

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE IV.

## ORIGEN AND THE RETURN TO GREEK THEOLOGY.

BY THE REV. JAMES, W. FALCONER.

A FAVORITE advice given of late to younger students has been that they should consult the wise theologians of the East before completing their system. The Western authors have been worked out, it is said, and new treasures must be sought for in the works of Alexandria and Cæsarea. The age of Nicæa is recommended as a fit period for study, while the Greek exegetes are extolled as the best interpreters of the New Testament language.

This cry, "Back to Greek theology," renders timely a study of Origen, who may be regarded as the most interesting figure in the Eastern section of the early church.

Such a study may well be prefaced by a glance at the state of contemporary spiritual and intellectual life. The spiritual tendency of the time was well marked, and manifested itself in the highest circles of society. Emperors were the patrons of religion. New faiths were admitted into the state on equal terms with the old worship. There were almost as many gods as men, and the feasts of the nation were far up in the hundreds. Deification became a frequent, although in some cases a doubtful, honor; as when Caracalla murdered his brother and then deified him, adding the words, "He may be a god as long as he is dead."

If the existence of so many gods militated against the growing belief in monotheism, it was met by some such explanation as that of Neoplatonic allegory, by which these

various religions, with their absurd traditions and immoralities, were compacted into a conglomerate. The age was also gradually coming to a consciousness of sin. A desire for purity was being evolved. The most coveted of appellations were *pius* and *sanctus*. "Between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius the world had passed from credulity to devotion." All this found expression in the Mysteries, which about this time begin to absorb a great share of attention. The old philosophy had failed; and since men could not find God by means of the reason, they turned for help to the wildest forms of Eastern worship. They sought light from initiation. Thus we find Septimius Severus, as soon as his great victory is over, hastening to be admitted into the mysteries of Serapis. The most enlightened spirits of the age freely patronized these rites. In these mysteries the secrets of the world were said to be revealed. Future life, sin, expiation, redemption, spiritualism, were matters for instruction. Réville calls it, "Theology in action." Men could see and take part in it. But, in spite of all its zeal, the age was shallow and without conviction. It was too tolerant to have much faith. It was weak in effort. Of Alexander Severus it is said, "He could think, he could love, but he could not will." In his tolerance he admitted Christ among the catalogue of saints, while his mother sent for Origen to receive instruction on Christianity; yet it was a reign that would never sacrifice the pleasures of sense for the truth of the soul. Thus the religious activity was strongly marked; but religion was a fad rather than a conviction.<sup>1</sup>

The other characteristic of the time was its scientific zeal. There was a greed for gain; only it was the gain of mental culture. No subject was foreign to its schools. Plato was being revived in the form of Neoplatonism, and Stoicism had its full share of followers. The contemporary world in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*.

intellectual things was eclectic. All systems were laid under obligation. The account given by Clement of Alexandria of his teachers is very suggestive as an example of this. He mentions as his instructors, The Ionian, one from Cœlo-Syria, another from Palestine, one from Assyria, another from Egypt, and Pantænus in Alexandria.

Each of these tendencies reappears in the church. The religious syncretism knocked at the door of Christianity, and in many places gained admission. In Gnosticism we see the fusion of Eastern mystery and Christian teaching. Spiritualism, theosophy, magic, crop up again. Faith is merest speculation or *gnosis*. The wave of intellectualism also surged into the church; but it came as the false philosophy of the Gnostics, and threatened to sweep away the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The result of this brief survey may be thus stated: the contemporary world was expecting a message from God which should also be in accord with the best results of scholarship and thought. Gnosticism had attempted this task, but had failed. It failed because it lacked the essential element of faith. Therefore it was left to the Christian church to work out this problem. By its faith in the personal Saviour it was able to unite these divergent elements. The church was the only school that had not been worked out. Christianity was vigorous, and active with the pulsations of a new life. It was just becoming conscious of its own expansiveness. It was as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiced as a strong man to run a race. In no place does this activity of churchmen in dealing with the problems of thought and religion appear more conspicuously than in the catechetical school of Alexandria. Not that the Egyptian capital had a monopoly of such work, for we find evidences of a kindred energy in many other parts of the church;<sup>1</sup> e.g., Cappadocia, with its Bishop Al-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* i. 549.

exander ; Edessa, with its widely-reputed Bardesanes ; Palestine, with its critic Julius Africanus ; Rome, where Aristotle was carefully studied ; Carthage, with its ornament Tertullian. There was a universal desire to find the connecting link between thought and religion ; so that the Alexandrian school is no spasmodic or abnormal appearance. It is rather the high-water mark of an incoming tide that was flowing round the Christian world.

