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Origen's Doctrine of God as Relected in De Principiis

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ORIGEN'S DOCTRINE OF GOD AS REFLECTED IN

CELESTIALISM

SHORT TITLE

ORIGEN'S

THEOLOGY

A Thesis in the Faculty
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APPROVED BY:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of Origen's theological doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of the Holy Spirit is the Church's long history. Origen was one of the greatest and most original thinkers of the early Christian Church, yet his memory has

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Origen's work in this direction was very great. His theological contributions were well and known to the fathers of the Church of God, Origen's contributions were great.

Certainly a knowledge of such evidence ought to provide interest in the history, but such were ought the theologians before us.

Frederick A. Schwarz, "Origen: The First Christian Liberal," *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, VIII (February, 1940), 136-141.
Quoted in *Origen: The First Christian Liberal*, *The American Baptist*, January, 1941, I, 207.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Vir magnus ab infantia was Jerome's unequivocal estimate of the genius and fecundity of the most prolific writer in the Church's long history. Origen was one of the greatest and most original thinkers ever given to the Christian Church, yet his memory has been clouded by both Eastern and Western Fathers since the third century. Because of the various erroneous views resulting from his speculations, the name of Origen has long been associated with all that is heterodox and undesirable in Christian dogma, leading Frederick Bratton to refer to him as "The Forgotten Man of Christianity."¹ We cannot say that the great doctrinal controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries would not have taken place except for the speculations of Origen, but as a matter of fact they almost all centered around points on which he had speculated most boldly, as Harnack observes:

If the formulating of Christian doctrine which took place in the Nicene and following ages was a beneficent consummation, then Origen's merit in this direction was very great. If those fierce theological controversies were evil and hurtful to the progress of the Kingdom of God, Origen's responsibility was great.²

Certainly a personage of such eminence ought to excite interest in the historian, but much more ought the theologian become aware

¹Frederick Bratton, "Origen, The First Christian Liberal," The Journal of Bible and Religion, VIII (February, 1940), 137-141.

²Quoted by Albert Henry Newman, Ancient and Medieval Church History, in A Manual Of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1951), I, 287.

of the doctrinal dilemmas confronting the Church of the third century. The themes discussed seem likely to assume a growing importance in relation to present-day problems in theology and philosophy, particularly in such areas as ontology, the Trinity, hermeneutics, and immortality. An American author, A. V. Allen, wrote:

If I were revising my book I should try to enforce more than I have the importance of the work of Origen. He was a true specimen of a great theologian, the study of whose life is of special value today as a corrective to that tendency to underrate dogma in our reaction from . . . dogmas, or the disposition to treat the feelings and instincts of our nature as if they were a final refuge from reason.³

Whether the student acknowledge Origen as the author of two thousand works, as does Jerome, or of six thousand volumes, as does Epiphanius, it would require much more than the limited scope of this treatise even to touch upon all the areas of knowledge pursued in the works of Origen. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the doctrine of God, both in His unity and tri-unity, as reflected in Origen's dogmatic work, De Principiis.

The reader will discover that in outlining the doctrine of God, Origen proceeds from the basis of the regulae fidei. In his doctrine of the Father as the source of all things he emphasizes both God's immanence and transcendence. Because God is seen as Creator, we shall briefly investigate Origen's cosmology and anthropology. God the Son is presented as the God-Man, eternally generated from the Father. The idea of the hypostatic union will

³Quoted by William Fairweather, Origen and Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. ix.

necessitate a glance into Origen's doctrine of the Incarnation and Redemption. God the Holy Spirit is presented as true God, although Origen expressed some doubt as to His nature, function, and origin. De Principiis reflects a true Trinity, yet in language ambiguous enough to be utilized by heterodox and orthodox alike.

Although Origen's theology in the narrow sense can hardly be called a synthesis of Christian dogma in the third century, yet an appreciation of him as a systematician requires an acquaintance with the theology of his predecessors. De Principiis did not evolve spontaneously from the mind of this great Alexandrian, but consciously or unconsciously drew upon the speculations and the formulations of the Fathers. For this reason a section has been included giving in very brief detail the theological atmosphere of the century preceding Origen, ending with his great North African contemporary, Tertullian.

Since the History of Dogma is inextricably bound with that of men and ideas, a brief summary of Origen's life has been included, with the hope that it might serve as a mirror reflecting the culture of the times and the status of ecclesiastical life. Because we take as our primary source Origen's dogmatical treatise, more time will be devoted to De Principiis than to the other works when treating of Origen's writings.

Inasmuch as the Origenistic formulations were to a large extent indebted to the Alexandrian mode of Scriptural interpretation, we shall provide a short summary of the hermeneutical principles Origen employed in reaching his conclusions. In doing

so we consider the "how" of his doctrines as a preliminary to the formulations themselves.

The works consulted in the preparation of this thesis are many, yet special indebtedness is due DeFaye's authoritative Origen and His Work, Fairweather's Origen and Greek Patristic Theology, and Bigg's Christian Platonists of Alexandria. Eusebius was most useful in outlining the life of Origen and in understanding later developments in the Origenistic controversies. Because of the limitations of availability and language, Redepenning's monumental Origenes: Eine Darstellung seines Lebens und seiner Lehre (2 Vols., Bonn, 1841-1846) was of small value, except as quoted by secondary authors. G. W. Butterworth's Origen On First Principles was made available only after the completion of this writing. The translations of passages quoted from the writings of Origen are taken mostly from the volumes of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, but sometimes they are those of Bigg or Pressense, and in a few instances they are the author's.

The primary source from which Origen's doctrine of God has been delineated is his great dogmatical treatise on First Principles, De Principiis. This was the first attempt in Christendom at a systematization of doctrines, as Hans Lietzmann points out:

The first bold attempt to combine Christian pronouncements about God, the world, and man in a closely knit system of doctrine of a strictly scientific character, and it stands in majestic isolation in the history of the early Church. No theologian of the East or none of the West dared to attempt again this immense task.

⁴Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 397.

Much has been written concerning the decidedly inferior translation we possess of the work, a translation deliberately colored by Rufinus, for which reason De Principiis is held in disrepute by some authorities. Rufinus' expressed motive was to prevent Origen from being slandered.

So far as he may have been able to free the text from real corruption his work was no doubt praiseworthy; yet on many accounts it is permissible to wish that his editorial supervision had been spared. As it is, one can never be certain as to what is Origen's and what is due to Rufinus.⁵

Should the foregoing statement of Fairweather be allowed to pass without comment, the serious student would indeed have difficulty basing a scholarly production on such an unreliable source. As it is, De Principiis, although written comparatively early in Origen's life, forms a grand synthesis, a summa theologica of his later teachings. To Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus we owe the Philocalia which has preserved for us a considerable portion of De Principiis in the original Greek. Because of Origen's voluminous writings the student has little difficulty in comparing the cardinal teachings reflected in De Principiis with other discourses. Such a comparison reveals that in all matters of primary importance, especially regarding the doctrine of God, the extant Latin version is on all points in harmony with the later thought of Origen. Numerous references will be made to other of his writings by way of illustration. "De Principiis can still be held to be the most notable production of the Ante-Nicene age."⁶

⁵Fairweather, op. cit., p. 125.

⁶Ibid.

As such we shall refer to it as the mirror reflecting its author's doctrine of God.

In all ages of Christendom theologians have found difficulty in maintaining a dispassionate opinion of Origen. Those who gather to desecrate his memory as the father of heresies and the source of error must shield their eyes from the brightness of his vision, his unchallenged superiority in Biblical knowledge, and his unexcelled contributions toward textual criticism. Those who hail him as a champion of universalism and father of liberalism cannot deny that it was his teachings that caused three centuries of schism and disunity within Christendom, and that by his use of the allegorical method he literally denied the Atonement. Yet we can certainly appreciate the many eulogies to his name as a theologian of first rank. Newman speaks of him as "the most learned and one of the profoundest thinkers in the ancient Church."⁷ Bratton makes the claim that "his critical judgement, creative energy, and catholicity of knowledge are not equalled in any Christian thinker before Erasmus."⁸ Athanasius defended his orthodoxy and spoke of him with reverence.

⁷Newman, op. cit., p. 281.

⁸Bratton, op. cit., p. 137.

¹Richard Barnack, *Origen: The History of Origen*, translated from the German by David King (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 137.

²Origen U. Richardson, "The Controversy of Origen," *Church History*, VI (March, 1937), 50-54.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE SECOND CENTURY

Because of the diverse and conflicting schools of thought existing in early Christendom, Origen can hardly be referred to as a systematician representing all the elements of theology. The attacks of the Antiochenes, Latins, and even Alexandrians already during his lifetime exclude him from any claim to being spokesman for catholic Christianity. However, inasmuch as Origen utilized the methodology of his forebears and built upon the speculations of preceding hellenizers of Christianity, fusing them into one grand system, his can be considered the final synthesis of the intellectual Christian currents of the day. "What the apologists, gnostics, and Old Catholic theologians had taught, he brought together and combined."¹ Richardson has pointed out that until the beginning of the fourth century the task of the apologists was to show the affinity between Christianity and classical civilization.² In Origen this trend reached a climax. Alarmed by the lengths to which the wedding between philosophy and Christianity had brought theology, the Church Fathers began a decided reaction against philosophical speculation and "Origenism." With this in mind,

¹Adolph Harnack, Outlines of the History of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 153.

²Cyril C. Richardson, "The Condemnation of Origen," Church History, VI (March, 1937), 50-64.

Origen's movements certainly can be termed polar, the marking of an epoch. Our immediate concern will be to determine the nature of the theology of the second century of which Origen was the grand synthesis.

The Post-Apostolic era witnessed Christians admirable in action, firm in belief, and heroic in faith, yet they were hardly intellectual giants or profound thinkers. Reading Ignatius, Clement of Rome, or Polycarp, one is made aware of the urgency of church union, unanimity of purpose, and a united front against the attacks of the state and populace. "Their chief interest was in the demands of the new Christian life."³ With the influx of more and more converted pagans who had been reared in the classical tradition, the Christian theology assumed a more sophisticated garb. The apologists no longer advocated for Christianity on moral or ethical grounds, or as reflected in the lives of its adherents, but proposed to defend the faith on a purely intellectual basis. In doing so, the Church necessarily adopted the methods and the terminology of its rational antagonists, leading later thinkers, particularly Origen, into all sorts of difficulties which were eventually considered heretical by the Church Catholic. Hatch points out that the danger to the Church was less one of incorporating philosophical speculations themselves, than one of acquiring the attitude and habitude of speculation.

³J. L. Neve, History of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 36.

The absorption of Greek ideas was less of speculation than of the tendency to speculate. The residuum of permanent effect was mainly a certain habit of mind. This is at once a consequence and a proof of the general argument that certain elements of education in philosophy had been so widely diffused, and in the course of centuries had become so strongly rooted, as to have caused an instinctive tendency to throw ideas into a philosophical form, and to test assertions by philosophical canons. The existence of such a tendency is shown in the first instance by the mode in which the earliest defenders of the faith met their opponents.⁴

The theologians of the second century went to considerable lengths to show affinity between Christianity and pagan philosophy. Justin Martyr saw the Logos at work in all the worthwhile productions of antiquity, maintaining that Christians actually teach much the same as early philosophers.⁵ Octavius in Minucius Felix argued that the poets and philosophers of antiquity held views identical with Christians,⁶ while Tatian maintained that the Greeks were indebted for all their wisdom to none other than Moses.⁷ Athenagoras claimed all the ancient poets gave witness to the fact of the unity of God.⁸

⁴ Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) p. 133.

⁵ Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chap. 5 and 24, translated from the Greek by Dodds and Reith, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951), I, 161-187. Hereafter The Ante-Nicene Fathers will be referred to as ANF.

⁶ Minucius Felix, Octavius, Chap. 19, translated from the Latin by Robert Ernest Wallis, in ANF, IV, 169-198.

⁷ Tatian, To The Greeks, Chap. 31 and 40, translated from the Greek by J. E. Ryland, in ANF, II, 61-83.

⁸ Athenagoras, A Plea For Christians, Chap. 5, translated from the Greek by B. P. Pratten, in ANF, II, 123-148.

Another characteristic of second century thought can be described as a lack of uniformity or cohesion regarding the subtle and fine points of theology, as F. J. Hort observed:

In what we call the Age of the Fathers, there was anything rather than a uniform state of things. Movement was at that time more rapid than probably at any later time of Christian history.

The illusion of an ancient creed formulated in a fixed manner has long led scholars astray. "In the whole of the ancient Church there are not two writers who quote one and the same creed, and even the same Father formulates his faith differently on different occasion."¹⁰ Particularly in this era, with the rise of the various Monarchist groups and reactionary tendencies, the Christian apologists found it necessary to treat schismatics in diverse ways. Due to the absence of an authoritative creed or dogmatic statement limiting the bounds of speculation, the imaginative tendencies of many led to preposterous heresies. Yet the theologians of the second century certainly contributed immeasurably to the creeds of the Church, albeit some in a negative fashion. As Elliot-Binns has observed, "Even heretics and schismatics have their part to play by exploring the limits of the faith and revealing the necessity for defining its boundaries."¹¹ The same author suggests:

⁹ F. J. Hort, Six Lectures On The Ante-Nicene Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 3.

¹⁰ Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 148.

¹¹ L. E. Elliot-Binns, The Beginnings of Western Christendom (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p. 257.

In their efforts to solve . . . problems, they may have made mistakes in the course of their thinking; experiments which, so to speak, went wrong, and have been condemned by the more mature experience of later ages. It is surely not without significance that two of the thinkers who stand out in the Pre-Nicene Church, the one in the East and the other in the West, Origen and Tertullian, have not unblemished reputations.¹²

Bishop Wand compared the thinking of this age to the trial and error experiments known to present-day science.¹³ Since conclusions in the sphere of theology could not be verified by physical experiment, the standard of truth rested in coherence and agreement with revealed truth.

This presents us with a third characteristic of second century theology, the generally accepted truth that in spite of superficial differences, there was an underlying unity and basis of doctrines accepted by all Christians, that of the regulae fidei. There began to appear in many Christian writings short summaries of belief, objectively stated, which were called variously the "canon of truth," "the preaching of the Church," "Rule of Faith" or regulae fidei. These, however, are not to be confused with the Christian symbols which existed entirely apart from the Rules of Faith. Albert C. Outler maintains there were six definitive Rules of Faith prior to Origen, those of Ignatius, Aristides, Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus.¹⁴ Each regula contained that which was considered the principal doctrines of the Church.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1955) p. 15.

¹⁴ Albert C. Outler, "Origen And The Regulae Fidei," Church History, VIII (September, 1939), 215.

As a defense against the trend of speculation, Christians were compelled to search for a trustworthy safeguard against the inroads of the gnostics and Platonists. "The apostles were the last and only authorities. Also, the Lord was quoted as the highest authority."¹⁵ The Rule of Faith in effect acted less as a deterrent to heresy than as its foundation, since most erring thinkers invariably appealed to the Rule of Faith. Origen claims to begin from the regulae fidei in De Principiis and maintains that the Rule was simply a starting point for speculation.¹⁶ The elements which the six Rules of Faith mentioned above have in common are simply stated as follows:

1. God is One, He is almighty, He is the Father of Jesus, He is the creator of the world.
2. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose from the dead, is the Lord who reigns together with the Father, will return to judge the world.
3. The Holy Spirit is holy, it was He who inspired the Old Testament prophets, it was He who conceived Jesus, in the womb of Mary, He dwells in the hearts of saints.¹⁷

While the Rule of Faith in itself would have been an ineffective guard against wild and free speculation, since most speculation concerned itself with the doctrines of the Rule, the establishment of the New Testament canon aided in stopping the flow of

¹⁵ Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 124.

¹⁶ Origen, De Principiis, Praef., translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in ANF, IV, 223-384.

¹⁷ Outler, op. cit., p. 216.

pseudepigraphical productions upon which erring theologians might base unsound teachings.

