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SIN IN ORIGEN'S *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS*

Stephen Bagby
Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2013

SIN IN ORIGEN'S *COMMENTARY ON ROMANS*

by Stephen Bagby

Abstract

Origen is a critical third century voice in seeking to articulate a cogent doctrine of sin. His magisterial *Commentary on Romans* opens a unique window to understanding his mature thought on the subject. In this thesis I argue that Origen's teaching on original and volitional sin demonstrates divergence from and continuity with the prevailing theological tradition. Here he conceives of the preexistent fall of souls as encapsulated in a mystical, yet historical, fall of Adam in the Garden. The taint of this sin is shared by all humanity *ab initio* and expresses itself through the loss of the image of God and the spread of death and dominion. His defense of infant baptism further recognizes the inheritance of sin from Adam. Origen's understanding of volitional sin is situated within the context of his polemic against the Gnostic doctrine of natures. Thus his tripartite anthropology seeks to offer the parameters of a cogent doctrine of sin: the soul is free to choose between body/flesh (vice) and spirit (virtue). Sin is a misappropriation of the individual's tripartite makeup, a situation where God's law—natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel—is breached through the soul's lack of moderation. This is caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body.

Declaration

This thesis is the product of my own work and does not include work that has been presented in any form for a degree at this or any other university. All quotation from, and references to, the work of persons other than myself have been properly acknowledged throughout.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic and the Internet, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

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Abbreviations

Primary Works

Origen:

Cels.
comm. in Cant.
comm. in Mt.
comm. in Rom.
comm. in Eph.
dial.
hom. 1–16 in Gen.
hom. 1–13 in Ex.
hom. 1–16 in Lev.
hom. 1–28 in Num.
hom. 1–26 in Jos.
hom. 1–9 in Jud.
hom. 1–14 in Ezech.
hom. 1–39 in Lc.
Jo.
or.
princ.

Against Celsus
Commentary on Song of Songs
Commentary on Matthew
Commentary on Romans
Commentary on Ephesians
Dialogue with Heraclides
Homilies on Genesis
Homilies on Exodus
Homilies on Leviticus
Homilies on Numbers
Homilies on Joshua
Homilies on Judges
Homilies on Ezekiel
Homilies on Luke
Commentary on John
On Prayer
On First Principles

Other Authors:

Barn.
De bapt.
Dem.
Deus

Ecl.
ep.
Epict. diss.
Eth. Nic.
Ex.Theo.
Haer.
Herm. Sim.
Herm. Mand.
Herm. Vis.
Med.
orat.
Paed.
Prot.
QDS
Strom.
trad. ap.

The Epistle of Barnabas
On Baptism, Tertullian
On the Apostolic Preaching, Irenaeus
Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit (On the Unchangeableness of God), Philo
Epitome of Stoic Ethics, Arius Didymus
Epistle, Cyprian
Discourses, Epictetus
Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle
Excerpta ex Theodoto (Excerpts of Theodotus), Clement
Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies), Irenaeus
The Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes
The Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates
The Shepherd of Hermas, Visions
Meditations, Marcus Aurelius
Address of Tatian to the Greeks
Paedagogus (The Instructor), Clement
Protrepticus (Exhortation to the Heathen), Clement
Quis Dives Salvetur (Rich Man's Salvation), Clement
Stromata (Miscellanies), Clement
On the Apostolic Tradition, Hippolytus

Editions, Translations, Series, and Journals

ACT	Ancient Christian Texts
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AGBL	<i>Aus der Geschichte der Lateinischen Bibel</i> (= <i>Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel: Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel</i>).
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BLE	<i>Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique</i>
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</i> . Edited by F. G. Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar. New York, 1997-1998
ESV	English Standard Version
FOTC	The Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
PG	Patrologia graeca [= <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i>]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857-1886
RAM	<i>Revue d'ascétique et de mystique</i>
RSPT	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i>
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SE	<i>Studia Evangelica I, II, III</i> (= TU 73 [1959], 87 [1964], 88 [1964], etc.)
StPatr	<i>Studia patristica</i>
SVTQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
VetC	<i>Vetera Christianorum</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZKT	<i>Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie</i>

INTRODUCTION

The central claim of the Christian message is that humanity has sinned against a holy God and stands in dire need of the redemption found in Jesus Christ. Attempting to explain this seemingly inexplicable condition has occupied Christians for two thousand years. How did we get into this situation? What exactly *is* this situation? Why do I revolt against the very God who created me? The answers are not easy. Sin is so perverse, irrational, and incomprehensible—dare I say mysterious?—that it makes the formal academic study of it almost impossible. Yet we must study it. A culture which has removed “sin” from its vocabulary is at a loss to find the language to express the occurrence of evil. This realization may be the impetus behind increasing interest in this topic in recent years.¹

My goal in this thesis is to return us to one of the first and most incisive writers on sin: Origen. Against much existing scholarship, this thesis argues that Origen’s doctrine of the preexistent fall of souls is encapsulated in a subsequent historical fall of Adam in the Garden. The taint of this sin is shared by all humanity *ab initio* and expresses itself through the loss of the image of God and the spread of death and dominion. His teaching on infant baptism serves to highlight the emerging theological rationale for this notion of inherited sin. Over against a perceived Gnostic threat, Origen sketches the parameters of volitional sin by articulating a tripartite anthropology. The soul must choose between spirit and flesh, a choice delineated by way of his use of the existing ‘two ways’ tradition. The practice of volitional sin is a conscious misappropriation of the individual’s tripartite makeup, a situation where God’s law—natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel—is breached through the soul’s lack of

¹ Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Sin, Death, & the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Christof Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (New York: HarperOne, 2009); Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ian McFarland, *In Adam’s Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Harry Lee Poe, *See No Evil: The Existence of Sin in an Age of Relativism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004); John Portmann, *A History of Sin: Its Evolution to Today and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007); Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002).

moderation, caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body. To state this succinctly, sin is the soul's deviation from its created, natural order. This understanding of sin represents both a measure of continuity as well as a point of departure from the existing theological tradition.

I have chosen to delimit this study in two significant ways. The study is delimited first with regard to the topic: sin. This is not a study of Origen's anthropology *per se*. Much recent work has been done in this area of his thought and need not be rehashed presently.² I understand hamartiology as a discipline within anthropology. As such this study will inevitably include many anthropological themes by way of association. So in this examination of sin I will be looking particularly at the *nature* of sin. I will seek to answer the fundamental question: What is sin? Tangential accounts of sin (e.g., the nature of evil, types of sin, forgiveness of sin, corporate sin) also stand outside the immediate aims of this project. The incorporation of some of these themes will inevitably arise over the course of this study in offering a supporting role in answering the aforementioned question. But the focus will always remain on how Origen defines sin. The second delimitation is the decision to restrict the study to the *Commentary on Romans*. This delimitation stems from two interrelated convictions. The first of these convictions is that Origen's teaching on sin evolved throughout

² For recent studies on Origen's anthropology see Cécile Blanc, "L'attitude d'Origène a l'égard du corps et de la chair," *StPatr* XVII (1982), 843-58; Benjamin P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012); D. G. Bostock, "Quality and Corporeity in Origen," *Origeniana Secunda: Second Colloque International des Études Origèniennes (Bari 20-23 septembre 1979)*, edited by Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1980), 323-37; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 160-77; Henri Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archè au telos," in *Arché e Telos: l'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa*, edited by Ugo Bianchi (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1981), 36-57; *ibid.*, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956); *ibid.*, *Origen*, translated by A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 87-98; Jacques Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'homme: Étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967); Mark Edwards, "Christ or Plato? Origen on revelation and anthropology," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 11-25; *ibid.*, *Origen against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 87-122; *ibid.*, "Origen No Gnostic; Or, On the Corporeality of Man," *JTS* 43 (1992), 23-37; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Origene: Studi di antropologia e di storia della tradizione* (Rome: Edizioni dell'ateneo, 1984); Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen, "Origen on the Human Body," in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition*, Volume 1, edited by Lorenzo Perrone, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 649-56; Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History*, translated by Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 117-49; Christoph Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe: Gesammelte Studien* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 98-105.

his career. In his recent work on Origen, Ronald Heine has argued convincingly that traditional scholarship has failed to consider development in Origen's thinking. Dissatisfied with scholarship's tendency to rely on his early and "convenient" work *On First Principles*, Heine suggests that "new situations brought new problems for Origen, and these new problems caused him to turn his attention in new directions, and sometimes, even to rethink old positions."³ P. Tzamalikos also recognizes the limitations of studying only *On First Principles* when he asserts, "*Princ* should not be regarded as a cornerstone for determining Origen's ideas."⁴ Predictably, very few attempts have been made to analyze Origen's understanding of sin beyond the preexistent fall in *On First Principles*. One notable exception is the work of Georg Teichtweier. Teichtweier's 1958 habilitation thesis, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, offers the most comprehensive account of Origen's doctrine of sin to date.⁵ This ambitious effort includes hamartiological topics such as the problem of evil, original sin, consequences of sin, punishment for sin, types of sin, and the forgiveness of sin, among many others. Teichtweier's study is useful but insufficient. His project does not provide an adequate account of development in Origen's theology, the scope is too broad to offer any sustained expression of one aspect of Origen's hamartiological teaching, and he is unable to show sensitivity to Origen's particular exegetical concerns. Origen's theology developed far too much to treat any one aspect in a monolithic manner. Written very late in his career, the *Commentary on Romans* reveals hamartiological development and represents

³ Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), viii. Just prior to this Heine asserts, "I have made a serious attempt in this book to treat Origen's Alexandrian works and his Caesarean works separately, without throwing their contents into one bowl and stirring them together to give an homogenized view of his thought. It is in this rigorous separation of his works into their two settings with their unique contexts that this study differs from preceding books on Origen. This separation also distinguishes, consequently, between the thought of the young Origen and the old Origen. Neither of these distinctions has been taken very seriously in studies of Origen. He has, in fact, often been presented as having developed a system of thought in his early period in Alexandria and never deviated from it. This approach is partly the result of the focus of his Alexandrian work, *On First Principles*, as the most convenient way into his thought," vii-viii.

⁴ P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 13. This assertion by Tzamalikos has more to do with the "meagre and tantalizingly inconclusive" evidence found in "this untrustworthy rendering" (i.e., Koetschau's edition). I tend to disagree with Tzamalikos on this point even if I agree with him on the need to look to Origen's wider corpus.

⁵ Georg Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, Studien zur Geschichte der katholischen Moraltheologie, Volume 7 (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1958).

Origen's mature thinking on sin. The second conviction behind delimiting the study to the *Commentary on Romans* is the nature of commentary writing. Genre is critical when assessing one's theology. Origen's voluminous corpus includes commentaries, homilies, apologetic works, systematic treatises, and several other works of various genres. The manner in which he treats any doctrine is subject to alteration and nuance based on genre. Since Scripture carries supreme authority in Origen's mind, it forces him down particular roads and demands that he turn and explore unforeseen corners. In his exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans it has thus been impressed upon him to provide answers to very difficult questions posed by the Apostle. Issues raised by the Apostle—Adam's sin, baptism, the law, the passions, and moderation—guide Origen's discussion and explanation of sin. Sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* has been studied once. Over twenty years ago José Ramón Díaz Sánchez-Cid published his *Justicia, Pecado y Filiación: Sobre el Comentario de Orígenes a los Romanos*.⁶ On the surface this appears to be a work closely related to my own. Sánchez-Ciz's analysis of sin, however, is limited to a discussion of the sin of Adam. His main concern is reconciling the sin of Adam with God's justice in Origen's thought. Its helpfulness for the present study is very limited.

The study of sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* seems timely. After decades of neglect, this important commentary is only now beginning to receive increased scholarly attention.⁷ The value of this unique commentary in illuminating Origen's thought would be difficult to overstate. *Romans* is the only of Origen's commentaries we possess from start to finish.⁸ Here we can see the full outworking of his aims, giving it a certain coherency lacking

⁶ José Ramón Díaz Sánchez-Cid, *Justicia, Pecado y Filiación: Sobre el Comentario de Orígenes a los Romanos* (Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso, 1991).

⁷ Cf. Maureen Beyer Moser, *Teacher of Holiness: The Holy Spirit in Origen's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005); Reimer Roukema, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988); Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). Henri Crouzel says the *Commentary on Romans* is the *parent pauvre* (poor relation) of Origen's writings, "Current Theology: The Literature on Origen 1970-1988," *TS* 49 (1988), 506.

⁸ For more on Origen's *Commentary on Romans* see Francesca Cocchini, *Il Paolo di Origene: Contributo alla Storia della Recezione delle Epistole Paoline nel III Secolo* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1992), 78-82; *ibid.*, "Romani (scritti esegetici sulla Lettera ai -)," in *Origene: Dizionario la cultura, il pensiero, le*

in other works. All the “vital ingredients” to a discussion of sin are present in the *Commentary on Romans*. With this in mind I have decided to divide this study into four chapters. In Chapter One I will survey select second century theologians with regard to sin. By looking at theologians who had both a positive and negative influence on Origen, this survey will be arranged topically to cover many of the main ideas related to our forthcoming analysis of sin. Such topics include theological anthropology, the sin of Adam, the will, and the passions. This chapter will serve as a sort of hermeneutical map to situate Origen’s own contribution. In Chapter Two I will analyze Origen’s understanding of original sin. I will demonstrate that the preexistent fall plays into his understanding of original sin with regard to Adam in the Garden. The shape of his exegesis of Adam in Romans 5:12-21 and other passages admits a certain notion of inherited sin, a belief that underlay his rationale for infant baptism. But Origen’s notion of original sin involves both inherited sin *and* an existential diminishment of life by way of the loss of the image of God and the spread of death and dominion. Chapter Three signals a shift in the study by beginning the two part exploration of Origen’s understanding of volitional sin. Here I bring to light how Origen conceives of the parameters of volitional sin. The deterministic background to the commentary shapes Origen’s tripartite anthropology and notion of free will, and his incorporation of Stoic ideas on nature and law allows him to develop these parameters a great deal further. Chapter Four explores the practice of volitional sin. This narrow analysis of the individual act of sinning will explore Origen’s conception of the soul, especially as it relates to the body. A discussion of the passions and the life of moderation (or lack thereof) will round out this chapter. I will conclude the study by assessing Origen’s theology of sin in light of the later debates involving Augustine and Pelagius.

