will then dwell within them,⁷²⁸ how the soul can be immortal though the mortal body dies,⁷²⁹ and what the significance of the death of Jesus is for believers.⁷³⁰

We have also seen Origen account for the renewal of believers through the proper exercise of their own free will, which seems never to have been inhibited.⁷³¹ Since believers have full moral agency, it is not surprising that he warns his audience of a kind of death which is not bodily but spiritual, in which the individual lives again to sin and so dies to God.⁷³² Therefore, in the direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 in Origen’s treatises, we see that “dying to sin” is in effect formal renunciation. In this, his applied exegesis of Paul accords with perspectival accounts of personal renewal.

6.3 Homilies

Origen’s preaching begins soon after he was ordained presbyter in Caesarea and settled there in 232.⁷³³ At Caesarea, he found a congregation often aware of the opposition from Jewish,

⁷²⁸ Rom 6:12 in *Or.* 25.

⁷²⁹ Rom 6:10 in *Dial.* 26.11-25.

⁷³⁰ Rom 6:4, 10 in *Cels.* 2.69; Rom 6:6 in *Pasch.* 6.15-20.

⁷³¹ Rom 6:12 in *Or.* 25.

⁷³² Rom 6:2-4 in *Comm.Rom.* 7.12.4; Rom 6:10 in *Dial.* 25.9.

⁷³³ If Eusebius is right and Origen’s homilies began to be taken down after he had turned sixty (*Eccl.Hist.* 6.36.1), then the first recorded homilies would date from around 245. In his first recorded homily, *Homily on Psalm 36*, Origen refers to an Emperor who reigned some thirty years ago and who was followed by a quick succession of short-lived rulers: “Look who reigned as emperor some thirty years ago [*quis imperavit ante hos triginta annos*], see how his empire flourished. But straightaway it began to wither like the flower of the field,

Marcionite, and Valentinian groups. Hence, as a preacher, Origen tends to reserve the more technical questions for the commentaries and instead imparts or reinforces catechetical knowledge in his homilies.⁷³⁴ He uses Paul's texts to shed light on those from the Hebrew Bible in order to show how both Testaments witness to Christian theology; he also preaches through almost all of the New Testament. It was from this time onwards that much of his maturation as an exegete took place; it is said he only allowed stenographers to preserve those homilies which reflected his own maturity as preacher.⁷³⁵

Sadly, we have no homilies of Origen on Romans. Indeed, with the exception of the *Commentary on Romans*, we have but fragments of Origen's works on Paul. However, we do have seven homilies on other books of Scripture which contain direct citations from Romans 6:1-14. He works Paul into his "public exegesis" as Paul's writings shed light on texts appearing in worship services.⁷³⁶ The question of how particular scriptural books were chosen for liturgies, and hence, for preaching, is difficult to answer with certainty. For Heine, the choice was determined by the the religious and political environment: "He used the particular scriptural book that he commented on because he believed that this book, or some portion of it, addressed issues facing the Church and individual Christians of his day."⁷³⁷ This appears to be true of the *Homilies on Isaiah*, which are on the "vision" texts rather than a semicontinuous reading. Certainly, Origen's homilies had to be accessible to all, since his congregation at Caesarea was likely composed of the baptized and catechumens,⁷³⁸ the latter still much in need of building a body of religious knowledge, which was then achieved by means of the homilies themselves. Monaci Castagna's view, then, rings true: "Origen had conceived the

then there was another next after him, and then another and another." *Hom.Ps.36* 1.2; Heintz, *The Pedagogy of the Soul: Origen's Homilies on the Psalms*, 98. Scholarly views differ on whether the Emperor of whom Origen is speaking is Septimus Severus (r.193-211) or Macrinus (r.217-218), placing the recorded preaching of Origen from 241 or 248 respectively. Pierre Nautin, *Origène : Sa vie et son œuvre*, CA (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 404-05. See also Adele Monaci Castagna, "Origen the Scholar and Pastor," in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* ed. Cunningham Allen and Pauline Allen, NHS 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 67.

⁷³⁴ Mark W. Elliott, "Exegetical Genres in the Patristic Era," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 775, 78-9.

⁷³⁵ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 33.

⁷³⁶ Andrew S. Jacobs, "Sordid Bodies: Christ's Circumcision and Sacrifice in Origen's Fourteenth Homily on Luke," in *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: Reception and Use of New Testament Texts in Ancient Christian Ascetic Discourses*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, NTOA/SUNT 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 221.

⁷³⁷ Heine, *Origen*, viii.

⁷³⁸ It is in his homilies on the longer readings from the Old Testament books that Origen mentions how catechumens were expected to attend daily worship (*Hom.Gen.* 10.1, 3, *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 4.1). From this, and from evidence of *Apostolic Tradition* concerning the non-admission of catechumens to liturgies at which the Gospel was read (*Trad.Ap.* 20.2), Nautin concludes that Origen's homilies on the Old Testament are mainly for catechumens and those on the New Testament for the baptized. See Nautin, *Origène*, 394.

systematic commentary on the Scriptures as an educational process aimed at both the baptized and the catechumens, and organized so as to offer a continuous commentary” on the Pentateuch, and prophetic, and historical books.⁷³⁹

We have direct citations in five homilies on Old Testament books: Genesis, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Two further citations occur in homilies on the Gospel of Luke, which he delivered in all likelihood at the Eucharist.⁷⁴⁰ These homilies were for those already-initiated members of the Church at Caesarea, who were making their journey from purification through knowledge towards perfection.⁷⁴¹ As with the treatises, we shall consider the homilies in the order in which they were probably written:⁷⁴² Romans 6:12 in *Homily 1 on Isaiah*, Romans 6:12 in *Homily 1 on Jeremiah*, Romans 6:4 in *Homily 2 on Ezekiel*, Romans 6:11 in *Homily 11 on Genesis*, Romans 6:12 in *Homily 15 on Joshua*, and Romans 6:12 in *Homilies 30 and 36 on Luke*.

6.3.1 Homily on Isaiah 1.1

A direct citation of Romans 6:12 occurs in the first paragraph of Origen’s first homily on Isaiah, in which he addresses with the prophet’s vision in Isaiah 6:1-7.⁷⁴³ The prophet receives a vision only after the death of King Uzziah (Isa 6:1): “As long as King Uzziah was alive, the prophet Isaiah was not able to see a vision ... If Uzziah is alive, we do not see the glory of God; but if he dies, then we see the glory of God as soon as Uzziah dies.”⁷⁴⁴ This notion of the recapitulation of an honourable figure after the death of a wicked tyrant also features in the works of Philo.⁷⁴⁵ Origen applies Philo’s notion of the recapitulation of the good person to the prophet Isaiah himself, and thence to the Christian congregation. Of interest to us is how Origen sustains each aspect of Philo’s reading: the

⁷³⁹ Monaci Castagna, "Origen the Scholar and Pastor," 66.

⁷⁴⁰ Nautin, *Origène*, 391-94, 400.

⁷⁴¹ Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*, PTS 28 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), 71-107.

⁷⁴² Nautin, *Origène*, 403.

⁷⁴³ It seems likely that Origen preaches on Isaiah 6:1-7 precisely because it includes a vision passage, since he did not preach from a semi-continuous reading of the book: *Homilies 1 and 4* are both on Isaiah 6:1-7, which could have been followed in sequence by *Homilies 6 and 9* on Isaiah 6:8. Thus, the extant collection shows that either we have some of the homilies from two or more cycles on Isaiah, or the texts on which Origen preached were thematically chosen. Alfons Fürst and Christian Hengsternann, *Origenes: Die Homilien zum Buch Jesaja*, WDU 10 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 5.

⁷⁴⁴ *Hom. Isa.* 1.1; Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Isaiah : Including St Jerome's Translation of Origen's Homilies 1-9 on Isaiah*, ACW 68 (New York: Newman, 2015), 885.

⁷⁴⁵ We find the notion of the recapitulation of the good person in Philo’s work, *How the Worse attacks the Better (Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat, Det. 93-94)*, which Origen references in *Commentary on Matthew 15.3*. Origen imports this notion into *Homily 1 on Isaiah* and *Homily 1 on Judges*.

recapacitation of the good person on the death of the tyrant, which he symbolically reads as wrongdoing, and their freedom from the performance of the works the tyrant demands.

Thus, the immediate task for those who symbolically identify with the prophet is the destruction of the wicked king:

Therefore, this sort of ruler of the soul must die, so that we may be able to see the vision of God. For it is not in vain that it is written, "And it came to pass in the year in which King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord" (Isa 6:1). Uzziah, or pharaoh, is alive in each one of us, and we do not groan as we do Egyptian works (cf. Exod 2:23). But if he dies, then we groan, as it is written in Exodus. If Uzziah is alive, we do not see the glory of God; but if he dies, then we see the glory of God as soon as Uzziah dies. Only may this be the case, that the word reign in us of him who said, "But I have been appointed king by him" (Ps 2:6), and may wrath not reign.⁷⁴⁶

We begin to see the symbolic reading of Uzziah which Origen is taking: Uzziah lives on precisely "in each one of us".⁷⁴⁷ The indwelling of such a tyrant proves detestable, and those who are possessed by him "do not see the glory of God."⁷⁴⁸ Whereas Philo provides Origen with the general direction of his symbolic reading of Uzziah, it is Paul who furnishes him with the detail that the indwelling tyrant is sin:

To be sure, there is also a king of sin; the Apostle knew this when he said, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (*Non ergo regnet peccatum in mortali vestro corpore*, Rom 6:12). Wretched is the one in whom sin reigns, who hands themselves over to such a king, who despises the kingdom of God, and subjects themselves to pleasure.⁷⁴⁹

The text that Origen produces from Romans 6:12 readily agrees with that of Paul. As we shall see throughout the homilies (with the exception of the citation in *Homily 15 on Joshua*), Origen omits the terminating phrase of Romans 6:12, "to make you obey its desires". The omission certainly functions to concentrate the congregation's attention on their responsibility to refrain from sinful misdeeds and alert them to sin's ruling power: those who do let sin reign in their mortal body "hand themselves over to such a king," that is, hand themselves over to a foreign tyrant who prevents their vision of the "glory of God". Here, the Pauline citation fills out Origen's symbolic reading of Isaiah

⁷⁴⁶ *Hom. Isa.* 1.1; Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Isaiah*, 885.

⁷⁴⁷ Origen leads Didymus and Evagrius in the interiorised application of the apocalyptic imagery of Isaiah 6. Bogdan G. Bucur, "'I saw the Lord': Observations on the Christian Reception History of Isaiah 6," *ProEccl* 23, no. 3 (2014): 314.

⁷⁴⁸ The references to Pharaoh, "Egyptian works," and the groaning of the people appear to be intrusions out of context in Origen's homily on Isaiah. All three are found together in the other work of Philo's in which the notion of recapacitation of the good person is found, the *Allegorical Interpretation* on Genesis 2 and 3 (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.211-213).

⁷⁴⁹ *Hom. Isa.* 1.1; Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Isaiah*, 885; WDU 10:194.

for his Christian congregation and thus the two scriptural texts parallel one another in their depiction of the reigning evil tyrant, Uzziah or sin. There are two conclusions which flow from this.

Firstly, this citation shows the inhibiting role that sin may play in the lives of those who subject themselves to it. The reference to “handing oneself over” to sin suggests that Origen is indeed addressing those who have already committed themselves to this ethical project. Should they fail to refrain from sin by indulging in vain pleasures, believers will be prevented from beholding “the glory of God” as Isaiah was because of Uzziah. This means that, unlike the historical figures Uzziah or Pharaoh, sin can live on again in those who pursue pleasure; where it lives on, sin enslaves those whom it indwells in order to make them do its bidding. Apart from this, there is no other suggestion than that of what being ruled by sin might look like, or indeed what other capacities might be restored if we follow Origen’s reading of Philo.