In the first generation of church history the burning question was, Is it possible for a *Gentile* to be saved ? The problem that succeeded this was, Is it possible for a *wise man* to be saved ? The early Christians would naturally give a universal application to the words of Christ, "I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast concealed these things from the wise and prudent" ; and we can understand how the prejudice against learning and the pride of philosophy would arise. However, the truth of the Kingdom would not long submit to be confined to so narrow a sphere. Man must be religious, but he must also be rational. The creeds and councils of the early centuries are the outcome of this mental necessity. First of all, the Apologists attempted a defense of Christian philosophy, but it was of a somewhat halting nature. Their attitude resembled guerilla warfare. Entrenching themselves in their ambush of prophecy, they leave us with the impression that they fear an open encounter with the foe. There is no halting claim, however, when we come to the teaching of the school of Alexandria. Here it is not only maintained that the wise man can be saved ; it is further held that the wise man is the only one who enjoys the full benefit of salvation. Clement and Origen drew distinctions between faith and knowledge, *pistis* and *gnosis*, and made faith the necessary but subordinate step in religion. Those who remained content with *pistis* were imperfect Christians. All should strive to join the choir of the blessed which sang the praises of philosophy. The believer

was to become a Christian gnostic, who could combine culture and science with the revelation of God. As we might expect, the writers of Alexandria abandoned the methods of the apologists. They met the foe on an equal footing and with similar weapons. They were versed in all the science of the day, and were acquainted with the course of Greek metaphysics. Indeed the frequent use that Origen made of Greek philosophy brought upon him the charge that he was Christian in name, but Greek in thought.<sup>1</sup>

Of the names connected with the catechetical school of Alexandria that of Origen stands out with conspicuous brilliancy. His predecessor, Clement, had played an important part in the development of theology, but in this case the pupil excelled the teacher. Origen was more systematic than Clement. He had better opportunities. He had been gifted with an unparalleled capacity for work, and the circumstances of the age were favorable to his plans.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps there has not been in all the range of church history any instance of such loving and unceasing toil in all the branches of theology as is found in Origen. In his estimate of this church father, Dr. Harnack says: "Among the theologians of church antiquity Origen, along with Augustine, has been the most important and influential. He is the father of church science in the widest sense of the word, and the founder of that theology which came to perfection in the fourth and fifth centuries, which in the sixth century formally repudiated its author, without, however, abandoning the distinctive marks which he had bestowed upon it. . . . He brought in the reconciliation of science with Christian faith, of the best culture with the gospel message, and aided

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Eusebius, H. E. vi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> "No heathen contemporary deserves to be named in the same day with Origen for patience and accuracy in textual criticism, to say nothing of other intellectual capacities, which, notwithstanding all his faults, distinguish him as the foremost writer of his age." (Bishop Lightfoot's *Essays*, p. 269.)

most of all in winning the ancient world for the church. But he made no compromise in the way of cowardly submission or truculence. His was a pure conviction that the source of Christianity included all the ideals of antiquity. . . . His character was simple, his life blameless. In his work he was indefatigable and self-forgetful. There are few of the church fathers whose biography leaves so pleasant an impression as that of Origen."<sup>1</sup>

## II.

We have two sources, whence to draw our knowledge of the life and method of Origen: Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History," Book vi., and the "Panegyric" of Gregory, the Bishop of Neo-Cæsarea. The latter is a kind of valedictory, composed by the youthful student on the completion of his five-years' course under the great master of theology. Each of these accounts speaks in glowing terms and with loving regard of Origen, the student-martyr. Origen was in many respects the ornament of the third century. There comes to us through these records a delicate spirit of appreciation which reveals the reverence felt for the exalted character and learning of their hero. He was prized then as such men are always prized, as a champion of the faith. In his erudition, combined with a life so pure and blameless, men felt a satisfaction, which had a tinge of pride as well as of mental security.

Turning first to the history of Eusebius, we discover Origen in a rôle which he never ceased to play, viz., that of the eager inquirer into Holy Scripture. We read of the young boy puzzling his fond parent, Leonidas, putting to him "questions what forsooth the passage of the inspired scriptures should mean." These Leonidas would gently turn aside, all the time with his heart full of gratitude that he was honored to be father of such a child. In connection

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* i. 559 f.

with his early life we meet with what may be called the father's "Night-watch," "when standing over his sleeping boy, he would uncover his breast, and as a shrine consecrated by the Divine Spirit, he reverently kissed it."<sup>1</sup> At the early age of eighteen he became famed as an instructor in the school at Alexandria; and so eager was he in the support of all, whether students or martyrs, that the hostility of the unbelievers was great against him. Yet since "his doctrine was as his life, and his life as his doctrine," no one could help admiring the youth. Up to this time he had taught for his own support the Greek language and literature; but he decided that to be concerned exclusively with this was inconsistent with the study of divine truth. Therefore selling his prized Greek manuscripts for a competency of eight cents a day, he continued to lead the life of an instructor in the school during the day, and at night devoted most of his time to the study of Holy Scripture. Sometimes he was exercised in the discipline of fasting; then again at night he limited his time for sleep, which, in consequence of his great zeal, he never enjoyed on his bed, but upon the bare ground. "But, most of all, he thought that the evangelical precepts of our Saviour should be observed in which he exhorts that we should not have two coats, nor make use of shoes, nor pass our time in cares for the future."<sup>2</sup> In such language does the enthusiastic historian speak of his hero's virtues, and he inspires us with some of his affection, while we wonder at the industry that turned out volume after volume in such rapid succession. After twenty-five years' work in the catechetical school, Origen met with episcopal opposition which necessitated his departure for Cæsarea, where he labored for twenty years more in study and instruction. In the Decian persecution he was martyred, being cast into the deepest recesses of the prison, where for many days he was extended and stretched on a rack; "besides the threats of

<sup>1</sup> H. E. vi. 2.   <sup>2</sup> H. E. vi. 3.

fire, and whatsoever other sufferings inflicted by his enemies he nobly bore."<sup>1</sup> The tradition of his burial in Tyre still lingers about the place: "for it is said that the natives to the present day point out the spot where 'Oriunus' lies under a vault, the relic of an ancient church now covered by their huts."<sup>2</sup>