The Church recognized the danger that was threatening her and called a halt to the process (of the enlargement of the New Testament). The principle of apostolic authorship drew the deciding line in the past and broke the authority of the free prophetic spirit. What took place in the sphere of Church constitution was paralleled in that of literature. The apostles became the guarantors of both episcopal authority and of the books of the New Testament, and the same thing was to happen in regard to doctrinal formulas. In this way, the foundation of the Church Catholic had been firmly laid.¹⁸

Therefore, as a result of the gnostics and Platonists within and without the Church, second century theologians witnessed a tendency to limit all speculations to the bounds of the New Testament. In placing this restriction on theologians, the Church also opened the way for further authoritarianism in the development of the episcopate, a study not immediately within the scope of this thesis.

Along with the Rule of Faith and the establishment of the canon, these theologians were also aware of numerous symbols being utilized in the liturgical rites of the Church. We may regard the creeds as compendia of the theology of the Church, and may gather from them those propositions which were common to the theology of the age. The most ancient text of a creed within our reach is that of Marcellus of Ancyra (337 or 338 A.D.).¹⁹ It was this creed which Rome adopted when she adopted Latin about 150 A.D. The creed

¹⁸ Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 135.

¹⁹ Reinhold Seeberg, History of Doctrines In The Ancient Church, in Text-Book Of The History Of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 84.

gives expression to the second century theology in these words:

I believe in God (Father) Almighty, and in Christ Jesus, His only-begotten Son, born by the Holy Ghost and the virgin Mary, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried. (And) the third day He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is sitting on the right hand of the Father, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh (and life everlasting).

Irenaeus and Tertullian regarded this confession as thoroughly ecumenical, and Ignatius and Justin appear to pre-suppose a fixed formula of this kind.²¹ Hans Lietzmann points out that "All the doctrinal elements to be found in the Apostles' Creed appear about the end of the first century in the formularies of the Church, giving them fullness and an impressive definiteness."²² And so it is necessary to recognize that alongside a great variety of opinions there existed a deep and underlying unity of doctrine and belief in the second century, a unity fostered by the regulae fidei, the symbols, and the growing tendency toward a fixed canon. We shall proceed to uncover certain specific doctrines of God held by the Fathers, doctrines and ideas which, we recall, Origen combined into a grand synthesis.

The heritage of the Church and its uniqueness in an age charged with polytheism was the monotheism of Scripture. That God

²⁰As found in Seeberg, op. cit., p. 84. Translation is the author's.

²¹Seeberg, op. cit., p. 85.

²²Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 140. For an interesting discussion regarding the occasion for the rise of the symbols see Lietzmann, pp. 140-148.

is One, indivisible and without parts, was a sine qua non of all the Church Fathers. Hermas began his Pastor with, "Above all things, believe that there is one God who created and ordered all things."²³ Justin defended the Christians against the charge of atheism by writing that they worshipped the one true God, even as Socrates had.²⁴ Octavius in Minucius Felix' delightful dialogue scored the polytheism of Caecilius and pointed to the rationality of believing in the unity of God.²⁵ Tatian advocated the unity of God in his invective against the Greeks.²⁶ Theophilus expounded on the nature of God and His attributes in Autolycus, as did Athenagoras in his defense of Christians.²⁷ The fact that the persecutions, organized and otherwise, suffered by the early Christians were due to their rejection of polytheism is accepted by all students of Church History.

Not only was God's unity defended, but His transcendence was upheld by most Fathers of the age.²⁸ The populace would understandably charge the Christians with atheism since no images were

²³Pastor, I. 1; II. 1, translated from the Greek by Frederick Crombie, in ANF, II, 3-57.

²⁴Justin Martyr, op. cit., Chap. 5, pp. 161-187.

²⁵Minucius Felix, op. cit., Chap. 21, pp. 169-198.

²⁶Tatian, op. cit., Chap. 4, pp. 61-83.

²⁷Theophilus, Ad Autolycus, I. 3, 4, translated from the Greek by Marcus Dodds, in ANF, II, 87-121.

²⁸Athenagoras, op. cit., Chap. 5, pp. 123-148.

discernible in their worship. Hence, a major task of the apologists consisted in defending themselves from the charge of this "Epicurean heresy." Theophilus was one of the first to answer the charge of an "invisible God" when he wrote to Autolycus that God can be perceived only through His works, and that only after mortality has put on immortality shall we be able to see God.²⁹ Athenagoras defended God's transcendence by writing to M. Aurelius that Christians do not now worship the sky or universe, but the one true God.³⁰

The early Christians, together with the Jews, were also unanimous in asserting God as creator of the world. The particular method He employed in bringing the One in contact with the Many led theologians into many fanciful speculations, yet the core fact of God as creator was universally proclaimed. Some leading ideas about the nature of God may be illustrated by a few quotations from early writers. Tatian wrote to the Greeks:

Our God does not have His constitution in time. He alone is without beginning; He Himself constitutes the source of the universe. God is spirit. He does not extend through matter, but is the author of material spirits and of the figures in matter. He is invisible and intangible.³¹

Athenagoras expressed allegiance to:

One God, the uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, uncontainable, comprehended only by mind and reason, clothed in light and beauty and spirit and power indescribable, by whom the totality has come to be.³²

In brief, God is everlasting and transcendent, free from all

²⁹Theophilus, op. cit., I. 5, 6, 7, pp. 87-121.

³⁰Athenagoras, op. cit., Chap. 16, pp. 123-148.

³¹Tatian, op. cit., IV. 1, 2, pp. 61-83.

³²Athenagoras, op. cit., X. 1, pp. 123-148.

limitations of time and space, possessed of supernatural power and glory. Theophilus wrote:

The form of God is ineffable . . . in glory He is unattainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in height inconceivable, in might incomparable, in wisdom without peer, in goodness inimitable, in well-doing indescribable. He is without beginning because He is uncreated, and He is unchangeable because He is immortal--not only to be everywhere but also to overlook all things, and to hear all things and yet not to be contained in space.³³

This divine transcendence did not remove God into a realm of Epicurean remoteness, but God was knowable through the mediation of the Logos, as we shall see presently. The Christians of the second century were quite convinced of these attributes of God and spent little time exercising themselves on questions concerning God as Supreme Being.

To all He is God, Almighty Lord, Creator, Upholder, and Ruler of the world; He Himself is not a part of it. At the same time He is the merciful Father who manifests Himself as love to men, and especially to sinners.³⁴

In the teachings concerning the Son and the Spirit we find more speculation and less uniformity, although all confessed their faith in Jesus Christ as expressed in the symbols and the regulae fidei. "From the earliest moment of theological reflection it was assumed that Jesus Christ was true God as well as true man."³⁵ The problem, therefore, was not whether He was God, but how within the monotheistic system it was still possible to maintain the unity

³³Athenagoras, op. cit., I, 3, pp. 123-148.

³⁴Neve, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁵G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. 76.

of God while insisting on the deity of one who was distinct from the Father. Significant is the fact that the Fathers continued to follow St. John in using the term Logos to apply to the person of Christ. Yet in utilizing this age-old terminology, a favored term of the cultured classes, the Church invited believers and pagans alike to ascribe to Christ all the attributes of the many logoi of antiquity, from Heraclitus to Philo. Neve associates the use of the term with an emphasis on the deity of Christ.

Whenever it (Logos) was mentioned, the interest of all was at once secured. But that precisely this term was chosen proves how entirely the thoughts of the Church were centered in the exalted Christ. If they had thought chiefly of the man Jesus, they might easily have characterized him as a second Socrates. But they thought of Him as God, in and with God, and hence selected a term such as Logos in order to make the matter plain to the heathen.³⁶

However, it must be emphasized that absolute deity was ascribed to Christ before the name Logos was given Him, not after, as Prestige in his exhaustive treatise comments:

This happened (deity predicated of Christ), and the fact must not be overlooked, before and not after the rise to prominence of the Logos doctrine. Logos theories were an attempt to explain an already accepted belief in the deity of the Son, not the cause of such a belief gaining acceptance.³⁷

Just as the acceptance of monotheism was taken for granted, so also the divinity of Christ was a fundamental article of faith. Even Barnack, who at times posits theories hardly consonant with orthodox belief, maintained that Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas and

³⁶ Neve, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁷ Prestige, op. cit., p. xxi.

Justin could not conceive of a Christianity without faith in the divinity of Christ.³⁸ In the letters of Ignatius, Christ is always "our God" and "my God." Governor Pliny (Ep. 96) reported that the Christians "are accustomed to sing a hymn to Christ as God."

At the same time the humanity of Jesus was just as clearly recognized. Ignatius wrote to the Trallians that Christ was "conceived by Mary" and was the "seed of David."³⁹ In the Homily of Clement we read, "The Lord who saved us, though He was originally spirit, became flesh and thus called us."⁴⁰ Although the dual nature was recognized, the Ante-Nicene Fathers generally overlooked the rational difficulties connected with the problem, leaving it to their successors of the Nicene and Post-Nicene ages to discuss. As pointed out by Lietzmann, and as emphasized in the treatment of the characteristics of this age:

In the world of ideas of the early Church and its theologians, all these ways of thought were to be found uncoordinated side by side: what modern logical analysis separates neatly stood closely together in the life and thought of the early Christians, and did so for the most part without any signs of clash; but in the course of time theologians became aware of hidden incongruities, and attempted to find a genuine agreement.⁴¹

In addition to the doctrine of Christ's dual nature, the Ante-Nicene Fathers concerned themselves with discussing His work.

³⁸ Harnack, op. cit., p. 53.

³⁹ Ignatius, To The Trallians, translated from the Greek by Roberts and Donaldson, in ANF, I, 66-72.

⁴⁰ Homily Of Clement, translated from the Greek by Marcus Dodds, in ANF, VII, 187-198.

⁴¹ Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 152.

The Logos was operative at creation and later in the prophets and wise men.⁴² His pre-existence is clearly asserted by Ignatius when he states that before time and space began, Christ was God, exalted above the angels. He assisted at creation, who later appeared in the flesh to open the Kingdom of Heaven to the ransomed.⁴³ Hermas said that "The Son of God is older than His creation, so that He was the counsellor of His creation to the Father."⁴⁴ Theophilus asserted much the same thing when he ascribed to the Logos a role in creation, particularly of rational creatures.⁴⁵ Although the Logos was assigned the work of creation, this in no way detracted from the activity of the Father, as Hatch comments, "His (the Father's) supremacy was as absolute as His unity: there was no rival, because in either view (modal or substantive) the Logos was God."⁴⁶

Little is found of the Pauline doctrines in the Ante-Nicene Fathers. All speak of Christ's work, yet there is little clarification as to wherein that work consisted, leaving the later Alexandrians to pose him merely as a divine teacher without fear of contradiction. In view of the flagrant licentiousness of the times the emphasis on legalism and moralism outweighed that of

⁴² Justin Martyr, op. cit., I. 44, pp. 161-187.

⁴³ Ignatius, To The Magnesians, translated from the Greek by Roberts and Donaldson, in ANF, I, 59-65.

⁴⁴ Pastor, op. cit., IX. 12, 2, pp. 3-57.

⁴⁵ Theophilus, op. cit., II. 10, pp. 87-121.

⁴⁶ Hatch, op. cit., p. 200.

freedom in Christ. However, there is a beautiful testimony approaching Pauline teaching in the ninth chapter of Diognetus.

Contrary to the thinking of some scholars, the Holy Spirit was certainly not ignored in the theological discussions of early Christendom. A whole series of detailed confessions concerning the existence of the Holy Spirit can be found in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, and most give expression to His deity. Yet there appeared no definitive or explicit tradition concerning the position and work of the Spirit.

In practice, when a distinction comes to be made between that which belongs to deity and that which belongs to creation, the line is drawn below the triad of divine entities, and not below a dyad. The expression of divinity is three-fold. The Holy Spirit may not be directly called God, but He stands unquestionably on that side of the borderline which belongs to godhead.⁴⁷

Most of the Fathers recognized the Spirit's influence in the Old Testament prophets, as reflected in Justin, "The holy prophetic Spirit taught us this through Moses."⁴⁸ Athenagoras wrote that "the prophets uttered the message with which they were inspired in a state of supercession of their rational consciousness, as

⁴⁷ Prestige, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁸ Justin Martyr, op. cit., I. 44, 1, pp. 161-187. See also his Dialogue With Trypho, translated from the Greek by Dodds and Reith, in ANF, I, 194-272. "As the Holy Spirit cries through Isaiah." Clement of Rome in his epistle to the Corinthians, I. 13, 1, translated from the Greek by Dodds and Reith, in ANF, I, 5-21, quotes Samuel, "The Holy Spirit saith." The Didache, XI. 7, translated from the Greek by Robertson, in ANF, VII, 78-85, mentions the Spirit, "the Old Testament prophets speak in the Spirit."

the divine Spirit moved them, and the Spirit employed them as a flutist breathes into a flute."⁴⁹

By the time of Origen a definite Trinity was recognized in the godhead. Although the baptismal formulas had used the Trinitarian symbol since 100 A.D., the theologians did not speculate on the relationships of the Persons within the Trinity. Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthians, "Have we not one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace shed upon us?"⁵⁰ Justin recognized baptism in the name of the Triune God,⁵¹ as did the Didachee before him.⁵² Athenagoras was the first to submit a rational demonstration of the Trinity, while Theophilus was the first to use the term trias.⁵³ Tertullian contributed toward the definition of this doctrine by the Church in his treatise against Praxeas, in which work the term trinitas is first used in the extant works of Christendom.

Prestige offers an interesting insight concerning the tardiness of speculation about the Holy Spirit and the Trinity in general when he writes:

Down to the fourth century the deity of the Holy Spirit came in for much less either of explicit assertion or of direct attack than that of the Son. Largely this result was due to

⁴⁹Athenagoras, op. cit., IX. 1, pp. 123-143.

⁵⁰Clement of Rome, op. cit., I. 46, 6, pp. 5-21.

⁵¹Justin Martyr, op. cit., Chap. 61, pp. 161-187.

⁵²Didachee, op. cit., VII. 1, pp. 79-85.

⁵³Theophilus, op. cit., II. 9, pp. 37-121.

its raising no special problem. If the godhead was not unitary it was as simple to conceive of three Persons as of two; hence, the deity of Christ carried the weight of the Trinitarian controversies without any necessity for extending the range of dispute, and as a matter of history, the settlement of the problems connected with the Father and the Son was found to lead to an immediate solution of the whole Trinitarian difficulty.⁵⁴

Origen, looking back upon the second century, saw an age of discussion and conflict. It was not until he endeavored to combine these theological currents into a systematic scheme that the Church Catholic was forced to assert itself in an authoritative way at Nicea. By using the speculative methods, the tenets of the creeds and the Rules of Faith, the Alexandrian school arrived at a system of theology implicit and explicit in the second century theologians. Origen himself summarized the current doctrine of God in the preface to his great dogmatical treatise, as we shall observe. In this way all the variables and constants of this century found a meeting place in Alexandria.

⁵⁴Prestige, op. cit., p. 30.

CHAPTER III

ORIGEN--HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Origen was born in Alexandria about the year 185 A.D. Although his name seems to have been derived from that of an Egyptian deity, there is little reason to doubt that his parents were Christian at the time of his birth. He was surnamed Adamantius because of his capacity for indefatigable toil.¹ His father, Leonidas, was of Greek descent, if not a Greek by birth, and appears to have been a man of breadth and culture. Leonidas was his son's instructor, and while he introduced him to the elements of general culture, he made it his special care to familiarize him with the Holy Scriptures, not allowing a day to pass in which the boy did not learn by heart and repeat considerable portions of it. Of these early studies Mackinnon writes, "His precocity in the knowledge of the Scriptures as well as of other subjects gave a foretaste of his future eminence as a Christian scholar."² Eusebius relates that Origen was already at this time not satisfied with the plain and obvious meaning of the text of Scripture, but sought to penetrate into its deeper signification, causing his father trouble by the questions which he put to him regarding the sense of particular passages.³

¹Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, translated from the Greek by Rev. C. F. Cruse (London: George Bell and Sons, 1892) VI, 14.

²James Mackinnon, From Christ To Constantine (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1936), p. 486.

³Eusebius, op. cit., VI, 2, para. 9.

In the year 202 A.D., when Origen was about seventeen years old, the great persecution of the Christians under Septimius Severus broke out, and among the victims was Leonidas, who was apprehended and put into prison. Origen's eagerness to share the fate of his father was frustrated only by his mother's device of hiding his clothes. Unable to visit his condemned father, Origen wrote to him, "Take heed, my father, that you do not change your mind for our sake."⁴ Origen wrote

bidding his father stand fast, though his life should be taken away and his property confiscated. There is not in the annals of ancient persecution a more notable example of that moral and spiritual strength which knows nothing of flesh and blood when the question is between confessing Christ and denying Him.⁵

Leonidas remained steadfast and was executed.