Secondly, believers’ capacity itself to repel sin appears to be unaffected. Individuals, then, determine the extent of their association with sin, which means that the battle for oneself can be fought and won. For Origen, personal action must be taken against whatever has previously prevented the “vision of God”: “This sort of ruler of the soul must die.”⁷⁵⁰ Individuals must be constantly vigilant and take active steps to ensure that the former reign of sin is not allowed to resurge. According to Origen, then, sin, which may again rule individuals like a wicked king, is withstood by forgoing bodily pleasures.

Crucially for our purposes, this means that Origen witnesses to the perspectival view of ethical renewal. There is no reason to think that the vision of the “glory of God” which comes by eschewing sinful misdeeds means any substantial change to a person’s ethical experience. Origen’s citation also means that moral degeneration is possible, insofar as a person who returns to the practice of misdeeds will find themselves ruled by sin.

6.3.2 Homily on Jeremiah 1.7.1

We have another citation from Romans 6:12 in Origen’s first *Homily on Jeremiah*. His homilies on Jeremiah are an “inoculation” of his audience against a foreseeable rejection of the Old Testament on account of the harshness of the words of the prophet.⁷⁵¹ With its anti-Marcionite tone, the homilist’s principal message for his congregants is that the prophet’s stern warnings still need to be

⁷⁵⁰ *Hom. Isa.* 1.1; Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Isaiah*, 885.

⁷⁵¹ Trigg, *Origen*, 179. Smith offers a less polemical view: “The homilies on Jeremiah comprise a catechism of Origen’s view of Christian doctrine and Christian philosophy.” John Clark Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings 28*, FC 97 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1998), xvi.

heeded, as they form part of the one call to conversion which is found in all Scripture: “As these things are imposed, the words of the Prophets, the words of the law, the words of the Apostles, and the words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, speak to us about repentance, encourage us toward conversion.”⁷⁵² Origen returns several times in the homilies to the coherent witness of all Scripture to the one call to conversion, which is aimed at the “miserable heretics”⁷⁵³ who neither read the Old Testament nor, in Origen’s judgement, find sufficient evidence in the rest of Scripture for a call to repentance and so the responsible exercise of free will.⁷⁵⁴

We find that Origen interprets Paul as also having a symbolic reading of Jeremiah 1:10, “See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms.” Origen regards the plain reading of this text as easily exhausted:

Everyone who has received words from God and has the grace of heavenly words has received them in order to uproot and demolish nations and kingdoms. Though everyone who has received words from God is said to uproot nations and kingdoms, it is not, it seems to me, said in a bodily sense.⁷⁵⁵

Thus, he turns to Romans 6:12:

For when one has considered human souls which are ruled by sin according to the passage from the Apostle, “Let not sin reign in our mortal body” (Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ἡμῶν σῶματι, Rom 6:12), and when one sees also the many kinds of sins, they interpret allegorically also the “nations and the kingdoms” (cf. Jer 1:10) as the bad movements in the souls of persons which are uprooted and demolished by those words of God which are given either to Jeremiah or to whomever.⁷⁵⁶

The key variant in Origen’s text of Romans 6:12 is the possessive adjective in the first-person plural, “our”, thus: “Do not therefore let sin reign in our mortal body.” That Origen is not speaking about a corporate body such as a city or ecclesial community is evidenced by the two references to personal wrongdoing which precede and follow the citation: “Human souls which are ruled by sin,” and “They interpret allegorically also the nations and the kingdoms as the bad movements in the souls of persons.”⁷⁵⁷ However, we cannot exclude the possibility that this variant may be best explained by a homilist’s use of an inclusive form of address to his congregants.

⁷⁵² *Hom.Jer.* 1.4.2; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 5-6.

⁷⁵³ *Hom.Jer.* 1.16.2; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 20.

⁷⁵⁴ Torjesen, *Origen's Exegesis*, 50.

⁷⁵⁵ *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 8.

⁷⁵⁶ *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 8, SC 232:206-08.

⁷⁵⁷ *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 8.

The language of sovereignty or dominion is common to Jeremiah 1:10 and Romans 6:12. By bringing these two texts together, Origen witnesses to the power of sin which may rule over persons, just as “nations and kingdoms” do. This would be further confirmed by the second authority he introduces, drawn from empirical observation, that there are many kinds of sins into which believers continue to fall. Their falling into sin in these cases is attributed to “bad movements” in their souls. Origen makes no comment on the capacity of individuals to rid themselves of these bad movements, although he does say that the words of God given “to Jeremiah or to whomever” can rid them of these movements. Thus, the prophet or preacher comes to the aid of those who suffer the tyrannies of sin.

For our purposes, Origen’s use of Paul demonstrates that persons can be ruled by sin, that is, ruled by the many and varied misdeeds that they commit. The form of this rule seems to be compulsion to wrongdoing, since persons are unable to escape the “bad movements” which drive them on. However, people trapped into the pattern of such conduct can be freed by the “words from God” which have been given to preachers. Origen does not elaborate on what these words are, and thus we must assume that he is thinking of the ministry of the word in general. This reading of Paul therefore likely reflects substantial renewal since believers who continue to fall into these “bad movements” have the “words of God” available to them to rescue them.

6.3.3 *Homily on Ezekiel 2.5*

Two direct citations from Romans 6:4 are found in the last section of Origen’s homily on Ezekiel 13:1-19, in which he sets out how the Lord’s admonition of false prophets applies to those who in his own day “preach from their own heart” (Ezek 13:2).⁷⁵⁸ The way in which teachers read Scripture sets true teachers apart from false ones. Origen explains that teaching “against the will of God” is teaching against what Jesus said and intended: “If anyone reads the Gospel and fits his own meaning to the Gospel, not understanding it as the Lord spoke it, they are a false prophet speaking from their own heart in the Gospel.”⁷⁵⁹ Those who teach in the Church are therefore expected to be faithful to the intended meaning of Christian Scripture: “If anyone assents to the will of the Holy Spirit – of him

⁷⁵⁸ Thanks to Jerome’s Latin translation while he was in Constantinople, we have fourteen homilies on Ezekiel. Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel*, ACW 62 (New York: Newman, 2010), 3. We also have a number of fragments in Greek, one of which we shall see is also on the same text. *Fr. Ezech.* 13.5c; Mischa Hooker, *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel*, ATT 2 (Ipswich: Chieftain, 2014), 551.

⁷⁵⁹ *Hom. Ezech.* 2.2; John D. Sehorn, “Origen of Alexandria’s Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel: Translation and Commentary” (Doctoral diss., University of Notre Dame, 2014), 391.

who spoke in the Apostles – he does not speak ‘from his own heart’, but from the heart of the Holy Spirit who spoke in Paul, who spoke in Peter, who spoke also in the rest of the Apostles.”⁷⁶⁰

The false teachers of the “heretics”⁷⁶¹ are distinguished from true teachers by their addition of mythological concepts, such as “aeons”, to their interpretation of Scripture, and thus by their ignorance of the Gospel: “Indeed there is nothing absurd in understanding these sayings to be about the heretics. For they hold forth about the fables of their aeons, as if they had to do with the Gospels and the Apostles, setting out their own heart, not the heart of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁶² Mention of “heretics” who introduce “aeons” into Scripture betrays the identity of these opponents. In his other *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Origen indicates that he is in close contact with followers of the triumvirate of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, whom he groups together.⁷⁶³ Despite the extraordinary diversity of their followers’ teachings, they were united in their “polytheistic or dualistic tendency: they all deny the one God as unique source of all creation, revelation and grace.”⁷⁶⁴ Only late in *Homily 2 on Ezekiel* does he identify the false prophets as “the Marcionite teachers and the flourishing sect of Valentinus.”⁷⁶⁵

The addition of alien elements into the biblical text by these two groups concerns Origen, who is aware that he also must faithfully teach his congregation so that they will safeguard what they receive for their eternal life. As Scheck points out in relation to the “heretics”, if “a Christian’s heavenly rewards depend not on an inborn nature but on earthly merit, on a good and responsible use of one’s free will, and on achieving a spiritual victory over the devil,”⁷⁶⁶ then having the right teacher is everything. The Marcionites and Valentinians are therefore the ones who are responsible for division in the community: “Those whom they teach, those whom they establish ... they collect together as schismatic flocks against the Church of God – against the house of Israel.”⁷⁶⁷ For Origen, the false teaching of the Marcionite and Valentinian “heretics” must be called out and corrected, so that the unity of the Church will be recovered.

The citations from Romans 6:4 occur in the last section of the homily, in which Origen is commenting on Ezekiel 13:5-6:

They did not rise who said, “In the day of the Lord,” while seeing falsehoods (Ezek 13:5-6). They did not rise, but the righteous, rising, say, “We have been buried with Christ

⁷⁶⁰ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.2; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 390-91.

⁷⁶¹ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.2; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 391.

⁷⁶² *Hom.Ezech.* 2.2; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 391.

⁷⁶³ *Hom.Ezech.* 3.4, 7.4, 8.2.

⁷⁶⁴ Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel*, 9-10.

⁷⁶⁵ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.5; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 404.

⁷⁶⁶ Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel*, 10.

⁷⁶⁷ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.5; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 401.

through baptism, and we have risen with him" (*Consepulti sumus Christo per baptismam, et consurreximus ei*, cf. Rom 6:4). For just as we have the pledge of the Holy Spirit, whom we shall receive in full after what is perfect comes, so also we have the pledge of resurrection, since none of us so far has risen again in the perfect resurrection. But nonetheless we have risen again, as Paul says, "We have been buried with Christ through baptism, and we have risen with him" (*Consepulti sumus Christo per baptismam, et consurreximus ei*, cf. Rom 6:4). Thus, the false prophets and false teachers who said, "In the day of the Lord," while seeing falsehoods, have not risen, that is, they have not yet obtained the baptism of resurrection. Falsehoods are all they see, and they cannot at any time contemplate the truth.⁷⁶⁸

The two citations from Paul seen here are very much like those that we see in *Against Celsus* 2.69 and in *Commentary on John* 10.231. It may seem that Origen intends to cite Colossians 2:12. Certainly, the phrase, "and we have risen with him," lends itself to such an assessment. However, there are features from Romans 6:4 to be identified here too: the verbs in the perfect tense and the close verbal parallels support our assessment, that Romans 6:4 is at least also in view, if not mainly so. The exchange of the pronoun for its principal, "Christ", is not significant here. If Origen has both Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:4 in mind, then he is effectively demonstrating a harmony between present and future eschatology.⁷⁶⁹ Thematically, Origen's Apostle in both Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 witnesses to the union of the righteous with the risen Christ and with faithful teachers among them.

By means of Paul, Origen brings out two forms of participation in the resurrection. The more obvious is the one he calls the "perfect resurrection". By this, he means the resurrection of the dead: "None of us so far has risen again in the perfect resurrection."⁷⁷⁰ This is not the only sense of resurrection, however; another sense can be discerned from Paul, the working of which the righteous can already detect in their mortal life. This other sense by comparison is 'imperfect,' and concerns a person's life following baptism: "The righteous, rising, say, 'We have been buried with Christ through baptism, and we have risen with him' (*Consepulti sumus Christo per baptismam, et consurreximus ei*, cf. Rom 6:4)."⁷⁷¹ The false teachers of the faith do not enjoy this "imperfect" experience of resurrection because they have not been united with Christ, whose Scripture does not bear the foreign elements they introduce. This is confirmed by the Greek fragment we have from one of Origen's works on Ezekiel: "They did not rise up again with Christ, because they were not buried with him (Οὐκ ἀνέστησαν σὺν Χριστῷ, διότι οὐ συνετάφησαν αὐτῷ) – those who say and see

⁷⁶⁸ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.5; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 401-02; SC 352:116.