If we wish to gain a clearer idea of the methods of this author we must turn to the "Panegyric" of Gregory, one of the most valuable works of the third century. Gregory commences by saying that he intends speaking "of one who has indeed the semblance and repute of being a man, but who seems, to those who are able to contemplate the greatness of his intellectual calibre, to be endowed with powers nobler and well-nigh divine."<sup>3</sup> While in Cæsarea and on his way to study laws at Berytus, Gregory had chanced to meet Origen, and the day of meeting was, he says, "the first day to me; since then for the first time the true sun began to rise upon me." In the succeeding paragraphs Origen's method of instruction is outlined. The teacher's plan was first of all to inspire his pupil with a love of philosophy, which he lauded with many noble utterances, declaring that those only live a life truly worthy of reasonable creatures, who aim at living an upright life. He asserted that it was not possible for any one to be truly pious who did not philosophize. With this advice came the stimulus of friendship, keen and most effective, the argument of a kind and affectionate disposition. This like a spark lighting upon the inward soul flashed out into love for the Holy Word, the personal perfection.<sup>4</sup> The next task of Origen was to test each pupil thoroughly, examining the soil of each, ere he prepared the seed that he was to sow. As a gardener he removed all thorns and weeds, and whenever he saw any baseness or infirmity he pricked it out with his discourses.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. E. vi. 39. <sup>2</sup> Cf. Westcott, *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> Paneg. ii. <sup>4</sup> Paneg. vi. <sup>5</sup> Paneg. vii.

The intellect was next exercised in logic, and after this follow, in due succession, instruction in physics, astronomy, and geometry.<sup>1</sup> Then he imbued their minds with ethical science, "by pertinent discourses, of a wise and soothing tendency," which touched the moral disposition. But in this he exceeded other teachers, that not only in words did he go over the truths concerning the virtues, but he "incited us much more to the practice of virtue, and stimulated us by the deeds he did more than by the doctrines he taught."<sup>2</sup> He was the first who urged Gregory to the study of Greek philosophy; for in his seminary Origen recommended all writers but the atheists. He thought that the Christian student should obtain and make himself familiar with all other writings, whether Greek or foreign.<sup>3</sup> Yet in all this his advice was to attach ourselves to none of these, but only to God and the prophets. These were the final subject of all study. "Therefore, to us there was no forbidden subject of speech; for there was no matter of knowledge hidden or inaccessible to us, but we had it in our power to learn every kind of discourse, both foreign and Greek, both spiritual and political, both divine and human. . . . And to speak in brief, he was Paradise to us."<sup>4</sup> And now that Gregory has to leave his master he knows not what to say, "unless it be that I am like a second Adam and have begun to talk, outside of Paradise."<sup>5</sup>

With this sketch of Origen's life and method, we pass on to take a glance at his system.

### III.

For the outline of his theology we look to Origen's "De Principiis," or, *Περὶ ἀρχῶν*. This is the first treatise on the subject in the history of the church, and it became the fountain-head for most of the subsequent streams of theological discussion. It is an early production of Origen, and

<sup>1</sup> Paneg. viii. <sup>2</sup> Paneg. ix. <sup>3</sup> Paneg. xi. <sup>4</sup> Paneg. xv. <sup>5</sup> Paneg. xvi.

comes to us through the Latin translation of Rufinus, whose reputation has often been assailed. However, Rufinus in his prologue makes a defense which should free him from any charge of dishonesty; for he says plainly that his purpose is to give a paraphrase in which those parts are omitted which he regards as heretical additions made by malevolent persons. Besides this, as far as there are opportunities for comparing this translation with those parts of the original that have been preserved, the verdict formed of the Latin version must be favorable; so that we are justified in using this work as a trustworthy source of the opinions of Origen. In his edition of the "Philocalia," Dr. Armitage Robinson pays the following tribute to Rufinus: "He gives, as a rule, a quite intelligible sense; and for the most part it is Origen's sense, if we have regard to the general thought rather than to the individual sentence. He thoroughly appreciated his author, and may be considered as fairly representing his views and arguments."<sup>1</sup>

The "First Principles" consists of four books. Each of the first three of these forms more or less of a whole. The same field is traversed, thus accounting for the frequent repetitions; but in each book there is a new starting-point, which gives direction to what follows; while the goal in each case is the same, viz., his eschatology. The subjects of the three books are God, the world, and man, respectively. The concluding book is devoted to the subject of Scripture. These four ideas—*God, world, man, revelation*—will give a suitable division for the following treatment. However, it may be better to take the last of these first, for Scripture is both the strength and weakness of Origen's system.

I. It is by his doctrine of *Scripture* that we are entitled to call Origen a theologian rather than a philosopher. He

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. A. Robinson, *Origenis Philocalia*, Introd. xxxiii. Dr. Robinson's edition, which is textual, would be more serviceable to the ordinary student if it were annotated more fully.