In the hour of need a rich and noble lady of Alexandria, who is nowhere named but who is said to have been a Christian, interested herself in the bereaved and impoverished family. She opened her home and treasury to the youthful Origen. The company in which he found himself was far from agreeable, however, since he shared the house with a certain Paul of Antioch, whom Eusebius terms, "an advocate of the heresies then existing in Alexandria."⁶ Finding conditions at this house intolerable, Origen ventured to support his mother and six younger brothers by becoming a teacher of rhetoric and grammar. As he had been carefully instructed by his father

⁴ Eusebius, op. cit., VI. 2.

⁵ David Duff, The Early Church, edited by David Duff II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), p. 284.

⁶ Eusebius, op. cit., VI. 2.

in Greek literature, he was able to carry on his instructions with a high degree of success.

Clement of Alexandria was forced to flee the city during the same persecution which had taken Leonidas, thus leaving vacant the presidency of the famed catechetical school. The eminent learning and fame of the scholarly Origen, who was only eighteen years of age, caused him to be recognized as Clement's successor. However, it appears as though Origen's official appointment to the position was not made until after his success had been assured. At any rate, within a short time the bishop, Demetrius, officially placed Origen at the head of the school.

Origen's succession to the presidency of the school was accidental rather than otherwise. He saw that there were young Christians and inquirers who desired to learn, and that there was none but himself who was able and willing to assume the hazardous duty of instructing them. Demetrius assigned him only after he had been successful as a teacher.

Meanwhile the persecution continued. The Edict of Severus was directed against conversions to Christianity, not against those who had been born of Christian parents and were Christians from birth. This is an explanation of Origen's escape from sharing his father's death. "His youth and his comparative obscurity sheltered him from immediate peril."⁸ Origen's diligence and learning soon attracted many pupils, a number of whom attested to the zeal with which Origen inspired them by sealing their Christian confessions with

⁷W. F. Farrar, Lives Of The Fathers (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907) I, 395.

⁸Ibid.

martyrdom. Some of his scholars became notable in the later history of the Church, among them Plutarch, who died the death of a martyr, and Heracles, who afterwards became the bishop of Alexandria. Students were attracted to the school not only because of the outstanding abilities of its master, but also because of his unquestioned piety and asceticism. He refused remuneration for his labors but supported himself by selling his books, most of them manuscripts which he himself had copied. After a day of teaching in the school he spent the greater part of the night studying the Scriptures, which he knew almost entirely by heart. When finally he did lie down to sleep, it was not on a bed but on the bare ground. He literally carried out the command of the Savior not to possess two coats nor wear shoes.

That Origen carried his asceticism to the extent of literally interpreting Matthew 19:12 by committing self-mutilation is universally recorded by church historians. However, the issue itself is at best controversial. Farrar claims:

It has been questioned by Schnitzer and Baur. Eusebius is our sole original authority on this subject, and although he had access to documents which exist no longer, he was by no means exempt from the possibility of error.

Origen's commentary on Matthew 19:12 points against his personal share in the error, and it is remarkable that in the Alexandrian synods which more or less condemned Origen no reference was made to a circumstance which, in the current condition of Biblical

⁹Ibid., p. 399.

exegesis, would have furnished the best justification for their severity.¹⁰

On the other hand, Fairweather claims:

That he could have done this has been declared incredible (Schnitzer, Baur), although upon insufficient grounds. The fact is well attested. Moreover, the practice in question was far from uncommon in the ancient world.¹¹

At best the account is uncertain.

Some authorities claim that the idea of severe self-denial and asceticism was in the fabric of the times. Hatch points out that Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and other Stoics claimed three elements essential in attaining goodness: nature, learning, and discipline.¹² Fairweather, in discussing Origen's asceticism, writes:

At this period, the Graeco-Roman world, weary of an enervating self-indulgence, turned wistfully from the refinements of Epicureanism to the stern renunciations of Stoicism, with the remarkable result that Jewish theosophy, the later Platonism, and Christianity were all looking in the direction of self-denial as the key to the deepest philosophy of life.¹³

For a number of years Origen continued to labor with growing success. In consequence of the increasing numbers, and with the view of gaining more time for the investigation of divine truth, he entrusted to Heracles the task of instructing the younger and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ William Fairweather, Origen and Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 43.

¹² Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 143.

¹³ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 42.

weaker. Since the school was attracting more and more learned scholars, many of them pagans searching for the truth, Origen sought to equip himself to meet the challenge of heathenism by becoming its student. He went to the most famous philosopher of the time, Ammonius Saccas, the supposed founder of Neo-Platonism, and there met Porphyry, the greatest exponent of the school.

Porphyry later wrote of Origen:

He was a scholar of Ammonius and made great progress in his philosophy; he belonged, however, to the barbarous and corrupt sect of Christians, and so corrupted and falsified the excellent things which he had learned, mixing up outlandish fables with the true doctrine of God and the universe.¹⁴

Lietzmann writes of Origen's interest in Neo-Platonism:

His studies under Ammonius were actually of the greatest importance to him, because they made him systematically acquainted with the methods of the entire mode of feeling and thought which passed as modern learning at the beginning of the third century.¹⁵

During these years Origen also sought to acquaint himself with the Hebrew language, studying under a certain Rabbi Huillus. This is a remarkable circumstance, as the Fathers generally were not only content with the Septuagint, but appear to have regarded it as equally inspired and authoritative with the original.¹⁶

Origen interrupted his labors with occasional journeys. He visited Rome during the bishopric of Zephyrinus about 215 A.D.,

¹⁴ As quoted in Duff, op. cit., p. 288.

¹⁵ Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 388.

¹⁶ Duff, op. cit., p. 289. Eusebius expounds at length concerning Origen's progress in these studies, especially in philosophy. See Ecclesiastical History, VI, 18 and 19.

where he made the acquaintance of Hippolytus.¹⁷ The fame of the great Alexandrian was not confined to his native land, however, and about 216 A.D. a request was made by the Roman governor of the province of Arabia to Demetrius and the prefect of Egypt that he might hold an interview with Origen. We know very little about the Arabian trip, and Eusebius offers scant information when he merely states, "Having accomplished the objects of his journey, he again returned to Alexandria."¹⁸

In 216 A.D. Caracalla visited Alexandria and began inflicting tortures there, particularly upon scholars. Origen left Alexandria and journeyed to Palestine, where his acquaintance with Theoctistus, Bishop of Caesarea, and Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem, ushered in a new period of life for him. Although not even a presbyter, Origen was recognized as an eminent doctor ecclesiae, and the Palestinian bishops requested him to honor them by delivering discourses in their churches. Demetrius was incensed at what he considered a breach of the Church's law and tradition, allowing an unordained layman to preach in the Church, and he demanded Origen's immediate recall. Origen complied, but the Palestinian bishops claimed their action was not without precedent and that they had violated no laws. Mackinnon says of this incident:

The Palestinian Church had evidently retained the old freedom of prophesying open to any member of the congregation, at least with the episcopal sanction. That of Alexandria, on the

¹⁷ Eusebius, op. cit., VI, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

other hand, had adopted the practice, which had by this time apparently become widespread, of restricting edification to the bishop or the presbyter. Origen evidently felt himself at liberty to disregard the Alexandrian practice in a region where it did not apply, and probably resented the rather overbearing conduct of Demetrius.

Origen returned to Alexandria to begin fifteen years of intense and prolific authorship. A certain Ambrosius who had been converted from Valentinianism attached himself to Origen's school, and the two became intimate friends. Origen himself had been most reluctant to produce writings, yet at the insistence and urging of Ambrosius, referred to by Origen as "my taskmaster," hundreds of manuscripts flowed from his pen. Ambrosius furnished him with:

More than seven amanuenses, who relieved each other at stated times, and with an equal number of transcribers, along with young girls who had been practiced in calligraphy.²⁰

Mackinnon says of these years:

The literary activity must have been prodigious, and probably they were among the happiest which Origen ever enjoyed. Engaged in his favorite studies, surrounded by many friends, adding yearly to his own stores of learning, and enriching the literature of the Church with treatises of the highest value . . . it is difficult to conceive a condition of things more congenial to the mind of a true scholar.²¹

It was during these years that Origen produced most of the major exegetical, critical, and textual works we shall discuss later.

Only one incident of any importance seems to have taken place during these years, his visit to Julia Mamaea, the mother of the

¹⁹ Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 483.

²⁰ Eusebius, op. cit., VI, 23.

²¹ Frederick Crombie, "Introductory Note to the Works Of Origen," in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), IV, 227.

emperor, Alexander Severus. Origen responded to her invitation to visit her in Antioch, during which time he engaged in "exhibiting innumerable illustrations of the glory of the Lord, and of the excellence of divine instruction, and then hastened back to his accustomed studies."²²

About the year 228 A.D. Origen was summoned to Achaia to conduct some business of which nothing is known with certainty. He took his way over Palestine, and at Caesarea the bishop, Theoctistus, with the concurrence of Alexander of Jerusalem, ordained him a presbyter. No doubt the motives of his friends were of the highest kind, but his ordination proved for Origen the beginning of difficulties which were to plague him for many years. Perhaps Theoctistus and Alexander sought to remove the former ground of charges against them, but in so doing brought more censure upon themselves from Demetrius. Fairweather offers another possible motivation for Origen's ordination:

It is probable that he desired presbyterial status in view of the difficult task awaiting him in Greece, while on their (Palestinian bishops') part, they may have thought it well to obviate all risk of²³ further rebukes from Demetrius by licensing him to preach.

Origen finished his task in Greece and returned to Alexandria, only to find a storm had gathered around him. This time Demetrius was not content simply to rebuke and denounce Origen, but convoked a synod in 231 A.D. composed of Egyptian bishops and Alexandrian presbyters, who declared Origen unworthy to hold the office of

²²Eusebius, op. cit., VI, 21.

²³Fairweather, op. cit., p. 50.

teacher and excommunicated him from the fellowship of the Church of Alexandria. Not content with the pronouncements of the first synod, a second assembly, consisting of bishops entirely under the influence of Demetrius, deposed him from the office of presbyter. These resolutions were communicated to the churches around the world and were concurred in by all excepting those in Palestine, Phoenicia, Arabia, and Greece.

Much has been written concerning the motivations prompting the deposition of Origen from office.²⁴ Inasmuch as a large segment of the Church Catholic today still agrees with the denouncements first enacted against Origen by his bishop, we shall briefly examine some of the viewpoints of historians concerning the issue.

Heretical doctrines are sometimes made the cause of Origen's dismissal. Cyril C. Richardson claims that the major cause for condemnation was Origen's tendency toward unorthodox views. "Also his doctrines were called into question. This charge of heresy was due to an increasing aversion from pagan philosophy during the third century."²⁵

Following the lead of Eusebius,²⁶ some claim episcopal jealousy the main cause for Origen's condemnation. Cardinal Newman

²⁴For a good summary see Eugene De Pressense, The Early Years of Christianity, translated from the French by Annie Harwood-Holmden (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1878), pp. 113 ff.

²⁵Cyril C. Richardson, "The Condemnation of Origen," Church History, VI (March, 1937), 50-64.

²⁶Eusebius, op. cit., VI, 22 and 23.

wrote that "Origen was the victim of episcopal envy."²⁷ Fairweather, writing in the same vein, maintains that "Demetrius had nursed his wrath to keep it warm against his return, and Origen, fully gauging the situation, voluntarily left the city."²⁸

On the other hand, Pressense' claims that

Demetrius had long been the friend of Origen; he was proud of the lustre which his teachings had shed upon the Church of Alexandria. The feelings of base jealousy which Eusebius imputes to him are gratuitously supposed, and rest on no historical basis. That which is certain is that Demetrius sought to reinforce the episcopate and to restrict the liberties of the Christian community.²⁹

Still others attempt to explain the condemnation by making reference to Origen's alleged self-mutilation, charging that the office of the priesthood was closed to a eunuch. However, the apostolic canon which forbade the priesthood to a eunuch was as yet not in force, else the resistance of the churches of Syria could have been quelled by a simple appeal to an accepted rule, and the elders at Alexandria would not have hesitated to degrade Origen in the first synod.

The incident which provoked the entire controversy seems to have been Origen's consecration by a bishop other than his own. However, the first synod convoked by Demetrius did not venture to

²⁷ John Newman, History Of The Arians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark), I, 406.

²⁸ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 51.

²⁹ Pressense', op. cit., p. 112.

dispute the consecration; hence, to that assembly it seemed legitimate. Hort writes that

Demetrius assembled a synod of bishops and of certain presbyters. . . . They did not agree to reject his (Origen's) ordination as apparently Demetrius wished. Our too fragmentary authorities do not tell us quite clearly the ground of condemnation.³⁰

Pressensé makes the claim that the only motivation in condemning Origen was that of maintaining episcopal supremacy, as noted above. He maintains that

It is important for us to note that the hierarchical tendency had no more declared enemy than Origen, the finest genius of Christian theology. His activity in this sphere has been hitherto too little noticed.³¹

A reasonable and acceptable summary of the entire controversy is given us by Fairweather.

These circumstances (the loss of the proceedings of the councils) and the somewhat fluid condition of Church law and discipline that then obtained, render it difficult to adjudicate in this quarrel. Both were right and both were wrong. Origen should not have been ordained outside of Alexandria, and Demetrius should not have kept him without recognition for such a long time.³²

Origen was left with no recourse but to take himself to his friends in Syria--Theoctistus and Alexander. While living in Caesarea, he made numerous trips around the Holy Land, visiting various locations hallowed by the memory of his Lord. Ambrosius joined him in Caesarea, and supported by his taskmaster, the exiled scholar devoted himself chiefly to his exegetical and critical works.

³⁰F. J. Hort, Six Lectures On The Ante-Nicene Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895) p. 121.

³¹Pressensé, op. cit., p. 112.

³²Fairweather, op. cit., p. 53.

The Caesarean school enjoyed widespread fame, attracting scholars who were to become notable in the later history of the Church, such as Gregory Thaumaturgus and Firmilian.

The Maximinian persecution (235 A.D.) obliged Origen to take refuge in Cappadocian Caesarea for three years, where he was fortunate to discover various texts of the Greek Testament unknown up until that time. It was from here, too, that he composed his Exhortation To Martyrdom, addressed to his friends Ambrosius and Protocletus, who had been imprisoned but escaped with their lives after the persecution ended. In 238 A.D. Origen returned again to the scene of his labors in Caesarea.

During the next five years he travelled occasionally within and outside of Palestine. In Athens he disputed with one Bassus concerning the canonicity of the Book of Susanna. On two occasions he answered invitations by Arabian officials to come and assist in straightening out heresies. The first visit was successful in bringing Beryllus, Bishop of Bostra, to the realization of his errors and an acknowledgement of the truth. The second visit was prompted by heretical views regarding the resurrection of the dead, wherein Origen convinced his hearers that the soul did not die with the body but lived on into eternity. Farrar writes concerning these visits:

Far from being regarded as a deposed priest and an excommunicated heretic, they revered him as the most powerful living champion of the orthodox faith.

³³Farrar, op. cit., p. 423.

Richardson writes regarding Origen's numerous pacific ventures:

From the number of visits that Origen paid to Antioch, Arabia, and Achaia to refute heretics and defend the faith, we are left with the impression that not only the keenness of his scholarship but also the unimpeachable orthodoxy of his belief was widely recognized in the Christian world of that day.³⁴

Hort gives us insights into Origen's successful methods in reconciling men to the truth and to one another:

In each case, instead of using declamation and anathemas, he sought quiet conferences with the men who had propounded these doctrines; and in each case, succeeded in persuading them that they had been in error.³⁵

Weakened and broken in health, Origen died in Tyre following the tortures he endured during the Decian persecution (c. 250 A.D.). The date of his death is usually fixed at 254 A.D. at the age of sixty-nine years. For many years his resting place in the wall behind the high altar of the church in Tyre was honored, and the memory of his greatness still lingers about a spot where even the fame of the great Emperor Barbarossa has long been forgotten. For two centuries the Church loved and honored him passionately, only to condemn him as a heretic a century later.³⁶

In discussing Origen's works we shall treat successively his Biblical works, apologetical and polemical works, ascetical writings and letters, and finally his great theological writings.