⁷⁶⁹ Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 402.

⁷⁷⁰ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.5; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 402.

⁷⁷¹ *Hom.Ezech.* 2.5; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 401.

the day of the Lord falsely."⁷⁷² Although we do not have a Pauline citation here, the verb "they have risen" (συνετάφησαν) is found, which corresponds with Origen's texts of Ezekiel 13 and Romans 6:4 in *Homily 2 on Ezekiel*. The Greek fragment and Jerome's Latin translation both identify Origen's principal concern: to warn the baptized congregation about the heretics, who are not risen with Christ as they are.

For our purposes, the "imperfect" sense of resurrection parallels the incapacity of the false teachers: "Falsehoods are all they see, and they cannot at any time contemplate the truth."⁷⁷³ Here Origen signals that those with a defective faith do not have the assurance of resurrection. In this, we see a notion of degeneration: false teachers slip into ignorance because of their perversion of Scripture. Conversely, Origen also shows how the baptized congregation, having risen with Christ, can contemplate truth. For our purposes, this constitutes a substantial change in the righteous. Whereas false teachers do not benefit from baptism because they adduce foreign elements into Scripture and thus are left to ponder falsehoods, the baptized now take up the contemplation of truth because they remain true to the Gospel with their faithful teachers.

6.3.4 *Homily on Genesis 11.3*

A citation of Romans 6:11 occurs in *Homily 11 on Genesis*, which focuses on the marriage of Abraham and Keturah, the death of Abraham, and the succession of Isaac.⁷⁷⁴ Origen begins the homily by announcing that he means to present through Paul the symbolic reading of the last phases of Abraham's life: "The Holy Apostle always offers us opportunities for spiritual understanding and shows the zealous signs by which one may recognise in all things that the law is spiritual."⁷⁷⁵ Thus, Origen's Apostle speaks to the theological significance of Abraham's great age (Rom 4:19), his fruitfulness in producing spiritual offspring like Paul (cf. 1 Cor 4:15), and he provides evidence for Origen's opinion that wisdom more readily comes to those who subdue base desires (cf. 2 Cor 4:10).

⁷⁷² *Fr. Ezech. 13.5c*; Hooker, *Origen: Ezekiel*, 550-51.

⁷⁷³ *Hom. Ezech. 2.5*; Sehorn, "Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel," 402.

⁷⁷⁴ We know from fragments and cross-references that Origen wrote a commentary on Genesis while he was in Alexandria, dealing with the first few chapters of the book; unfortunately, there is no material from it which corresponds with this homily. Ronald E. Heine, "The Testimonia and Fragments Related to Origen's Commentary on Genesis," *ZAC* 9, no. 1 (2005): 122. Internal cross-referencing in the homilies shows that the congregation at Caesarea read through the historical books, including Genesis, after the Wisdom books and prophetic books. Even so, they appeared in the middle years of Origen's time in Caesarea, perhaps 238-244. This means that Origen returned to the book of Genesis later in his life after early consideration of it. The homilies, then, are the fruit of more mature thought and an experienced preacher. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 22-23.

⁷⁷⁵ *Hom. Gen. 11.1*; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 168.

Origen arrives at the symbolic significance of the death of Abraham for his congregation by means of Matthew 22:32 and Romans 6:11. Firstly, he turns to the dominical teaching concerning Abraham in the New Testament:

What more can we say about the death of Abraham than what the word of the Lord in the Gospels contains, saying: "Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read how he says in the bush: 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living. For all those are living" (Matt 22:32).⁷⁷⁶

The Lord's words interpret the death of Abraham insofar as the patriarch lives on to God. This dominical witness to the continuation of life after death is deeply reminiscent for Origen of the life which entails self-renunciation: "Let us also, therefore, choose this kind of death, as also the Apostle says, that we may die to sin, but live to God" (*moriatur peccato, vivamus autem Deo*, Rom 6:11).⁷⁷⁷ Although Origen undeniably attributes this citation to the Apostle, the wording he offers is somewhat inexact. Although Heine identifies this as Romans 6:10,⁷⁷⁸ we may see that it is in fact Romans 6:11. The first half of the citation preserves the order of Paul's concepts as they occur in Romans 6:11: in both Paul and Origen's citations of Romans 6:11, the verb "to die" in the passive voice precedes the noun "sin" in the dative. Furthermore, the word order of the second half of the citation is even closer to Romans 6:11 than the first half of the citation: the verb "to live" precedes the conjunction *autem* and the noun in the dative, *Deo* (God). Admittedly, the verb is in the subjunctive in the citation rather than a participle, but both Paul and Origen's citations have it in the present tense.

The effect of correctly identifying the citation could be quite marked. Whereas Romans 6:10 is primarily about Christ's death, to which and in which believers are united, Romans 6:11 in Origen's hands becomes an exhortation, such that this kind of death may be freely chosen, perhaps even again and again. We have already seen how Origen distinguishes between different kinds of death in the *Commentary* and in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* (see respectively 5.7 and 6.2.2 above). There we saw how Paul is brought in as a proof-text to justify his turning death into a homonym: "death" could be death to sin, death to God, or death to the world/common death.⁷⁷⁹ Since homonymy applies to narratives as well as words,⁷⁸⁰ Origen calls on Paul to make a symbolic reading of Abraham's death as just one kind of death, namely, death to sin because he lives to God (cf. Matt

⁷⁷⁶ *Hom.Gen.* 11.3; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 172-73.

⁷⁷⁷ *Hom.Gen.* 11.3; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 172-73., SC 7-bis:286.

⁷⁷⁸ Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 173.

⁷⁷⁹ cf. *Comm.Rom.* 7.12.4.

⁷⁸⁰ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1998), 17.

22:32): “Indeed the death of Abraham should be understood to be such, which death amplified the bosom so much that all the saints who come from the four parts of the earth may be borne by the angels into the bosom of Abraham.”⁷⁸¹ Thus, by symbolically choosing the kind of death which Abraham suffered in the flesh, believers may receive also the life to God he obtained.

Origen’s citation of Romans 6:11 is confined to the trope, “we may die to sin, but live to God.” The present subjunctive verbs (*moriatur* and *vivamus*) develop the Apostle’s text into an exhortation. This corresponds well with perspectival views of personal renewal. It does not appear that believers have obtained the renewal to which Origen bears witness; they must yet undergo that symbolic death which they now see in Abraham via Paul’s witness. If this is a homily for catechumens or with them in mind,⁷⁸² Origen could be here encouraging his congregants to push on towards the baptism for which they are readying themselves. That context leaves us with perspectival renewal, insofar as believers are preparing themselves for that life which follows the death they will obtain in baptism.

Thus, the Pauline citation serves exclusively to exhort believers to make the choice that Abraham is said to have made: “Let us also, therefore, choose this kind of death, as also the Apostle says, that we may die to sin, but live to God” (*moriatur peccato, vivamus autem Deo*, Rom 6:11).⁷⁸³ Origen therefore sees in Paul’s words not necessarily a single moment in which death to sin occurred or will occur and life to God begins, but a way of life, perhaps pattern of thought, which simply renounces old ways. Hence, believers are subject to a renewal by self-renunciation, which they achieve by persevering in their resolve to die to sin and live to God.

6.3.5 Homily on Joshua 15.4

In his homily on Joshua 11:8-20, Origen cites Romans 6:12 to help him explain the symbolic significance of the historical wars of the Ancient Israelites for Christians. The violence of the physical wars in the conquest of Palestine under Joshua may very well create a dilemma for the Christian preacher, who believes that all of Scripture communicates the divine Word: “For what good was that description of wars to those to whom Jesus says, ‘My peace I give to you; my peace I leave to you?’

⁷⁸¹ *Hom.Gen.* 11.3; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 173.

⁷⁸² Certain features of the ritual of baptism can be detected in the third part of this homily: the symbolic reading of Isaac’s well as the font, his vision as the illumination of the recipients, and the water in the well as symbolic of that which is used in the ritual: “You, therefore, hasten and act sufficiently that the blessing of the Lord may come to you, that you may be able to dwell, ‘at the well of vision,’ that the Lord may open your eyes and you may see ‘the well of vision,’ and may receive from it ‘living water,’ which may become in you a ‘fountain of water springing up into eternal life.’” *Hom.Gen.* 11.3; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 174.

⁷⁸³ *Hom.Gen.* 11.3; Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 172-73.

(John 14:27).⁷⁸⁴ In Origen's day, the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides fervently opposed the demiurge who brought on "massacres ordered by Joshua, the anathema cast over entire cities."⁷⁸⁵ For Origen, only the symbolic reading brings out the significance of Ancient Israelite history as found in Scripture:⁷⁸⁶ "Unless those physical wars bore the figure of spiritual wars, I do not think the books of Jewish history would ever have been handed down by the apostles to the disciples of Christ."⁷⁸⁷ As we shall see, by "spiritual wars," Origen means the battle believers wage against the passions in order to partake of Christ's victory.⁷⁸⁸

The citation of Rom 6:12 occurs midway through *Homily 15*, by which point Origen is commenting on Joshua 11:12:

"And Jesus," it says, "put all their kings to death by the sword" (Josh 11:12).

Sin has reigned in every one of us, and in every one of us vices have reigned, and in every one of us was a general kingdom of sin, just as the Apostle says, "For all have sinned and are devoid of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Yet everyone also had some particular "king" in them who reigned in them and ruled over them. For example, in one, avarice had a kingdom; in another, pride; falsehood reigned in another; lust ruled another; and another endured rage as king. Since these things are so and sin reigns in each one of us, believe the apostle Paul speaking, for he says, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body to obey it (*Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore ad obediendum ei*, Rom 6:12).⁷⁸⁹

Origen's text of Romans 6:12 contains a striking variant. This is the only time in the homilies that he cites nearly the entire verse. Where we might normally expect reference to the mortal body and passions, we have a pronoun in the dative singular which serves one of two terms: either the feminine noun "sin," or the masculine nominal phrase "your mortal body." We observed earlier how Irenaeus and Tertullian's texts contains the same variant (see 2.4 and 4.2 above). It seems unlikely that Origen would be saying that "your mortal body" will obey itself should sin be allowed to reign therein, so the pronoun stands for "sin". The effect of this text is intriguing: according to Origen, if a particular sin "reigns", the mortal body becomes enslaved to that sin's ruinous design on the person. Earlier in the same homily, Origen affirms that these other "kings" have one, sinister purpose: "to make us sin. Because, just as the body dies when it receives the wound of a sword, so also the soul

⁷⁸⁴ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.1; Barbara Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, FC 105 (Washington, DC: CUA, 2002), 138.

⁷⁸⁵ Annie Jaubert, *Origène: Homélie sur Josué*, SC 71 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 12.

⁷⁸⁶ Paul C. Boles, "Allegory as Embodiment: The Function of History in Origen's Genesis Homily," *JTI* 10, no. 1 (2016): 101.

⁷⁸⁷ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.1; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 138.

⁷⁸⁸ Jaubert, *Origène: Homélie sur Josué*, 16.

⁷⁸⁹ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 144-45, SC 71:344.

dies when it receives the wound of sin.”⁷⁹⁰ Paul, then, as Origen cites him, accords the original mastery over sinners ultimately to sin itself. The lack of the otherwise expected reference in this citation to the passions of the mortal body, and the insertion of the pronoun for “sin” instead, has Origen pointing to the neutrality of the mortal bodies of believers, as indeed Irenaeus does. For Origen, the mortal body of the Christian is the field of battle: instead of the passions lingering in the mortal body, the sin which the final Jesus has conquered is not to be allowed to “reign and rule” again.