had an authority external to the mind, a norm which he always kept before him. He is the first theologian, because the first thorough student of Scripture. He made it his constant endeavor to think according to its teaching. The opening words of his treatise are: "All who believe and are assured that grace and truth were obtained through Jesus Christ, and who know Christ to be the truth, . . . derive the knowledge which incites men to a good and happy life from no other source than from the very words and teaching of Christ." He proceeds to explain that by the words of Christ he means the Holy Scriptures. Origen tries to adhere to all the teaching of the word, and wishes in no way to differ from ecclesiastical and apostolical tradition. He was an enthusiast for the Bible.<sup>1</sup> He has been called the "Father of interpreters." All subsequent expositors have laid themselves under great obligations to his Homilies and Commentaries. Dr. Scrivener says of his biblical scholarship: "Origen is the most celebrated biblical critic of antiquity. His is the highest name among the critics and expositors of the early church. . . . Seldom have such warmth of fancy and so bold a grasp of mind been united with the lifelong, patient industry which procured for this famous man the honorable appellation of Adamantinus."<sup>2</sup> Hence there is no excess in saying, that the strength of Origen is his firm belief in the inspired word. But this is also his weakness. For, while his principle of appeal is correct, the practical use of the principle is foreign to our notion of logical proof. His treatment of separate passages renders much of Origen's work trivial and absurd to us. In reading his volumes we are suddenly stopped by impossible

<sup>1</sup> The "Philocalia," which is a selection of passages from Origen's writings compiled by SS. Gregory and Basil, contains twenty-seven sections, and out of these fifteen are devoted to the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, iv. 235.

applications. It is like having the sleigh-runner grate against the bare earth.<sup>1</sup>

We may examine in more detail the treatment of this fourth book. Origen's argument for the divinity and authority of Scripture is drawn from the success of its teaching. Moses and Christ have been able to impress their doctrines on the world within a short space of time; whereas the Greeks have never had more than a limited constituency. This success is due to a cause that cannot be human and finite. Moses and Christ must therefore be of divine origin. Having thus proved the deity of Christ, Origen comes to the conclusion that therefore the writings which prophesied of him must be divinely inspired. On examination, we find that this is, as nearly as possible, verbal inspiration. These are his words: "The wisdom of God lies hid in every scripture, which is inspired, even to the actual letter."<sup>2</sup> Every iota is significant. There is planted in each letter a seed, and this seed is the word of salvation. There is a "secret and hidden meaning in every word."<sup>3</sup> However, it is but justice to state that Origen did not accept the theory of the earlier fathers as to the magical communication by means of ecstasy.<sup>4</sup> His doctrine of inspiration was largely due to the influence of rabbinism and Greek exegesis. But, although Origen held fast to the theory of verbal inspiration, his artistic feeling and his delicate sense of style and moral propriety had to find expression. Hence we hear him saying that the Epistle to the Romans is more perfect than First Corinthians.<sup>5</sup> He also speaks of the solecisms and weak expressions of the Gospels.<sup>6</sup> But he encounters his greatest difficulty in accounting for those events of Old Testament history, that appeared to run counter to ethical purity.<sup>7</sup> Thus his keen sense of what is pure in style and

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e. g., *De Princ.* i. 7. 5; *Philoc.* ii. 1.   <sup>2</sup> *Philoc.* ii. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *De Princ.* iv. 1. 7.   <sup>4</sup> Cf. *Redepenning, De Principiis*, p. 51, note.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Preface to the Commentary on Romans*, p. 458.   <sup>6</sup> *Philoc.* iv.

<sup>7</sup> *De Princ.* iv. 1. 17 ff.

morality clashes with this preconceived notion of verbal accuracy. How can he escape this dilemma? Either the words must have a secret interpretation, or they cannot be divine. How is he to retain his belief in Scripture and remain faithful to his attainment of ethical and artistic truth? He had not grasped the idea of development in revelation, and the only way that seemed open to him was that of allegory—a method common to Greek and Jew. Allegory had, indeed, been employed in the church before this, by Clement for instance; and, in a certain form, it is essential to our finite understandings, which must treat of the deepest truth in more or less of a pictorial or symbolical fashion. Much of the sermonizing of our, as of every, age must be allegorical. But Origen carried allegory to its ultimate reach, and formed a systematic theory of it. He took a verse in Proverbs as his authority, "And do thou portray them in a threefold manner."<sup>1</sup> This threefold manner is the flesh, the soul, and the spirit: "for as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does scripture." These three interpretations are therefore to be found, corporeal, psychical, spiritual. Certain passages contain no corporeal sense, but all contain the spiritual. The first sense is chiefly for the sake of the uninformed. "Many interpretations are adapted to the multitude which edify those who are unable to understand the profounder meaning."<sup>2</sup> The ideal interpretation is that which is all spiritual, and he alone is versed in Scripture who finds this deeper sense. Origen describes his exegesis as the discovery of "wells below the surface." Naturally this distinction in interpretations led to a system of esoteric teaching, a scholarly cryptogram by which the best gains of Scripture were confined to the initiated. God conceals from the multitude the deeper meanings, and the impossibilities and imperfections are inserted for the sake of the more skillful and inquisitive in order that they may give

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxii. 20. It is a wrong translation.    <sup>2</sup> De Princ. iv. 1. 12.

themselves to the toil of investigation.<sup>1</sup> These principles led Origen to great excesses, and he deserves some of the condemnation lavished upon him; although we cannot forget his humble desire to follow the instruction of God. We may easily understand how he longed to find the truths of Greek philosophy in the Scriptures. This he did by means of allegory. His doctrine of types is but another form of the Platonic doctrine of ideas, and his dislike of the bodily sense of Scripture is a remnant of the Hellenic dislike of the flesh and its weakness.