Before beginning this study a couple of textual notes should be made. Origen wrote the *Commentary on Romans* in Greek in the year 246, well after his move from

opere, edited by Adele Monaci Castagno (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2000), 415-8; Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, 197-205; Theresia Heither, *Translatio Religionis: Die Paulusdeutung des Origenes in seinem Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, Bonner Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte 16 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1990); Christoph Marksches, “Origenes und die Kommentierung des paulinischen Römerbriefs,” in *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 63-89.

Alexandria to Caesarea.⁹ The commentary was translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia around the year 406. In his Preface Rufinus admits that his translation is an abridgment by one half of its original length.¹⁰ He has chosen to omit certain verbose passages and is prone to convey Origen's ideas more strictly than his words. The reliability of this translation, and indeed all of his translations of Origen's works, has been the subject of intense debate for years. Much of this debate surrounds the orthodoxy of Origen's Christology and Trinitarian theology.¹¹ But this has little bearing on the present argument. The present concern is whether or not Rufinus can be trusted on comments that seem to anticipate Augustine's teaching on Adamic solidarity. I do not believe there is justifiable evidence to suggest Rufinus has interpolated. There are at least five reasons for this belief. The first reason is the ongoing reassessment of Rufinus as a translator of Origen. Scholars such as Henry Chadwick,¹² Ronald Heine,¹³ Jean Scherer,¹⁴ and Karl Schelkle¹⁵ have testified to the faithfulness of Rufinus' Latin translations.¹⁶ The second reason, as we will see in Chapter Two, is that J. N. D. Kelly and David Weaver are the only two scholars ever to have levied the charge of

⁹ For the Greek see Jean Scherer, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III.5-V.7 d'après les extraits du Papyrus n° 88748 du Musée du Caire et les fragments de la Philocalie et du Vaticanus gr. 762: Essai de reconstitution du texte et de la pensée des tomes V et VI du "Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains,"* Bibliothèque d'Étude 27 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1957); A. Ramsbotham, "The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans," *JTS* 13 (1912), 209-24; 357-68; 14 (1913), 10-22. The move from Alexandrian to Caesarea occurred in the year 231.

¹⁰ Pref Ruf; 1.1.

¹¹ Cf. M. J. Edwards, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homoousios* to the Son?" *JTS* 49 (1998), 658-70, for a qualification to this position.

¹² Henry Chadwick, "Rufinus and the Tura Papyrus of Origen's Commentary on Romans," *JTS* 10 (1959), 10-42, esp. 15 and 25.

¹³ Ronald Heine, "Introduction," *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FOTC 71 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 27-39. Heine concurs with the main contours of Chadwick's analysis.

¹⁴ Scherer, 88, notes, "[L]e traduction de Rufin est souvent précise, exacte et, dans une large mesure, fidèle."

¹⁵ Karl H. Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter: Die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer I-II* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1956), 443-8.

¹⁶ For a critical appraisal of Rufinus as a translator see Friedhelm Winkelmann, "Einige Bemerkungen zu den Aussagen des Rufinus von Aquileia und des Hieronymus über ihre Übersetzungstheorie und -methode," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Volume 2, edited by Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970), 532-47.

Adamic interpolation against Rufinus. In fact, Weaver simply borrows the claim of Kelly without further warrant. Kelly reasons that since these comments seem to run against the normal grain of Origen's thought, they must have come from Rufinus. Thus the only scholar to suggest interpolation has based his view on an argument from silence. The third reason I support Rufinus has to do with the date of the translation. As I stated earlier, his Latin translation was carried out in 406. Thomas Scheck is correct to note that this is before the real struggle of the Pelagian crisis, and it would therefore be unrealistic for Rufinus to feel the need to alter his translation.¹⁷ Neither side would become entrenched until 411 with Augustine's response to Julian of Eclanum. The fourth reason stems from the notion that some have reasonably suggested that Rufinus undertook his translation to serve as an antidote to Augustine's reading of Romans. If this was the case then it would make little sense if he chose to interpolate comments that *conformed* to Augustine's theology! Finally, a comparative sampling will corroborate the above claim and reveal that Rufinus has indeed given us the *ipsissima vox* of Origen. Scherer's text is extremely fragmentary and begins at Origen's comments on Romans 3:5 and concludes after Origen's comments on Romans 5:7. Our inability to offer sustained reflection on any one text is frustrating but one can certainly detect fidelity. Two samples will bear out this claim. The first sample comes from Origen's comments on Romans 3:29-30.

Scherer:

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπιστήσωμεν τίνι διαφέρει ἢ ἐκ πίστεως δικαιο[ουμένη] περιτομῆ τῆς οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλὰ διὰ πίστεως δικαιο[μένης ἀ]κροβυστίας. Οὐ γὰρ νομιστέον ὡς ἔτυχεν τὸν Παῦλον ἐπὶ [μὲν τῆς] περιτομῆς κε|χρηῆσθαι τῇ «ἐκ» προθέσει, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς ἀκροβυστίας τῇ «διὰ».¹⁸

Hammond Bammel:

...quod dicit quia circumcisionem ex fide iustificet et non per fidem; praeputium uero per fidem et non ex fide. Non enim mihi uidetur superflua apud eum haberi ista praepositionum commutatio, quia inuenimus ab eo et in aliis locis non ut

¹⁷ Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 73-9, esp. 75-7.

¹⁸ Scherer, 170.

libet sed obseruanter haec posita et necessario differentiam distinctionis huius esse seruatam...¹⁹

Scheck:

He says that God justifies the circumcision from faith and not through faith; but the uncircumcision through faith and not from faith. That alteration of prepositions, it seems to me, was not uttered by him purposelessly. For we find in other passages of [Paul] that [prepositions] are not used arbitrarily but in a carefully considered fashion, and the necessary difference of this distinction is preserved.²⁰

The second sample comes from Origen's comments on Romans 4:18-22.

Scherer:

Ὅρα μήποτε ὡς Ἀβραὰμ παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ἐπίστευσεν, οὕτως καὶ πάντες οἱ τῆς | πίστεως Ἀβραὰμ υἱοὶ παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδα <πιστεύουσιν> περὶ πάντων ὧν πιστεύουσιν, εἴτε περὶ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν εἴτε περὶ τοῦ κληρονομήσειν βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν ἢ βασιλείαν Θεοῦ.²¹

Hammond Bammel:

Sicut autem Abraham contra spem in spem credidit ita omnes qui per fidem filii sunt Abraham contra spem in spem credunt de singulis quibusque quae credunt siue de resurrectione mortuorum siue de hereditate regni caelorum.²²

Scheck:

But Abraham "against hope believed in hope," so also all who are sons of Abraham by faith against hope believe in hope in every detail of what they believe, whether it concerns the resurrection of the dead or the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.²³

These samples demonstrate that Rufinus has preserved for us the *ipsissima vox* of Origen. In the case of the second sample, Rufinus has even given us the *ipsissima verba* of Origen.

Let me now turn to the final textual note. Origen's *Commentary on Romans* was translated into English by Thomas P. Scheck in 2001-2.²⁴ Scheck based his translation on the

¹⁹ Hammond Bammel, 16:253.

²⁰ Scheck, 103:231.

²¹ Scherer, 212.

²² Hammond Bammel, 33:312.

²³ Scheck, 103:268.

²⁴ *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5; 6-10*, translated by Thomas P. Scheck, FOTC 103-4 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001-2).

Latin critical edition by Caroline P. Hammond Bammel.²⁵ All English translations are Scheck unless otherwise noted. For English citations I have used The Fathers of the Church series enumeration according to volume and page number (e.g., Scheck, 103:57 or Scheck, 104:199). For Latin critical edition references I have used AGBL volume and page number (e.g., Hammond Bammel, 16:85 or Hammond Bammel, 33:104). Scheck has retained book, chapter, paragraph (e.g., 5.1.2) according to Migne. The following thesis will conform to Hammond Bammel's text reflecting only book and paragraph (e.g., 5.1). The two differ at certain points in the commentary. Scripture citations are from the lemmata, drawn from the Old Latin version, unless otherwise noted.²⁶

²⁵ Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes*, in *Vetus Latina*, vols. 16, 33, 34 (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1990-98). Please note that the work of Caroline P. Hammond Bammel can also be found under other authorial designations: C. P. Hammond Bammel and C. P. Bammel.

²⁶ Cf. Thomas P. Scheck, "Introduction," *Origen: Commentary on Romans*, 103:14-5.

CHAPTER ONE: SIN IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

Introduction

The study of Origen's understanding of sin in his *Commentary on Romans* will benefit greatly by contextualizing our author within his historical and theological milieu. Origen inherited a developing Christian tradition with regard to anthropology and sin. As orthodox Christians competed with Gnostics, anthropology, and by extension hamartiology, received a measure of sophistication and nuance.²⁷ This sophistication did not lead to consensus. Second century authors differed in critical areas. Origen inherited this theological tradition and borrowed heavily in some areas while ignoring or rejecting others. The forthcoming examination is delimited to include theologians who had a more or less direct influence on Origen. This includes authors within the Alexandrian theological tradition such as Barnabas, Clement of Alexandria, and the Gnostic theologians, Basilides and Valentinus. I am not concerned with assessing what these Gnostic thinkers actually taught, but instead to ascertain how orthodox Christian authors construed Gnostic thought to shape their own. Orthodox polemical appraisals will be taken at face value. Authors who stand outside the Alexandrian tradition will receive treatment for their influence on theology in Alexandria. Here I will examine thinkers such as *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Tatian, and Irenaeus. Thus, both orthodox and Gnostic, as well as Alexandrian and non-Alexandrian, theologians are considered for their respective influence on Origen's conception of sin. The forthcoming survey will also benefit through an added emphasis on the interpretation of Romans in this period. The second and more substantial part of this chapter will highlight Origen's own teaching on sin throughout his corpus. This portion of the study will interact a great deal with themes found in the later chapters on the *Commentary on Romans*. But there will be a concerted effort on my part to highlight areas in Origen's hamartiology that show

²⁷ For the sake of clarity I have chosen to label the two groups "orthodox Christian" and "Gnostic." "Orthodox Christian" will refer to those generally seen as favorable in light of later orthodoxy (e.g., Clement), while "Gnostic" will refer to those generally seen as unfavorable in light of later orthodoxy (e.g., Basilides). I am fully aware of the complexities a taxonomy like this creates. But I am equally aware that qualifying each and every label will prove needlessly cumbersome.

development by the time they are encountered in his late *Commentary on Romans*. So while this study will interact with Origen's Alexandrian and Caesarean writings, there will be a strong focus on his early writings such as *On First Principles* and the *Commentary on John*. We will see that his conception of original sin evolves throughout his career and begins to borrow elements found in Irenaeus. For the most part, his conception of volitional sin remains steady throughout his career and borrows heavily from his teacher Clement.²⁸

The following survey will proceed along thematic lines. This is an attempt to avoid repetition by way of an author-by-author approach. The forthcoming themes are chosen because they constitute key debates and positions from people known to Origen and by Origen himself. The arrangement of these themes accords with the interconnected flow of these authors' respective theologies and accords nicely with our forthcoming discussion of sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*. I will first explore sin in relation to anthropology. This discussion of the human constitution will dovetail nicely with the creation and Fall accounts of Adam and Eve in the Garden. A couple of these authors reflect on the Apostle's construal of Adam in Romans. From here we delve more directly into explorations of volitional sin. This portion of the survey is concerned to explore sin in relation to the will. How does the will operate in light of sin? How defective is the human will? I will close this chapter with an analysis of the passions in second century thought. This will highlight hamartiological motifs such as irrationality and ignorance. Let us now turn to the first key theme in this survey: sin and anthropology.

Sin and Anthropology

The perceived threat by Gnostic theology was an important factor in the second century and textured much of the theology of orthodox Christian authors. These competing anthropologies produced diverse ways of elucidating the reality of the presence of sin and

²⁸ The first portion of this survey gives priority to Clement of Alexandria. The theologies of Clement and Origen are not always as correlative as many suppose. Origen was a much more penetrating and inventive theologian than his teacher. In the present case, this certainly comes out in his teaching on original sin. But Origen's understanding of volitional sin shows a great deal of dependence on Clement. With only minor qualifications one could say that Origen only deepens and extends Clement's teaching on volitional sin.

evil. Various solutions and emphases can be seen in their respective works as these authors sought to meet the immediate needs of their audiences.