Origen’s symbolic reading of Joshua 11:12 distinguishes between two kinds of “kings” slain by the last Jesus. There is the “general kingdom of sin” in which everyone was once a subject, for which he finds support in Romans 3:23, and, thanks to Romans 6:12, Origen notes that there are also “particular kings” who also once reigned in the believer: “For example, in one, avarice had a kingdom; in another, pride; falsehood reigned in another; lust ruled another; and another endured rage as king ... believe the apostle Paul speaking, for he says, ‘Therefore, do not let sin reign.’”⁷⁹¹ However, since Jesus came and put all sins to death according to the symbolic reading, believers enjoy freedom from both the general kingdom of sin and the particular sins which once ruled them. This is significant for our purposes insofar as believers experience change precisely in and as a result of their freedom from “particular sins”: since believers are no longer ruled by their particular sin, those sins need not appear in their personal conduct. In this, Origen displays a reading of Paul along the lines of perspectival renewal. The difference is a question of inevitability: whereas before Jesus came particular sins “reigned and ruled” individuals, now these sins do not, and believers have the capacity not to let sin reign in their mortal body.

Origen’s variation of the Pauline text brings out the personal nature of the problem and its solution. It could be noted that Origen’s emendation of the Pauline text excludes the possibility of reading “your mortal body” as a corporate body. For Origen, however, the violence to be done to one’s own individual sins, their “particular king”, is a decidedly personal undertaking. Although Origen finds in a symbolic reading of Joshua 11:12 that the entire reign of sin is defeated by the last Jesus, the fact of the Apostle’s command in Romans 6:12 means believers have the responsibility not to let sin regain its former possessions: “Since these things are so and sin reigns in each one of us, believe the apostle Paul.”⁷⁹² Origen elaborates on this in the homily: “Thus a kingdom of sin was in every one of

⁷⁹⁰ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.1; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 139.

⁷⁹¹ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 145.

⁷⁹² *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 145.

us before we believed. But afterwards, Jesus came and struck down all the kings who possessed kingdoms of sin in us, and he ordered us to destroy all those kings and to leave none of them.”⁷⁹³

Crucially for us, Origen’s use of Paul displays his understanding of the possibility of moral degeneration. This means that it now falls to believers to keep their mortal bodies free from sin; those who fail to do so and “let sin reign in their mortal body” find themselves ruled once again by their particular sin. As Origen deploys Romans 6:12 for the homily to his Christian audience, he sees that the formerly inescapable reign of sin has come to an end in the last Jesus. Origen has struck a delicate balance as he interprets Joshua 11:12 with the help of Romans 6:12: sin is destroyed but can regain its former control if the believer betrays themselves to its power.

6.3.6 *Homilies on Luke 30.1, 36.2*

Two of Origen’s homilies on Luke contain a direct citation from Romans 6:12.⁷⁹⁴ In his preaching through the Gospel, Origen arrives at two passages which contain teaching about the kingdom of Christ, namely the second temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:5-8) and the saying about the indwelling of the kingdom of God (Luke 17:21). Using Romans 6:12, he adopts a symbolic reading of both passages which leads his congregation of catechumens and initiates to discover their relationship to Christ’s kingdom.⁷⁹⁵

In *Homily 30* on Luke 4, Origen casts the interaction between “the Son of God and the Antichrist”⁷⁹⁶ as a contest between the two cosmic potentates in which people are themselves the prize of the victor:

Both the Son of God and the Antichrist are eager to reign. But the Antichrist wants to kill those he has subjected to himself. Christ reigns to save. And, if we are faithful, Christ, who is Word, Wisdom, Justice, and Truth, reigns over each of us. But, if we are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, then sin reigns over us. The Apostle says of

⁷⁹³ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4; Bruce, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 145.

⁷⁹⁴ *Homilies 30* and *36* belong to the earliest extant work on the Gospel of Luke. Since Origen refers to another of his homilies on Luke in the *Commentary on Matthew* (*Hom.Luc.* 34 in *Comm.Matt.* 16.9), we can place these two between his arrival in Caesarea when he began preaching (ca.233) and around the time of the *Commentary on Matthew* (ca.244). Whereas *Homily 30* is part of the collection from Origen’s semi-continuous reading through the Gospel, *Homily 36* belongs to a small collection of six homilies which are on isolated passages; other homilies from this second series have been lost.

⁷⁹⁵ cf. *Hom.Luc.* 32.6.

⁷⁹⁶ A distinction between Satan and the Antichrist is more typical in the Christian literature of the period, as Origen himself adopts in *Against Celsus* (ca. 245): “It was right, also, that one of the extremes, the best, should be called Son of God because of his superiority, and that the one diametrically opposed to him should be called son of the evil daemon, who is Satan and the devil.” *Cels.* 6.45; Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 362. Thus, this reference in *Hom.Luc.* 30 appears to be the only reference in Origen which conflates the devil and the Antichrist.

it, "Therefore, let not sin reign in your mortal body (*non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore*, Rom 6:12)."⁷⁹⁷

Origen's text of the first half of Romans 6:12 conforms well to that of Paul. Origen here omits the terminating phrase "to make you obey its desires" from Romans 6:12, as he usually does in his homilies. Had he included it, the terminating phrase would attribute sinful conduct to the devil. This would run contrary to what he says in this passage about people exercising personal responsibility to be "lovers of God" and not "lovers of pleasure". The text as he cites it keeps the congregation's attention on the symbolic reading of the devil as sin. The Apostle aids Origen in discerning a symbolic reading of Luke 4:5-6: the rule of the devil over the kingdoms of the world corresponds with his rule as sin over the world's inhabitants. Hence, those who are subjecting themselves to the rule of the Son of God are not to "let sin reign" in their mortal body. Further, the citation as it stands without the terminating phrase keeps the congregation's attention on the desire and power of the devil to rule even persons.

Thus, as he reads Luke 4:5-6 with Romans 6:12, Origen finds that the mortal body is the place where the devil as sin may reign. The eagerness of the "Antichrist" to reign means that believers will find that they have to resist his incursions precisely in the body. This means that believers experience only mitigated freedom from the Antichrist insofar as they refrain from sinning. Paul's text in Origen's mouth as preacher warns believers that the devil wins out when individuals become "lovers of pleasure" and thus subject themselves to his reign.⁷⁹⁸

We have another description of the devil's methods with a citation of Romans 6:12 in *Homily 36 on Luke*. As he preaches on Luke 17:21, Origen expands on how the kingdom of God dwells within persons (cf. *Or.* 25.1). After his brief treatment of Luke 12:5, Origen takes up the text for preaching: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21):

But the Pharisees also asked the Saviour about the kingdom of God, when it would come. He answered, "The kingdom of God does not come through watching. And they do not say, 'See, here!' or 'See, there!' For the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21). The Savior does not say to everyone, "The kingdom of God is within you." For, in sinners, the kingdom of sin exists. Without any ambiguity, either the kingdom of God reigns in our hearts, or the kingdom of sin. For this reason, we should attentively ponder what we do and speak and think. Then we shall see whether the kingdom of God or the kingdom of sin reigns in us. The Apostle knew that this difference existed. He warns some people and says, "Let sin not reign in your mortal bodies" (*non regnet*

⁷⁹⁷ *Hom.Luc.* 30.1; Lienhard, *Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke*, 123; SC 87:370.

⁷⁹⁸ *Hom.Luc.* 30.1.

*peccatum in mortali vestro corpore, Rom 6:12).*⁷⁹⁹

Paul and Origen's texts readily agree, except that Origen once again omits the terminating phrase, "to make you obey its passions." This time, however, the same omission as in the aforementioned *Homily 30* fulfils a different purpose: to testify that indwelling sin excludes the kingdom of God. Thus, Origen in *Homily 36* speaks of the incompatibility of sin and the life of faith. The reign of either kingdom is described in terms of an indwelling power, whose influence over the person is measured in terms of human action: "We should attentively ponder what we do and speak and think. Then we shall see whether the kingdom of God or the kingdom of sin reigns in us."⁸⁰⁰ For our purposes, this means that believers enjoy full agency to align themselves with either kingdom, and thus this citation also witnesses to a perspectival view of ethical renewal.

However, Origen's prayer at the end of *Homily 36* obscures the question of human agency in resisting sin: "Let us rise up and pray to God that he might take from us the kingdom of the enemy. May we be able to live under the reign of Almighty God – that is, under the reign of wisdom, peace, justice, and truth."⁸⁰¹ Although this prayer might be a stylised exhortation, the strong phrase "that God ... take from us the kingdom of the enemy" does not allow us to say that Origen only regards agency to resist sin as restored by the initial donation of grace. He seems to envisage a role for the ethical in the process of renewal of believers to God, who it is hoped will act to make the transfer to his kingdom after prayer has been offered him. In this, we note the availability of divine assistance in the pursuit of the kingdom of God and its corresponding acts.

In all, we see again Origen's largely perspectival view of ethical renewal. The Apostle comes to the aid of the preacher in order to arrive at the fuller meaning of the contest between Christ and the Antichrist in *Homily 30* and the possibility of indwelling sin in *Homily 36*. This perspectival view is to be tempered by his witness to the divine help available to believers, perhaps through prayer, to rid themselves of sin and pursue good acts.

6.3.7 Summary

Through Origen's preaching with Romans 6:1-14, we have ample evidence for the perspectival view of ethical renewal. Believers can enjoy freedom from sin, and so Origen makes Paul's exhortations to believers his own so that they may keep themselves from it. There is insufficient indication in

⁷⁹⁹ *Hom.Luc. 36.2; Lienhard, Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke, 151-52; SC 87:432-34.*

⁸⁰⁰ *Hom.Luc. 36.2; Lienhard, Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke, 152.*

⁸⁰¹ *Hom.Luc. 36.3; Lienhard, Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke, 152; SC 87:434.*

these homilies as to whether this freedom comes with initiation (i.e., Baptism), perhaps because Origen is usually preaching to initiates. He intensifies the gravity of this responsibility by casting them as the prize of a contest between Christ and the Antichrist.

Although Origen's preaching with Paul mainly evidences the perspectival view of ethical renewal, we do have significant witness to the possibility of believers' moral degeneration. This degeneration takes the form of believers returning to the practice of misdeeds and then being compelled to continue in them. Regarding *Homily 1 on Isaiah* and *Homily 15 on Joshua*, we saw that sin, though defeated, can regain its former possessions if believers allow sin to reign over them again by misdeeds (cf. Rom 6:12). This means that their initial freedom from sin is not permanent insofar as they remain susceptible to temptation and sin.

Origen mentions two distinct aids for those who do fall into moral degeneration. Firstly, believers can be rescued again by God by special appeal to him in prayer. We saw in *Homily 36 on Luke* that they can be "taken from the kingdom of the enemy" by God. Secondly, God has provided his words to preachers for the people. In *Homily 1 on Jeremiah*, Origen says that these words are to deliver people from the "bad movements" which they have.

Finally, it is also important to note that there are aspects of substantial renewal in Origen's reading of Paul. Believers who remain faithful to the word as preached to them, unlike the false teachers, are made capable of contemplating divine truths.

6.4 *Commentary on John 10.231-232*

There are two direct citations of Romans 6:4 in the *Commentary on John* for our analysis. In this the largest of all Origen's extant works,⁸⁰² he often only deals with the symbolic sense of Scripture.⁸⁰³ The plain sense is repeatedly considered and then dismissed.⁸⁰⁴ The exception to this preference for the symbolic reading comes in response to the symbolic ones provided in the works by Heracleon,

⁸⁰² He regards John as the apex of all Scripture: "We might dare say, then, that the Gospels are the first-fruits of all Scriptures, but that the first-fruits of the Gospels is that according to John." *Comm.Jo.* 1.23; Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1-10*, FC 80 (Washington, DC: CUA, 1989), 38.

⁸⁰³ He is setting out to furnish the Church to which he belongs with the symbolic reading of the most spiritual Gospel: "His mind wandered at ease through its pages, plucking appropriate phrases and arranging them artfully in his pursuit of the spiritual meaning he perceived to be latent in each word and phrase." Heine, *Origen: Commentary on John*, 3.