Perhaps the greatest and best known of Origen's Biblical works is the Hexapla, or six-fold Bible. It contained Old Testament

³⁴ Richardson, op. cit., p. 51.

³⁵ Hort, op. cit., p. 125.

³⁶ Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 303.

texts arranged in six columns, according to the following scheme:

- a) The Hebrew text in Hebrew characters
- b) The Hebrew text in Greek characters
- c) The Greek version of Aquila
- d) The Greek version of Symmachus
- e) The Greek version of the Septuagint
- f) The Greek version of Theodotion

This arrangement of the texts enabled one to compare the various versions current to determine the exact meaning of the original. Fairweather speaks eloquently of this initial effort at textual criticism when he writes:

As an example of sheer pluck and monumental industry there is perhaps nothing in the annals of scholarship to compare with this first achievement in the field of Biblical criticism.³⁷

Origen sought an improvement of the text of the Septuagint by providing a recension more reliable than the text of any single manuscript then existing. On the other hand, he sought to exhibit the real state of the case as between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text, so that Christians might no longer be at a disadvantage in their disputations with the Jews.

Other Scriptural writings of Origen include his Scholia, or brief notes on the more difficult passages of the Bible, his Homilies, and his Commentaries. Only a few passages of the Scholia have been preserved. In his Homilies Origen usually discusses a text from as many viewpoints as his imagination can muster. About two hundred have been preserved, most of them in Latin translations by Rufinus and St. Jerome. In the Commentaries Origen sought to

³⁷Fairweather, op. cit., p. 100.

explain scientifically the books of Scripture. The value of his comments has largely been depreciated because of his failure to note or discuss the literal sense of passages, a criticism to be discussed in the succeeding chapter. In commenting on Origen's exegetical and Biblical writings, one authority maintains that he knew the Greek grammar and Greek language as thoroughly as any Greek scholar of his time. His commentaries, however, are not without faults, inasmuch as they are marred by their excessive length and discursiveness, lacking clarity and overloaded with irrelevancies and repetitions.³⁸

Origen's principal apologetical work is his treatise against Celsus, written in eight books. Celsus was a learned pagan who had made a thorough investigation of Christianity, and his attack was at once one of the most insidious and serious attacks on the Church up to the end of the second century. Origen, at the insistence of Ambrosius, undertook to write a defense of the faith which had been attacked in Celsus' writing, Discourse on Truth. As a fierce antagonist and merciless critic of the Christian religion, Celsus has been called the "Voltaire of the Second Century."

Not only is he (Celsus) well informed; it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that no more plausible dissertation against the Christian faith has ever been penned.³⁹

If Celsus' attack had been merciless, Origen's defense was equally competent and displayed to a high degree his knowledge of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

the literature of the ancients as well as of Scripture. Hort summarizes his views of the Contra Celsum in these words:

The books against Celsus contain at once the best and the most comprehensive defense of the Christian faith which has come down to us from the days of the Fathers.⁴⁰

Origen has left us two ascetical writings, his Exhortation To Martyrdom and a treatise On Prayer. His fame also called forth an extensive correspondence. Eusebius had gathered more than one hundred letters; however, only two complete epistles have reached us, a letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus and one to Julius Africanus.

Origen's one great theological writing is the De Principiis, or the writing concerning First Principles. It was written around 250 A.D. while he was still a resident of Alexandria. Origen states his purpose in the introduction. Starting with the apostolic and ecclesiastical preaching, which is the source of the Christian faith, he attempts to give a connected and systematic treatment of the fundamental tenets of that faith by bringing together its many elements, clearing up certain difficulties, and completing ideas which were but implicit with the apostles. The whole idea is that of a Summa Theologica. Tixeront maintains that "only a genius could have conceived of it in Origen's time."⁴¹

However, errors crept into the text which proved injurious to the

⁴⁰Hort, op. cit., p. 151.

⁴¹J. Tixeront, A Handbook Of Patrology, translated from the French by S. A. Racmers (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1951), p. 95.

reputation of the book and its author. Hatch says of this work:

In the De Principiis of Origen we have the first complete system of dogma; and I recommend the study of it, of its omissions as well as of its assertions, of the strange fact that the features of it which are in strongest contrast to later dogmatics are in fact its . . . most conservative elements.

Although frequently the fundamental truths of Christianity are overshadowed by the general philosophical speculations of the age, nevertheless the work displays throughout a spirit of unwavering loyalty to Scripture and to the creed of the Church. Especially do we find Origen on solid Scriptural grounds when speculating about the godhead, albeit at times the speculations arrive at the truth through devious ways. It was Origen's resolve to outline the faith of the Church as revealed in Scripture, and then to build upon this basis further elaborations which he considered implicit in the apostles. The immediate goal was not, however, edification of the saints, but rather a polemical and apologetical one.

The object, however, which his taskmaster and himself had in view in publishing the results of his . . . theological studies was not in fine writing, but the checkmating of the Gnostics, who under cover of the gnosis set themselves against God's Holy Church.

This is the man and these his writings. Of his eminence and importance in Christendom there is little question, although the Church has produced men who claim his influence more negative than positive. Farrar makes the claim:

In the history of the early Church there is no name nobler or more remarkable than that of Origen. . . . He has exercised an influence deeper in many respects than that even of

⁴²Hatch, op. cit., p. 323.

⁴³Fairweather, op. cit., p. 48.

Augustine. By general admission he is the greatest, in almost every respect, of all the great Christian teachers of the first three centuries.

Although one may compare Origen with Augustine in point of influence and learning, yet the life-long self-denial and purity of life of Origen contrasts markedly with the sin-stained youth of Augustine. One hesitates to eulogize a personage to the exclusion of recognizing his errors. The judgement of the centuries has concerned itself primarily with the negative aspects of Origen's influence; however, while maintaining an impartial attitude we shall endeavor to point out Origen's brighter more positive contributions to the Church while outlining his doctrine of God as reflected in his theological writing.

⁴⁴Farrar, op. cit., p. 391.

⁴⁵Philip Hef, "Introduction," to Jesus Christ, Messiah of the History of Jesus, translated from the German by John G. Mitchell (Boston: Boston Press, 1937), p. 3.

CHAPTER IV

ORIGEN AND THE HELLENISTIC METHOD

Many attempts have been made, particularly in modern times, to show that the Church by its doctrinal definitions changed the whole character of the Gospel. Thus it is said that an ethical sermon has been changed into a metaphysical creed. The ablest and most portentous exposition of this view is to be found in Harnack's History Of Dogma. In the introduction to the latter work, Philip Rieff maintains that by the fourth century the living Gospel had been masked in Greek philosophy and that dogma in general is a bad habit of intellectualizing which the Christian picked up from the Greek when he fled from the Jew.¹

On the contrary, however, modern scholars maintain that the essentials of the Christian kerygma appear in the New Testament and that later formulations were merely a systematic presentation of that which the apostles did not venture to set in logical order. We believe this thesis to be true. The fact that the apologists utilized the philosophical methodology and forms of speech cannot be denied, but to insist that this utilization changed the very content of the Gospel is untenable. Neve has written that the New Testament does not offer a formulated and systematized scheme of doctrines for the Church, but that it does supply the principles

¹ Philip Rieff, "Introduction," to Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 4.

and set the standards for the later definition of dogma.² Prestige maintains that the only point of affinity with Greek philosophy was one of using the rational method, and that method was by no means the sole property of the Greeks.

There is nothing particularly Hellenic, still less pagan, about the rational method, except that the Greeks had the providential privilege of its discovery and development. In itself it is a part of the equipment with which human nature has been endowed by God who made mankind.³

Scholars who tend toward the Harnack thesis are prone to recognize Origen as being the very embodiment of hellenized Christianity. Theologians and students unacquainted with Origen's writings will invariably identify him with allegory or philosophy at the very sound of his name. Yet the Church is surely indebted to him primarily as being the first systematician, one who applied the rational method in order to set forth a lucid, orderly, and systematic exposition of the faith. That the Church charged him with heresy is quite immaterial. Neve recognizes Origen's eminence in this respect when he writes:

Origen was a pioneer in the quest for theological method. Irenaeus' refusal to recognize philosophy prevented him from making any contribution to the solution of the Trinitarian problem. But the contribution of Origen and his successors was great.⁴

The most apparent element in Origen's thinking is that of Alexandrian erudition. Speculative theologians have often been

²J. L. Neve, History Of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946) I, 33.

³G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. xiii.

⁴Neve, op. cit., p. 85.

influenced by contemporary philosophy, and the Alexandrians of the third century were heirs both to the revival of Platonism and the growing Christianity. It was quite natural that the seat of Christian learning should spring up in the intellectual capital of the world. "Contiguity to a great seat of learning has always an influence on Church life."⁵ Alexandria was no exception. The mutual effects of Church and classical learning upon each other gave to the catechetical instruction a more systematic and scholastic form than elsewhere. In spite of the metaphysical and speculative coloring of the century, however, fundamental to our understanding of Origen is the basic fact that he was primarily a Biblical theologian. "Origen lived in the Bible to an extent which perhaps no one else has rivalled except Luther."⁶ The important difference between Origen and philosophy is his adherence to the Bible and the teachings of the Church. As a student of the Bible and as an exponent of Alexandrian learning, Origen carried in himself the harmony of reason and faith. Whether this wedding was for good or ill, Lietzmann's words reflect that which is true.

Origen accomplished for the first time an achievement which all later creative dogmatic thinkers have made, to present a Christian view of the world in harmony with the educated opinion of the era.⁷

Although he was conversant with both worlds, it is as a student of the Bible that Origen is remembered rather than as a classicist.

⁵William Fairweather, Origen And Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 9.

⁶Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938) II, 417.

⁷Ibid., p. 402.

His many commentaries, exegetical works, homilies--all give evidence of his superiority in the knowledge and application of Scripture.

The primary hermeneutical principle which guided Origen in his interpretation of Scripture was that of allegory. Part of the general intellectual movement of the fifth century B. C. was the use of allegory. Surviving in its various forms through the years, the application of the allegorical method was an accepted method of literary criticism, and it was to this method of interpretation that Origen fell heir in the Alexandrian tradition.

The method survived as a literary habit long after its original purpose failed. The mythology which it had been designed to vindicate passed from the sphere of religion to that of literature; but in so passing it took with it the method to which it had given rise. The habit of trying to find an arriere pensee beneath a man's actual words had become so inveterate that all great writers without distinction were treated as writers of riddles.

In the allegorical method the interpreter seeks to discover a hidden meaning within a plain text. Such a method is at the mercy of the imagination of the exegete, since he will invariably find a meaning hidden which has already been lurking in his own mind. The text, therefore, will not give rise to a meaning but will only serve to justify the exegete's speculations. Unless he already has it in his own mind, he will not discover the meaning. Obviously such a method has in it as many dangers as man's imagination can produce. In the case of Origen, as with many other

⁸ Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957) p. 65.

speculative theologians, it furnished him with nothing new since it was after all only the reflections of his own thoughts.

It has been suggested that irrespective of controversies with Jews or heretics, for which reason he often appealed to allegory, Origen would still have been driven to this principle by the conditions of the preaching of his time. The preacher's custom was one day to read and expound a page of Scripture, the next day to read and expound the page following. In the case of various sections of the Bible not immediately suitable for didactic purposes one can understand the embarrassment he would sometimes experience. Only by by-passing their literal meanings could he draw edifying lessons from texts but little edifying in themselves.⁹ Such a practice under certain circumstances might have been excusable, yet in the area of defining the teachings of the apostles the recourse to this questionable method was regrettable. Not merely content with its use, Origen sought to justify the allegorical method psychologically as a trichotomist, claiming that just as a body is composed of flesh, mind, and spirit, so too is Scripture interpreted in a literal, moral, and spiritual sense.

What, then, is the source of Origen's faith, since he allegorizes all texts according to his own choosing? More than anything else it is the living tradition of the Church. It is this oral Christianity, far more than books, which inspired the youthful Origen, and so when he begins to write De Principiis, he claims

⁹Fairweather, op. cit., pp. 79 ff.

that he aims at being nothing but the interpreter of apostolic tradition. The dogmatical work is prefaced with an outline of the doctrines of the Church. Origen believed that the apostles expressed themselves with clarity when expounding on the fundamentals of the faith, but that they left other areas to be investigated by learned Christians.

On other subjects they merely stated the fact that things were so, keeping silence as to the manner and origin of their existence so that the more zealous of their successors might have a subject¹⁰ of exercise on which to display the fruit of their talents.

Origen always begins with apostolic tradition. That alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolical tradition.¹¹

In the preface to De Principiis we have one of the clearest and most fundamental statements of the Rule of Faith in the early Church. Origen first established the doctrines as they had been handed down from the Fathers, and upon this concise summary he proceeded to the consideration of other questions not clearly answered by Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition. As he himself wrote in his preface:

Every one, therefore, must make use of elements and foundations of this sort, according to the precept, "Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge," if he would desire to form a connected series and body of truths agreeably to the reason of all these things, that by clear and necessary statements he may ascertain the truth regarding each individual topic, and form, as we have said, one body of doctrine, by

¹⁰Origen, De Principiis, Praef., 3.

¹¹Ibid., 2.

means of illustrations and arguments--either those which he has discovered in Holy Scripture, or which he has deduced by closely tracing out the consequences and following a correct method.¹²

Although Origen is fascinating to follow, is imaginative and colorful in his interpretations, and is astonishing in his breadth of learning, when all is said, there remains the regret that his eagle eye should have been so enchanted by a fleeting shadow that his colossal abilities were devoted to the building up of a false system of interpretation. Nevertheless, in his doctrine of God there remains for us not only a reflection of the theology of the third century but also an invitation for us as individuals to appraise our own personal reasons that the words "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" have meaning. It is with a degree of anticipation that we approach the study of Origen's teachings and speculations concerning the godhead. Some definitions the Church has retained in her doctrinal statements, others have been discarded as meaningless, and not a few have been stricken as being heretical. Yet all of Origen's thoughts will invite some reaction or response from our own frames of thinking.

¹²Ibid., 10.

Origen, *De Principiis*, tract. 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Louw, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1924), IV, 323-324. Hereafter *De Principiis* will be referred to as *Pr.* and *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* as *ANF*.

Yore, *Origens de Principiis et his Partibus*, translated from the Greek by Fred McNeill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 70.

CHAPTER V

ORIGEN'S DOCTRINE OF GOD, THE FATHER

Origen first lays the foundation for his subsequent speculations by prefacing his remarks with the accepted teachings and beliefs of the Church, teaching with which he is in wholehearted agreement. There is one God who created and arranged all things ex nihilo. This God, in these last days, as He had announced beforehand by His prophets, sent Jesus Christ to call Israel and the Gentiles to Himself. This just and good God, the Father of Jesus Christ, Himself gave the law and the prophets together with the Gospels, since He is God both of the Old and New Testaments.¹

There was little speculation among the early Christians regarding the unity of God. Yet it must be acknowledged that there was the greatest confusion of ideas among them regarding His providence, His nature and character, and His relation to the created world.² This confusion Origen set about to correct.

First, Origen places in the forefront the absolute immateriality of God. God is Light, and by Light is meant an influence of

¹Origen, De Principiis, Praef. 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951), IV, 223-384. Hereafter De Principiis will be referred to as DP, and The Ante-Nicene Fathers as ANF.

²Faye, Eugene de, Origen and His Works, translated from the Swedish by Fred Rothwell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 70.

God or a means by which the ignorant may be enlightened. To those who claim that the sun, too, is light and body at the same time Origen replies that no one ever receives knowledge or understanding from the sun, and the analogy is false.

How should there be the slightest ground for imagining that from that corporeal light anyone could derive the cause of knowledge and come to the understanding of the truth?