Since the Gnostic cosmological speculations had real implications in the terrestrial realm—especially in relation to sin and ethics—the orthodox anthropological rebuttal often began very broad in scope. These authors were insistent that any cosmic determinism undermined Christian ethics and the incentive to avoid sin. Thus efforts were frequently made to speak of cosmology in a dynamic manner that did not presume outcomes. Clement asserts that man is endowed with an innate conception of God,²⁹ and elsewhere claims that we have been constituted by nature to have fellowship with God.³⁰ As this narrows to a more focused discussion of sin in the terrestrial realm we see authors offer sharp critiques of their Gnostic opponents. Their doctrine of natures proved particularly abhorrent. The orthodox critique usually involves a rebuttal of Valentinus and Basilides who posited the existence of a certain class saved by nature.³¹ Clement writes with an urgency commensurate with this threat. This Valentinian and Basilidean doctrine makes us “lifeless puppets,”³² and the followers of the latter school of thought use this teaching as a license to sin.³³ When Basilides claims that the elect are supramundane by nature, Clement counters by affirming that the essence of all humanity is one.³⁴ Irenaeus answers this threat in the same manner.³⁵ All who abandon the desires of the flesh are considered spiritual before the Lord, says Clement.³⁶ In fact, he uses his opening thoughts in Book Five of the *Stromata* to argue against the

²⁹ Clement, *Strom.* 7.2 (Roberts, 525).

³⁰ Clement, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 200).

³¹ Clement, *Strom.* 4.13 (Roberts, 425). Cf. *ibid.*, 2.20 (Ferguson, 232).

³² *Ibid.*, 2.3 (Ferguson, 164).

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.1 (Ferguson, 257). Cf. *ibid.*, 2.20 (Ferguson, 231-2) on the use of adventitious spirits as an excuse for sin.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 4.26 (Roberts, 440).

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.37.2 (Roberts, 519).

³⁶ Clement, *Paed.* 1.6 (Roberts, 217).

pernicious teachings of Valentinus, Basilides, and Marcion.³⁷ One cannot admit, with Basilides, that sins have been committed before our present embodying.³⁸ Clement later quotes Basilides as saying that only sins committed involuntarily and in ignorance are forgiven.³⁹ Irenaeus also shows his disdain for their doctrine of natures by saying that any assignment of praise or blame should be considered just, fair, and good.⁴⁰

The doctrine of natures posed a serious threat to the goodness of God's creation. Orthodox Christian authors chose to espouse a theology of God's creation that stood in sharp opposition to the alleged teachings of Gnostics. The anti-Gnostic context in Clement's writings betrays a very basic fact: God is not the author of evil.⁴¹ A God who saves must necessarily be a good God.⁴² His economy of creation is likewise good.⁴³ The Gnostic denigration of creation always weighs heavily on Clement's mind. Thus for Clement creation is naturally attenuated to a theology of birth that upholds its goodness as a part of God's plan for his creation. He labors tirelessly to counter the associated notion that birth is evil.⁴⁴ He isolates the arch heretic Marcion who says both created matter⁴⁵ and the creature are evil.⁴⁶

³⁷ Clement, *Strom.* 5.1 (Roberts, 444-5). Origen includes all three of these authors in many of his critiques in the *Commentary on Romans*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.12 (Roberts, 425).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.24 (Roberts, 437).

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.37.2 (Roberts, 519).

⁴¹ Clement, *Strom.* 1.17; 4.13 (Ferguson, 86, 426); *ibid.*, 4.22; 5.14; 7.2, 4 (Roberts, 437, 475, 526, 529).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.18 (Ferguson, 92). Cf. *ibid.*, 7.3 (Roberts, 527).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.12; 4.23 (Roberts, 309, 436). Earlier in the *Stromata* he demonstrates the inconsistencies of the Gnostics. "But in their irreverent war with God they stand apart from natural reason. They despise God's generous goodness. Even if they choose not to marry, they still use the food he has produced, they still breathe the creator's air," *ibid.*, 3.3 (Ferguson, 264). Cf. W. E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 20.

⁴⁴ Clement also cites a number of ancient thinkers (Heraclitus, Euripides, Homer, Plato, etc.) who deprecated birth (*Strom.* 3.3; Ferguson, 265-71).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.3 (Ferguson, 263). Pace N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1927), 207, who mistakenly attributes to Clement the idea that evil is caused by a certain "weakness of matter" (*Strom.* 7.3, Roberts, 527), rather than understanding Clement's rhetorical foil over against those who strive to be the ideal Christian Gnostic.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.7 (Roberts, 417).

Those who disparage birth, says Clement, have no way of accounting for the goodness of the Incarnation. Such a theology leads some, like Cassian, to a docetic view of Christ.⁴⁷ One should rather understand birth as the process by which we come to know the truth.⁴⁸ There may also be some connection to his disdain of Basilides for teaching a preexistent fall of souls.⁴⁹ So birth must never be disparaged. It should instead be considered holy.⁵⁰ Clement is not naïve. He is fully aware that death always follows on the heels of birth.⁵¹ Thus birth is in some sense “balanced” by a process of decay.⁵² This relates directly to the body. The body is not *ipso facto* evil. Rather, bodies are subject to decay and are to be understood as naturally unstable.⁵³ Clement even rebukes those who think sexual intercourse is polluted.⁵⁴ That which is created by God is naturally good.

The manner in which orthodox Christian authors articulated the material creation in light of sin had to be narrowed even further. This battle over Christian anthropology brought the human constitution into sharper relief. In an attempt to account for the tendency toward evil in the individual, some theologians questioned the number of souls one possesses. Clement accuses Basilides’ son Isidorus of espousing the two souls theory.⁵⁵ Isidorus is said to teach that one soul proves the existence of an “inferior creation” within

⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.17 (Ferguson, 320).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.16 (Ferguson, 320). Clement also records (*Ex.Theo.* 67) that the Savior does not reproach birth because it is necessary for the salvation of believers, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria*, edited, translated, introduction, and notes by Robert Pierce Casey, in *Studies and Documents*, edited by Kirsopp Lake and Silva Lake (London: Christophers, 1934), 83.

⁴⁹ Clement, *Strom.* 4.12 (Roberts, 424).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.17 (Ferguson, 321).

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.6 (Ferguson, 284).

⁵² Ibid., 3.12 (Ferguson, 311).

⁵³ Ibid., 3.12 (Ferguson, 310).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.6 (Ferguson, 285-9). John Behr’s lack of qualification on this topic leads the reader to believe that Clement had little positive to say about marriage, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 148.

⁵⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 (Ferguson, 232). The extent to which this is to be considered two souls or simply a sharp division in one soul is a question for debate.

us.⁵⁶ Orthodox Christian authors generally found the two souls theory not to be amenable to their overall theology. With the exception of Origen's speculations on the matter in *On First Principles*, this theory is notably absent from their writings.⁵⁷ But the denial of the two souls theory does not preclude dualistic language in these authors. Some early Christian authors speak of the soul as divided. Division within the soul allowed these authors to account better for moral and immoral actions. Clement is our most prominent voice in this regard. While he rejects certain Platonic aspects of the soul,⁵⁸ he also admits that the soul should be understood in a tripartite manner. At the beginning of Book Three of the *Paedagogues* he explicitly endorses a tripartite view of the soul: intellectual, irascible, and appetitive.⁵⁹ He echoes this sentiment later in the *Stromata*.⁶⁰ His language on the soul gave way to more explicitly Stoic categories for greater clarification, an approach taken up and expanded by Origen. Clement postulates an important role for the ruling part of the soul: the *hegemonikon*. At times he calls the *hegemonikon* "reasoned reflection" and a "pilot."⁶¹ The *hegemonikon* is critical to the process of Christian knowledge. "[K]nowledge is the purification of the leading faculty of the soul (ἡγεμονικοῦ),"⁶² and is achieved "when the chief faculty of the soul (ἡγεμονικὸν) has nothing spurious to stand in the way of its power."⁶³ But the ruling faculty is not above fault. Those who have failed to become a Christian Gnostic should at the very least understand it as "unstable,"⁶⁴ and at most it should be understood as buried in idolatry.⁶⁵ But Scripture calls

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.19 (Roberts, 372).

⁵⁷ Origen's flirtation with the two souls theory in *On First Principles* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.13 (Ferguson, 315).

⁵⁹ Clement, *Paed.* 3.1 (Roberts, 271). Cf. Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 81 n2.

⁶⁰ Clement, *Strom.* 5.12 (Roberts, 463).

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.11 (Ferguson, 193 and 194, respectively).

⁶² Ibid., 4.6 (Roberts, 416; Mondésert, 122).

⁶³ Ibid., 4.6 (Roberts, 416; Mondésert, 124). Cf. *ibid.*, 5.14 (Roberts, 466; Voulet, 180).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.9 (Roberts, 498; Descourtieux, 216).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6.6 (Roberts, 490; Descourtieux, 150).

the individual to repentance. This act cleanses the region of the soul “from anything discordant,”⁶⁶ and the true Gnostic instead desires the “tranquility”⁶⁷ and “rectitude”⁶⁸ of soul. Righteousness, or true virtue, is the concord of the parts of the soul.⁶⁹ Clement’s incorporation of some Platonic and Stoic concepts shaped his anthropology and conception of ethics and provided material for later Christian authors to utilize.

Looking more broadly at second century views on the human constitution produces two prevailing views: bipartite (body, soul) and tripartite (body, soul, spirit). Depending on the context Clement can affirm either a bipartite or a tripartite anthropology. In one place he speaks of the whole man that needs to be purified: body and soul.⁷⁰ Composed of body and soul, man is considered a universe in miniature.⁷¹ Early in the *Stromata* he refers to the “body, soul, the five senses, the power of speech, the power of procreation, and the intellectual or spiritual or whatever you want to call it.”⁷² He tends to flirt with a tripartite understanding of the individual throughout the *Stromata*. He laments those who choose to live according to their body and not their spirit,⁷³ and elsewhere speaks of integrating both soul and spirit in obedience to the word.⁷⁴ Like Clement, Irenaeus lacks precision when speaking about the human constitution. But John Behr is correct to note that when Irenaeus

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.13 (Ferguson, 197).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.23 (Roberts, 437).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.7 (Roberts, 493).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.26 (Roberts, 439). Cf. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 62, citing a similar passage in the *Paedagogues*, notes other philosophical tendencies in Clement’s thought by saying this idea may “hint also at the Platonic view according to which virtue is nothing but the harmony of the soul, i.e. the agreement between its inferior parts and reason, its ruling principle.”

⁷⁰ Clement, *Strom.* 5.10 (Roberts, 459).

⁷¹ Clement, *Prot.* 1 (Roberts, 172).

⁷² Clement, *Strom.* 2.11 (Ferguson, 193). For other bipartite references see *ibid.*, 4.26 (Roberts, 440).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3.6 (Ferguson, 284).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.13 (Ferguson, 314). For another possible reference to the tripartite anthropology see *ibid.*, 1.24 (Ferguson, 140) and *ibid.*, 7.12 (Roberts, 543).

says, “man is a living being composed of a soul and a body,”⁷⁵ it should be understood in its hortatory rather than dogmatic sense.⁷⁶ In Book Five of the *Against Heresies* he remarks, “Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.”⁷⁷ While these reflections demonstrate an emerging doctrinal concern to account for different parts in the individual, they were not always exceptionally clear.

Despite their teaching with regard to a bipartite or tripartite anthropology, these authors were in careful unison in the conviction that the body is inferior to the soul. When Clement asserts that humans are the noblest of all God’s creatures⁷⁸ and constituted by nature to have fellowship with God,⁷⁹ he also insists that a distinction must be maintained between the soul and the body.⁸⁰ The body is inferior to the soul because the latter should be considered “immortal,”⁸¹ “the more subtle substance,”⁸² and “rational.”⁸³ It even contains a “spark of true goodness.”⁸⁴ The body, on the other hand, is susceptible to the dregs related to corporeal existence. Clement’s eschatological remarks can thus take on a pejorative tone when he asserts that one day the soul will “no longer [be] obstructed by the paltry flesh.”⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Dem.* Pref 2 (Behr, 40).

⁷⁶ John Behr (trans.), *St Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 102 n6.

⁷⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.6.1 (Roberts, 531). Earlier in the same work (3.22.1; Roberts, 454) Irenaeus states, “But every one will allow that we are [composed of] a body taken from the earth, and a soul receiving spirit from God.”

⁷⁸ Clement, *Paed.* 1.8 (Roberts, 225).

⁷⁹ Clement, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 200).

⁸⁰ Clement, *Paed.* 2.9 (Roberts, 259).

⁸¹ Clement, *Strom.* 5.14 (Roberts, 466).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.6 (Roberts, 492).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.3 (Roberts, 410).

⁸⁴ Clement, *Prot.* 11 (Roberts, 204). Cf. Tatian, *Orat.* 13.

⁸⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 6.6 (Roberts, 491). Interestingly, Clement rejects the notion held by a certain Cassian and others who consider the “tunics of skins” (Gen 3:21) to be our bodies, *ibid.*, 3.14 (Ferguson, 315-6).