⁸⁰⁴ "This spiritual gospel is the reality of which Christ's acts were symbols; it is the secrets hidden in the mysteries of Christ's words. There are, then, two gospels." Heine, *Origen: Commentary on John*, 12.

Ptolemy, and Theodotus.⁸⁰⁵ As we shall see, the important unit for understanding a particular text was the word and not the sentence or pericope of later exegetes.⁸⁰⁶ Further, because Origen is not as constrained by length as he is in the homilies, we see an exhaustive treatment of the text. This scientific exploration leads him to introduce Paul as a help to uncovering the full possibilities that the text might offer.

The citations occur in Origen's comments on John 2:19, Jesus' prophecy concerning the resurrection of his body, the temple. Origen makes use of the symbolic reading of the Jerusalem Temple as Jesus' body which the Gospel itself provides (cf. John 2:21) and wording consistent with 1 Peter 2 to read symbolically the Temple and Jesus' body together as figures of the Church: "The Church, being called a temple, is built of living stones, becoming a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the chief corner stone."⁸⁰⁷ However, Origen encounters a snare, in that Christ's body, the Church's prefigured reality, truly died and rose again in a way that the suffering Church seems yet to do. He therefore offers two ways in which the resurrection appears in the mortal lives of Christ's members. The first of these is the experience of the martyrs in facing physical tortures and death: "All the bones of Christ appear to be scattered in persecutions and afflictions by the plots of those who wage war against the unity of the temple by persecutions, the temple will be raised up and the body will arise on the third day."⁸⁰⁸ The second comes directly from Paul:

Each of [the saints], like Paul, boasts in nothing else than "in the cross of our Lord Christ Jesus" through whom they have been crucified to the world and the world to him (Gal 6:14).²³¹ They have, therefore, not only been crucified with Christ, and crucified to the world, but they are also buried with Christ, "for we," Paul says, "were buried with Christ" (συνετάφημεν γὰρ, φησὶ, τῷ Χριστῷ, Rom 6:4).²³² And as if they have attained some pledge of the resurrection, he says, "We were raised with him" (cf. Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12) since they walk in a certain newness of life (ἐπεὶ ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς τιμὴ περιπατεῖ, cf. Rom 6:4), inasmuch as they have not yet arisen so far as concerns that anticipated blessed and perfect resurrection. They have, therefore, either now been crucified, and, after these things, are buried, or they are now buried, having been removed from the

⁸⁰⁵ Trigg, *Origen*, 84, 92. We have an opaque reference to Heracleon in Origen's description of his task in writing the *Commentary on John*: "Even now the heterodox, with a pretense of knowledge, are rising up against the holy Church of Christ and are bringing compositions in many books, announcing an interpretation of the texts both of the Gospels and of the apostles. If we are silent and do not set the true and sound teachings down in opposition to them, they will prevail over inquisitive souls which, in the lack of saving nourishment, hasten to foods that are forbidden and are truly unclean and abominable. For this reason it seems necessary to me that one who is able intercede in a genuine manner on behalf of the teaching of the Church and reprove those who pursue the knowledge falsely so-called." *Comm.Jo.* 5.8; Heine, *Origen: Commentary on John*, 166.

⁸⁰⁶ Lienhard, *Origen: Homilies on Luke. Fragments on Luke*, xvii.

⁸⁰⁷ *Comm.Jo.* 10.228; Heine, *Origen: Commentary on John*, 305.

⁸⁰⁸ *Comm.Jo.* 10.229; Heine, *Origen: Commentary on John*, 305.

cross, and at some time, insofar as they have now been buried, they will arise.⁸⁰⁹

An initial question arises as to which Pauline texts Origen is citing here. There are features of Romans 6:4 that may be identified in this direct citation. We have a verbal parallel συνετάφημεν (cf. συνταφέντες in Col 2:12), which is then followed by an appropriate post-positive conjunction (cf. Origen's γὰρ with Paul's stronger οὖν). Paul's pronoun has been replaced with its principal, "Christ". There is also a further citation of another part of the same verse: "they walk in a certain newness of life" (ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς τινη περιπατεῖ). The only alteration to this text is the verb shown here in the third person singular (περιπατεῖ, cf. περιπατήσωμεν in Rom 6:4), agreeing with its subject in the singular, "Each of [the saints]".⁸¹⁰

However, we do not have an altogether clean citation of Romans 6:4. There is a possibility that Colossians 2:12 is also in Origen's mind here, even though the verbal parallels are weaker. The sense of a completed resurrection is important for Origen here. Because Christ has already been raised and believers are united with him in his death and burial, it stands to reason that Origen should say that they are also raised with him (cf. Col 2:12). Paul appears here to be little more than Origen's scriptural proof for the saints' "betrothal to resurrection",⁸¹¹ the union of each member of the "body of the saints" with Christ, who died, was buried, and rose again. By means of Paul, then, Origen shows how the Lord's prophecy about the razing and rising of the Temple in John 2:19 is fulfilled in the head and members of Christ.

Despite the complete unity of the saints with Christ, however, the "deficit" of the resurrection remains: they are not yet raised with Christ to whom they are already joined. Thus, he nuances the bold statement "We were raised with him" by means of Romans 6:4.⁸¹² It is true that Colossians 2:12 witnesses more clearly to the completed action of resurrection than does Romans 6:4, although Origen may need both texts: to account for the assurance of future resurrection, and its signs in the present.

The qualification he adds, "in a certain newness of life" (ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς τινη περιπατεῖ), is of interest to us. Although this "newness of life" corresponds with the Lord's resurrection, it is not the resurrection itself but evidence for it. Origen's qualification even of Paul's text, "a certain newness of life", serves to mitigate further any claim about a completed resurrection for those still in mortal life. It may be that without the qualification, Origen finds that Romans 6:4 also comes too close to

⁸⁰⁹ *Comm.Jo.* 10.231-232; *Origen: Commentary on John*, 306; SC 157:522.

⁸¹⁰ *Comm.Jo.* 10.230; *Origen: Commentary on John*, 306.

⁸¹¹ Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 87.

⁸¹² *Comm.Jo.* 10.232.

speaking of the resurrection in a completed way, such as we see in Colossians 2:12. The nuance “certain newness of life” reflects the present experience of believers as those who make their own the pattern of Christ, who died, was buried, and rose again.⁸¹³

For our purposes, Origen here reads Paul as saying that “walking in newness of life” is tantamount to assurance of a believer’s participation in Christ’s resurrection, rightly expectant of it because of their participation in Christ’s death and burial. We may suppose that by the qualified statement “a certain newness of life”, he means an experience of mortal life refreshed by believers’ faith in the risen Christ, to whom they are already joined. However, it does seem that the renewal brought to the saints is decidedly focused not on the ethical but on the soteriological. This means that although the renewal is substantial (that is, believers are not simply to think of themselves as raised but are indeed raised with Christ), the form of renewal does not appear here strictly to be ethical.

6.5 Origen’s Use of Romans 6:1-14 in His Other Works

In total, we have seen direct citations of Romans 6:4-6 and 10-12 in Origen’s treatises, homilies, and the *Commentary on John*, which together constitute more than half of all our citations. This impressive if uneven coverage of our passage enables us to draw together a summary of the purposes to which he puts Paul’s text.

Origen makes frequent use of Romans 6:4 to support the argument he is making. In response to Celsus, Romans 6:4 (with 6:10) demonstrates the Christian belief in the necessity of Christ’s death. This belief must be held in full, for there will be no resurrection for those who do not hold to it, as he shows in *Homily 2 on Ezekiel*. As he demonstrates in the *Commentary on John*, however, perhaps admixing Romans 6:4-5 with Colossians 2:12, believers can be assured that Christ has accomplished their resurrection in himself but not yet revealed it.

We also saw the application of Romans 6:6 in *On the Pasch* to show how Moses and Aaron differ from the rest of the people of Israel. They anticipate and embody the complete change which believers undergo when they die with Christ.

Of special note is his use of Romans 6:10 in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* to distinguish “death to sin” (cf. Rom 6:2) from the death of the soul and common death,⁸¹⁴ as the formal and therefore ongoing renunciation of sin. However, believers’ death to sin is not so far removed from Christ’s death;

⁸¹³ cf. *Comm.Jo.* 1.181-182, 267.

⁸¹⁴ Rom 6:10 in *Dial.* 25.9, Rom 6:11 in *Hom.Gen.* 11.3.

indeed, it is a participation in it, which promises his resurrection to those who experience it.⁸¹⁵ The citation of Romans 6:11 in the *Homily on Genesis* confirms this distinction. Because the Lord attests that Abraham lives (cf. Matt 22:32), Abraham has suffered the kind of death which believers may also symbolically undergo, namely a death to sin.

Romans 6:12 is by far the most frequently cited verse of our passage in Origen's other works. Further, of the six citations of Romans 6:12 we have seen in Origen's other works, four lack the terminating phrase "to make you obey its passions"⁸¹⁶ and the other two contain a variant which attributes sinful desires to "sin" itself rather than the "mortal body".⁸¹⁷ The cumulative effect of this is that Origen's Apostle finds the mortal body of believers to be in a neutral position; it may be swayed by one or the other leading entity which seeks to possess it, whether by God or sin. This neutrality of the body easily lends itself to a description as a prize to be won by two rival kings (including Uzziah, Pharaoh, and the devil on the negative side), with the matter decided by the individual in an act of the will. Believers can therefore return to be ruled by sin if they subject their will to it. Of course, this means that believers have been removed from such a rule, but the danger of returning to it is ever-present. The reading of the devil for "sin" is the most common: if believers return to wrongdoing, they are as much allowing themselves to be dominated by the high malefactor himself and to allow him to carry out his designs on them through the actions performed in their mortal bodies.⁸¹⁸ By means of the symbolic reading, then, Origen is able to bring out for his congregants the stark contrast between life in sin and life in Christ, and thereby to exhort them to the responsible use of free will so that they may persevere in righteous conduct.

In summary, it seems that the principal purposes to which Origen put these Pauline texts to use are to make the link between believers and the historical death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and to exhort them to avoid yielding to ever-present sin. We would have liked to see some consideration of the purpose clauses of Romans 6:4 and 6, and also some mention of Romans 6:7. Nonetheless, we now have a range of readings with which to consider whether Origen witnesses to the moral regeneration of believers in this deployment of texts from Romans 6:1-14.

6.6 Conclusion: Moral Regeneration in Origen's Other Works?

⁸¹⁵ Rom 6:4 in *Cels.* 2.69, *Comm.Jo.* 10.231-232.

⁸¹⁶ The citations of Romans 6:12 in *Hom.Isa.* 1, *Hom.Jer.* 1, *Hom.Luc.* 30 and 36 lack the terminating phrase "to make you obey its passions".

⁸¹⁷ The citation of Romans 6:12 in *Or.* 25 terminates with "obey its [ie, sin's] passions", and that in *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15 terminates with "obey it [ie, sin]".

⁸¹⁸ *Hom.Isa.* 1.1, *Hom.Luc.* 30.1.