God is Fire, but again this does not imply corporeality. God consumes sinful thoughts, wicked actions, and sinful desires when they find their way into the minds of believers.⁴ To emphasize God's immateriality, Origen calls Him Spirit, and makes the assertion, "It is the custom of sacred Scripture, when it wishes to designate anything opposed to this gross and solid body, to call it Spirit."⁵ Since the saints also participate in God, He cannot be understood to be a body, which being divided into corporeal parts is partaken of by each one of the saints. To illustrate this later assumption, Origen offers the illustration from areas of human experience. There are many persons who take part in science or medicine, but those who do cannot be said to be "science" or "medicine." So also men partake of the sanctifying power of God's Spirit. Origen refers to St. John 4:23 where Christ called God a "Spirit," and makes the following observation:

He called God a Spirit that He might distinguish Him from bodies; and He named Him the Truth to distinguish Him from a shadow or an image.

³DF, I. 1, 1.

⁴DF, I. 1, 2.

⁵DF, I. 1, 2.

⁶DF, I. 1, 4.

Closely associated with God's incorporeality is His transcendence. "We must of necessity believe that He is by many degrees far better than what we perceive Him to be."⁷ In fact, Origen refers to God as the pure, invisible, incorporeal, intelligent Being per se. Celsus makes the charge that the Christians believe in an immanent God, but Origen refutes the charge by claiming to hold no such Stoical views. "I will not permit it to be said that God sojourns in a material place."⁸ Origen draws the analogy of light and the sun. If we were to know of anyone not able to look at a spark of light or the flame of a very small lamp and wished to acquaint this person with the splendor of the sun we should have much difficulty. The best that could be done is to say that the sun is immeasurably greater and more brilliant than the spark. So our understanding is shut in by the fetters of flesh and blood, and because of its participation in material substances is dull and obtuse. Origen's transcendental ideas of God are summed up for us in the following words:

He is "of nothing," the One in contrast to the Many, the absolute existence as contrasted with conditioned existences, and revealed by the dependence, the order,⁹ and the yearning of the manifold as the Source of all good.

Although Origen exerts much effort to show that God is beyond all human experience and outside this world, yet it is God who

⁷DP, I. 1, 5.

⁸Origen, De Orations, XXIII. 3, translated from the Greek by Robertson in The Ante-Nicene Christian Library (The Christian Literature Pub. Co., 1885), VIII, 118.

⁹William Fairweather, Origen and Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 142.

remains the sustaining and preserving agent of the world. "Moreover, all men are not without communion with God . . . and all men have a share in God."¹⁰ The cosmos appears to be a gigantic animal of which deity is the soul. DeFay observes:

Can these two (immanence and transcendence) be reconciled? Nowhere does our theologian ask this question. He does not seem to perceive that this doctrine involves a somewhat apparent contradiction.¹¹

Inasmuch as God is beyond human experience, He is incomprehensible. Since part of the activity of the Logos is to reveal God to men, we shall discuss this aspect of the divinity in greater detail when speaking of the Logos. Just as our eyes cannot look upon the light of the sun itself but can see rays coming through a crack in a wall, so our minds cannot comprehend God Himself, but can observe from the works of nature the nature of His essence. God is Being absolutely intelligent. When Scripture speaks of man being made in the image of God, the point of likeness is that of intelligence, and the intelligence or mind of man is that which is god-like. Since like knows like, every man can know God by virtue of the fact that every man has a mind, and so a share in God. But, as Hatch maintains, in the strict sense of the word He is beyond human knowledge.¹² Origen writes that

¹⁰ DP, I. 3, 6.

¹¹ Faye, op. cit., p. 58.

¹² Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 256.

It is one thing to see and another to know: to see and to be seen is a property of bodies; to know and to be known is an attribute of intellectual being.¹³

Therefore, insofar as man has developed his mental abilities he is able to know God. Yet man is encumbered by being imprisoned in a material body. Since the Son and Spirit are not hampered by corporeality, they have a full share in the divinity, for which reason St. Matthew wrote, "No one knoweth the Son save the Father; nor anyone the Father save the Son" (11:27). God must be knowable to some extent, else we could not even know that He is incomprehensible, and in what respects He is so. On the question how we attain to a knowledge of God, Origen holds against Celsus that the notion of God cannot be arrived at by analysis and synthesis, but only through a certain grace inborn in the soul, not without God, but with a certain enthusiasm. It is a special gift of intuition. It was a fundamental axiom in the thought of Origen, as subsequently in that of Leibnitz, that God is not to be discovered by scientific demonstration, but is near to us in our hearts. And so Origen retains the irreconcilable paradox of both divine immanence and transcendence united in the godhead, yet with transcendence predominating. Only a relative knowledge is derivable from creation. Clouds and darkness are around Him; His ways are past finding out. He dwells far above the reaches of our feeble perception.

The most important function of the transcendent, incomprehensible Father is that He is the Creator. He created the world

¹³DP, I. 1, 8.

out of nothing. Origen dismisses the assertions of Lucretius and the philosophers who denied God's creativity when he says:

And I cannot understand how so many distinguished men have been of opinion that this matter was uncreated, i.e., not formed by God Himself, who is the Creator of all things,¹⁴ but that its nature and power were the result of chance.

God, of course, is eternal. There was never a time when He was not. However, in order to assert His godhood, and as a manifestation of the very essence of His being, He had to create. But if God created the world in time, there must have been a previous time when God could not be called "Creator," since He had created nothing. If, then, the title "Creator" was added to God, He was lacking in being a creator before the formation of the world. Since this idea, that God could change from non-creator to creator, was untenable, involving an addition to the godhead, Origen maintained that all creation took place from eternity.¹⁵ Yet God Himself was not the actual creator, but the Logos.

It remains we seek a being intermediate between all created things and God, a mediator whom the apostle styles the first born of every creature.¹⁶

God first created many spirits as part of His creative nature and impulse, all alike in substance. These spirits were endowed with a free-will.¹⁷ Although Tertullian was the first of ancient authors to emphasize the place of man's will, Origen also used free-will to explain the diversities in the material world and the existence

¹⁴ DP, II. 1, 4; II. 9, 6.

¹⁵ DP, II. 9, 6.

¹⁶ DP, II. 6, 1.

¹⁷ DP, II. 9, 6.

of evil. All souls existed before their entry into the material world, and their position in the world is determined by their behavior in the extra-mundane state. Therefore, the position of all living beings has been determined not by God but by the souls themselves. Origen assumed that various spirits defected from primeval goodness by degrees. This grand Fall of all created spirits is portrayed allegorically in the Genesis account of Adam and Eve.

Those 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.¹⁸

Origen stoutly maintains that the created spirits have no affinity whatever with the Platonist images or the gnostic emanations.

We deny that we maintain the existence of certain images which the Greeks call ideas. For it is certainly alien to our writers to speak of an incorporeal world existing in the imagination alone, or in the fleeting world of thoughts.¹⁹

The Fall, therefore, involved the defection of the spirits. Some fell very far. These are the demons who inhabit the air. Some fell only a short distance and now inhabit the material bodies of humans. Some spirits fell not at all or only an inconsiderable extent, and these are the heavenly bodies in the universe. The cause of the creation of the material world, therefore, was the defection of the spirits. Hence, the creation of the world

¹⁸DF, II. 1, 1.

¹⁹DF, II. 3, 6.

fulfilled two functions, exhibiting God's creative power and providing a home for fallen spirits.²⁰

At this point one may legitimately ask whether it is possible for many eternities (God, world, souls) to exist side by side. John Scotus Erigena explains the aberrancy and upholds Origen's doctrine by differentiating between a temporal and causal relationship.

Erigena, like Origen, asserted the eternity of the world, and held that had God existed before and without the world, creation would have been an accident in the divine life. Only in the sense that cause must exist anterior to effect, i.e., by a logical interval, but not an interval of measurable time, did God exist before the world.²¹

The creation recorded in Scripture was for the purpose of punishment and purification of fallen spirits.²² Man was to be purified by living in the world until he merited a return to pre-mundane goodness. Man originally had a part of the Logos or Divine Fire, but by virtue of the Fall this spark cooled down into a soul. Although man is depraved because of the Fall and his association with materiality, yet every man has a spark of the divine in him,

²⁰DP, II. 8, 3; II, 9, 2.

²¹Fairweather, op. cit., p. 256. See also DP, II, 8, 3. Lietzmann writes, "He (Origen) was aware that the conception of time was not applicable to God or the divine, and that in addition to the horizontal division of phenomena in a temporal sequence, there was a vertical sequence which took account of a series of causes and effects apart from the conception of time." Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 413.

²²DP, III. 4, 5; II. 1 - 4.

actually a part of the Logos. Therefore, the purpose for incorporeity is primarily one of purification rather than punishment. In fact, this idea is paramount in Origen's proposition of the many worlds, each one for the perfection of the saints.

There will be again, for the correction and improvement of those who stand in need of it, another world, either resembling that which now exists, or better than it, or greatly inferior.²³

Exactly where this present world fit into this scheme Origen was unprepared to say. In conjunction with the idea of the world being for corrective purposes, Harnack observed, "Life is a discipline, a conflict under the permission and leading of God, which will end with the conquest and destruction of evil."²⁴

We have already discovered the reason why God created the material world, that it might serve as a reformatory for fallen spirits. Origen suggests that the motivation for creating spirits or rational creatures in the first place was nothing less than the pure goodness of God.

When He (God) in the beginning created those beings which He desired to create, i.e., rational natures, He had no other reason for creating them than on account of Himself, i.e., His own goodness.²⁵

Hans Lietzmann comments on this doctrine in Origen when he maintains that the positive understanding that God was the final cause

²³DP, II. 3, 1.

²⁴Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 160.

²⁵DP, II. 9, 6.

of all creation was transformed into a striking view of the absolute goodness of God, who created living things because He wished to manifest goodness to them. Moreover, since God's will was a part of His being and therefore eternal, it followed of necessity that the created world was eternal.²⁶

It appears, then, that Origen's entire doctrine of God as Creator, or cosmology, is in actuality a theodicy, or a vindication of God for permitting evil to exist. The crux of the entire system is the doctrine of free-will, which shifts the cause of evil from the Creator to the creature, and places the cause for seeming injustice in this world to pre-mundane guilt. Hatch maintains that in Origen's theology, Stoicism and Neo-Platonism are blended into a complete theodicy, and that a more logical superstructure has never been reared on the basis of philosophical theism.²⁷ We conclude our remarks concerning God as Creator by reiterating the words of Hatch who comments, "The belief in the unity of God and in the identity of the One God with the Creator of the world was never again seriously disturbed," following the middle of the third century and the Origenistic definitions.²⁸

Not only was God, the Father, transcendent, incomprehensible, and Creator, but He was also God of both Old and New Testaments. Origen maintains against Marcionism that justice and goodness are

²⁶Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 403. See also DP, IV. 4, 3; I. 2, 10; I. 4, 3.

²⁷Hatch, op. cit., p. 234.

²⁸Ibid., p. 206.

not only reconcilable in God but are both characteristics of one and the same Father. In Marcionism, dithelism was presented as the only solution to the seeming contradictions between vindictive anger in the Old Testament and forgiving love in the New. Origen writes:

We refute those who think that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a different God from Him who gave the answers of the law to Moses, or commissioned the prophets,²⁹ who is the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

According to Origen, the indiscriminate bestowal of benefits upon all, irrespective of conduct, is a perverted notion of goodness, whereas punishment inflicted as a deterrent from evil implies real goodness. To those who hold that justice and goodness are mutually exclusive, justice being the Old Testament God and goodness the New, he points out that justice can easily be attributed to the New Testament and goodness to the Old, since there are flashes of both throughout Scripture.³⁰ He concludes his argument by saying:

By all which it is established that the God of the law and the Gospels is one and the same, a just and good God, and that He confers benefits justly, and punishes with kindness; since neither goodness without justice, nor justice without goodness, can display the real dignity of the divine nature . . . we may also hold the virtue of goodness and justice to be one and the same.³¹

An interesting glimpse is given in this respect into his principles of interpretation. Origen lays the blame for Marcion's error on a

²⁹DP, II. 4, 1.

³⁰DP, II. 5, 2.

³¹DP, II. 5, 3.

literal interpretation of Scripture where allegory is demanded.

"Now such are their opinions because they know not how to understand anything beyond the letter."³²

A further characteristic of God is His self-limitation.³³ In the beginning He created a limited number of souls and as limited amount of matter as He knew would be needed for the housing of the souls. In respect of omnipotence God is limited. Were it not so He would be incomprehensible even to Himself. He can do only that which He wills to do. He is thus limited not by the resistance of created matter, but through His own nature, in virtue of His own reason and goodness. It is also certain that God cannot do that which is morally evil, and logically certain that He can do nothing contrary to nature. There are certain evils connected with the carrying out of God's plans, evils which God Himself cannot limit.

Origen draws the following analogy in Contra Celsum:

Evils in the strict sense are not created by God; yet some, though but few in comparison with the great, well ordered whole of the world, have of necessity adhered to the objects realized, as the carpenter who executes the plan of a building, does not manage without chips and similar rubbish, or as architects cannot be made responsible for the dirty heaps of broken stones and filth one sees at the sites of buildings.³⁴

Origen has none of the modern reverence for the word infinite. To him, as a Christian Platonist, it is nearly equivalent to evil, and

³² DP, II. 5, 1.

³³ DP, II. 9.

³⁴ Origen, Contra Celsum, VI. 55, translated from the Greek by Frederick Crombie, in ANF, IV, 395-669.

the very perfection of the divine attributes lies in their mutually limiting character.³⁵

In defending God's transcendence and changelessness, Origen again reverts to the allegorical method when interpreting those parts of Scripture which ascribe human traits to divinity. He writes:

But when we read either in the Old Testament or in the New of the anger of God, we do not take such expressions literally, but seek in them a spiritual meaning, that we may think of God as He deserves to be thought of.³⁶

Although God surpasses all experience, yet He is immanent in the sense that He is potentially everywhere as a sort of almighty superintending providence. Human attributes are ascribed to divinity only in the sense of aiding our comprehension of Him, and these are extremely misleading substitutes at best.

Since the soul's sojourn in the world is considered one of purification and learning more than punishment, God is thought of as being the Divine Teacher and Physician. Actually, the Logos functions more as The Teacher, but the idea is certainly not absent from the function of the Father. Origen writes:

Those who have sinned need to be treated with severer remedies, and because He applies to them those measures which, with the prospect of improvement, seem nevertheless, for the present, to produce a feeling of pain.³⁷

The idea of purification is even applied to hell, since the purpose and function of damnation is remedial.

³⁵ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 147.

³⁶ DP, II. 4, 4.

³⁷ DP, II. 5, 3.

God, our Physician, desiring to remove the defects of our souls, which they had contracted from their different sins and crimes, should employ penal measures of this sort, and should apply even, in addition, the punishment of fire to those who have lost their soundness of mind.³⁸

And so it appears that just as Epictetus and the later Stoics had conceived of life as a moral discipline, and of its apparent evils as a necessary means of testing character, so the Christian philosophers of Alexandria conceived of God as the Teacher and Trainer and Physician of men, of the pains of life as being disciplinary, and of the punishments of sin as being not vindictive but remedial.

In summary, the following points can be attributed to Origen's understanding of the nature of God, the Father. God is eternal, and because of His very nature of goodness, created spirits and matter from eternity. The spirits were endowed with free-will, and because some chose to sin to a greater or lesser degree, became embodied in matter corresponding to the degree of their fall. God is transcendent and incomprehensible, yet in a providential sense He is also immanent. He is knowable to the extent that our minds, which are made in God's image, can grasp His reality. God is impassible, and whatever human attributes are ascribed to His nature must be understood allegorically. The God of the New Testament is identical with that of the Old, inasmuch as justice and goodness are opposite sides of the same coin. Finally, the primary function of God toward man is one of Preserver, Teacher, Physician, and Trainer of men's souls, looking forward to the great final consummation when all souls will return to their primordial premundane

³⁸DP, II. 10, 6.

state of divinity, purged of all evil and corporeality. In this sense Origen can perhaps be charged with allowing Stoicism to infiltrate his theology with the idea of a return to a World Soul. Regardless of such speculative aberrations, his views ought always be treated by the scholar and theologian with the same spirit in which they were formulated, that of seeking after the truth on the basis of Scriptures. As Origen himself admits:

These subjects, indeed, are treated by us with great solicitude and caution, in the manner rather of an investigation and discussion, than in that of a fixed and certain decision.³⁹

Perhaps later theologians, both heterodox and orthodox, would have avoided much controversy and invective regarding Origen had they recalled his motive as one of satisfying curiosity rather than that of producing a fixed formula of faith.