One should not read this as a denigration of the body. The body is not evil. Such an idea is foreign to Clement's theology. Rather, he laments the presence of sin. This reality is born out elsewhere in the *Stromata* where Clement states the matter unequivocally. "The soul of man is confessedly the better part of man and the body the inferior. But neither is the soul good by nature, nor, on the other hand, is the body bad by nature."⁸⁶ The body is less than the soul but it is not a useless instrument. Against the Gnostics Clement can assert strongly that flesh and soul are not fundamentally opposed to one another.⁸⁷ Interestingly, in one place Clement sees similarities between the denigration of birth by Plato and how the Apostle Paul speaks of the body in Romans 7:24 ("Wretch that I am, all too human, who shall rescue me from this body of death?"). He chooses, however, to understand the Apostle metaphorically to represent the body as seduced into vice.⁸⁸ Clement's interpretation of this passage in Romans is illuminating. Clement's reflection on the body frequently brings him to a wider reflection on creation. He makes a point to differentiate man from other beings, for man is endowed with a purer essence than other animate beings.⁸⁹ Clement has brought his teaching into sharp relief from that of his Gnostic opponents. The reflections by the great second century Alexandrian do not stop with assessing the body in light of existing matter. The human body is a created reality that is unique in other ways. He offers what would become an enduring theological rationale for our bipedal existence. "Those, then, who run down created existence and vilify the body are wrong; not considering that the frame of man was formed erect for the contemplation of heaven."⁹⁰

As we turn from anthropology to more explicit hamartiological themes we continue to see second century theologians struggle to craft a Scripturally faithful narrative in

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.26 (Roberts, 439). See also *Paed.* 2.11 (Roberts, 267); *Strom.* 1.27 (Ferguson, 149); Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 170.

⁸⁷ Clement, *Strom.* 3.17 (Ferguson, 322).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.3 (Ferguson, 267).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.13 (Roberts, 465).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.26 (Roberts, 439).

light of the Gnostic threat. The sin of Adam and its effects on humanity will pose a unique challenge in this regard and produce similar and dissimilar readings from these authors.

Sin and Adam

The sin of Adam is an important theme in second century hamartiological reflection. Any analysis must remain sensitive to the multivalent character of a “theology of Adam” as construed in this period. In these varying Adamic contexts, we will encounter a number of themes including Adam in light of God’s creation, the relative maturity of Adam and Eve in the Garden, the innocence or guilt of infants, and the interpretation of Paul’s construal of Adam in the fifth chapter of Romans. With a notable exception or two, these second century authors demonstrate striking unanimity.

Early Christian authors frequently traced the Fall of humanity back to the Garden account in the third chapter of Genesis. Clement makes the point that Adam’s entrance in this world should be considered a “high birth.”⁹¹ He understands that while still new and young, Adam and Eve were deceived and led astray.⁹² In Book Three of the *Stromata* he seems to connect it to a premature sexual union—the serpent representing bodily pleasure.⁹³ All the human faculties were present in the first man. “Adam was perfect, as far as respects his formation; for none of the distinctive characteristics of the idea and form of man were wanting to him; but in the act of coming into being he received perfection.”⁹⁴ But Clement complements this later in the *Stromata*. In Book Six, and countering the Gnostics, he argues that Adam was not perfect in regard to virtue at the point of his creation. “For they shall hear

⁹¹ Ibid., 2.19 (Ferguson, 222).

⁹² Ibid., 3.17 (Ferguson, 321). Cf. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria’s Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 51, where he calls it a “childish mistake,” and earlier (p. 36) claims that Clement considered this a “fortunate event.”

⁹³ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 205, takes this text (*Strom.* 3.14), our previous text (*Prot.* 11 (Roberts, 202-3)), and a later text (*Adumbrationes*, Dindorf iii:479-89 (Williams, 205 n1)), as signifying a faint echo of original sin in Clement’s corpus. I find each example a distention of the evidence. Williams’s own lament at the end of his section on Clement (p. 208) signifies to me that he is attempting, with increasing futility, to find *something* that suggests original sin (or guilt) in Clement.

⁹⁴ Clement, *Strom.* 4.23 (Roberts, 437). Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 203 n1, says, “Adam was only ‘perfect’ in the sense that no specifically human characteristics were lacking to him.”

from us that he was not perfect in his creation, but adapted to the reception of virtue. For it is of great importance in regard to virtue to be made fit for its attainment.”⁹⁵ The distinction here is between Adam’s moral *capability* and Adam’s moral *progress*. The former is complete while the latter was yet to be determined.

A closely related tradition developed that would gain a lot of traction during this period. Several authors in the second century conjecture that Adam and Eve were youthful at the time of their transgression. Irenaeus remarks, “man was a young child, not yet having a perfect deliberation, and because of this he was easily deceived by the seducer.”⁹⁶ In a different context he argues that Adam and Eve, “having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age.”⁹⁷ Clement likewise speaks of Adam’s sin as the mistake of a child.

The first man, when in Paradise, sported free, because he was the child of God; but when he succumbed to pleasure... was as a child seduced by lusts, and grew old in disobedience; and by disobeying his Father, dishonoured God.⁹⁸

The notion that Adam was youthful in paradise seems to be unique to second century theology. But there does exist a thought by Clement, a conviction many earlier and later authors would share, that Adam’s disobedience constituted an exchange of immortality for mortality.⁹⁹ There may also be in Irenaeus an allusion to speculation with regard to preexistence. In Book Five of *Against Heresies* Irenaeus adds detail to Adam’s sin. “And then afterwards, when [man] proved disobedient, he was cast out thence into *this* world.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.12 (Roberts, 502).

⁹⁶ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.1.12 (Behr, 47). Shortly after this (1.1.14; Behr, 48) he says Adam and Eve possessed an “innocent and childlike mind.”

⁹⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.22.4 (Roberts, 455).

⁹⁸ Clement, *Prot.* 11 (Roberts, 202-3). Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 203, in treating the extended version of this quote, finds in Clement a certain “‘mystical’ or ‘physical’ identity, a solidarity which necessarily involves mankind in the bondage to ‘pleasure,’ that is, to the sensual appetites, first incurred by its common father. This is at least a minimal doctrine of ‘Original Sin,’ even though, as Dr. Bigg justly points out, it contains no suggestion of the idea of ‘Original Guilt.’”

⁹⁹ Clement, *Strom.* 2.19 (Ferguson, 222).

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.5.1 (Roberts, 531), emphasis mine.

Irenaeus may be referring to a casting down from the third heaven (cf. his use of 2 Cor. 12:4) to this lower terrestrial realm. Or he may simply be referring to this world of sin and death after and outside of the Garden. Because there is insufficient evidence for this in the theology of Irenaeus, it must be held lightly.

Most authors in this period had absolutely no theology of the inheritance of Adam's sin at birth. *The Shepherd of Hermas* speaks of some as "innocent as children."¹⁰¹ In fact, children, "in whose hearts no evil originates," are "honourable before God."¹⁰² The anti-Gnostic context shaped Clement's manner of framing the issue and made it clear for him that "sin is an activity, not an existence: and therefore it is not a work of God."¹⁰³ A careful examination of his entire corpus produces only one *possible* reference to inherited sin. A very curious statement in *The Rich Man's Salvation* is found within the context of how God's love overcomes all sin.

Even though a man be born in sins (καὶν ἐν ἀμαρτήμασιν ἢ γεγεννημένος), and have done many of the deeds that are forbidden, if he but implant love in his soul he is able, by increasing the love and by accepting pure repentance, to retrieve his failures.¹⁰⁴

This arcane assertion is not drawn out any further and must remain unexplained. It cannot be used to alter the existing paradigm of Clement's teaching on sin. He clearly accepts no inheritance at birth. So for instance at one point in the *Stromata* he even goes to the extent of saying "God has created us sociable and righteous by nature."¹⁰⁵ These and other statements strongly suggest that Clement had no conception of original sin with regard to inherited guilt. W. E. G. Floyd is therefore correct to argue that Clement will not admit any physiological transmission or inheritance of Adam's sin.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ *Herm. Sim.*, 3.9.31 (Roberts, 53).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 3.9.29 (Roberts, 53).

¹⁰³ Clement, *Strom.* 4.13 (Roberts, 426). Cf. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Clement, *QDS* 38 (Butterworth, 348-9).

¹⁰⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 1.6 (Ferguson, 47).

¹⁰⁶ Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 54.

The interpretation of Adam and Eve in the Garden can be read alongside the Apostle's construal of the former in the fifth chapter of Romans. Even though this epistle did not receive sustained comment in the second century, there are nevertheless scattered reflections on this text. An allusion to this text in his *On the Apostolic Preaching* gives Irenaeus the opportunity to elaborate on the spread of death to humanity. "And because all are implicated in the first-formation of Adam, we were bound to death through the disobedience, it was fitting, [therefore], by means of the obedience of the One, who on our account became man, to be loosed <from> death."¹⁰⁷ Clement also understands this text to stress the transmission of death. "By natural necessity of divine dispensation, death follows birth, and the union of soul and body is followed by their dissolution... Woman is regarded as the cause of death because of giving birth, but for the same reason she is also to be regarded as the cause of life."¹⁰⁸ But for Clement death is not *ipso facto* evil.¹⁰⁹ Nuancing his theology of death in the same breath, he can call it a state of sin with the body, as opposed to life as the separation from sin.¹¹⁰ At other times Clement simply asserts that sin is eternal death.¹¹¹

There seems to be little notion of inherited sin at this point in the church's young history. Clement's use of Scripture will substantiate this claim. Instructive is his use of Psalm 51:5 ("I was brought into being in sin; my mother conceived me in disobedience to the Law."), a verse that would prove critical for Origen and many later theologians. Clement rarely utilizes this verse in his writings even though he appears to be very familiar with the Psalms. But in Book Three of the *Stromata* he argues that David's exclamation refers prophetically to Eve (Gen 3:20: "Eve became the mother of all who live."). He then explicitly denies the possibility that David was brought into being in sin.¹¹² But interestingly, in Book

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.3.31 (Behr, 60).

¹⁰⁸ Clement, *Strom.* 3.9 (Ferguson, 296).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.3 (Roberts, 411).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Clement, *Prot.* 11 (Roberts, 204).

¹¹² Clement, *Strom.* 3.16 (Ferguson, 319).

Four of the *Stromata* Clement quotes again from Psalm 51. After reading the first four verses, he skips verse five, and resumes at verse 6!¹¹³ Here he clearly intends to highlight volitional sin over against any idea of inherited sin. His notion of the innocence of children at birth is made even clearer through his understanding of certain key texts. Quoting the laments of Jeremiah 20:14, 18 and the proclamation of Job 14:4-5, Clement mockingly proclaims, “It is for them to tell us how the newly born child could commit fornication or in what way the child who has never done anything at all has fallen under Adam’s curse.”¹¹⁴ Clement’s commitment to keep the Gnostic denigration of material creation from gaining the upper hand shapes his exegesis of Scripture. We will see in the next chapter how Job 14, Psalm 51, and Romans 5 greatly informed Origen’s own discussion of sin in his *Commentary on Romans*.

The recapitulation theory of Irenaeus opens another window into his thinking on the sin of Adam. This theory frequently leads him to speak of original sin in terms of *death*. “For it was necessary for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ, that ‘mortality might be swallowed up in immortality.’”¹¹⁵ In the same work he says that Christ’s recapitulation of all things involves abolishing death.¹¹⁶ Later he speaks of death in terms of disobedience when he argues, “And because all are implicated in the first-formation of Adam, we were bound to death through the disobedience, it was fitting, [therefore], by means of the obedience of the one, who on our account became man, to be loosed <from> death.”¹¹⁷ He expounds on disobedience when he asserts, “So, by means of the obedience by which He obeyed unto death, hanging upon the tree, He undid the old disobedience occasioned by the tree.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.17 (Roberts, 429).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 3.16 (Ferguson, 319).

¹¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.3.33 (Behr, 61). Cf. 2 Cor 5:4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1.1.6 (Behr, 43).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1.3.31 (Behr, 60).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1.3.34 (Behr, 62).

Indeed, Jesus “dissolved the old disobedience.”¹¹⁹ Recapitulation also relates directly to the image of God. “He...furnished us...with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.”¹²⁰ More will be said on the image below. But a careful reading of recapitulation demonstrates that he is speaking of more than death and its effects on the image. In his theory of recapitulation Irenaeus also gives credence to *sin*, and this sin may be understood as that which is transmitted from Adam. Other citations of recapitulation bear out this claim.

But inasmuch as it was by these things that we disobeyed God, and did not give credit to His word, so was it also by these same that He brought in obedience and consent as respects His Word; by which things He clearly shows forth God Himself, *whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam*, when he did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death.¹²¹

The obedience of Christ is juxtaposed with the disobedience of Adam, demonstrating that sin is clearly at the forefront of Irenaeus’ mind. Furthermore, the fact that “we” offended God “in the first Adam” speaks to a sense of solidarity. This is not the only place he makes mention of solidarity in Adam. In Book Five he once again uses such language with regard to the Fall. “He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning *led us away captives in Adam*.”¹²²

Discerning the effect of sin on the image of God can also provide a window into early Christian hamartiology. Theologians by the late second century were fairly consistent in

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1.3.37 (Behr, 64).

¹²⁰ Ibid., *Haer.* 3.18.1 (Roberts, 446). In passages like this and others (cf. *ibid.*, 5.16.2; 5.34.2), Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 197, sees strong solidarity language on the part of Irenaeus. “The indefinite character of Irenaeus’ language debars us from attributing this theory to him in anything like that precise and fully articulated shape which it wears in the thought of Ambrosiaster and Augustine, some two centuries later. But I must needs think that a rude and inchoate form of it is implicit in his frequent use of the phrase ‘in Adam’ to describe the *rationale* of man’s subjection to sin and death.” He admits this diverges from F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 289ff.