There is ample evidence from Origen's applications of Romans 6:4-6 and 10-12 for the voluntarist hermeneutic such as we saw in the *Commentary on Romans*. Two features of this voluntarism are pertinent to our discussion of ethical renewal in Origen's readings of Paul. Firstly, Origen consistently shows his support for the doctrine of the moral neutrality of the mortal body. His assessment of this doctrine most clearly appears in the treatise *On Prayer* and *Homily 15 on Joshua*, wherein his version of the Pauline text attributes sinful desires to sin rather than to the mortal body. The mortal body is not hostile to God by nature as the determinist opponents would have it; indeed, it can be oriented either towards sin or away from it. Secondly, human volition is entirely free and unimpeded through a person's life. Only once does Origen suggest it may be inhibited, in *Homily 1 on Jeremiah*. In this instance, however, the restriction takes the form of "bad movements" in individual souls which are "uprooted and demolished" by the words of preachers.⁸¹⁹

The voluntarist hermeneutic which Origen applies to our passage readily produces the perspectival view of ethical renewal. He frequently witnesses believers' full capacity to rid themselves of sin as an element foreign to their life in Christ, and also to God's initial intervention of alienating them from sin. A particularly lucid example of this is found in *Homily 15 on Joshua*: the homilist distinguishes between a general kingdom of sin and kingdoms of particular sins, both of which are swept away by the last Jesus although ongoing responsibility for remaining free from the latter is accorded to believers themselves.

In the main, Origen believes that believers are fully capable of resisting sin and producing righteous conduct themselves, usually without any form of alteration to their constitution to carry out those twin tasks. This is perhaps why he is so insistent and strong with relaying the Apostle's exhortations to break with sin and stave off temptation. For Origen, in terms of believers' conduct, sin and goodness are mutually exclusive. Thus, according to his symbolic readings for "sin", there is fierce competition between Christ and the devil or Antichrist to possess souls. It is death to sin, understood as formal and effective renunciation from misdeeds, which is to become a way of life for believers to ensure that the kingdom of God indwells them.

Although he frequently emphasises responsibility and free volition according to the perspectival view of ethical renewal, Origen also witnesses to the possibility of moral degeneration. We saw this in the treatise *On Prayer*, and in the homilies on Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joshua, and Luke. This substantial self-diminution is where believers freely return to the practice of misdeeds, such that they are now made to serve sin and to produce further misdeeds. Nevertheless, such persons are not trapped

⁸¹⁹ *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1; Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings* 28, 8.

forever in a renewed slavery to sin because they can turn to God for his help through prayer as in *Homily 36 on Luke* or to the preacher's words as in *Homily 1 on Jeremiah*.

Finally, we also conclude that there is only scant evidence for moral regeneration in Origen's other works. As we noted, he mainly takes the perspectival view, although he does envisage two new attributes of believers which are sustained by God. The first of these concerns their knowledge of God. Since they have received the "baptism of resurrection", in contrast to the one received by "false teachers" who add strange terms to Scripture, believers participate in the "imperfect resurrection" of contemplating revealed truth. This ability in respect of otherwise unknowable truth indeed proceeds from baptism, but only when it is received in right faith. The second aspect of moral regeneration in Origen relates to the availability of divine help. The concluding prayer to *Homily 36 on Luke* suggests that God is present to believers in order to deliver them from the enemy and enable them to live in truth. While this does not affect the responsibility believers have for their own conduct, it does suggest that God shares in that responsibility when they call on him.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 The Use of Romans 6:1-14 by Early Christian Readers

This study has engaged with early Christian readings of Romans 6:1-14 up to the death of Origen in order to see what, if any, continuing relationship with sin the early readers envisage believers having after their profession of faith or baptism and to what, if any, substantial regrowth of believers' ethical capacities their early readings of Paul witness. We have established that, among all possible borrowings from Paul, we would consider direct citations, which have we defined as those early Christian readings that display an attribution signal and a very high degree of literality. Applying our criteria to the possible references of Paul in the earliest Christian literature, we have found direct citations of Paul in Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Ps.-Hippolytus,⁸²⁰ and Origen.

It is possible that a broader set of criteria for identifying a Pauline reference or adopting a different Pauline passage would have included even earlier readers' works in this study. For example, the absence from this study of those in the "living memory"⁸²¹ of Paul is regrettable. However, there are no extant direct citations from Romans 6:1-14 before Irenaeus. This may be for two possible reasons: firstly, our passage does not touch as directly on the more controverted topics of the day such as the fleshly resurrection and Christian instruction, and secondly, direct citation appears to be the way early Christian writers more commonly use Scripture from Irenaeus onwards. Similarly, we were only able to treat the Valentinian sources and Nag Hammadi library insofar as they proved useful for identifying the position which an early author who directly cites from Romans 6:1-14 is opposing. Another study may be able to press these texts about ethical renewal by applying broader criteria for identifying Pauline indebtedness but at the risk of scriptural misidentification. Similarly, another study may be able to widen the scope of analysis to the early readers up to the end of classical antiquity but with a workable scope, such as delimitation by geography or language group.

Nevertheless, the criteria for direct citation which we have adopted have enabled us to identify a set of texts of undeniable Pauline origin. Having considered the early readers' texts in detail in their respective chapters, we make a number of conclusions about Romans 6:4 and 6:12, the two most frequently cited texts from Romans 6:1-14, and about the curious omission of Romans 6:7. Then, we shall proceed to make the final conclusions about our questions of perspectival renewal and moral regeneration in the early Christian readers of Paul.

⁸²⁰ Seeing as neither of the two references from our passage in Ps.-Hippolytus' *Benedictions of Moses* speak to our research questions, we have only used them to demonstrate our methodology (see 1.5 above).

⁸²¹ Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 172.

The text which our early Christian readers most cite is Romans 6:12. All four of our early Christian readers make use of it, that is, if we include Clement of Alexandria's abridged citation of Romans 6:6-13. The eleven citations from this verse fall into two main categories. Firstly, Romans 6:12 was used to show the Apostle's witness to the moral neutrality of the mortal body and thus its salvageability. Irenaeus and Tertullian in particular use it against their opponents in order to argue for the fleshly resurrection.⁸²² The Apostle's exhortation not to let sin reign in mortal bodies is thought to show how sin does not have a such a hold over mortal flesh that would necessarily mean that it could not be finally raised up. This sense of the body's moral neutrality is heightened by Irenaeus⁸²³ and Tertullian,⁸²⁴ as well as Origen⁸²⁵, by their inclusion of a pronoun agreeing with "sin". The appearance of this pronoun in these citations denies that there are any sinful desires latent in the mortal body, such as the Apostle's full text may recognise, and therefore more clearly attributes to sin the power to rule the otherwise neutral mortal bodies of recidivist believers. Tertullian appears to balance the moral neutrality which he claims for the mortal body by observing inherent weakness and frailty in it.⁸²⁶ Secondly, Origen makes extensive use of the plain and symbolic readings of either the whole or first part of Romans 6:12 in order to address the problem of post-baptismal sin. According to the plain reading, Origen's Apostle exhorts believers not to surrender themselves to the reign of a king which sets itself up in the mortal body.⁸²⁷ According to the symbolic reading, he identifies this "king" as the particular sins which a person committed in their past life⁸²⁸ or Satan.⁸²⁹

The second most cited text from our passage is Romans 6:4, which appears a total of nine times in the works of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. Irenaeus⁸³⁰ and Tertullian⁸³¹ omit the phrase "by the glory of the Father", but, because Origen includes it,⁸³² we regard their omission as the fault of memory, or manuscript, if it is not deliberate. Romans 6:4 was put to two main uses. Firstly, Irenaeus and Origen make use of it to create boundary markers for their Christology and its soteriological consequences. Both early readers deploy Romans 6:4 to show how believers are united by baptism to the one person, "Christ Jesus",⁸³³ whose death was necessary for their eternal

⁸²² *Haer.* 5.14.4; *Res.* 47.

⁸²³ *Haer.* 5.14.4.

⁸²⁴ *Res.* 47.

⁸²⁵ *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4

⁸²⁶ *Pud.* 17.

⁸²⁷ *Comm.Rom.* 5.6.6-7, 6.1.2, *Hom.Isa.* 1.1, *Hom.Luc.* 36.2.

⁸²⁸ *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1, *Hom.Jes.Nav.* 15.4.

⁸²⁹ *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.37, *Or.* 25, *Hom.Luc.* 30.1.

⁸³⁰ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

⁸³¹ *Res.* 47, *Pud.* 17.

⁸³² *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.8, 5.8.11, 9.39.2.

⁸³³ *Haer.* 3.16.9.

life.⁸³⁴ Secondly, Paul's text witnesses to the new pattern of life which believers are now following, whether that proceeds from Christ,⁸³⁵ or the Spirit,⁸³⁶ or exclusively from formal renunciation of sin.⁸³⁷

We also noted the curious absence of any direct citation of Romans 6:7 by the early readers. Origen has wording consistent with it in *Commentary on Romans* 6.1.6 and 6.6.7, although neither text in fact witnesses to a direct citation because an attribution signal is lacking in both texts. We accepted the conclusion of Kreinecker that the omission is likely due to an early scribe, who skipped from "sin" in Romans 6:6 to "sin" at the end of Romans 6:7 (see 4.2 above).⁸³⁸ There is more work to be done on the early transmission of this verse and its consequences for Christian moral thought. For our purposes, the omission of any direct citation of Romans 6:7 is lamentable because, had our early readers known it, they might have reflected further on the nature of the separation of believers from sin. What would Irenaeus or Origen say through Paul about believers being united by baptism to Christ, whose death to sin was complete? What would Tertullian make of Paul's statement that the baptized are justified from sin? Nevertheless, the early readers made good use of the rest of Romans 6:1-14 in order to demonstrate the Apostle's teaching on the absolute necessity of believers to end their relationship with sin.

7.2 Early Christian Readings of Paul on Ethical Renewal

In the Introduction (see 1.3 above), we defined two main scholarly views of ethical renewal in Paul: the perspectival, which envisages ethical renewal proceeding exclusively from free action after entry into Christ, and the substantial, which proposes the ongoing reordering and regrowth of believers' moral faculties by God under grace. With these definitions and with the analysis of our early readers' direct citations from Romans 6:1-14, we are now in a position to make conclusive responses to our research questions: what, if any, continuing relationship with sin do the early readers of Romans 6:1-14 see believers having? To what, if any, substantial regrowth of the believers' ethical capacities do their readings of Paul bear witness?

⁸³⁴ *Cels.* 2.69.

⁸³⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2, *Comm.Jo.* 10.231-232.

⁸³⁶ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

⁸³⁷ *Res. 47, Pud. 17, Comm.Rom.* 5.8.

⁸³⁸ Kreinecker, "Rufinus' Translation of Origen's Commentary on Romans," 238-39.

7.2.1 The Perspectival View

The perspectival view of ethical renewal is readily seen in the works of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. For Clement, the Basilidean and Valentinian reading of Romans 6:14 presents a threat to the Christian moral order because being “under grace” does not mean immunity from guilt for all wrongdoing but only for involuntary misdeeds.⁸³⁹ Thus, Clement, like his opponents, demonstrates how believers have an unaffected relationship with sin and a largely unaltered moral experience, except that he teaches that all receive knowledge of God which moves them towards right action. Therefore, believers advance towards “true gnosticism” by knowledge of God and by the practice of virtue rather than by any divine power working over the course of their life.

Like Clement, Tertullian envisages believers making progress in moral conduct by their own efforts and thus progress in this way to an unaffected relationship with sin. His repeated exhortations and harsh invective show that these efforts to avoid wrongdoing are made in order to fulfil the obligation of moral propriety which their baptism imposes on them. God overcomes the past transgressions of believers in baptism but leaves intact their propensity to commit them again in the future. However, the prospect of living again to sin is so disastrous that Tertullian takes to evocative language to avert it: recidivism in believers is tantamount to abandonment of the Lord.⁸⁴⁰ Therefore, Tertullian turns to Paul for his witness to the total separation of believers from their past and the obligation to moral propriety, the prize of which is fleshly resurrection.⁸⁴¹

Origen’s view of ethical renewal corresponds with Clement and Tertullian’s accent on personal responsibility. However, his voluntarist hermeneutic was not developed in response to the pastoral crisis of recidivism but in response to the determinist hermeneutic of his Valentinian opponents. Thus, Origen places great emphasis on the moral responsibility which believers have for their moral conduct after God’s initial work in clearing away personal sins, especially in the *Commentary on Romans*.⁸⁴² However, this responsibility proceeds from Christ’s saving death more clearly than it does in Clement or Tertullian. Origen’s Apostle does not only define Christ’s death as a common death,⁸⁴³ but in fact also as a death to sin which confers life on believers.⁸⁴⁴ In this way, he can say

⁸³⁹ *Strom.* 2.64.4.