As was already said, Origen's use of Scripture texts is foreign to our ways of interpretation. Verses are taken from the context and made to serve for the whole Bible; e. g., in seeking to prove that the Holy Scriptures have a "concealed and hidden meaning," he quotes a passage from Revelation, "and I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within, and on the backside, sealed with seven seals"; immediately following this quotation comes this comment, "These words are written not only concerning the Revelation of John, but also concerning the whole of divine scripture."<sup>2</sup> In Origen's system of exegesis, verbal coincidences are regarded as of divine import. Passages with the same sound are correlated. Isolated texts are exalted to infallible axioms, and all that is required to substantiate his teaching is some word of a cognate appearance. These passages are wrenched from their context with harsh grasp, and placed in a completely new soil; yet they are expected to flourish there as well as in their native place, as if a text any more than a plant could flourish away from its environment.<sup>3</sup>

We seem justified, therefore, in emphasizing the weakness of Origen's treatment of Revelation; and we must look elsewhere than to his doctrine of Scripture for a return to

<sup>1</sup> De Princ. iv. 1. 15.   <sup>2</sup> Philoc. ii. 1, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Farrar's *History of Interpretation*, p. 187 ff.

Greek theology. With our ideas of realism and of historic development in revelation, we can never accept the mechanical doctrine and fanciful explanations as seen in the writers of Alexandria. Rather should we deprecate the already too long supremacy of that method of exegesis. We have Dr. Hatch's authority for saying that one of the evil results of Greek influence was to postpone to modern times "the acceptance of a literal grammatical and historical sense as the true sense of Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

2. As we turn to Origen's doctrine of *God*, we find, as Harnack says, that the unity of God is the key to his philosophy. God is the absolutely One, the cause of all things. He is incorporeal, and incomprehensible in the sense of being far beyond our knowledge of Him. He is an uncompounded intellectual nature,<sup>2</sup> and must be regarded in the terms of mind.\* In the section on God, Origen insists strongly on the spirituality of God, and shows his earnest desire to oppose the faintest hint of materialism. "God is to be seen not by the eyes. He has no body; but the pure in heart shall see Him."<sup>3</sup> The theology is deduced from this general idea of God's unity. Origen strives to remain true to the facts of revelation; but he is not free from the fault of the Greek mind of minimizing the importance of facts, and of making personal speculation coincident with truth. The doctrines of the church—such as the Trinity, Creation, Redemption—become what might be called his categories of thought. They furnish the formal part, which Origen proceeds to clothe with the speculations of Greek philosophy. Applying the Greek principles of distinctions in the Absolute, he shows that God's unity cannot be unconditional; for He has such various attributes as, wisdom, intelligence, life, truth, omnipotence. These also must have always been with Him, "for He cannot be regarded as ad-

<sup>1</sup> Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, Lect. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *De Princ.* i. 1. 6.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

vancing from a condition of inability to ability, or as having possessed the power to form them, yet delayed their production."<sup>1</sup> All these qualities have existed in God from all time; and we see the importance of the term "*eternal generation*," which is a regulative thought in Origen's system.

It is in the treatment of the second Person that the chief contribution of Origen consists. He worked out the doctrine of the Son's relation to the Father. It was at this place that the contemporary philosophy had failed. The need was universally felt of some mediating principle between the Infinite and the finite. The Gnostics had taught a procession of deities, each less exalted than its predecessor, emanations to whom was entrusted the lesser work of creation. Origen defeated this Gnostic heresy, but it was by a deft use of the Logos doctrine of Philo. In his chapter on the Son he draws a distinction between the nature of the preëxistent Son, or Logos, and the human life of Christ. Nor is it hard to detect that Origen's interest is in the first of these. He concentrates attention upon the metaphysical relation between God and the preëxistent Son. Scripture terms are employed, "First-born of every creature," "Truth," "Way," "Resurrection," "Life," "Wisdom," "The image of God." As combining all these, the Son existed from all eternity; for Origen is careful to insist upon the eternal generation of the Son, "wherefore we have always held that God is the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of Him, but without any beginning. . . . Let him who assigns a beginning to the Word take care that he be not guilty of impiety against the Almighty Father Himself, seeing that he denies that He has always been a Father."<sup>2</sup>

Thus does our author get over the difficulty of mediation between the Absolute and the finite. This eternally created Son can now create the world. The types or forms of cre-

<sup>1</sup> *De Princ.* i. 2. 2.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

ation have existed for all eternity in the Son. The Logos is also the Resurrection, which is not a definite event in history, but an eternal generation. It is the recuperative power in God, which exists for all time to remove the contingency of death in actual creation. The life of Christ is an eternal resurrection. Thus in Origen's teaching of the Son we seem to be dwelling afar from time and history. The interest of the school is largely devoted to the connection between God and the Logos, as this concerns the metaphysical possibility of thought and creation. It is a theodicy and cosmogony. The Son is seldom regarded in the light of his historic existence and actual redemption. The Greek theology breathes open space. It knows no limit in years or life. All things are viewed *sub specie æternitatis*.