¹²¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.16.3 (Roberts, 544), emphasis mine. For more solidarity language in Irenaeus see *Ibid.*, 5.17.3.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 5.21.1 (Roberts, 548), emphasis mine.

their belief that the true image of God is Christ. This is a teaching of Irenaeus¹²³ and Clement.¹²⁴ Clement also makes a fundamental distinction between being made “according to the image” and “according to the likeness.”¹²⁵ “Likeness” pertains only to *perfection*. Furthermore, the image and likeness are not to be understood materially, but rather immaterially. They are related to intellect and reason.¹²⁶ The divine image is said to be established in our minds only when pure and free of vice.¹²⁷ But the image of God in us has experienced corruption. “[W]e have been corrupted in advance by much weakness,” Clement says, “and have enjoyed in advance a previous misdirection from a combination of ignorance and damaging upbringing and nurture.”¹²⁸ He later asserts that revolt from the knowledge of God brings corruption.¹²⁹ One is encouraged rather to “throw off corruption,”¹³⁰ and by doing so will be reestablished by the Lord in peace and incorruption.¹³¹ Only the Christian Gnostic can be considered in both the image *and* likeness of God.¹³²

Sin and the Will

The Gnostic threat produced sharp clarity in works by orthodox Christian authors with regard to the will in the second century. The manner of expression varied, but the deterministic teachings produced vigorous denunciations. These denunciations were followed

¹²³ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.2.22 (Behr, 53).

¹²⁴ Clement, *Paed.* 1.12 (Roberts, 234). Cf. also *Strom.* 5.14; 7.3 (Roberts, 466, 527).

¹²⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 2.22 (Ferguson, 245). Cf. *ibid.*, 4.6 (Roberts, 414).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.19 (Ferguson, 225). Irenaeus is less inclined to draw such sharp distinctions. Cf. *Haer.* 5.6.1 (Roberts, 531-2); *Dem.* 1.1.11 (Behr, 46-7; cf. p. 104 n36). Although Irenaeus makes a point to say that being made in the likeness of God is why humans possess free will: *Haer.* 4.37.4 (Roberts, 519).

¹²⁷ Clement, *Strom.* 3.5 (Ferguson, 282). Cf. *ibid.*, 7.3, 5 (Roberts, 527, 530).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.20 (Ferguson, 229-30).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.10 (Roberts, 459). Cf. *ibid.*, *Ex.Theo.* 80.

¹³⁰ Clement, *Prot.* 12 (Roberts, 205-6).

¹³¹ Clement, *Strom.* 2.2 (Ferguson, 159). Corruption is not a prominent theme in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* but does occur in his *Commentary on Ephesians* (*comm. in Eph.* on 6:24; Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 272).

¹³² Clement, *Strom.* 2.19 (Ferguson, 221).

by robust defenses of the will's freedom—despite the presence of sin. All early Christian authors dealing with the Gnostic threat considered free will an axiom of their respective anthropologies.

Irenaeus and Clement have a great deal to say about the importance of free will for ethics. In his *Against Heresies* Irenaeus asserts, “[M]an, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself.”¹³³ Clement also exhibits an unbridled enthusiasm for what he calls either free will¹³⁴ or free choice.¹³⁵ In *The Rich Man's Salvation* he says, “For to save men against their will is an act of force, but to save them when they choose is an act of grace.”¹³⁶ He finds support for this in that Platonists and Stoics both agree that our intellectual assent is within our own control.¹³⁷ Clement speaks of deliberate versus non-deliberate sin.¹³⁸ He also considers free will a fundamental principle of the Christian faith. Therefore, evil resides in the will. Sin is an activity.¹³⁹ Although executed voluntarily, it is a reality of life in this world and should be understood as universal. Clement says that sin is “natural and common to all,” save Christ.¹⁴⁰ Commenting on Romans 3:20 he argues that the Law did not create sin, but simply revealed it,¹⁴¹ revealing the sin that is hidden.¹⁴² Clement has no real notion of a weakened will. An examination of his corpus yields little that would suggest that

¹³³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.4.3 (Roberts, 466).

¹³⁴ Clement, *QDS* 10 (Butterworth, 289); *Strom.* 2.6 (Ferguson, 177); *ibid.*, 4.21; 5.13; 6.17 (Roberts, 433, 464, 517).

¹³⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 1.17 (Ferguson, 87); *ibid.*, 4.13; 5.1; 6.9, 16; 7.2, 7 (Roberts, 426, 445, 496, 512, 526, 534).

¹³⁶ Clement, *QDS* 21 (Butterworth, 315).

¹³⁷ Clement, *Strom.* 2.12 (Ferguson, 196).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.15 (Ferguson, 202).

¹³⁹ Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 21.

¹⁴⁰ Clement, *Paed.* 3.12 (Roberts, 293).

¹⁴¹ Clement, *Strom.* 2.7 (Ferguson, 181).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.12 (Ferguson, 308). Clement, like Origen after him, speaks of the laws of reason as inscribed on men's hearts. Cf. Clement, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 202). In *Stromata* (1.29; Ferguson, 155) Clement will equate this with the Mosaic Law and speak of it as “innate.”

sin is caused by a will weakened or inhibited by the Fall, corruption in the image of God, or the spread of death. It is difficult to conceive of how Clement acknowledges the pervasiveness of sin. He does however admit in one place that Tatian taught the weakness of the will.¹⁴³ Clement's confidence in the will's power to adjudicate is a striking feature of his theology. However, the will is deceived by the devil. This is a prominent feature of Clement's hamartiology.¹⁴⁴ Overall, Clement admits only the slightest degree of weakness of the will. He can say that persistent sinning leads to a situation where the soul is buried in a slough of vice.¹⁴⁵ Later in the same work he remarks that the feebleness of the soul is the reason we need a divine teacher.¹⁴⁶ But these examples are rare exceptions to the overarching rule that the will is entirely unhindered. Sin has not impaired the will's ability to adjudicate between right and wrong. Deception is a more prominent motif.

The will's ability to discern right from wrong is only fully realized when there is a clear articulation of the parameters of sin and ethics. Here again he borrows from the Stoics. There are innumerable references in his writings that the proper ethical life is one that is lived in accordance with nature¹⁴⁷ or reason.¹⁴⁸ The elucidation of these ethical boundaries are ubiquitous. "And to be in no want of necessaries is the medium. For the desires which are in accordance with nature are bounded by sufficiency."¹⁴⁹ At other times he is more direct with regard to sin. Sin is that which is contrary to reason.¹⁵⁰ Later in the same work he goes further

¹⁴³ Clement, *Strom.* 3.12 (Ferguson, 306).

¹⁴⁴ Clement, *Prot.* 1 (Roberts, 173); *Strom.* 1.17 (Ferguson, 86); 2.20 (Ferguson, 233); 3.16 (Ferguson, 320); 4.3 (Roberts, 411); 4.12 (Roberts, 424); 4.14 (Roberts, 426). Cf. Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.1.16 (Behr, 49), where he says the devil is the head and originator of sin.

¹⁴⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 (Ferguson, 235). Cf. Irenaeus, *Dem.* 1.3.37 (Behr, 64), where he speaks of a "prison of sin."

¹⁴⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 5.1 (Roberts, 446).

¹⁴⁷ E.g., *ibid.*, *Paed.* 2.12, 13; 3.1, 11 (Roberts, 267, 269, 271, 284); *Strom.* 6.16; 7.15 (Roberts, 515, 550).

¹⁴⁸ E.g., *ibid.*, *Strom.* 4.6; 6.11; 7.7 (Roberts, 414, 501, 536-7).

¹⁴⁹ Clement, *Paed.* 2.1 (Roberts, 242).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.2 (Roberts, 210).

in his appraisal. “For many think such things to be pleasures only which are against nature, such as these sins of theirs.”¹⁵¹ Clement is frequently inclined to get very specific about what constitutes a violation of nature.¹⁵² In fact, any excessive act that runs contrary to nature is the seed of sin,¹⁵³ especially impulses that are contrary to right reason.¹⁵⁴ But Clement does not think of nature as some disembodied, external entity. Nature involves our created selves. He can therefore say that each must act in accordance with *his own* nature.¹⁵⁵ This doctrine of the Stoics is not without citation. He frequently specifies that the Stoics teach that one should live according to nature.¹⁵⁶ But importantly, he also finds this imperative corroborated in Scripture.¹⁵⁷ It therefore informs and textures his notion of the Christian life. The ethical ideal is then presented with straightforward clarity in the *Stromata*. “The Christian Gnostic will refrain from errors of reason, thought, perception, and action.”¹⁵⁸

A final look at sin and the will should make mention of the role of the ‘two ways’ tradition in early Christian writings. This tradition emphasized the different ethical paths one could take: good or evil. Many scholars find the roots of the ‘two ways’ tradition in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 30:15 says, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (ESV). It is utilized in the New Testament in Matthew 7:13-4 through Jesus’ teaching of the wide and narrow gates/roads. The ‘two ways’ teaching became a useful tool

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 2.10 (Roberts, 262). Cf. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria’s Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 49.

¹⁵² Clement, *Paed.* 2.13; 3.11 (Roberts, 270, 285). He also discourses on the proper understanding of clothing, an understanding that is according to nature, *ibid.*, 3.11 (Roberts, 284). *Ibid.*, 3.3 (Roberts, 276).

¹⁵³ Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 (Ferguson, 229).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.18 (Ferguson, 212). Clement elsewhere says that the ability to discriminate between impulses is a characteristic unique to humans, *ibid.*, 2.20 (Ferguson, 230).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.10 (Ferguson, 56).

¹⁵⁶ E.g., *ibid.*, 2.19, 21 (Ferguson, 224, 242); *ibid.*, 5.14 (Roberts, 466). Clement was “thinking through the doctrines of Christianity in the language of Stoic ethics and Platonic metaphysics, in order to lend Christianity an air of respectability and enhance the appeal of the gospel message,” Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria’s Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, xx.

¹⁵⁷ Clement, *Strom.* 6.14 (Roberts, 506).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.11 (Ferguson, 192).

in early Christian discourse. It is utilized by the editor of the *Didache* to articulate a Christian ethic within a baptismal catechesis.¹⁵⁹ The ‘two ways’ tradition comprises the last four chapters of *The Epistle of Barnabas* (18-21) where he juxtaposes light and darkness, virtue and vice, and righteousness and sin. This usage of the ‘two ways’, according to James Carleton Paget, has the threefold purpose of facilitating the correct interpretation of the law, acting as a homiletical exhortation to strengthen covenantal identity, and correcting possible anti-nomian tendencies within his community.¹⁶⁰ *The Shepherd of Hermas* seems to have some use for it as well. At one point he asserts, “For the path of righteousness is straight, but that of unrighteousness is crooked.”¹⁶¹ Shortly after this he refers to attendant angels—both good and bad. These angels speak their respective virtuous or unvirtuous behavior to the heart.¹⁶² Clement seems to have limited use for this tradition. He is certainly familiar with Deuteronomy 30:15, quoting it several times in his writings.¹⁶³ There are a few of instances where he presents the ethical life—delineating sin very clearly—that seem to have the marks of the ‘two ways’. He ends his *Protrepticus* by saying people are to choose between judgment and grace,¹⁶⁴ elsewhere speaks of attendant demons not being an excuse to choose one way over another,¹⁶⁵ and even quotes Parmenides as an early adherent of a ‘two ways’

¹⁵⁹ Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, translated by Linda M. Maloney and edited by Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 30-41, 59-124; Jonathan Draper, “Barnabas and the Riddle of the Didache Revisited,” *JSNT* 58 (1995), 89-113, esp. 96.

¹⁶⁰ James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, WUNT 64 (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994), 62-3. Jonathan Draper sees the ‘two ways’ in *Barnabas* as the exemplification of an emerging ascetic program, that is, “advanced ‘gnosis’ for secondary socialization,” “Barnabas and the Riddle of the Didache Revisited,” 97. Ronald Heine has outlined Origen’s relationship to the *Epistle of Barnabas* in *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, 34-42.

¹⁶¹ *Herm. Mand.* 2.6.1 (Roberts, 24).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.6.2 (Roberts, 24). In the *Stromata* Clement quotes the Gnostic Isidore as making reference to attendant daemons, *Strom.* 6.6 (Roberts, 492). In Platonic philosophy, to which this has reference, daemons were not necessarily pernicious, but often innocuous.

¹⁶³ Clement, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 198); *Strom.* 5.11, 14; 6.6 (Roberts, 461, 467, 491).

¹⁶⁴ Clement, *Prot.* 12 (Roberts, 206).

¹⁶⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 6.12 (Roberts, 502).

ethic!¹⁶⁶ Whether or not Irenaeus was aware of the ‘two ways’ tradition is debatable. But in at least one place he seems to structure his ethics accordingly. “For the way of all those who see is single and upward, illuminated by the heavenly light, but the ways of those who do not see are many, dark and divergent; the one leads to the kingdom of heaven, uniting man to God, while the others lead down to death, separating man from God.”¹⁶⁷ Several early Christian authors demonstrated an attempt to present the ethical life in very clear terms. The onus was then on the individual to choose the correct path.

Sin and the Passions

We have seen that Clement seems to rely on Stoic concepts for his understanding of ethics. Clement’s emphasis on the passions in his depiction of sin is on constant display in his writings.