³⁹DP, I. 6, 1.

³⁹Origen, in *Principia*, Book 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in the *Intelligent Reading*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), IV, 225-226. Hereafter in *Principia* will be referred to as *Pr*.

CHAPTER VI

ORIGEN'S DOCTRINE OF GOD, THE SON

The accepted tradition of the Church which Origen recognizes in his preface embodied the views accepted by the Church in all ages. Jesus Christ, who came into the world, was begotten of the Father before all creatures. It was He who was instrumental in the creation of all things (St. John 1:3). In the last times He divested Himself of glory and became incarnate, although God, and while made a man remained the God who He was. He assumed a body like our own, differing in this respect only, that it was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was truly born, did truly suffer, and did not endure death only in appearance but in actual fact. He rose from the dead and conversed with His disciples, after which He was taken up into heaven.¹ In accordance with his axiom, "Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge," Origen bases further speculations on this Rule of Faith.

It was Origen's doctrine of the Son more than any other of his teachings that played so important a part in later doctrinal formulations. Inasmuch as the first four ecumenical councils were concerned primarily with questions centering about the Son, appeals were made to Origen by both orthodox and heterodox parties to substantiate their views. In light of this it is well for students

¹Origen, De Principiis, Praef. 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951), IV, 223-384. Hereafter De Principiis will be referred to as DP.

of history, of theology, and of the ancient Church to have a passing understanding of the Alexandrian's thoughts concerning the matter.

Already in the second century the air vibrated with strife as to the sense in which God is One and at the same time Three, the strife centering particularly in Rome. The latter aspect of the problem formed the center of the controversy. The main issue in the debate was how to indicate that Jesus is God, yet at the same time a Person entirely different from the Father. "This problem is specifically a problem of Christian theology. How can a triad be reconciled with a monarchy, so long as the triad is real and permanent."²

The main contribution of Origen in the area of Christology is his definition of the Scriptural doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. The Son "was begotten before any beginning that can be either comprehended or expressed."³ Again Origen gives expression to this view when he writes:

Wherefore we have always held that God is the Father of His only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of Him, and derives from Him what He is, but without any beginning.

Origen arrives at his idea of eternal generation not by adducing Scripture references but by the same reasoning process by which he demonstrates that the world is eternal. God cannot be called

²G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. 135.

³DP, I. 2, 2.

⁴DP, I. 2, 2.

omnipotent unless there exist those over whom He may exercise His power. In like manner, God cannot be called Father unless He have a Son. Since God has been Father from eternity, the Son, too, must be eternal. Also, the title of Omnipotent cannot be older than that of Father, for it is through the Son that the Father is almighty.⁵ Neve makes the statement that this was the first advance toward stating the Son's co-eternity with the Father which is expressed in the ancient creed. This thought opened the way to that other and equally important term of the creed, the homousios.⁶ The eternal begetting is not, however, of the Father's essence, but of the Father's will. In the generation of the Son, the Father's essence was not diminished or divided in any way, but the Son was begotten as a mirror of the Father's glory, as His image, as His wisdom existing hypostatically.⁷ Origen again points out that the difference between divine generation and human generation is as great as that between deity and humanity; therefore, the Son's generation is eternal and everlasting, just as the radiance is continuously generated from light.⁸

As to Origen's primacy in propounding this definition Harnack maintains that there was none preceding him who made the idea

⁵DP, I. 2, 10.

⁶J. L. Neve, History Of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 37.

⁷DP, I. 2, 6; I. 2, 2; I. 2, 9; I. 2, 10; I. 2, 12.

⁸DP, I. 2, 4.

explicit. There is uncertainty in Justin Martyr, it is not in Hippolytus, and it is only implied in Irenaeus.⁹ Origen certainly was the first to place this teaching in a central position in his Christology.

Perhaps one of the loudest cries of theologians raised against Origen through the centuries, in addition to that raised against his use of allegory, has been the cry voiced against his idea of the subordination of the Son. Defay maintains that "it is absurd to bring as a grievance against him the charge of subordinationism. In his time one could not help being one."¹⁰ Origen has been accused of using the term κτίσις in reference to the Son, that is, a created being. The only instance of the term is in a fragment of De Principiis (IV. 4, 1) preserved by Emperor Justinian and printed in the Berlin edition. Prestige maintains:

If this extract is genuine and literally accurate the state is indeed a serious matter. But even in the same context the erring Origen stoutly denies the truth of the formula adopted by Arius, that there was a time when He was not. . . . Origen held a species of subordinationism, but he most certainly was no Arian.¹¹

The Son is subordinate in that He derives His existence from the Father.¹² He is the mirror of God's glory, hence, not that glory

⁹As quoted by Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 267. Prestige, op. cit., p. 153, on the other hand, maintains that Hippolytus described this doctrine early, speaking of the Son as a ray from the sun.

¹⁰Faye, Eugene de, Origen and His Works, translated from the Swedish by Fred Rothwell (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1929), p. 102.

¹¹Prestige, op. cit., p. 133.

¹²DP, I. 2, 2.

in itself. He is the image of God to men, but not Being per se.¹³

Because He is substantia substantialiter subsistens, He is as such

no ὑπόστασις. He is an ὑπόστασις, and the Father is πρῶτος

ὑπόστασις.¹⁴

Accordingly, He is the first stage in the transition from the One to the Many. From the standpoint of God the κρίσις ἐμοῦ ἑαυτοῦ, from our standpoint the manifest essential God. For us, alone, therefore, does the essential likeness of the Father and Son exist. His unchangeableness is therefore only relative, since it does not reside in the αὐτοῦσις.¹⁵

And so it appears that as soon as the category of causality is applied to the relationship of the Father to the Son, all other characteristics also receive a limitation. The Son is that which is caused; thus, the Father is greater than the Son, and all other attributes of deity to the Son are relative, whereas those of the Father are absolute. According to the De Principiis it may also be held that the kingdom of the Father is more extensive than that of the Son, which is confined to rational beings.¹⁶ The kingdom of the Son will come to an end,¹⁷ whereas that of the Father is eternal.

¹³ DP, I. 2, 8.

¹⁴ Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 159.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For further discussion concerning the work of the Son see the discussion on the Trinity in Ch. 7.

¹⁷ This is disputed by Charles Bigg, The Christian Platonists Of Alexandria (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 154.

In spite of the decided pronouncements of Origen's subordinationism, most of which have been derived by later scholars in tracing out his ideas rather than made explicit by Origen himself, he maintains that the Son and the Father are equal. "This image (Son) contains the unity of nature and substance belonging to the Father and the Son."¹⁸ Again he writes, "The omnipotence of Father and Son is one and the same, as God and Lord are one and the same with the Father."¹⁹ The Son is the same in substance with the Father, sharing in His essence and possessing all His attributes. "There is no dissimilarity whatever between the Son and the Father."²⁰ "No one ought to be offended, seeing God is the Father and the Savior is also God."²¹

It is not to be imagined that there is a kind of blasphemy, as it were, in the words, "There is none good save one only, God the Father," as if thereby it may be supposed to be denied that either Christ or the Holy Spirit was good.²²

It appears, then, that Origen's greatest difficulty lay in the fact that while representing the Father as the foundation of godhead, at the same time he sought to conserve true deity for the Son.

Not only was the Son true God, eternally generated, but also a person distinct from the Father. Origen was a strong opponent of Monarchianism, which had its supporters in Rome. It was he who

¹⁸ DP, I. 2, 6.

¹⁹ DP, I. 2, 10.

²⁰ DP, I. 2, 12.

²¹ DP, I. 2, 10.

²² DP, I. 2, 13.

first taught that the Son, begotten of the Father from all eternity, was also from all eternity an hypostasis.²³ This teaching differed from all previous conceptions of a hypostatic Logos; especially was this true with reference to the apologists who took the position that the hypostasizing of the Logos occurred in time for the purpose of creation and redemption.²⁴ When Origen does speak in terms of the Son being of another substance than the Father, he means to emphasize His distinct being, as the context shows.²⁵

It appears, then, that Origen's views concerning the second Person of the Trinity in His relationship to the Father and the godhead can be summarized in three statements. He is an eternally begotten Person, and there never was a time when He was not. Yet, as being an hypostasis derived from the Father, He is subordinate in the causal sense. As regards His true nature, however, He is true God, of the substance of the Father, equal to the Father in every respect except that of origin.

Origen also speculated concerning the relationship of the Logos to the created world. The Logos was the instrumental cause of the existence of the cosmos. As such, He acted as intermediary between God and man, deity and matter. Christ was Wisdom, and Origen claims that "Wisdom containeth within herself either the

²³ DP, I. 2, 9 ff.

²⁴ Neve, op. cit., p. 86.

²⁵ See Prestige, op. cit., p. xxvii. F. W. Green disputes this claim, as quoted in Prestige.

beginnings, forms, or species of all creation."²⁶ A more explicit statement occurs in the second book of De Principiis where Origen writes:

Seeing then that all things which have been created are said to have been made through Christ and in Christ . . . it will undoubtedly follow that those things which were created in the Word and Wisdom are said to be created also in that righteousness which is Christ.²⁷

Again he writes that "Wisdom was the beginning of the ways of God."²⁸

Not only is Christ a mediator between God and man in the sense of creation, but He acts in the same capacity in relation from man to God, as it is only through Him that knowledge of the Father can be communicated to created beings. Here, too, we catch sight of Origen's conception of the work of the Logos. Wisdom, or Christ, is so called because He discloses to other beings the principles of the mysteries and secrets which are contained within the wisdom of God.²⁹ The Logos is Wisdom, and in proportion as each man has cultivated his own rationality or mind, to that extent does he have the Logos dwelling in him. The Logos is called the Word because He is, so to speak, the interpreter of the secrets of the mind of God. In this way the function of the Logos, personified in Jesus Christ, is primarily that of divine instructor rather

²⁶ DP, I. 2, 2.

²⁷ DP, II. 9, 4.

²⁸ DP, I. 2, 3.

²⁹ DP, I. 2, 3.

than that of vicariously fulfilling the law for mankind.³⁰ He is the image of God to men. Origen draws the analogy of a statue. Supposing, he says, that there existed a statue of such enormous proportions as to fill the whole world. It would be impossible for any man to see the entire statue at one time. However, if another smaller statue were formed resembling the larger in every detail, every man could grasp the image of the immense statue by looking at the smaller one. In this way Jesus Christ is an instructor who shows us in His person what the Father is like.³¹ Lietzmann makes the observation that "only to the extent that we know the Son do we know God, and our knowledge is therefore always merely relative and can never be absolute."³²

The doctrine of the Logos as a mediary, both from God to man and from man to God, profoundly affected Origen's doctrine of redemption, or the work of the Logos. We have already seen that the primary work of Christ in the world is that of a teacher; hence, the highest salvation consists in being taught. "It is not as the crucified One, but merely as a divine teacher that He is of consequence to the wise."³³ It is true that to the simple Christian

³⁰ DE, I. 2, 3.

³¹ DE, I. 2, 8.

³² Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Wolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 403.

³³ William Fairweather, Origen And Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 91.

Origen holds out the doctrine of Atonement and grace in Christ Jesus, but to the true gnostic Christian this doctrine is inadequate. Newman remarks:

Origen believed in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. Christ is a sacrifice, not merely for all men, but for fallen angels. The merit of Christ must be appropriated by each individual through faith. By believing in Christ we become like Him in character. Origen distinguished in graduations³⁴ in the Christian life: mere faith, knowledge, and wisdom.

In the final analysis, education is the method of redemption as understood by Origen. It consists in divine training and guidance. Since salvation is primarily education, it can be taught. This may be one reason for the pre-eminence of the School of Alexandria rather than the Church, and may also shed some light on the controversy centering about Origen and Demetrius, inasmuch as Origen very likely considered the position of teacher superior to that even of bishop.

Harnack summarizes the doctrine when he writes:

Blessed are the advanced ones who need no more the physician, the shepherd, and the redeemer--but the teacher is finally no longer necessary to those who have become perfect; such rest in God.³⁵

It is quite natural, therefore, to discover in Origen's view of the world the idea of life being a discipline and a remedial period where men are to seek after the knowledge of God, and to the extent that they learn more about God, to that extent will they

³⁴ Albert Henry Newman, Ancient And Medieval Church History, in A Manual Of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publications Society, 1951), I, 285. See also DeFay, op. cit., pp. 109 and 128.

³⁵ Adolph Harnack, op. cit., p. 155.

approach godliness. Virtue is that which can be taught. Origen's conception of the life after death toward which all men are striving is a striking one in Christian literature.

I think, therefore, that all the saints who depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which Holy Scripture calls Paradise, as in some place of instruction, and so to speak, classroom or schoolroom of souls, in which they are to be instructed regarding all the things which they had seen on earth, and are to receive also some information respecting things that are to follow in the future.³⁶

Such is the true scholar's vision of Paradise. DeFay comments on Origen's soteriology in clear but all too tragic terms. "He offers us the paradoxical example of a man who is imbued with the purest Christian spirit and yet does not know who Jesus of Nazareth was and what He really intended to do."³⁷ This confusion led to an inordinate stress on faith in facts rather than in the person of Christ.

Origen admits to both natures of Christ being united in the Incarnation. "The spectacle is to be contemplated with all fear and reverence that the truth of both natures may be clearly shown to exist in one and the same Being."³⁸ He combats docetism when he clearly asserts that those things that were done were not illusions or by imaginary appearances.³⁹ However, he is quite unprepared to state with any degree of finality the purpose or the nature of the Incarnation. In fact, Origen claims that even the apostles lacked

³⁶ DP, II. 11, 6.

³⁷ DeFay, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁸ DP, II. 6, 2.

³⁹ DP, II. 6, 2.

the power of grasping its significance. In the end, he leaves it as an article of faith.

The explanation of that mystery is beyond the grasp of the entire creation of celestial powers. We shall state the contents of our creed rather than the assertions which human reason is wont to advance.

Origen continues to speculate, however, as to the purpose of the Incarnation. The soul is the intermediary between God and man in every rational creature. Christ's was a pure soul which had not participated in the pre-mundane Fall. It was this soul which united itself with Jesus' body in Mary's womb, and it was to this union that the Scripture passage, "they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24), had reference. For this reason not only is the divine nature spoken of in human terms, but the human nature is adorned with appellations of divine dignity.⁴¹ Origen was careful to leave to each of the two natures of Christ its natural properties, yet felt obliged to insist upon a real union, ἕνωσις, rather than a communion, κοινωνία. Taking this view, that the Logos inhabited Jesus' body inasmuch as He had a pure soul, the Logos lost nothing of its own nature through this union. Harnack maintains that because both (body and soul) are pure and their substance in themselves without quality, Jesus' body was still actually totally different from ours.⁴² Yet in Origen's doctrine there is explicit definiteness in asserting true divinity and humanity,

⁴⁰ DE, II. 6, 2.

⁴¹ DE, II. 6, 3.

⁴² Harnack, op. cit., p. 163.

combatting at the same time docetism and ebionitism. He finally allowed the human nature to be transformed into divinity, so that the end result was pure divinity.⁴³ Although Origen seemed reluctant to make statements regarding the purpose of this union, Neve maintains that implicit in his pronouncements is the idea that Christ became the God-Man for the sake of the imperfect and simple Christian.⁴⁴ The assumption appears valid, inasmuch as Origen did propose the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement for the simple Christian, and in order to validate the Atonement, Christ of necessity had to be both God and man.

Origen concluded his statements regarding the Incarnation in the same spirit with which he approached the study of the nature of the Father.

The above, meanwhile, are the thoughts which have occurred to us when treating of subjects of such difficulty as the Incarnation and deity of Christ. If there be anyone, indeed, who can discover something better, and who can establish his assertions by clearer proofs from Holy Scripture, let his opinion be received in preference to mine.⁴⁵

To summarize: the Logos as mediator between God and man is the first instrumental cause of the existence of the cosmos. A part of the Logos dwells in the soul (rationality) of every human being. Christ's work in the world consisted in enlightening men's minds as to the true nature of God, therefore salvation is primarily education, but for the simple Christian the Gospel of faith in the

⁴³DE, II, 6, 5.

⁴⁴Neve, op. cit., p. 90.