⁸⁴⁰ *Pud.* 17.

⁸⁴¹ *Res.* 47.

⁸⁴² *Hom.Jer.* 1.7.1.

⁸⁴³ Rom 6:10 in *Dial.* 25.9.

⁸⁴⁴ Rom 6:10 in *Comm.Rom.* 4.12.5.

that Christ has given believers both a new birth⁸⁴⁵ and a “pattern of life”.⁸⁴⁶ This pattern of life consists of the self-actuated refrainment from sin and the pursuit of virtue.

7.2.2 The Substantial View, or Moral Regeneration

Two of our early Christian readers, Irenaeus and Origen, display the substantial view of ethical renewal in their citations from Romans 6:1-14. In contrast with his contemporaries, Irenaeus provides us with readings of Paul which reflect the substantial view of ethical renewal through the abiding presence of the Spirit. Some of Origen’s citations from Romans 6:1-14 also speak to the substantial view of ethical renewal by the subjugation and supplementation of natural desires.

For Irenaeus, all renewal in mortal lives proceeds from the Holy Spirit, who abides within them. It is he who “gradually accustoms” believers to “receive and bear God”.⁸⁴⁷ Thus, when Irenaeus cites from Romans 6:4, he not only finds reference to the unity of “Christ Jesus”⁸⁴⁸ but also understands “newness of life” in its moral sense as the result of the stable presence of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴⁹ This does not negate personal responsibility for moral conduct, as we see in other places where he cites from our passage. In Romans 6:12-13, he finds Pauline witness to the necessity of refraining from those deeds which are “flesh and blood”.⁸⁵⁰ Thus, believers avoid wrongdoing by the responsible exercise of free volition, which is consonant with the perspectival view of ethical renewal.

Nevertheless, Irenaeus’ pneumatology shapes his reading of Paul so that he sees moral regeneration of believers in Romans 6:4, such that they need not have an ongoing relationship with sin if the Spirit is maintained by continual good action.

Despite his voluntarist hermeneutic which appears across much of his writing and preaching career, Origen also witnesses through Paul to the substantial renewal of believers’ constitution as reflected in their moral conduct. Two of his citations of Romans 6:12 show us the precise means by which the moral regeneration of believers comes about. He sees that a second set of desires has been given to believers in addition to the desire for sin.⁸⁵¹ These supernatural desires come from the Spirit. In the face of temptation, however, believers can appeal to the Lord’s cross, which dispels sinful desires and leaves them free to pursue their supernatural desires.⁸⁵² For our purposes, the addition of a

⁸⁴⁵ Rom 6:6 in *Pasch.* 6.19-20.

⁸⁴⁶ *Comm.Rom.* 9.39.2; Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on Romans, Books 6-10*, 239.

⁸⁴⁷ *Haer.* 5.8.1.

⁸⁴⁸ *Haer.* 3.16.9.

⁸⁴⁹ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

⁸⁵⁰ *Haer.* 5.14.4.

⁸⁵¹ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4.

⁸⁵² *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4.

second set of desires and the availability of effective help against temptation reflect a reading of Paul which envisages moral regeneration for believers. Although they remain susceptible to temptation, believers are not inevitably going to commit the same faults as before. Rather, the freedom from past sins which they received on their entry into Christ, also develops into freedom from temptation insofar as they will it. He emphasises prayer as the means by which believers obtain this divine help in temptation.⁸⁵³ In this way, Origen envisages that believers are responsible for both their moral action and for their own moral regeneration.

7.2.3 Moral Degeneration

In addition to moral regeneration, Origen also occasionally witnesses to believers' moral degeneration by their return to the practice of sin. We could be cautioned here by Gunnar af Hällström's assessment, that Origen's homiletical style is like that of "a revivalist preacher, appealing personally to his listeners."⁸⁵⁴ If af Hällström is correct, then we may not be seeing moral degeneration so much as a highly-stylised exhortation. However, it is not in the homilies that we find the concept of moral degeneration but in the *Commentary on Romans* and in the treatise *On Prayer*, two works to which Origen more carefully executed and devoted relatively more time and space. He does not only present recidivism as a failure to exercise personal responsibility but also as the condition in which believers are ruled by sin; under such a condition, their desires are not their own but are those of sin.⁸⁵⁵ Thus, it is perhaps in the context of moral degeneration that we may understand how he sees believers who fail to meet their obligation to exercise moral propriety as conscripts of Satan.⁸⁵⁶

7.2.4 Summary

In summary, we find ample evidence for the perspectival view of ethical renewal in the early Christian readings of Romans 6:1-14. The accent on personal responsibility, which the perspectival view entails, reaches its height in Tertullian. He certainly sustains the hortative reading of Paul but he does not answer the challenge which post-baptismal sin presents the Church with exhortation to believers but with the expulsion of recidivists. Clement and Origen, however, present believers in a

⁸⁵³ *Hom.Luc.* 36.

⁸⁵⁴ Gunnar af Hällström, "More than Initiation? Baptism According to Origen of Alexandria," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm, et al., BZNW 176/1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 1005.

⁸⁵⁵ *Or.* 25.

⁸⁵⁶ Rom 6:12 in *Comm.Rom.* 5.1.37.

different light: they have the same propensity to sin as they had prior to their initiation, but they now have different kinds of help available to them. Whereas Clement sees divine help in the exculpation of believers for involuntary wrongdoing thanks to the grace which they are under, Origen credits believers with a second set of desires which may win out should they appeal to the Lord's cross, and thus, with moral regeneration. Irenaeus differs from all of his contemporaries on this point, as he allows for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to bring about new moral outcomes for believers, who wisely choose to refrain from sin. Thus, the same early readers who envisage moral regeneration for believers adopted the perspectival view of ethical renewal as well.

7.3 Early and Modern Christian Readings of Paul on Ethical Renewal

7.3.1 The Perspectival View

Now that we have addressed our research questions in respect to Paul's early readers, we can put the early and modern readers into dialogue. Modern readers of Paul frequently identify cognition as the means by which believers achieve ethical renewal. We saw in the Introduction (see 1.4.2 above) that Siikavirta and Barclay envisage no substantial change to believers' ethical faculties which should not be attributed to God. For them, God does not begin to impart a particular grace which renews and improves their capacities. Rather, the Christian life is about the appropriation of God's universal action; by his provision, God leaves them free to pursue righteous conduct, which is motivated by recalling the significance of God's intervention for them.

Clement agrees with these modern readers insofar as he too does not envisage any change in believers' faculties as a result of ongoing divine assistance given to believers in order to produce righteous conduct. However, he parts ways with Siikavirta and Barclay on the continued ethical experience of believers. Whereas Clement sees that believers still bring forth involuntary misdeeds, guilt for which grace covers over, our modern readers would offer that even these misdeeds would be subject to the renewal effected by believers' self-understanding. They may be motivated by being "under grace" to be vigilant even against minor forms of wrongdoing which used to appear in their past lives. In this, Clement's witness to an unaltered ethical experience exceeds these modern readers' view.

Tertullian's view that recidivism is "abandonment of the Lord" may provide a stronger basis for modern exhortations to ethical renewal.⁸⁵⁷ This evocative way in which he casts post-baptismal sin provides the essential impetus for believers' continuation in righteous conduct. However, the

⁸⁵⁷ *Pud.* 17.

ungratefulness and treachery, which Tertullian would accuse recidivists of, are not the most appropriate drivers of the baptized towards righteous conduct if all they receive in baptism is a sign of a reality which should be borne in mind. Thus, in order for Tertullian truly to advance the perspectival view of renewal by cognition, there needs to be a corresponding movement by modern readers towards his understanding of the effects of baptism, namely, participation in the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, the effects on which his strong moral exhortation rests.

We also saw in the Introduction (see 1.4.2 above) that Barclay's model of cognition consists of "a new φρόνημα of cognitive and practical schemas operative in physical deportment, corporeal practice, and bodily appetites."⁸⁵⁸ This φρόνημα bestows on them "allegiances, dispositions, emotions, and actions"⁸⁵⁹ which are not attributable to themselves but to Christ. The perspectival renewal reflected in Barclay's model of cognition corresponds to a high degree with Origen's identification of another set of desires implanted in believers by the Spirit. Origen, however, envisages the perseverance of sinful desires in believers alongside righteous ones. Whereas for Barclay, the new φρόνημα consists of the transformation of believers' desire from sinful into righteous, Origen regards the two sets of desires as existing unharmoniously in the mind of the person, ready to turn towards either one at will.

The modern readers appear to echo Origen's assessment that believers are never completely alienated from wrongdoing. Inasmuch as misdeeds are inadmissible, but nevertheless possible, believers must avail themselves of every opportunity to renounce them and thus to prevent the union of the soul with the flesh. However, Origen anticipates the modern readers in identifying the mind as the place where the battle for righteous morality is fought. His proposal that sin has established its "seat and kingdom" in the body⁸⁶⁰ leaves the mind free to redirect ethical action away from sin and towards goodness. Yet, as we have seen, Origen envisages a new set of desires, which have been implanted in the mind, and to this substantial view of ethical renewal we now turn.

7.3.2 The Substantial View, or Moral Regeneration

Modern readers like Keener, Morgan, Rabens, and Wright see that believers' conduct now is markedly different from what it was before, thanks to the transformative power of God working in their lives. One point of commonality between their models is that there is a particular relationship that believers have with God which forms the context for this renewal: for Keener, Rabens, and

⁸⁵⁸ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 508.

⁸⁵⁹ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 501.

⁸⁶⁰ *Comm.Rom.* 5.7.3.

Wright, believers have the Holy Spirit, whereas for Morgan, they have Christ's protective power.⁸⁶¹ This relationality is also present in Irenaeus and Origen's readings of Paul, which have been shown to reflect moral regeneration. For Irenaeus, the Holy Spirit's stable presence in willing believers is "moving [them] towards perfection and preparing for incorruption, gradually accustoming [them] to receive and bear God"⁸⁶² in fleshly resurrection. This motion towards perfection includes the Spirit's renewal of believers to produce that conduct, which Irenaeus describes as "newness of life".⁸⁶³ By his attention to Romans 8, Rabens' study therefore shows us that Irenaeus' blending the Holy Spirit into Romans 6:4 is not a contrivance but a drawing together of authentic scriptural strands into a new unity. To advance the discussion further, another study of early Christian readers on moral regeneration could be made by focusing instead on the contested Pauline passages which speak of the Holy Spirit's role in the mortal lives of believers. Further, Morgan's identification of service, a vital part of Christian moral conduct, as the purpose of Christ's *eincheiristic* renewal draws our attention to Irenaeus' naming the fleshly resurrection as the ultimate purpose of the indwelling Spirit's transformative power.

The ancient and modern readers which we have seen together agree that moral action may indeed be affected by believers' cooperation with divine action, whether that action is regarded as supplying believers' righteous conduct or regenerating their ethical faculties to produce it. The improved ethical outcomes to which all bear witness proceed from believers' engagement of their will to produce them. The ancient and modern readers appear to disagree on the faculties which are subject to any renewal following divine action, whether they be the body or the will, desire or the mind. Of particular note is how Origen presents readings of Paul which accord with both the perspectival and substantial views of ethical renewal. This appears to be grounds for further research into the relationship between divine action and the human will in Origen's readings of Paul.