Appetite is then the movement of the mind to or from something. Passion is an excessive appetite exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the word. Passions, then, are a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason. But revolt and distraction and disobedience are in our own power, as obedience is in our power. Wherefore voluntary actions are judged. But should one examine each one of the passions, he will find them irrational impulses.¹⁶⁸

This is Clement’s clearest definition of the passions. It gives essential coherence to most of the themes found in his hamartiology. I will revisit it in Chapter Four when setting up Origen’s doctrine of the same. So for Clement only Jesus is “devoid of passion,” that is, “wholly free from human passions.”¹⁶⁹ At times Clement offers austere warnings against the “excesses in the indulgence of the passions.”¹⁷⁰ He sometimes speaks of passions as “diseases

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.9 (Roberts, 458).

¹⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Dem.* Pref 1 (Behr, 39-40).

¹⁶⁸ Clement, *Strom.* 2.13 (Roberts, 361).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., *Paed.* 1.2 (Roberts, 210). Cf. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria’s Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 78.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 197).

of the mind.”¹⁷¹ At other times he offers more color in his elucidation. They are variously depicted as “passions of the soul,”¹⁷² a “brood of passions,”¹⁷³ “obscuring passions,”¹⁷⁴ “attendant passions,”¹⁷⁵ “impulses of passion,”¹⁷⁶ “violating passion,”¹⁷⁷ “base passions,”¹⁷⁸ and “inordinate passions.”¹⁷⁹ There is the fear of being “darkened by passions.”¹⁸⁰ At times he pleads his audience not to “indulge your passions,”¹⁸¹ or be “whirled about by the passions,”¹⁸² because they are to be considered no less than “diseases of the soul.”¹⁸³ As such they do great harm to the gift of life which God has given us. “Each decision, continually impressed on the soul, leaves an inner perception stamped upon it. And the soul, without knowing is carrying around the image of the passion. The cause lies in the act of seduction and our assent to it.”¹⁸⁴ The language of “inner perception stamped upon it” once again speaks to the Stoic elements in Clement’s thinking. Such an idea would find resonance deep into the fourth century, especially in the writings of Evagrius.¹⁸⁵ Clement goes on to explain how this image is detrimental to any attempt at future holiness. “The outpourings from physical desires produce

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 11 (Roberts, 204).

¹⁷² Ibid., *QDS* 12, 14, 15 (Butterworth, 295, 299, 301).

¹⁷³ Ibid., 20 (Butterworth, 313).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., *Strom.* 4.18 (Roberts, 430).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., *QDS* 25 (Butterworth, 323).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., *Strom.* 4.23 (Roberts, 436).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.18 (Ferguson, 217).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., *Paed.* 3.3 (Roberts, 275).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., *Strom.* 7.3 (Roberts, 528).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.6 (Roberts, 491).

¹⁸¹ Ibid., *Prot.* 4 (Roberts, 189).

¹⁸² Ibid., *Strom.* 7.2 (Roberts, 525).

¹⁸³ Ibid., *QDS* 21 (Butterworth, 315).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., *Strom.* 2.20 (Ferguson, 231). Cf. *ibid.*, 3.11 (Ferguson, 300).

¹⁸⁵ Cf. “On Thoughts,” in *Evagrius of Ponticus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, translated with introduction and commentary by Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136-82.

an evil character in the soul, scattering the images of pleasure in front of the soul.”¹⁸⁶ For this reason his awareness of the passions is seemingly limitless.¹⁸⁷ We all stand at the precipice of inflaming the passions. We so easily “enkindle the passions, and are not ashamed.”¹⁸⁸ These “unruly passions” are aroused and “overmaster the feebleness of the mind.”¹⁸⁹ These passions “break out”¹⁹⁰ or “break through”¹⁹¹ the mind, and are characterized by a bent toward pleasure which is “a drug provocative of the passions.”¹⁹² Once again, the will is the locus of good and evil. Clement insists that desire does not come from the body even though it expresses itself through the body.¹⁹³ Passions reside in the soul and are subject to the power of reason.¹⁹⁴ But humans are always subject to such perturbation,¹⁹⁵ even in dreams.¹⁹⁶

A thoroughgoing discussion of the passions can begin to temper what may be considered Clement’s optimistic approach to the spiritual life. He says the one who sins is “polluted,”¹⁹⁷ characterized by “disharmony,”¹⁹⁸ and experiences a certain “decay in the soul.”¹⁹⁹ This situation is characteristic of life in this world. Sin is an unfortunate mundane reality. So according to Clement there are three things in all people: habits, actions, and

¹⁸⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 (Ferguson, 233).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 197); *Paed.* 2.2; 3.11 (Roberts, 243, 284); *Strom.* 2.8, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23 (Ferguson, 185-6, 204, 206, 212, 229, 254); 4.18, 5.11; 6.15 (Roberts, 430, 460, 507).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, *Paed.* 3.11 (Roberts, 288).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.5 (Roberts, 250).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.1 (Roberts, 271).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 4.6 (Roberts, 415).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, *Paed.* 2.8 (Roberts, 255).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 3.4 (Roberts, 276).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.24 (Ferguson, 141).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.23 (Roberts, 437).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.22 (Roberts, 435).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Paed.* 2.10 (Roberts, 263).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 2.19 (Ferguson, 222).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.9 (Ferguson, 295).

passions.²⁰⁰ Some of these early Christian authors were inclined to specify what exactly constituted a passion. Very particular sins drew the ire of these theologians. For *The Shepherd of Hermas* it was the love of wealth,²⁰¹ and for Clement it was gluttony.²⁰² So for Clement, to capitulate to the passions is to love this fleeting world. This is fundamental. At its root sin is to side with the ephemeral,²⁰³ and is always characterized by unbelief.²⁰⁴ This disdain for the ephemeral was even (falsely) shared by Clement’s opponents. He claims the Gnostics taught that marriage—thought to be a fleeting institution—gives rise to the passions. Clement says the heretics see marriage as inherently sinful,²⁰⁵ and many even attribute such an act to the devil.²⁰⁶ His unequivocal response is to argue that marriage does not lack virtue. “No one should ever think that marriage under the rule of the Logos is a sin.”²⁰⁷

Another dominant motif in Clement’s hamartiology is his depiction of sin as irrational behavior. To acquiesce to the passions is to act against reason. Irrationality dovetails nicely with his emphasis on a life in conformity with nature or reason. This idea surfaces most often in the *Paedagogues* and produces some of his clearest definitions of sin in his entire corpus. At the end of Book One Clement offers a lucid account of irrationality.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., *Paed.* 1.1 (Roberts, 209).

²⁰¹ *The Shepherd of Hermas* calls a rich person “useless” (*Herm. Vis.* 1.3.6; Roberts, 15) unless he “bestows upon the poor man the riches which he received from the Lord” (*Herm. Sim.* 3.2.1; Roberts, 32). Not only are particular vices to be considered sin, but the lack of good is sin for the Shepherd. He says the exercising of restraint in doing good is a great sin (*Herm. Mand.* 2.8.1; Roberts, 25).

²⁰² “Some men, in truth, live that they may eat...But the Instructor enjoins us to eat that we may live,” (Clement, *Paed.* 2.1; Roberts, 237). Shortly after this he calls gluttons “all jaw, and nothing else,” (ibid., 2.1; Roberts, 238), and in the same breath speaks of how a diet that exceeds sufficiency brings harm, deteriorates one’s spirit, and renders the body susceptible to disease (ibid., 2.1; Roberts, 238). Indeed, too much food “drags the rational part of man down to a condition of stupidity (ibid., 2.9; Roberts, 258). For other specific sins see *Strom.* 7.7, 12 (Roberts, 533, 544).

²⁰³ Ibid., *Strom.* 2.4, 18 (Ferguson, 165, 211); 4.9 (Roberts, 422). Cf. *Prot.* 4 (Roberts, 188-90).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., *Strom.* 4.6 (Roberts, 415).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.18 (Ferguson, 322-3).

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 3.12 (Ferguson, 306).

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.9 (Ferguson, 297). Cf. ibid., 4.23 (Roberts, 436).

Everything that is contrary to right reason is sin. Accordingly, therefore, the philosophers think fit to define the most generic passions thus: lust, as desire disobedient to reason; fear, as weakness disobedient to reason; pleasure, as an elation of the spirit disobedient to reason. If, then, disobedience in reference to reason is the generating cause of sin, how shall we escape the conclusion, that obedience to reason—the Word—which we call faith, will of necessity be the efficacious cause of duty? For virtue itself is a state of the soul rendered harmonious by reason in respect to the whole life. Nay, to crown all, philosophy itself is pronounced to be the cultivation of right reason; so that, necessarily, whatever is done through error of reason is transgression, and is rightly called (ἀμάρτημα) sin...for he who transgresses against reason is no longer rational, but an irrational animal, given up to lusts by which he is ridden (as a horse by his rider). But that which is done right, in obedience to reason, the followers of the Stoics call προσῆκον and καθῆκον, that is, incumbent and fitting.²⁰⁸

By juxtaposing rationality (“the Word”) and irrationality (sin) Clement is able to give his readers a greater insight into the pedagogical nature of the Christian life. Our lives are in desperate need of the Instructor to guide against irrational desires. Such desires persist, according to Salvatore Lilla, because the irrational parts of the soul have not submitted themselves to reason which has been established by the Logos, that is, Christ.²⁰⁹ Clement does a similar thing at the end of Book One of the *Paedagogues* when he likens sin to irrational—animal—behavior.

Nay, to crown all, philosophy itself is pronounced to be the cultivation of right reason; so that, necessarily, whatever is done through error of reason is transgression, and is rightly called (ἀμάρτημα) sin. Since, then, the first man sinned and disobeyed God, it is said, “And man became like to the beasts:” being rightly regarded as irrational, he is likened to the beasts.²¹⁰

Clement stresses the role of reason a great deal. But they nevertheless share a commonality: sin is irrational, and such irrationality is characteristic of animals more than humans. In an intriguing section of the *Paedagogues* Clement asserts,

But irrational impulses must be curbed, lest, carrying us away through excessive relaxation, they impel us to voluptuousness. For luxury, that has dashed on to surfeit, is prone to kick up its heels and toss its mane, and shake off the charioteer, the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., *Paed.* 1.13 (Roberts, 235). Cf. *ibid.*, 1.9 (Roberts, 228); *Strom.* 3.15 (Ferguson, 317); *ibid.*, 4.6; 5.5 (Roberts, 416, 451).

²⁰⁹ Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 113.

²¹⁰ Clement, *Paed.* 1.13 (Roberts, 235). Cf. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 50.

Instructor; who, pulling back the reins from far, leads and drives to salvation the human horse—that is, the irrational part of the soul—which is wildly bent on pleasures, and vicious appetites, and precious stones, and gold, and variety of dress, and other luxuries.²¹¹

Later in the *Stromata* Clement will once again speak of sin in relation to the lower part of the soul. Here he asserts that “the turtle dove and the pigeon offered for sins point out that the cleansing of the irrational part of the soul is acceptable to God.”²¹² To sin is to live like animals who are “deprived of reason.”²¹³ The true Gnostic no longer succumbs to irrational desires.²¹⁴ Clement never shies away from his theological rationale for positing an irrational part of the soul.

Attenuated to the idea of irrationality is Clement’s understanding of sin as ignorance. No one chooses evil *qua* evil. A choice for evil is born out of ignorance.²¹⁵ A later expansion and clarification by him produces two sources of sin: ignorance and inability.²¹⁶ But this notion of ignorance is incorrect if understood as merely cognitive. It is in fact a spiritual ignorance. Thus he can say that ignorance characterizes our lives before Christ.²¹⁷ Absent the Divine Teacher the soul has no way of realizing spiritual realities. Therefore, the separation of the soul from truth leads to death.²¹⁸ Ignorance has in fact “swamped the soul’s perception” and is the result of bad training.²¹⁹ Again, his notion of ignorance and knowledge is always imbued with moral and spiritual significance. “Repentance is a slow form of

²¹¹ Clement, *Paed.* 3.11 (Roberts, 284). Clement’s affinity for Plato is seen clearly in this passage.

²¹² *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 7.6 (Roberts, 532).

²¹³ *Ibid.*, *Prot.* 10 (Roberts, 202).

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *Strom.* 7.11 (Roberts, 541).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.17 (Ferguson, 87).

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.16 (Roberts, 553).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.13 (Ferguson, 197).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.7 (Ferguson, 181).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.28 (Ferguson, 153). Later (2.18; Ferguson, 217-8) he equates sin with stupidity and irrationality.

knowledge. Knowledge is the first stage without sin.”²²⁰ Later in the same work he remarks that “ignorance is the starvation of the soul, and knowledge its sustenance.”²²¹ This knowledge is only gained through the Savior. Only Jesus can disperse such ignorance.²²² From this cursory glance one can easily see that ignorance plays an important role in Clement’s hamartiology.

Conclusion

This very brief survey has highlighted prominent motifs and exegetical strategies in second century attempts at sketching a doctrine of sin. The intense battle between the Gnostic and orthodox Christian interpretations of Scripture gives shape to the manner in which sin was articulated in this period. These authors sought to situate the text within the framework of their particular audiences’ needs. This can account for some of the diverse ways that these interpreters conceptualized sin. Both sides were fully cognizant that cosmological speculation had serious ethical and hamartiological ramifications. In light of this, various authors like Clement and Irenaeus argued for the goodness of God and his creation. The inevitable result of death does not make the act of birth something to be considered evil. In fact, many authors make efforts to speak of the goodness of birth as well as the innocence of infants. With regard to the sin of Adam we see some divergence. Irenaeus comes closest to questioning this innocence when positing a sense of solidarity with Adam. As the discussion turned more directly to volitional sin we saw that these authors spoke with relative unanimity with regard to sin’s location in the will. This became attenuated for Clement and others with a thorough understanding of the role of the passions. He understands a rise in the passions to occur when one has violated nature or reason. Several Stoic elements

²²⁰ Ibid., 2.6 (Ferguson, 176). Cf. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 308, clarifies the intent of early Christian authors when he remarks, “When knowledge is understood as participation and fellowship, love is its natural, indeed necessary, accompaniment.”