⁴⁵DE, II, 6, 7.

atonement work of Christ must suffice. At the Incarnation the person of Jesus Christ was united with the pure Logos, so that there was both God and man in the same Being. Finally, Origen emphasizes the fact that these have merely been tentative formulations and should be considered as such.

Origen's attitude in regard to the Spirit is this. The question arises whether the Holy Spirit was co-eternal in time and dignity with the Father and the Son. "But in this case it is not clearly signified whether He be regarded as created or uncreated." These are questions which have to be inserted into one of several speculative schemes of the age of our writing, and which demand careful investigation. The Spirit inspired each one of the apostles, whether prophets or apostles. There was not the Spirit in the age of the Old Dispensation and again in those following the advent of Christ. With this statement, not elaborate in concept, Origen explains the beliefs concerning Spirit in the third century.

While the Greek philosophers have acknowledged the existence of God as Father and Creator, and in some cases have even recognized a Son in the Logos or Word-idea, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit is derived exclusively from the testimony of Scripture.

Of the existence of the Holy Spirit no one indeed could entertain any doubts save those who were familiar with the law and the prophets, or those who possessed a belief in Christ.

¹Origen, *De Principiis*, Book I, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frank Lee Crossley, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1918), II, 22-24. Hereafter in *Principia* will be referred to as *Pr*, and *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* as *ANF*.

²*Pr*, Book I, c. 1.

³*Pr*, I, 1, 1.

CHAPTER VII

ORIGEN'S DOCTRINE OF GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Rule of Faith accepted by the Church Catholic from which Origen proceeds in regard to the Spirit is this. The apostles related that the Holy Spirit was associated in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son. "But in His case it is not clearly distinguished whether He be regarded as created or uncreated."¹ These are points which have to be inquired into out of sacred Scripture according to the best of our ability, and which demand careful investigation. The Spirit inspired each one of the saints, whether prophets or apostles. There was not one Spirit in the men of the old dispensation and another in those following the advent of Christ.² With this statement, not elaborate in content, Origen outlines the beliefs concerning Spirit in the third century A.D..

While the Greek philosophers have acknowledged the existence of God as Father and Creator, and in some cases have even recognized a Son in the Logos or World-Soul, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit is derived exclusively from the testimony of Scripture.

Of the existence of the Holy Spirit no one indeed could entertain any suspicion save those who were familiar with the law and the prophets, or those who profess a belief in Christ.³

¹Origen, De Principiis, Praef. 4, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), IV, 223-384. Hereafter De Principiis will be referred to as DP and The Ante-Nicene Fathers as ANF.

²DP, Praef. 4.

³DP, I. 3, 1.

In fact, it was the Holy Spirit Himself who inspired the writers of the Gospels and epistles.⁴ The importance of the work of inspiration is emphasized when Origen asserts that although the Father can be recognized as having been the creator, the nature and the essence of both Father and Son remain unintelligible to those who do not read the Scripture. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is of primary importance in leading us to the knowledge of the nature of the Persons in the godhead.

In a reference to baptism, Origen remarks that saving baptism was not complete except by authority of "the most excellent Trinity of them all, by naming the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."⁵ He continues to emphasize the majesty and eminence of the Spirit when he writes:

Who, then, is not amazed at the exceeding majesty of the Holy Spirit when he hears that he who speaks a word against the Son of Man may hope for forgiveness, but he who is guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has not forgiveness.

Although professing respect and admiration for the Spirit, Origen nevertheless is uncertain as to His origin. "Up to the present time we have been able to find no statement in Holy Scripture in which the Holy Spirit could be said to have been made or created."⁷ Statements of this nature opened a controversy as to whether the Spirit was created, begotten, or proceeding. Origen

⁴ DF, I. 3, 1.

⁵ DF, I. 3, 2.

⁶ DF, I. 3, 2.

⁷ DF, II. 7, 2.

explicitly states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, thus giving patristic sanction to the definition of His procession, but on the other hand aiding the East in his silence concerning the filioque.⁸ Fairweather maintains that in general Origen arrives at the conclusion that the Spirit "is become" through the Son, therefore a creature in a peculiar sense. He is the first creation of the Father through the Son and therefore subordinate to the Son as the Son is to the Father.⁹

However, if the Spirit is dependent upon the godhead for His existence, it is a dependence based upon logical necessity and not one taking place in time. The Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is eternal. He was instrumental in creation,¹⁰ and receives His knowledge directly from the Father, not through the Son.

For if the Holy Spirit knows the Father through the Son's revelation, He passes from a state of ignorance into one of knowledge; but it is alike impious and foolish to confess the Holy Spirit and yet ascribe to Him ignorance.¹¹

It is also foolish, claims Origen, to ascribe to Him eternity and yet to think of Him as deriving His knowledge and deity in time. For if this were the case, the Holy Spirit would never be reckoned with the unity of the Trinity, along with the unchangeable Father

⁸ DP, I. 2, 13 "The Son is born and the Holy Ghost proceeds." III, 5, 8 "Who proceedeth from the Father." See Elucidation III, ANF, IV, 383.

⁹ William Fairweather, Origen and Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 156. See also Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 159.

¹⁰ DP, I. 3, 5.

¹¹ DP, I. 3, 4.

and Son, unless He had always been the Holy Spirit.¹² It appears, therefore, that the Spirit is eternal in the same sense that the Son is eternal. The Father could not eternally be Father without an eternal Son. So also, the Father always had a Spirit existing hypostatically in creation, and since both creation and the Father are eternal, so also is the Spirit eternal.

Inasmuch as the Spirit partakes and shares in the essence of the Trinity, He is also true God. Origen castigates those who "maintain unworthy ideas of His divinity,"¹³ giving expression to the fact that the Spirit is divine, although he nowhere calls Him God. The idea, however, is certainly contained in the baptismal formula, in His eternity, in His inspiration of the prophets and the saints, and in His participation in the work of creation along with the Father and the Son. Harnack points out that the Holy Spirit is included in the godhead as a third unchangeable Being and reckoned as a third hypostasis.¹⁴

Since the Holy Spirit is divine, we may assume His incorporeality. Origen expressly states that the Spirit is without body.

Since many saints participate in the Holy Spirit, He cannot therefore be understood to have a body. . . . He is manifestly a sanctifying power in which all are said to have a share who have deserved to be sanctified by His grace.¹⁵

¹² DP, I. 3, 4.

¹³ DP, II. 7, 3.

¹⁴ Harnack, op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁵ DP, I. 1, 3; I. 6, 4. See also Hans Lietzmann, The Founding Of The Church Universal, in The Beginnings Of The Christian Church, translated from the German by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), II, 404.

Perhaps the greatest area of disputation regarding Origen's doctrine of the Spirit lies in his conception of the work and activity of the third Person. The Spirit's activity is confined to the saints, or those who have begun to live a life that is pleasing to God.

The operation of the Holy Spirit does not take place at all in those things which are without life, or in those which, although living, are dumb; nay, is not found even in those who are endued indeed with reason, but are engaged in evil courses, and not at all converted to a better life.¹⁶

The Spirit's presence is restricted to those who are already turning to a better life and walking along the way which leads to Jesus Christ, that is, those who are engaged in the performance of good actions. Origen's doctrine of sanctification is colored by his stress on man's free-will. It is possible for each individual to begin to live the holy life of his own free-will, but after the choice for the good has been made, the Holy Spirit assists the Christian to a more perfect holiness. Because man is a rational creature, he can choose virtue or vice, and because of this is capable of receiving either praise or blame, holiness or condemnation. After a man has made the choice to live a holy life, the Spirit begins to live in his heart and help him on to greater sanctification. As soon as a certain point in holiness has been reached, man is able "to receive Jesus Christ in the form of the righteousness of God."¹⁷

Those who have earned advancement to this grade by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit will also obtain the gift of

¹⁶DP, I. 3, 5.

¹⁷DP, I. 3, 8.

wisdom according to the power and working of the Spirit of God.¹⁸

This road of sanctification continues to lead onward and upward until at last the believer achieves a holiness comparable in some respects to God Himself, which achievement is given only to a very small faithful few. In Origen's own words:

Each one, by participation in Christ (a gift of the Spirit), makes progress and advances to higher degrees of perfection; and seeing it is by partaking of the Holy Spirit that anyone is made purer and holier, he obtains, when he is made worthy, the grace of wisdom and knowledge, in order that, after all stains of ignorance and pollution are cleansed and taken away, he may make so great an advancement in holiness and purity that the nature which he received from God may become such that the being which exists may be as worthy as He who called it into existence.¹⁹

This is the final consummation, the gathering together of all fallen spirits once again to be and reside in God. It was this teaching, the apocatastasis or universality of salvation, which caused no end of difficulty when the accusation was made that Origen advocated the ultimate salvation of the devils. In summary, Origen maintained that the Holy Spirit was true God, incorporeal and eternal, proceeding from the Father, and limiting His activity to the souls of the saints. In order to establish more clearly Origen's teachings concerning the Trinity and the relationship of Person to Person within the godhead, we continue with a discussion concerning Origen's views on the godhead.

Origen conceived of the godhead as being fundamentally a unity. He denied that there was actually any division in the

¹⁸ DF, I. 3, 8.

¹⁹ DF, I. 3, 3.

Trinity, "for to ascribe division to an incorporeal being is not only the height of impiety but a mark of the greatest folly."²⁰ Salvation is available only to those who affirm belief in the Trinity, as Origen writes, "Salvation has to do with Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, and he who is regenerated does not obtain salvation unless with the co-operation of the entire Trinity."²¹ Moreover, nothing in the Trinity can be called greater or less, since all partake of the fountain of divinity.²² In concluding his remarks concerning the work of the Spirit in relation to the other two Persons of the godhead, Origen writes, "From which it most clearly follows that there is no difference in the Trinity."²³ The functions of the Persons of the Trinity are described as constituting a unified plan of salvation. By the renewal of the ceaseless working of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in us we shall be able to behold the holy and blessed life. Fairweather summarizes Origen's views concerning the unity in Trinity.

Father, Son, and Spirit form a Trinity in which there is no difference, and in which accordingly nothing can be called greater or less. The three Persons are of the same nature and essence, equal in dignity and honor. Their consubstantiality is such that the Spirit of the Father is the²⁴ same as the Spirit of the Son, the same as the Holy Spirit.

²⁰ DP, I. 2, 6.

²¹ DP, I. 3, 5.

²² DP, I. 3, 7.

²³ DP, I. 3, 7.

²⁴ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 158.

Origen sees in the Trisagion of Isaiah 6:3 a reference to this equality, since the cherubim are not content with crying "Holy" once or twice, but three times, corresponding to the triple holiness of God as revealed in the three Persons.²⁵

In spite of these explicit statements as to the equality of the three Persons, Origen's Trinity is nevertheless a graduated one, graded according to function and origin of the Persons. The usual comparison made by scholars regarding Origen's Trinity is that of three concentric circles of which the Father is the largest and the Spirit the smallest.²⁶ As to the variations of function and spheres of influence Origen comments:

I am of the opinion that the working of the Father and the Son takes place as well in saints as in sinners, in rational beings and in dumb animals; nay, even in those things which are without life, and in all things which universally exist; but that the operation of the Holy Spirit does not take place at all in those things which are without life, or in those things which, although living, are dumb . . . or in those engaged in evil courses.²⁷

God, the Father, as creator, is responsible for the existence of all things; hence His sphere of influence reaches out to all parts of existence. God, the Son, is He who resides in the rational nature of humanity; hence His sphere of activity is limited to mankind. As Redeemer He has redeemed only mankind and not all creation. As Sanctifier, the Holy Spirit resides only in the

²⁵ DP, I. 3, 4.

²⁶ See J. L. Neve, History Of Christian Doctrine, in A History Of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 87. Also Harnack, op. cit., p. 159; Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 404; Fairweather, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁷ DP, I. 3, 5; I. 3, 7.

hearts of the saints, and thus is still more circumscribed than the Son. Lest any accuse Origen of giving preference to the Spirit over the Father or Son, since the work of the Spirit is highly specialized and a prime requisite toward the redemption of all men, Origen makes the remark:

Let no one, indeed, suppose that we, from having said that the Holy Spirit is conferred upon the saints alone, but that the benefits or operations of the Father and of the Son extend to good and bad, to just and unjust, by so doing give preference to the Holy Spirit over the Father and the Son, or assert that His dignity is greater.²⁸

Origen, therefore, does not assume that a difference in function necessitates a difference in honor and glory. It appears that modern scholarship has often proceeded on the unwarranted assumption that a difference in spheres of action necessitates a gradation or limitation in the Trinity. This, says the Alexandrian, is an illogical conclusion. And so it appears that Origen can be termed a subordinationist in the sense of the functions of the Persons only on the grounds of personal prejudice, depending upon each individual scholar's opinion as to what constitutes equality. According to the statements of De Principiis mentioned above, Origen himself would have been one of the stoutest defenders of orthodoxy in the Trinitarian controversies which followed in the centuries after his death. Undoubtedly the Alexandrian would have subscribed to the illustration of the three concentric circles, as

²⁸ DP, I. 3, 7. See also G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. 131.

indicated by the excerpt above, but he would have questioned the assumption that such an image destroys the equality in the Trinity.

More serious is the charge of subordinationism as to the origins of the Son and Spirit, but here as before one must make careful investigation. If Origen can be charged with subordinationism in this respect, so too must orthodox Christendom. Origen held to the belief that the Son was begotten from all eternity, God of God, Very God of Very God, equal in all respects to the Father. The Holy Spirit was not born but proceeded from the Father.²⁹ It is to Origen that Christianity owes the definition of the eternal generation of the Son, and it was to him that later theologians appealed when speaking of the profession of the Spirit. Admittedly, had Origen been more explicit in some areas and less ambiguous in fundamentals, much of the later controversy could have been avoided. The fact that both groups, orthodox and heretical, appealed to him is evidence of the fact that a case might be made for either side. It is regrettable, however, that in much of the scholarship since his time his errors in one field have been allowed to color opinions on all of his formulations.

In carrying out Origen's teachings on the Trinity to their ultimate conclusions, however, one finds a certain lack of precision. Since only the rational creation is abiding, all else being doomed to vanish away, and since all rational beings are destined to holiness, the action of the three Persons of the Trinity in

²⁹Supra., p. 79, footnote 3.

CHAPTER VIII

SIGNIFICANCE OF ORIGEN'S FORMULATIONS

"Like the influence of Socrates in Greek philosophy, so the influence of Origen in Church History is the watershed of multitudes of different streams of thought."¹ By the beginning of the fourth century the controversy between Christianity and paganism was waning. The Church had defined the limits of authority by the canon and the regulae fidei, the limits of speculation by the traditions accepted by the Church Catholic, and the limits of self-aggrandizement by the evolution of the monarchical episcopacy. The apologists were no longer needed since the line between Christians and pagans had been sharply drawn, and with the coming of Constantine no great literary defenses were felt necessary. Perhaps the peace and security which the Church enjoyed contributed as much to the beginning of the doctrinal controversies as ~~much~~^{did} the inroads of philosophy. At any rate, Origenism stands at the head of this century, and the story of this and succeeding generations is, to a large extent, the history of the reaction to Origen and his ideas.

Controversies did not so much end with Origen as begin with him. From that time they were mostly internal to Christianity, but their elements were Greek in origin.²

The significance of Origen was polar inasmuch as he spoke for the

¹W. F. Farrar, Lives Of The Fathers (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907) I, 432.

²Edwin Hatch, The Influence Of Greek Ideas On Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 269.

intellectual Christian of the preceding era and was the cause of much discussion following his age. Since we have already discussed the thoughts of the Ante-Nicene Fathers elsewhere, we shall devote our investigation to the reaction which followed Origen. This reaction can be seen both in the number of heresies ascribed to him and in the indebtedness of orthodox Christianity to his teachings.