When we leave the preëxistence of the Logos, and consider Origen's views on the historic Christ, we find less satisfaction. Here, it seems as if there were a great deficiency. Origen does of course claim identity between the Preëxistent One and the Messiah, and he beautifully expresses the amazement with which that stupendous mystery must ever fill us, yet we do not find emphasis put upon the actual Person and his earthly work. He esteems it of supreme importance to explain how there is a philosophic need of different persons in the Godhead, whereas the gospel record is of less consequence. The incarnation in the world almost seems to be more important than the incarnation in the man. This defect is due to the fact that Origen is occupied with the problem of creation rather than that of redemption. His references to the atonement are very inadequate. In the "De Principiis" there is no paragraph devoted to the atonement. In explaining the historic Incarnation, Origen taught that the Logos was united with an unfallen soul in the preëxistent state. This soul, inhering from the beginning of the creation and afterward inseparably in Him, was made with Him in a preëminent degree one

spirit. This soul received God into itself, and therefore deservedly is called the Son of God, and the Power of God, and the Christ, either because it received the Son of God wholly into itself, or because it was wholly in the Son of God. The practical value of the incarnation, according to this theory, is the example it gives. The Person of Christ is the guarantee that all rational souls can become partakers in God's nature. Redemption is in the will, while correct knowledge is the indispensable condition. Meditation on this life of Christ in God is the chief means of improvement. Thus one of the defects of the "De Principiis" is the treatment of the work of Christ. In Origen we search almost in vain for that stream of New Testament teaching which appears so strongly in the writings of St. Paul, viz., reconciliation by the death of Christ. Greek theology has not concentrated attention on the earthly work of the Saviour. It fails to explain why there should be such a cleft in the world's history, as the miraculous birth and death of the Son of God. In its insistence on the incarnation, it yet fails to justify this doctrine.

As regards the third Person, it is open to doubt whether Origen really felt any need for the Holy Spirit. His Logos doctrine left little room for the action of the third Person. His theory is the following: The Holy Spirit is known only through the revelation of Scripture. His sphere is much narrower than that of the Father and the Son. The Father and Son have an influence over all men, over saints and sinners, and dumb animals as well. The Holy Spirit comes only to those who are turning to a better life, and are walking along the road that leads to Christ. He departs from all who are unworthy. The sin against the Holy Ghost is more heinous because it is a greater lapse. It is the willing neglect of holiness after it has been obtained. God, the Father, bestows existence; Christ bestows reason; the Holy Spirit bestows help upon those who are desirous of choos-

ing the good. "In this way, then, by the renewal of the ceaseless working of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in us, in its various stages of progress, shall we be able at some future time, perhaps, although with difficulty, to behold the holy and the blessed life, in which we ought so to continue, that no satiety of that blessedness shall ever seize us: but the more we perceive its blessedness, the more should be increased and intensified within us the longing for the same, while we ever more eagerly and freely receive and hold fast the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup>

3. There is no place where Origen's thought takes such a vast sweep as in his speculations on the *World*. His doctrine of creation is that there exists an infinite stairway of worlds. At one end is the primal creation by God out of nothing; at the other a return to that primal unity. "Creation, as the word is commonly understood, was in Origen's view not the beginning, but an intermediate phase in human history. Eons rolled away before this world was made: eons upon eons, days, weeks, months, and years, sabbatical years, jubilee years of eons will run their course, before the end is attained. The one fixed point in this gigantic drama is the end; for this alone will be clearly revealed, God shall be all in all."<sup>2</sup>

Material existence is almost a disgrace. To be born is a confession of sin. At the beginning God created a sufficiently great number of rational creatures. These He made in his image. Since created they were changeable. God then endowed them with the gift of free and voluntary action. As this gift was employed so was each rewarded. Hence arose variety among the creatures. And to meet this difference in spirit, God created certain seeds of variety in matter that the bodies might vary with the change of rational souls. To use a crude illustration, Origen's creation

<sup>1</sup> De Princ. i. 3. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Bigg, *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 193.

reminds one of prisoners' clothing the marks on which tell the greatness of the culprit's guilt. The form of body is an index of the descent from the original state of equality. These are his words: "What other cause are we to imagine for so great a diversity in the world, save the diversity and variety in the movements and declensions of those who fell from that primeval unity and harmony in which they were at first created by God, and who, being driven from that state of goodness, and drawn in various directions by the harassing influence of different motives and desires, have changed, according to their different tendencies, the single and undivided goodness of their nature into minds of various sorts."<sup>1</sup> This accounts for the diversity of existences, for the angels who kept their first estate, for the dominions, princes, powers of the air, stars, suns, moons, ideas, men, women, demons, evil spirits. All of these dwell in a place which their merit has won for them, and are dressed in bodies fitted to their souls: those who dwell in goodness have a body that shines with the splendor of celestial light, while those of a lower order have bodies of a crasser and more solid condition. The world is a place of discipline for these fallen souls, a discipline which reminds one of the distresses of boyhood when the school exercises were turned into a spelling match. Here also there seems to be a continual putting up and down of the scholars. The created beings which form three classes—angels, men, demons—are in a ceaseless flux. Those below may pass on to become as the angels. The angels rest on the summit, but are liable to fall; and even the Devil, who rests at the foot of all, is rather unwilling than incapable of recovery. He may be reclaimed and restored when God is all and in all.<sup>2</sup>

4. *Man* takes his place among these as being a part in the infinite scale. He occupies an intermediate sphere, where his position is due to a previous fall. Having sinned

<sup>1</sup> De Princ. ii. 1. 1.   <sup>2</sup> De Princ. ii.

in a former world, he is now suffering punishment, for man has not a life of only fifty or sixty years, he has an infinite existence.<sup>1</sup> But though fallen, man is open to the influence of the better spiritual powers. This world is a place of conflict for man. He is open to all kinds of attack. As Michael and the Devil fought for the body of Moses, so angels and demons fight for the soul of man, and man has to determine, by his free-will, with which of these he will take sides. "Hence it is that the whole of mortal life is full of struggles and trials caused by the opposition and enmity of those who fell from a better condition, called the Devil and his angels." Free-will is thus the keynote to Origen's doctrine of man.