²²¹ Ibid., 7.12 (Roberts, 543).

²²² Ibid., *QDS* 4 (Butterworth, 279). In fact, Clement posits three states of the soul: ignorance, opinion, and knowledge, *Strom.* 7.16 (Roberts, 553).

are prominent in his thinking. Other hamartiological motifs like ignorance, corruption, irrationality, and the image of God were also explored and have a bearing on our forthcoming study.

The salient features of Clement's understanding of sin displayed in this chapter will situate Origen clearly at a later point in this study. As we move forward it will become very clear that Origen's own convictions on volitional sin owe a great deal to his teacher. But even here Origen will go much further than Clement in terms of breadth, depth, and clarity. The tone changes, however, with regard to their understanding of original sin. In the next chapter I will explore Origen's conception of original sin in the *Commentary on Romans*. His understanding will converge and diverge sharply from many of these second century theologians. The sense of solidarity found in Irenaeus will be extended by Origen into a more thoroughgoing understanding of inherited sin. He will add to this rationale a doctrine of infant baptism. These components are Origen's major contributions to discussions of original sin in the third century and one of the vital reasons for the present study.

Sin in Origen's Corpus

As this study transitions into an examination of Origen's teaching on sin in his corpus we take note of our author's inheritance of an evolving theological tradition. As he seeks to give this tradition more depth and coherence we will notice the emergence of certain themes. He is concerned to address many of the same areas as his predecessors in his early Alexandrian writings all the way through his Caesarean writings. The Gnostic threat looms large for our author and his attempt to counter it shapes his own doctrine of sin. While his doctrine of sin shares many of the same characteristics as that of Clement, some significant areas are notable for their departure and nuance. In the following pages I will sketch Origen's doctrine of sin in his wider corpus. The order will follow that found in the rest of the thesis: an examination of original sin followed by an examination of volitional sin.

Original Sin

In this section I will argue that Origen rarely ever taught a notion of original sin as will be seen in the *Commentary on Romans*. But there is a caveat. In speaking of original sin

I am speaking of an inheritance of sin from Adam at birth. He did, however, teach of a preexistent fall of souls. This is a teaching that can be construed by some as a doctrine of original sin.

The nature of the consequences of Adam's sin is the subject of intense debate in our own time. In the third century, while no direct polemical evidence survives, the church witnessed a range of meanings given to it. As we saw in the analysis above many early Christian authors were inclined to understand Adam's sin as that of a youth who had not reached maturity. The consequences of such sin were such that death was spread to humanity, not sin. Only Irenaeus offers a possible alternative to this reading. With Origen the picture becomes simultaneously clearer and more muddled. As we will see later in his *Commentary on Romans* he is inclined to understand Adam to have passed on sin to his descendents. This was not characteristic of his earlier writings.

To appreciate Origen's notion of a "theology of Adam" we must begin with his famous teaching on the preexistent fall in *On First Principles*. The task is exceedingly difficult when one takes into account various statements throughout his corpus that speak of Adam in less than historical terms. For instance, in an arcane passage in the *Contra Celsum* Origen offers a reading of Romans 5:14 as part of his refutation of Celsus.

Just as in this matter those who are concerned to defend the doctrine of providence state their case at great length and with arguments of considerable cogency, so also the story of Adam and his sin will be interpreted philosophically by those who know that Adam means *anthropos* (man) in the Greek language, and that in what appears to be concerned with Adam Moses is speaking of the nature of man. For, as the Bible says, 'in Adam all die', and they were condemned in 'the likeness of Adam's transgression'. Here the divine Word says this not so much about an individual as of the whole race. Moreover, in the sequence of sayings which seem to refer to one individual, the curse of Adam is shared by all men.²²³

The picture is muddled even further by the fact that Origen's *Commentary on Genesis* is lost and exists only in fragmentary form. His *Homilies on Genesis* survive to a

²²³ Origen, *Cels.* 4.40. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 228-9, sees this as a reversion back to his earlier theory of an immense number of individual prenatal falls.

limited extent and betray a tendency to allegorize much of the first two chapters of Genesis.²²⁴ Such an approach is found as far back as Book Four of *On First Principles*. Here he denies—even mocks—the idea that the opening chapters of Genesis should be taken in a literal fashion. Instead, they are “figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events.”²²⁵ In Book Thirteen of his *Commentary on John* he depicts prelapsarian Adam and Eve as *perfect* (τέλειος) creatures and questions anyone who would suggest otherwise.²²⁶ The testimony of Procopius (6th C.) casts doubt on whether Origen held to a belief in full corporeality in Genesis 1-3. His own *Commentary on Genesis* contains a critique of Origen’s interpretation of “dazzling” (*augoeides*) bodies that must be clothed with the “coats of skin” (cf. Gen 3:21).²²⁷ Origen makes no mention of the “coats of skin” in the *Commentary on Romans*. In his first homily on Ezekiel Origen seems to grant a measure of historicity to the Garden account. Both literal and allegorical readings are in play and he includes an allusion to a “place of tears,” an allusion we will find in the *Commentary on Romans*.²²⁸ All these statements testify to the fact that our author clearly has a very fluid concept of Adam in his writings.

²²⁴ His exposition provides an account of his tripartite anthropology as well as a depiction of humanity’s creation in the image of God, Origen, *hom. in Gen.* 1.15, 13, respectively.

²²⁵ Origen, *princ.* 4.3.1 (Butterworth, 288).

²²⁶ Origen, *Jo.* 13.239-241: “I think indeed some deeper mystery is stored up in these passages. For perhaps the rational creature (τὸ λογικὸν) was not altogether imperfect (ἀτελής) at the time he was placed in paradise. For how would God have placed what was altogether imperfect (ἀτελής) in paradise to work and guard it? For he who is capable of tending ‘the tree of life’ and everything that God planted and caused to spring up afterwards, would not reasonably be called imperfect (ἀτελής). Perhaps, then, although he was perfect (τέλειος), he became imperfect (ἀτελής) in some way because of his transgression, and was in need of one to perfect (τελειώσουτος) him from his imperfection (ἀτελεία),” in *Origène: Commentaire sur saint Jean*, edited by Cécile Blanc, SC 222 (Paris: Cerf, 1975), 158-60; *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Books 13-32*, translated by Ronald Heine, FOTC 89 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 117-8.

²²⁷ Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, 91. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), 90, says that while the Gnostics interpreted the “coats of skins” as bodies, Origen remained uncertain about this. In the *Contra Celsum* (4.40) Origen says they contain “a secret and mysterious meaning, superior to the Platonic doctrine of the descent of the soul.” In his sixth homily on Leviticus the “coats of skin” are “a symbol of the mortality which he (Adam) received because of his skin and of his frailty which came from the corruption of the flesh,” *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 6.2.7; *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus*, translated by Gary Wayne Barkley, FOTC 83 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 120.

²²⁸ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 1.3.7 (Scheck, 31).

Deciphering a “theology of Adam” is a notoriously difficult area of Origen’s thought. The attempt to disentangle his comments and construct such a theology has occupied the likes of Bürke,²²⁹ Simonetti,²³⁰ Crouzel,²³¹ Cornélis,²³² Pisi,²³³ Harl,²³⁴ Gasparro,²³⁵ Bammel,²³⁶ and Martens.²³⁷ The scope of each attempt is varied and all options have their respective merits and difficulties. In his recent essay Peter W. Martens has argued persuasively that Origen mapped onto the opening chapters of Genesis a theology of the preexistence. Thus Origen reads the opening chapters of Genesis from an entirely cosmic perspective. When Scripture says, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” this “beginning” (*arche/principio*) can refer to none other than Christ—the firstborn of every creature (cf. Col 1:15).²³⁸ The “heaven” of Genesis 1:1 refers to the world of rational creatures (“minds”) in the preexistence.²³⁹ Martens’ analysis is delimited to that which pertains directly to Origen’s remarks on the book of Genesis. He is not attempting in this essay to offer an overarching account of the entire Fall episode and admits that Origen could have read these

²²⁹ G. Bürke, “Des Origenes Lehre vom Urstand des Menschen,” *ZKT* 72 (1950), 1-39.

²³⁰ Manlio Simonetti, “Alcune Osservazioni sull’ Interpretazione Origeniana di Genesi 2, 7 e 3, 21,” *Aevum* 36 (1962), 370-81; *ibid.*, “Didymiana,” *VetC* 21 (1984), 129-55.

²³¹ Henri Crouzel, “L’anthropologie d’Origène: de l’archē au telos,” 42-5.

²³² H. Cornélis, “Les Fondements cosmologiques de l’eschatologie d’Origène,” *RSPT* 43 (1959), 222 n213; 217 n193.

²³³ Paolo Pisi, “Peccato di Adamo e caduta dei NOES nell’esegesi Origeniana,” *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2-6 September 1984)*, edited by Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 322-35.

²³⁴ Marguerite Harl, “La préexistence des âmes dans l’oeuvre d’Origène,” 238-58.

²³⁵ G. Sfamini Gasparro, “Doppia creazione e peccato di Adamo nel ‘Peri Archon’: fondamenti biblici e presupposti platonici dell’esegesi origeniana,” *Origeniana Secunda*, edited by Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli (Rome: Edizioni dell’Anteono, 1980), 57-67.

²³⁶ Bammel, “Adam in Origen.”

²³⁷ Peter W. Martens, “Origen’s Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis,” *ZAC* 16 (2013), 516-49.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 524.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 525-6.

chapters differently.²⁴⁰ So we are left with a fluid theology of Adam in Origen's writings. He sees little need to offer an overarching account of how the preexisting fall of souls accords with a terrestrial fall in the Garden. Such an account would have given greater shape to a cogent doctrine of original sin.

Origen's reading of Romans produces little in the way of inherited sin. The quotations and allusions we have of this verse throughout his writings demonstrate with some results expounded more than others. Interestingly, no mention is made of Romans 5:12 in *On First Principles*. In fact, he makes no mention of the fifth chapter of Romans at all in this work! In Book Ten of the *Commentary on John* we have a clear allusion to this text. Here Origen says,

For as 'through one man' came 'death,' so also through one man came the justification of life. Without the man, we would have received no benefit from the Word, if he had remained God as he was in the beginning with the Father, and not taken up the man who was first of all men, and more precious than all, and purer than all, being able to receive him.²⁴¹

This text is found in the midst of a protracted refutation of Marcion's alleged docetism and therefore does not bring with it much hamartiological extrapolation. But later in the same commentary we do possess a more thoroughgoing exposition of this passage which deserves to be quoted at length.

And we must assume that it is of this particular death that the Apostle says, 'Wherefore, as through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and so death passed to all men, because all have sinned, for until the law, sin was in the world (for sin is not imputed when there is no law), but death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who have not sinned in the likeness of Adam's transgression.' And a little further on, he adds, 'For if by one man's transgression death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and righteousness reign in life through the one man, Christ Jesus.' For what is that death, which has come into the world through sin, if it is not the last enemy of Christ that will be destroyed? And what is that death, which passed to all men because all have sinned, if it is not this very death that also reigned from Adam to Moses? Now Moses, that is, the law, continued until the sojourn of our Lord Jesus, and ruled 'by one man's

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 520, "Nor will I suggest that he (Origen) read the opening chapters of Genesis *exclusively* as an allegory of pre-existent souls and their fall. It is important to recognize that he interpreted these chapters in multiple registers, sometimes literally and at other times allegorically."

²⁴¹ Origen, *Jo.* 10.26 (Heine, 80:261).

transgression,’ ‘through that one man,’ until ‘those who have received the abundance of grace and righteousness should reign in life through the one Christ Jesus.’ Whoever, then, has kept the word of the Only-Begotten and Firstborn of all creation will never see this death, since it is the nature of the Word to prevent death from being seen. And this is how we must understand the words, ‘If any man keep my word, he shall not see death forever.’ It is as if he who speaks these words had given those who hear them light as a gift and said, If anyone keeps this light of mine, he will never see darkness.²⁴²

Origen does not seem to have in mind any notion of inherited sin in his reading of Romans 5:12. Even though he composed the *Commentary on John* well before his *Commentary on Romans*,²⁴³ this difference has less to do with time than it does with the text. Origen’s interaction with the Epistle to the Romans forced him to alter his position. This seems to be the case when one reads his *Homilies on Ezekiel*. Composed before the writing of the *Commentary on Romans*,²⁴⁴ Origen wrestles with Ezekiel’s statement, “For the depravity of your soul on the day on which you were born (Ezek. 16:5).” Origen immediately asks the question, “Can anyone have depravity of soul on the very day of birth?”²⁴⁵ He seems a bit dismissive of the possibility but does not reject it outright, either. There are, however, a couple of references to sin at birth in Origen’s writings. These will be taken up in the next chapter and do not need to be explained presently. But his comments in the *Homilies on Leviticus* and the late *Contra Celsum* provide sufficient evidence that he is shifting his position on this issue.