Wand maintains that a heresy is characterized in three ways. It is a novel idea, it is limited in geographical extent, and its proponents are usual stubborn and fanatical.³ If Origen propounded heresy, especially regarding his doctrine of God, it was decidedly none of these three. He was not novel but was reflecting the general intellectual attitude of his age. He was hardly limited to Alexandria since his thoughts were in accord with the rule of the Church Universal. To suppose that Origen himself was recalcitrant is ridiculous. The fact, however, that later heretics appealed to his authority was a sign for their orthodox opponents to cast suspicion on the Alexandrian. The repudiation of Origen began after Rufinus' translation of De Principiis had been unmasked by Jerome as being a falsified account of actual gross heresy by Origen. From this time on Origen has been looked upon as being heretical. Methodius and Epiphanius were two of the earliest opponents of Origenism, each for avowedly suspicious reasons. Origen, it is true, contained in his writings the seeds of such that

³J. W. C. Wand, The Four Great Heresies (London: A. R. Mowbray and Company, 1955, p. 14.

is alien to the faith, yet seldom did he become explicit in denying that which was accepted as cardinal by the Church Universal, as Prestige writes:

Not every heresiarch was himself a heretic. If we read more into a man's teaching than he is prepared to acknowledge in it, we cease to be impartial. Inconsistent⁴ he may be, but inconsistency is too common to be criminal.

If he did admit elements alien to the genius of Christianity, he must at least be acquitted of having either accepted anything "directly antagonistic to Christianity or having sacrificed any of its fundamental doctrines."⁵ However, inasmuch as the Arians first appealed to him, the opponents of Arianism gradually came to regard Origen as the source of all heresy. His name was dragged into all the subsequent controversies of the period--Pelagian, Nestorian, Eutychian, and Sabellian. This circumstance tended to increase the suspicion clouding his memory.

The discussion concerning Origen's significance as reflected both in heresy and orthodoxy will center about four principal issues: Biblical interpretation, Arianism and Nicea, the ultimate salvation of Satan, and the later history of Origenism.

Newman maintains that the effects of Origen's wild speculations as a result of the allegorical method resulted in two reactions: many were led astray by his example, and others, frightened

⁴G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Society For The Promotion Of Christian Knowledge, 1952), p. xiv.

⁵William Fairweather, Origen And Greek Patristic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 94.

by his boldness, denied the right of freedom of thought.⁶ In the area of hermeneutics Origen made few contributions that were positive and of lasting value. His allegory resulted in a reaction in Antioch led by Theodore of Mopsuestia, who re-emphasized the literal interpretation of the Bible. "In this particular, Origen's influence was bad, and only bad."⁷ Yet in textual criticism the Hexapla remained without peer for generations, and in stressing the verbal inspiration of Scripture Origen remained influential even to the days of the Reformers. "The inspiration extends to all Biblical books, and to every word in them, so that errors are impossible."⁸

In every part of Scripture Origen traces the breath of the same Spirit, and views both Testaments as containing between them one complete covenant record. He strongly asserted, in opposition to the gnostics, the unity of the sacred writings. His unswerving attitude on this point did more than any other influence to confirm the Church in the belief of the indissoluble connection between the Old and the New Testament.

Regardless of the salutary effects of Origen's authority supporting these cardinal tenets of the Church, his inordinate penchant for allegory did much to offset these good effects. Since his time this questionable hermeneutical principle has received his patristic sanction, and it has not been without ill result.

⁶ Albert Henry Newman, Ancient and Medieval Church History, in A Manual Of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publications Society, 1951), I, 286.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 68.

⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

The greatest Origenistic controversy centered around his doctrines concerning Christ, and it is especially with this controversy that we are concerned. Arius was the first to bring the discussion to an issue, which resulted in the first universal Church Council. Pamphilus felt constrained to defend Origen's orthodoxy in a five volume work, Apology For Origen, to which Eusebius added a sixth. In the writing of Pamphilus, Origen's doctrine of Christ is shown to be neither emanationistic nor docetic, and it is made plain that the opponents of Origen based their charges on idle rumor. "Considering it heretical to read Origen's works at all, they were not only for the most part quite ignorant of the writings they denounced, but they even charged him with errors which he had been at pains to refute."¹⁰ At Nicea, Arius and his party gathered up as much subordinationism as they could possibly squeeze from Origen, pressing to its logical conclusion every thread of thought which might represent the Son as inferior to the Father. A central point of discussion was the fact that Origen had referred to the Son as being γενερος θεου, and that the Arians meant this to be proof that the Son was a creature. Athanasius, on the other hand, maintained that the term was valid but still retained the idea of divinity inasmuch as the Father was the source and origin of being. Therefore the very use of the term proved the Son's deity.¹¹ The historian Socrates

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

¹¹ See Prestige, op. cit., p. 138.

quotes Athanasius as appealing to Origen in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, and he stigmatizes all of Origen's detractors as "vain and ambitious obscurantists, hero-levelling fellows."¹² Finally, it was the three great Cappadocians who finally gave the death blow to Arianism. Yet it was two of the Cappadocians who composed the Philocalia of Origen's writings, and all three, together with St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, and St. Athanasius, defended his orthodoxy.¹³ As long as the Christological controversy lasted, up to the Council of Chalcedon or even Toledo, Origen was presented as credentials for both parties. For this reason Prestige maintains he was the father of Arian heresy and Nicene orthodoxy alike.¹⁴

Although it was because of obscure and cloudy language that Origen could thus be quoted by both sides, it is to his lasting credit in this same area of Christology that it was he who was the first of the Fathers to teach with distinctness the Catholic doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. It is absurd to judge him by the standards of later creeds in an ex post facto manner, especially in view of the fact that the theology of the nature of the Trinity had not yet been defined by the Church. That the speculations of Origen served as a gadfly to spur the Church to

¹² Adolph Harnack, Outlines Of The History Of Dogma, translated from the German by Edwin Knox Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 146.

¹³ Farrar, op. cit., p. 432.

¹⁴ Prestige, op. cit., p. 131.

some sort of action can hardly be denied, and it is to his credit that he served as a catalyst. Clement and Origen had completely established the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the three Persons, but it was reserved for the Fathers of the fourth century to bring the labors of the Alexandrians to conclusion. In this way the work of Origen, especially in Christology, was indeed significant for the Church of later ages. With the definition of the nature of Christ the discussions of the nature of the Holy Spirit were also concluded, as has already been discussed.¹⁵

Origen's idea of the universality of salvation was significant as it appeared repeatedly in subsequent anathemas and denunciations, appearing as recently as the mid-twentieth century in theological circles.¹⁶ Here is another instance of bringing to its logical conclusion a doctrine which, when seen in its ultimate form, Origen denied. The question centered about the salvation of Satan. If all rational creatures will ultimately return to God, then devils, too, will be saved. Origen was accused of this heresy already in his own lifetime. He did not deny that the devil is capable of doing good.¹⁷ However, Jerome, quoting from a letter Origen wrote to friends in Alexandria, indicates what Origen's

¹⁵ Supra, p. 22.

¹⁶ See "Religion," Time, LXX (Dec. 30, 1957), 51, where Origen is referred to as the author of this heresy.

¹⁷ Origen, De Principiis, I. 8, 3, translated from the Greek and Latin by Frederick Crombie, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), IV, 223-384.

actual thoughts on the subject were.

Some of those who delight in bringing complaints against their neighbors ascribe to us and our teaching the crime of blasphemy which we have never spoken. . . . For they say that I assert that the Father of wickedness and perdition, of those who shall be cast out of the Kingdom of God, that is, the devil, will be saved: a thing which no man could say even though he had taken leave of his senses and was obviously insane.¹⁸

Theoretically, however, not only was the devil capable of salvation but of necessity had to be saved, since all rational creatures would attain to perfect godliness. This heresy only serves to indicate the truth already expressed before, that the system of Origen contained much which, if carried to its conclusion, would prove anti-Scriptural. This serves also as an example of how Origen could so easily be adduced as proof for diametrically opposite teachings in later years. In this, too, lies his significance. Because of the flexible and tentative nature of his speculations, he has been used ever since by any and all who require an authority on a subject.

Finally, we approach the subject of the Origenistic controversies in general. The furious strife that raged round his name from the time of his death until the middle of the sixth century was due more to personal antipathies than to any great living force in his theology. No great book was produced on either side. Neither side was at great pains to preserve his works. The first outbreak of hostilities took place between Jerome and Rufinus,

¹⁸Cyril C. Richardson, "The Condemnation Of Origen," Church History, VI (March, 1937), 50-64.

the latter championing the Alexandrian's cause. Epiphanius strove against Pamphilus and Eusebius, all in the name of Origen. It was due to his defense of Origen, or so it is said, that Chrysostam experienced much grief in his lifetime and that the Cappadocians were threatened with the charge of heterodoxy.

The prestige of the Augustinian theology which had occupied the field, as well as the barbarism and ignorance fostered by repeated invasions on almost every side, tended to bring about the general neglect of Origen's writings even after they were accessible to readers in the Latin tongue.¹⁹

As time passed, the controversy grew louder and more bitter.

Church fellowships were broken up, and private friendships were dissolved. Ultimately the orthodox party triumphed, but their victory did them little honor. Often the disputants knew of Origen only by rumor or merely condemned him in name. Finally, at the Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D., most historians agree that Origen was condemned, although no formal condemnation is listed in the conciliar proceedings. The closest to condemnation is the fact that Origen's name was enrolled in a list of heretics drawn up by the Council.²⁰

It would be a mistake to suppose that theological differences were really the main ground of Origen's condemnation. The most daring challenges of the great Alexandrian were not flung

¹⁹Fairweather, op. cit., p. 257.

²⁰See also Philip Schaff, Ante-Nicene Christianity, in A History Of The Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), II, 791. "At a local council in Constantinople in 543 A.D. solemnly condemned as heretical. (Not at the fifth Ecumenical Council as has often been asserted. See Hefele, Conciliengeschichte, II, 790 ff. and 859 ff.) Others, however, defend the other position.

at any official credo, and his teachings were in harmony with the fundamental articles of the general belief as defined by Irenaeus. There exists ²¹no positive proof that Origen was condemned for his doctrine.

The Emperor Justinian summoned the Fifth Ecumenical Council to meet at Constantinople in 553 A.D. Interesting is the fact that both Origen, exponent of allegorical interpretation and the Alexandrian tradition, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, champion of the literal interpretation of Scripture and leader of the Antiochian school, were included in the anathemas. Origen was not singled out for special attention, but the effect was the same as if he had been. Following the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the long and bitter series of controversies came to a close. Farrar descriptively portrays this council and casts serious doubts on its integrity when he writes:

That assembly was a discreditable one at best. It was born and died amid jealousies and counter-jealousies. Intrigue stood by its cradle and intrigue followed its hearse. It led to an outburst of cruel and wanton persecution. It was lightly regarded by Gregory the Great. It displayed nothing so much as the arbitrary will of a meddling and heretical emperor and the fickle intellect of an ignorant and simoniacal pope. It is uncertain as to whether it did condemn Origen, whose name it is almost certain was only inserted in its anathemas by later forgeries.²²

The question of Origen's salvation exercised the minds of certain scholastics during the Middle Ages. Stephen Binet, a Jesuit, wrote a little book, De Salute Origenis (Paris, 1629), in

²¹Eugene Pressense, The Early Years Of Christianity, translated from the French by Annie Harwood-Holmden (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1878), p. 107.

²²Farrar, op. cit., p. 429.

which the leading writers on the subject debate the question of Origen's salvation. A certain Barnius proposes a descent to the infernal regions to ascertain the truth. At last the final revision of the heresy trial is wisely left with the secret counsel of God.²³ According to Bratton, Luther questioned whether Origen was not "doomed to endless torment" for his impiety.²⁴ Pico della Mirandola was practically condemned for declaring that it was more reasonable to believe that Origen was saved. "Since the seventeenth century he has received the eternal condemnation of the papacy."²⁵ Fairweather comments on Luther's opinion:

The great Reformer's unfavorable estimate of Origen was possibly due, however, more to the impatience with which a practical mind is apt to view the idealist and his long-spun theories than to anything else. It is worth recalling that in his Table Talks he quotes with approval what Origen says about the power of devils being broken by the saints.²⁶

In addition to the decided reaction against Origenism and the positive contributions made by the Alexandrian, his significance lies also in the fact that his influence continued to manifest itself in the Church throughout the Middle Ages. His thoughts and words were appropriated and handed on by the Latin Fathers, especially Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, and St. Ambrose. In this way,

²³ Schaff, op. cit., p. 790.

²⁴ Frederick Bratton, "Origen, The First Christian Liberal," The Journal Of Bible And Religion, VIII (February, 1940), 137-141.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Fairweather, op. cit., p. 260. See Luther, Of The Devil And His Works, DCVII.

as well as by direct translations of some of his works, Origen's ideas continued to penetrate the thought life of the Church.

It supplied a by no means insignificant element in the very miscellaneous body of traditional interpretation which prevailed till the fresh and open study of the meaning of Scripture was restored, chiefly by the Revivers of learning just before the Reformation, and by some of the Reformers themselves.²⁷

The clearest exponent of Origenism in the Middle Ages is John Scotus Erigena (d. 1308) in his idea of the co-eternity of God and matter.²⁸

From the previous discussion it appears that those elements in Origen's system which were decidedly heretical found little vogue in the controversies. It was with the orthodox or semi-orthodox tenets of his dogmatics that many took issue, particularly in his doctrines of the Son and Spirit. Where Origen was found to be in harmony with Scripture, his views were cited as being worthy of adoption. Where there was serious question as to his adherence to revealed truth, there was controversy. In both instances Origen's significance for the Church Universal was great.

²⁷ F. J. Hort, Six Lectures On The Ante-Nicene Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 117.

²⁸ Supra, p. 57.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In light of the research of historians and opinions of the doctors of the Church, Origen can be viewed as exerting a dual influence. His significance can be seen on the one hand as eschatological in the sense that he is the final and ultimate expression of the intellectual atmosphere of the preceding ages of the Christian era. On the other hand, he is the beginning of a period of intense intellectual activity which divided the Church for generations to come.

In reviewing the Fathers' views of the doctrine of God in the second century, we have become aware that their ideas were not as explicit as in later Christendom. Origen, standing at the end of a period, made explicit the doctrine of the Trinity as found in the Scriptures and as reflected in the writings of his predecessors. He asserted that God, the Father, was creator and preserver of all matter; that God, the Son, was redeemer (albeit a gnostic redeemer) of all mankind; that the Spirit was operative in all saints. All three Persons are equal in honor and dignity, power and glory, since all belong to the essence of the godhead. Yet all three are separate existences, each One with His own sphere of activity unique to Him. All are eternal, equal in all things, yet the Son and Spirit are in a sense subordinate to the Father since they owe their existence to Him.

In the life of Origen we have observed that the Church of the third century A.D. mirrored later ecclesiastical history in its involved controversies, ferments which were due in no small part to the concern for a Scriptural definition of the faith. In this we have noted that the Church Catholic, guided by the Scriptures, accepted the Origenistic formulations where orthodox, but rejected and denounced as heresy all that appealed simply to reason or the imagination for its authority.

The influence of Origen on later generations of Christendom stems primarily from his hermeneutical principles and the results of his method. The question has yet to be solved with unanimity in Christendom, at least with clarity and precision, exactly where the seat of authority lies. Although Scripture is taken as the source and norm of faith, many Christians are divided concerning the methods of its interpretation. Those holding to the Alexandrian views seldom appeal to Origen because of the stigma attached to his name, yet they are nevertheless indebted to him for a clear expression of the allegorical method. Those who hold to the literal principles as expressed in Antioch by Theodore of Mopsuestia often fail to take into account other matters such as symbolism and typology.

Not only can Origen's influence still be felt in the area of hermeneutics and theology, but his eminence as a personage standing at the head of a period can be seen in the centuries of conflict following his death. This conflict eventually resulted in the filioque controversy and the great schism between East and West.

Origen, whatever might be the faults attributed to him, cannot be charged with authoring this schism; however, in the early years of the struggle his name was certainly prominent in discussions.

Hence, the influence of Origen as a polar figure in the history of the Church has been both positive and negative. We have seen both influences in his doctrine of God and have observed that these influences were due in part to preceding theology, to the allegorical method, and to the intellectual atmosphere of the times.

It is incumbent upon the Church historians of today to judge the merits of Origen in a spirit of understanding charity. He has been the victim both of unmeasured censure and indiscriminate praise, neither action being based on the historical facts of the case. His attempts at a systematic presentation and explanation of the Rule of Faith, his works on criticism and interpretation, his great apology and many commentaries, his purity of life, and zealous labors marked an epoch.

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