7.3.3 Moral Degeneration

A noted feature of Tertullian and Origen's accounts of ethical renewal is their witness to the moral degeneration of recidivist believers; none of the modern readers whom we have seen thus envisages such a prospect in the lives of believers. This lack of correspondence between early and modern readers may be because the omissions and emendations in the early readers' citations are, as a rule, not found in the modern readers' works. In Origen, the possibility of moral degeneration appears to come especially from his citation of Romans 6:12 with a pronoun which agrees with "sin" or "mortal

⁸⁶¹ Morgan, *Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul*, 90.

⁸⁶² *Haer.* 5.8.1; *SC* 153:92.

⁸⁶³ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

body” substituted for “its desires”.⁸⁶⁴ However, the appearance of early readings of Paul which allow or envisage moral degeneration is not only because of variations in the cited texts. Origen, of all our early readers, readily explores the symbolic reading of “sin” and discovers moral degeneration of believers even when he cites the full verse as in the *Commentary on Romans* and in the treatise *On Prayer*.⁸⁶⁵ The lack of agreement of early and modern readers on moral degeneration may also be because of the modern readers’ aversion to symbolic readings of Paul, despite the common assessment that Paul’s language in our passage is inherently symbolic in some places.⁸⁶⁶ Westerholm’s assessment is typical of this aversion. He proposes that “people may be ‘slaves’ of ‘Sin’ in Romans 6, but the same slavery is spoken of as a slavery to ‘uncleanness’ and ‘lawlessness’, and it is opposed to slavery to ‘obedience’ and ‘righteousness’: personifications of patterns of life, not supernatural forces, are in view.”⁸⁶⁷ We suspect that Tertullian would probably agree with this assessment, and, to a certain extent, Origen too. However, Origen’s facility with exploring symbolic readings of Scripture also leads him to conceive of a situation in which “sin” symbolically understood recaptures those it once ruled. For Origen, it is not just the power which sin inherently has that leads him to see it “reigning” in Romans 6:12.⁸⁶⁸ It is also the devil, the author and “king of sin”, who can be found in Paul.⁸⁶⁹ Thus, by his attendance to and exploration of the symbolic nature of Paul’s language, Origen contributes a notion of the possibility of moral degeneration to modern readers’ views of ethical renewal.

7.3.4 Summary

The cumulative weight of evidence from our early readers suggests that there is opportunity for both views of ethical renewal to be found in Romans 6:1-14, especially if we follow Origen who thus reads Paul. We have seen that the heavy emphasis which Clement and Tertullian place on moral responsibility finds its answer in Siikavirta and Barclay, even though Tertullian and these modern readers part ways on the efficacy of baptism and therefore on the notion that God severs believers’ relationship with sin at the time of their initiation. We have also seen that Irenaeus and Origen offer readings of Paul that envisage moral regeneration of believers, readings which correspond well with the models proposed by Keener, Morgan, Rabens, and Wright. If it should be the case that modern

⁸⁶⁴ *Hom. Jes. Nav.* 15.4.

⁸⁶⁵ *Comm. Rom.* 5.7.7, *Or.* 25.

⁸⁶⁶ Gathercole, “Sins’ in Paul,” 154.

⁸⁶⁷ Westerholm, “Paul’s Anthropological ‘Pessimism’ in Its Jewish Context,” 79.

⁸⁶⁸ *Comm. Rom.* 5.1.31, 5.6.6, 5.7.5, 6.1.4.

⁸⁶⁹ *Comm. Rom.* 5.1.37.

readers develop a fonder appreciation for symbolic readings, they may also take up Origen's reading of Paul on moral degeneration.

7.4 How do we read Romans 6:1-14 now?

We began our Introduction (see 1.1 above) by noting the intensity of the scholarly debate over the meaning of Romans 6:1-14. Given the fact that most, if not all, aspects of Romans 6:1-14 have been used by Paul's early readers, what does our study contribute to the reading of this vital text for Paul's hamartiology and soteriology?

Firstly, Paul's early readers offer no clear solution to the modern contention about whether Romans 6:12-14 belongs to Romans 6:1-11 or 6:15-23. Clement of Alexandria counters his opponents' use of Romans 6:14 by citing the very next verse.⁸⁷⁰ Tertullian witnesses both possibilities, citing Romans 6:11-13 together⁸⁷¹ and Romans 6:2-11 as a discrete unit before using Romans 6:12 as a proof-text for his argument for human moral weakness.⁸⁷² Origen echoes this kind of unity within Romans 6 by concluding Book Five of his *Commentary on Romans* with his treatment of Romans 6:11 and thus beginning Book Six with Romans 6:12-14. Thus, we are unable to advance the debate on the internal structure of Romans 6 with the help of the early readers of Paul.

Secondly, Paul's early readers readily anticipate Moo's perspectival view of ethical renewal.⁸⁷³ Clement and Tertullian, in particular, share his accent on personal responsibility for moral conduct insofar as the divine life laid over believers' ethical faculties makes demands of its recipients. Moo's reading with its locative sense that believers are called to live in Christ's life finds support for his reading of Paul in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*. For Origen, the appropriation of Christ's life is found in the symbolic imitation of Christ's three-day passage, which believers adopt as their own and from then on imitate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.⁸⁷⁴

Thirdly, Paul's early readers witness to compulsion to sin such as Wolter describes in moral degeneration. Tertullian and more so Origen demonstrate by their readings of Paul that believers who return to the practice of misdeeds will find themselves delving even more deeply into it. However, they arrive at this position through a symbolic reading of Paul. Thus, Tertullian and Origen

⁸⁷⁰ *Strom.* 3.61.1.

⁸⁷¹ *Res.* 47.

⁸⁷² *Pud.* 17.

⁸⁷³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 367.

⁸⁷⁴ *Comm.Rom.* 5.8.9.

offer Wolter the redirection that Paul is not speaking of a defective faculty of free will but of a re-enslavement to sin.

Fourthly, Origen's proposal can be added to Wright, that receiving and sharing in the Spirit's desires and making them their own constitutes an important aspect of the holiness of which believers partake.⁸⁷⁵ "Sheer, new-creational moral effort"⁸⁷⁶ is tempered by believers' attendance to a second set of desires which they also possess in righteousness. Thus, believers engage the divine by having holy desires, which have been added to their desires for sin.

Finally, Irenaeus corroborates Jewett's reading of Paul about believers being enabled to behave in a new way.⁸⁷⁷ Our early readers do not dwell on the "divine passives" of Romans 6:1-14 as he does, for they prefer instead to note well the permanent familiarity which believers have with sin and their responsibility to refrain from it. However, Irenaeus does envisage a new condition for the ethical capacities of those who preserve the Spirit.⁸⁷⁸ Thus, although they begin from different starting points, Irenaeus from the stable presence of the Spirit and Jewett from the divine passives of Romans 6, they agree that there is a pattern of behaviour which is newly taken up by believers and which is to be credited to God.

7.5 Final Summary

This thesis explored the earliest Christian readings of Romans 6:1-14, a hitherto neglected part of the relevant exegetical data, to consider whether Paul envisages moral regeneration for believers. We conclude that the earliest Christian readings of Paul up to the death of Origen reflect both the perspectival and substantial views of ethical renewal. Although we have no extant direct citations from our passage before Irenaeus, the readings of Paul by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen anticipate modern readings as seen in a select cross-section of scholarly views. All of our early readers prepare the way for modern readers by regarding believers as primarily responsible for producing the moral conduct required of them after an initial experience of conversion and the forgiveness of their sins. However, Irenaeus and Origen exceed the perspectival view of ethical renewal in their direct citations by identifying two different ways in which willing believers receive supernatural assistance to produce righteous moral conduct: for Irenaeus, it is the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and for Origen, it is the implantation of the Spirit's desires in

⁸⁷⁵ *Comm.Rom.* 6.1.4

⁸⁷⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1103.

⁸⁷⁷ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 399.

⁸⁷⁸ *Haer.* 5.9.3.

the mind and the power of the Lord's cross to dispel the desires of sin. Thus, there are early Christian readings of Paul which envisage the possibility of moral regeneration of willing believers.

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF DIRECT CITATIONS BY AUTHOR

Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 2.64.4	Rom 6:14
Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.61.1	Rom 6:14
Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.75.2-3	Rom 6:2-13
Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 4.51.1	Rom 6:6
Ps.-Hippolytus	<i>Benedictions of Moses</i>	Rom 6:8-10
Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 3.16.9	Rom 6:3-4, 9
Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 5.9.3	Rom 6:4
Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 5.14.4	Rom 6:12-13
Origen	<i>Against Celsus</i> 2.69	Rom 6:4, 10
Origen	<i>Commentary on John</i> 10.231-232	Rom 6:4-5
Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 4.12.5	Rom 6:10
Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.1.37	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.6.6-7	Rom 6:12-13
Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.7-6.1	Rom 6:1-14
Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 9.39.2	Rom 6:4, 8
Origen	<i>Dialogue with Heraclides</i> 25.1	Rom 6:10
Origen	<i>On the Pasch</i> 6.20	Rom 6:6
Origen	<i>On Prayer</i> 25	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Homily 2 on Ezekiel</i> 2.5	Rom 6:4
Origen	<i>Homily 11 on Genesis</i> 11.3	Rom 6:11
Origen	<i>Homily 1 on Isaiah</i> 1.1	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Homily 1 on Jeremiah</i> 1.7.1	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Homily 15 on Joshua</i> 15.4	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Homily 30 on Luke</i> 30.1	Rom 6:12
Origen	<i>Homily 36 on Luke</i> 36.2	Rom 6:12
Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17	Rom 6:1-6, 8-12
Tertullian	<i>On the Resurrection</i> 47.1-2	Rom 6:3-6, 8, 11-13

APPENDIX 2: TABLE OF DIRECT CITATIONS BY VERSE(S)

Rom 6:1-14	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.7-6.1
Rom 6:1-4	Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17
Rom 6:2	Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.75.2-3
Rom 6:3-5	Tertullian	<i>On the Resurrection</i> 47
Rom 6:3-4	Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 3.16.9
Rom 6:4	Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 5.9.3
Rom 6:4	Origen	<i>Against Celsus</i> 2.69
Rom 6:4	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 9.39.2
Rom 6:4	Origen	<i>Homily 2 on Ezekiel</i> 2.5
Rom 6:4-5	Origen	<i>Commentary on John</i> 10.231-232
Rom 6:5-6	Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17
Rom 6:6-13	Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.75.2-3
Rom 6:6	Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 4.51.1
Rom 6:6	Origen	<i>On the Pasch</i> 6.20
Rom 6:6, 8	Tertullian	<i>On the Resurrection</i> 47
Rom 6:8-10	Ps.-Hippolytus	<i>Benedictions of Moses</i>
Rom 6:8	Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17
Rom 6:8	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 9.39.2
Rom 6:9	Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 3.16.9
Rom 6:9	Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17
Rom 6:10-12	Tertullian	<i>On Modesty</i> 17
Rom 6:10	Origen	<i>Against Celsus</i> 2.69
Rom 6:10	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 4.12.5
Rom 6:10	Origen	<i>Dialogue with Heraclides</i> 25.1
Rom 6:11	Origen	<i>Homily 11 on Genesis</i> 11.3
Rom 6:11-13	Tertullian	<i>On the Resurrection</i> 47
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.1.37
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Homily 1 on Isaiah</i> 1.1
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Homily 1 on Jeremiah</i> 1.7.1
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Homily 15 on Joshua</i> 15.4
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Homily 30 on Luke</i> 30.1
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>Homily 36 on Luke</i> 36.2
Rom 6:12	Origen	<i>On Prayer</i> 25
Rom 6:12-13	Irenaeus	<i>Against Heresies</i> 5.14.4
Rom 6:12-13	Origen	<i>Commentary on Romans</i> 5.6.6-7
Rom 6:14	Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 2.64.4
Rom 6:14	Clement of Alexandria	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.61.1

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