In contemplating this vast system of worlds and of existences, and more especially the speculations about sun and moon and stars, we must be impressed with the extravagance of this Greek thinker. However, there are redeeming features in it all. And, one of these saving qualities is the intense ethical fervor of Origen. He has a hunger after righteousness. First of all he is at great pains to deny that there is any evil in God. Origen was cast upon a time that was beginning to discuss the problem of sin. Knowing the difficulties of his position, and feeling keenly the sorrow of life, he nevertheless held firmly to the truth that evil was not God's creation. Besides this, his optimism led him to the conviction that God would remove all things that offend, "for He consumes not men, but sins and troubles." With this defense of God's righteousness comes in the collateral doctrine of human responsibility. In his theology there is no loophole for human excuse or indifference. Every rational creature is capable of earning praise or blame: praise, if, in conformity to that reason which he possesses, he advances to better things; censure, if he fall away from the plan and course of rectitude. Life is a trial. Conduct is

<sup>1</sup> De Princ. iii. 1. 13.

the condition of progress. Each deed "dies, revives, goes to work" in our life; and on our work hangs our blessedness. Origen's explanation of evil and of human life may not possess as much finality as more modern theories, but his passion for righteousness redeems from condemnation much of his reasoning.

The doctrine of *final things* is a significant part of the doctrine of man and the world. As all begins in God, so all will end in Him. The last will return to the first. When we pause to watch Origen's picture of heaven, we are struck by the absence of that crasser eschatology which deforms many of the early fathers. His Paradise has none of the sensuousness of earthly joy. With the piercing eye of the mystic, he beholds a heaven in which there will be complete knowledge. Burning with an inexpressible desire for truth and certainty he will have his longing satisfied in this final state; for he shall see things as they are. He will know what Israel means, and what the twelve tribes signify. He will understand the nature of the soul and of apostate angels. He will see why it is that they are allowed to tempt us. And possessing this full knowledge he will have unspeakable joy. It is all a student's Eldorado. There will be no more wrestling with a mental phantasy that eludes the grasp, or with a phrase that will not fall into shape. The slow search for the tree of knowledge will give place to the gathering of the discovered fruit. He will *know*. Nor is Origen's idea of heaven merely a student's bliss. It is the hope of every rational spirit, as may be seen in the longing of pious souls in every age. For when the spaces of eternity open to them, and the voices break out from above and speak to men in confused whispers of the meaning of life, of the soul, of death, of God, of eternity, and when all that is heard is this indistinct whispering, then such longing hearts fall back upon the answer of Origen. In heaven we shall know. In heaven, he says, we shall once more go to

school, but to learn not secondary but real causes. This earth will give place to another, and when we have been graded into it we shall commence the study of the secret causes of the new world. And so, rising with a rapidity proportional to our purity, we shall pass through heaven after heaven, going through the many mansions of which Christ spake; till at last we shall come to an open space in the air and enter the kingdom of God. Such is Origen's *Paradiso*. It is one in which "the food is the contemplation and understanding of God."

To the realist these speculations may appear bold and suggestive of a sensuous nature; but to characters such as Origen, they were speculations that did not end in emotion, but became the nourishment of a spiritual life. They made human experience grander and fuller, and formed of this earth a mansion more fit for the soul's temporary abode. It was knowledge as the early dawn of feeling; for new ideas came to Origen, as they come to us, in feeling. They first meet us clad in a garb of phantasy.

#### IV.

With this hurried outline of his system, we may venture to form some conclusions as to the question with which we started our investigation, Will there be a return to this theology of Origen?

In modern writings there are two different answers to this. One school, the younger Oxford, and in general the Episcopal Church, is urgent in its call for a return to Nicene doctrine. In these ancient decisions and systems these thinkers find the solution for the problems that await us now, problems resembling those of the third and fourth centuries. "Our age is becoming increasingly Greek,"<sup>1</sup> one says. Another writes, "We have lost much of that rich splendor, that large-hearted fullness of power, which characterizes the

<sup>1</sup> *Lux Mundi*, Essay v.

great Greek masters of theology.”<sup>1</sup> Latin and Protestant insistence on the doctrine of the atonement, say others, has warped the church’s teaching.<sup>2</sup> Let us get back to Nicæa, and the heroic age of theological science. The other tendency is to minimize the importance of these early speculations. Greek thought has too much sway as it is, these say. Metaphysic has sapped the spiritual fervor of the church; and it becomes us to flee its gorgonean glance rather than beckon it back again.

Of these two opinions most will choose the former as being nearer the truth. The second, which is the Ritschlian view of church history, seems to me to be a study of decline. It finds in the history of doctrine a continual degeneration, and is unsatisfactory. The first school, on the other hand, gives a cause for the growth of doctrine and has a truer philosophy of history.

The work of Alexandria was the justification of reason. Its task was the fulfillment of our Lord’s command, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *mind*. This exercise of the rational faculties must always be highly valued. “We do not want less thought, but less false thought.” There is a question that sometimes comes into the mind when one hears the tirade against metaphysic, How far is the opposition to it a shirking of an irksome task and the cowardly libelling of a duty? The outcry against theology is perhaps the note of an indolent age; for we can never forget the marriage between thought and life, and “that as a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” Origen impresses us with the necessity of the exercise of the mind in religion. He is one of the heroes of thought, who sacrificed for the sake of learning the ease of other callings. He is the outstanding example in church history of a literary martyr. He surrendered his library, the dearest treasure of a student, in

<sup>1</sup> Scott-Holland, *Logic and Life*, Preface.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Allen’s *Continuity of Christian Thought*.

order that he might think. Is this world the world of God? Is God good? Is man responsible? Is there a soul? Such was the subject-matter of his investigation, and he went to his task with a doggedness born of scholarship. Such scholarship is a form of heroism; and if the return to Alexandria mean a return to the truth that the mind cannot be neglected without impunity, we accept it. A preacher may refuse to interest himself in the deep questions of theology; but, if so, he is almost sure to have a lingering feeling of incompetency, and a consciousness of his indolence. He is made uncomfortable by the impression of some task that remains unfulfilled. No doubt, many have gone to excess in metaphysics, as Origen did; and speculation may run mad. Indeed the appearance of Ritschlianism may be due to the excess of a previous rationalism. It is perhaps the loathing induced by a recent surfeiting. But the lesson of Alexandria is that any permanent renunciation of the mind will prove to be an injurious asceticism.

We shall ever need a return to Greek theology in this sense, because it corresponds with a well-defined and necessary moment in individual life. When faith has introduced a new experience, the mind hastens to accommodate the recent acquisition to the former habits of thought. It searches for hints of agreement between the old and new: for its desire is to put the newcomer at perfect ease with the older inhabitants. The mind's work is to heal ruptures in the inward polity of our organism, just as the body heals injuries on the surface. In a word, the mind rationalizes our faith. Such was the effect of Alexandria in the life of the church. It began to seek agreement and unity between the new experience and the old. The life in Christianity was fitted into the previous life of the Roman or Greek. It thus accomplished the task of rationalization. As doing this, Origen and his school have an important place in history, and must ever inspire us with admiration. Origen taught with vehe-

mence a necessary lesson, that a man can be both rational and religious, both learned and good. He claimed the whole field of knowledge and culture with a grasp that to the Gentile seemed to be greed. He held that Christ had made all things; therefore all things were his, since he was Christ's; and in this we must sympathize with Origen. .

If, however, the cry of a return to Greek theology means that we are to return to their actual systems, then we must put in a protest. Can our minds roll backward several centuries, as the sun went backward on the dial of Ahaz? Will this age have sufficient humility to revert to the old, saying, It is better than the new? Can we escape from the legacy of the intervening centuries, from that garment of delicate texture which has been cast around us since the days of Alexandria,—that garment, into which have been woven so many new threads, the historic idea, the realistic belief, the scientific gains, above all the principle of development that has been detected in every department of life, and seems to many to be the golden thread that binds together all things? Can we cast off this garment and return to the costume of Nicæa? In strictest literalism we must say, It is impossible. Our mental clothing is not so easily cast aside. Like Medea's robe it becomes part of us. Even though we accept the Greek doctrine of the incarnation,—and no one will question for a moment the value of the incarnation,—yet our use of this doctrine will differ from that of the Greeks. Granting for the moment that our circumstances resemble those of Alexandria, we cannot forget that the light which we bring to flash on these circumstances has gained in brilliance since the days of Origen and Athanasius. Our acceptance of the incarnation is with the conscious remembrance of the complete work of redemption by Christ; and we therefore very much deprecate the antagonism that is placed between the incarnation and the atonement. If we accept the first of these doctrines without the

second, we return to the weakness of Greek theology which never insisted enough on the historic work of Christ. It is therefore a short-sighted theology which would choose out one phase of past thought and exalt it to a supreme position. That theology is sure to suffer which honors one doctrine at the expense of another. If the intellect is to be satisfied by means of the incarnation, the moral nature, none the less, requires some such teaching as that of the atonement. The Alexandrian school appealed to the intellect as the essential part of human life. It accomplished a valuable work. Peace was by means of it brought to the disorders of a deformed mind. The recent insistence on the doctrine of the incarnation has much the same aim in view. It believes that it has rediscovered a divine truth whereby philosophy and the wealth of science may justly be claimed as the proper dowry of Christ's church.

But the modern schools must not turn a deaf ear to the demands of a disordered conscience. Since the third century we have become more versed in the ways of the human heart. Its depths have been sounded with greater accuracy. Introspection has brought to light many of the inner secrets. Psychology as a new science has taught effectively its lessons. Conviction as to our real condition has been intensified. And as a result of these things, man has learned to trust less to human reason and effort, and to fear the tight grasp of sin. The age is more willing now than ever before to say, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Hence the need of a theology that will give a force to combat this weakness and sin. The doctrine of the atonement is the only one to which we can look to find satisfaction for this cry of a disordered conscience. The incarnation is the peace-note for the intellectual nature, the atonement brings contentment to the moral nature.

Therefore as a result of our imperfect examination, we may perhaps say that there is only half a truth in the cry,

Back to Alexandria! We look to Origen as a type rather than a teacher, to his spirit rather than to his letter, to his method rather than to his matter.

There is a much more hopeful sign in modern times than this of which we have been speaking. It is the careful study, everywhere evident, of those Scriptures which contain all the phases of religious life, Scriptures which Origen valued so highly and did so much to expound. The cry, Back to the original sources! is more propitious, and it is growing louder year by year. We search the Scriptures, for in them we have eternal life, mental, moral, and spiritual.