So there is only a little evidence that Origen interpreted Romans 5:12 or any other passage along the lines of inherited sin before the composition of the *Commentary on Romans*. As we will see in the next chapter Origen is more willing to admit inherited sin when he pens his *Commentary on Romans* and the *Contra Celsum*, writings composed in the late 240s. This is a significant departure from the teachings of his predecessor Clement as

²⁴² Origen, *Jo.* 20.364-368 (Heine, 89:280-1).

²⁴³ Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 13–32*, 14, concludes that Origen composed the *Commentary on John* over a period of several years from 231 to 241 or 242.

²⁴⁴ Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Homilies 1–14 on Ezekiel*, 3, following Marcel Borret, dates these homilies to 239-242, four to seven years before the *Commentary on Romans*.

²⁴⁵ Origen, *hom. 1–14 in Ezech.* 6.7.1 (Scheck, 93).

well as a fairly significant breach in the dogmatic tradition, especially the developing Eastern tradition.

Volitional Sin

Origen's teaching on volitional sin in his corpus is directed by his teaching on anthropology, and the shape of his anthropology is in large part a response to his Gnostic opponents. The Gnostic doctrine of natures is a major theme in Origen's writings and can be found in almost all of his works from his early period well into his Caesarean writings. In his early *On First Principles* it appears as an imminent threat. In Book One he alludes to the Gnostic understanding of fixed natures by referencing certain Gnostics who teach that some inherently possess "spiritual natures."²⁴⁶ A little later in Book One Origen intensifies his polemic against this Gnostic doctrine. Here he calls the doctrine of natures "silly and impious fables"²⁴⁷ and asserts that the Gnostics have arrived at this position due to improper cosmological speculation. Erroneous is the deduction that one's nature—good or evil—derives from different creators. The Creator is one. The presence of good and evil is a reality found in any one individual.

Our contention is, however, that among all rational creatures there is none which is not capable of both good and evil. But it does not necessarily follow that, because we say there is no nature which cannot admit evil, we therefore affirm that every nature has admitted evil, that is, has become evil. Just as we may say that every human nature possesses the capacity to become a sailor; or again that it is possible for every man to learn the art of grammar or medicine, and yet this does not prove that every man is either a doctor or a schoolmaster: so when we say that there is no nature which cannot admit evil, we do not necessarily indicate that every nature has actually done so; nor on the other hand will the statement that there is no nature which may not admit good prove that every nature has admitted what is good.²⁴⁸

This threat looms large in his other writings as well. His *Commentary on John* is composed in part as a response to the Gnostic Heracleon's exegesis of the same book.²⁴⁹ The

²⁴⁶ Origen, *princ.* 1.7.2 (Butterworth, 60).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.8.2 (Butterworth, 68).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.8.3 (Butterworth, 69-70).

²⁴⁹ Cf. Ronald E. Heine, "Introduction," in *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 6-7, where he perceptively

fatalistic teaching of predetermined natures devalues the will and undermines any case for ethics. Sin is rendered moot. Furthermore, this doctrine of natures is part of a greater issue related to material existence. Origen, like many other Christian authors, sees in the Gnostics a persistent denigration of the material world. This denigration undermines the value of life here in the terrestrial realm. Additionally, it is frequently attenuated to a denial of the true humanity of the Savior. The response to the docetic threat is something we will see Origen take on in force in his *Commentary on Romans*, but is present in other works like the *Commentary on John* where he accuses Marcion of denying that Jesus was born of Mary.²⁵⁰

The Gnostic teaching on fixed natures forces Origen to sketch a coherent doctrine of the human constitution. He never ceases to affirm the goodness of God's creation. So it is in this vein of thought that he can also say that the constitution of man is a microcosm of God's wider creation.²⁵¹ Moreover, he gives this more theological and apologetical force by arguing for his tripartite understanding of the human person. Origen finds coherence in the human constitution through Scripture. The key text for his understanding the human constitution is 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (ESV). His philological approach to the Scriptures demands that he take this passage at face value. He then employs it throughout his corpus to argue for the tripartite nature of humans. The tripartite anthropological teaching can be found in almost all of his writings. In his famous speculation about the two souls theory in Book Three of *On First Principles* Origen simply assumes the threefold nature of the human constitution. "[W]e must...inquire whether there is in us, that is, in men who consist of soul and body and 'vital

states, "While Origen obviously intended to refute Heracleon's understanding of John, he seems to have had a broader goal in mind. Heracleon's comments are not the focus of Origen's arguments in the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* in the way that Celsus' comments are the focus of his arguments in the *Against Celsus*. The latter work is structured by Celsus' attacks on Christians and Origen's responses to those attacks. There are, however, large sections in the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* where there is no reference to Heracleon. Heracleon's work may have been the stimulus that moved Origen to action, but he seems to have intended to write a commentary that would be independent of Heracleon's work, and that would provide an interpretation of John's Gospel that would appeal to Christian intellectuals."

²⁵⁰ Origen, *Jo.* 10.24 (Heine, 80:260-1).

²⁵¹ Origen, *hom. 1-16 in Gen.* 1.11 (Heine, 61).

spirit', something else besides which possesses a peculiar inclination and movement in the direction of evil."²⁵² But *On First Principles* is not the place where Origen chooses to elaborate much on this. Other works would prove more conducive for extrapolating his anthropology.

Origen understands these three aspects of the person in terms of an inherent hierarchy. In *On First Principles* he labors to demonstrate that the Apostle elevates the spirit over the soul. "He does not say, I will pray with the soul, but with the spirit and the mind; not, sing with the soul, but sing with the spirit and the mind."²⁵³ Later in the same work he relates this hierarchy to the interpretation of Scripture. "For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."²⁵⁴ The "simple man" is edified by the "flesh" of Scripture. The one who has made "some progress" is edified by the "soul" of Scripture. But the one who is "perfect" is edified by the "spiritual law."²⁵⁵ This notion of gradations is no minor point. It is in fact critical in understanding his doctrine of sin. This much can be seen from his sixth homily on Judges. This homily contains some of his most concentrated teaching on his anthropology in his entire corpus. In this homily he states,

If, therefore, the spirit reigns in you and the body submits, if you cast desires of the flesh under the yoke of the commandment, if you suppress the nations of vices with the tighter reins of your sobriety, deservedly you will be called a king, you who would be made new to rule yourself rightly.²⁵⁶

Origen here subtly lays out his entire conception of the tripartite constitution with its attendant ethical import. Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro notes this fact. "Here Origen highlights his tripartite anthropology of the human person and how the three parts—spirit, soul, and body—work either harmoniously under the direction of the spirit or in disharmony

²⁵² Origen, *princ.* 3.4.1 (Butterworth, 230).

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.8.2 (Butterworth, 122).

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.2.4 (Butterworth, 276).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Origen, *hom. 1–9 in Jud.* 6.3 (Lauro, 89). Cf. also *ibid.* 6.4, 5.

and confusion under the direction of the fleshly tendencies of the body.²²⁵⁷ These fleshly tendencies of the body constitute a usurpation of the God-given design of the tripartite structure.

In Origen's understanding everyone knows how and when this tripartite structure is usurped, that is, every individual has the capacity of knowing right from wrong. Even those without the saving knowledge of Christ have in their possession natural law. This is a major theme in the *Commentary on Romans* and will appear in Chapter Three of the present study. Throughout his writings Origen imbibes prevailing Stoic terminology to elucidate his conception of natural law, the soul, and the parameters of sin.²⁵⁸ I will return to this idea shortly.

This notion of the human constitution is bound up in a theology of free will. Since the tripartite anthropology is Origen's framework for a discussion of sin and ethics, and sin undermines this God-given structure, then it is important to say a word about the role of the will. It is common knowledge that Origen is the champion of free will in the early church. His writings testify to an overwhelming emphasis on the will's freedom to choose good or evil. Faced with the perceived Gnostic threat of determinism, Origen responds frequently with unqualified praise of the will's ability. He consistently speaks of the freedom of the will in almost all of his works,²⁵⁹ and stands against any form of fatalism.²⁶⁰ This point does not need belaboring. But he does not always provide sufficient reasons as to *why* the will chooses evil. In his *Homilies on Ezekiel* he does provide one possible reason. He makes a point to say that demons are responsible for many of our sins.²⁶¹ While he shares this characteristic with

²⁵⁷ Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *Origen: Homilies on Judges* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 89 n44.

²⁵⁸ Cf., e.g., *hom. I-26 in Jos.* 15.3.

²⁵⁹ E.g., *hom. I-9 in Jud.* 6.2 (Lauro, 88); *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 1.3.8 (Scheck, 32); *I-28 in Num.* 14.2.6 (Scheck, 82).

²⁶⁰ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 1.10.2 (Scheck, 39).

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.11.1 n27 (Scheck, 185).

Clement, this rationale will change by the time he composes the *Commentary on Romans*. The latter work is colored by more pessimism with regard to the will than other works.

The false choice of the will gives rise to the passions. Throughout his corpus he demonstrates a great deal of consistency in this regard. Themes that will find full development in the *Commentary on Romans* are found in seed form in many other works. One of the clearest of these involves the relationship between natural law and the rise of the passions. Recalling our earlier discussion of natural law, we are now able to discern better the critical role of natural law in Origen's thought. It is an essential component in establishing any framework of Origen's doctrine of sin. This is evident when he offers one of his occasional "definitions" of sin throughout his corpus. In Book One of *On First Principles* he offers a clear and succinct definition of sin.

[W]e must know that every being which is endowed with reason and yet fails to adhere to the ends and ordinances laid down by reason, is undoubtedly involved in sin by this departure from what is just and right.²⁶²

This working definition comes early in his chapter on rational natures. This statement is critical in that his notion of sin is organized around and attenuated to his understanding of natural law. People are without excuse. This idea will appear with striking clarity later when we examine his *Commentary on Romans*. This fact is even more so for Christians for whom he addresses in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*. "There is no kind of sin about which Scripture is silent or fails to instruct its readers."²⁶³

Sin is an abnormality that runs against the grain of reason or the dictates of Scripture. It is an aberration and is out of accord with God's design for creation. Thus Origen laments the "harsh noise of sin,"²⁶⁴ the "wound of sin" that kills the soul,²⁶⁵ and concludes that sin is in fact "bitter."²⁶⁶ Everyone who sins "hides himself from God, flees His coming, and is

²⁶² Origen, *princ.* 1.5.2 (Butterworth, 44).

²⁶³ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 2.1.1 (Scheck, 46).

²⁶⁴ Origen, *hom. I-9 in Jud.* 6.3 (Lauro, 90).

²⁶⁵ Origen, *hom. I-26 in Jos.* 15.1 (Bruce, 139).

²⁶⁶ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 12.1.2 (Scheck, 147).

removed from boldness.²⁶⁷ Sin is injuring and dishonoring to God.²⁶⁸ He even goes as far as to say that the one who sins “curses the divine Word.”²⁶⁹ Sin, in the form of impure thoughts, may in fact “betray us on the day of judgment.”²⁷⁰ But not all sins are equal. Origen certainly believes there are different degrees of sin. He asserts there are greater and lesser sins,²⁷¹ at one point calling pride the greatest of sins.²⁷² Occasionally, he speaks about sin as debt, a theme that will become more prominent in his *Commentary on Romans*. In his work *On Prayer* he says we remain debtors to God because we have sinned against him.²⁷³ The language of debt leads Origen to think of all the different aspects of debt in life. He winds back to a discussion of sin by stating, “The one who tries very hard to become like this from a certain time, so that he is in debt for none of the things that might remain unpaid when they fall due, can rightly get this release. But those unlawful deeds that are marked in the governing mind become the bond that stands against us.”²⁷⁴

Thus the aforementioned themes all seem to come together in a passage found in his *Homilies on Genesis*.

“[N]ow if the soul, which has been united with the spirit and, so to speak, joined in wedlock, turn aside at some time to bodily pleasures and turn back its inclination to the delight of the flesh and at one time indeed appear to obey the salutary warnings of the spirit, but at another time yield to carnal vices, such a soul, as if defiled by adultery of the body, is said properly neither to increase nor multiply, since indeed Scripture designates the sons of adulterers as imperfect.”²⁷⁵

²⁶⁷ Origen, *or.* 23.4 (Greer, 128).

²⁶⁸ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 12.1.3 (Scheck, 148).

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, *or.* 22.3 (Greer, 124).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *hom. I-26 in Jos.* 21.2 (Bruce, 188).

²⁷¹ Origen, *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 9.2.1 (Scheck, 119). Cf. also *hom. I-26 in Jos.* 2.2.3 (Bruce, 25).

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.2.2 (Scheck, 119-20).

²⁷³ Origen, *or.* 28.3 (Greer, 148).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.5 (Greer, 149).

²⁷⁵ Origen, *hom. I-16 in Gen.* 1.15 (Heine, 68).

Conversely, concord is reached with soul and spirit when one advances in spiritual progress. To sin is to choose the ephemeral. The soul has been seduced by the things of this world. “But when our soul is involved in worldly cares, when it always burns with the hunger to have more, we are not setting our face on the things that God has commanded, but on things that are opposed to God’s precepts.”²⁷⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that Origen sees a close association between the vices and the body.²⁷⁷ But this does not tell the whole story. He sees the soul as active in any condition of sinning. As such he can say that sin can “proceed from the inclination of the soul and the thought of the heart, or...brought forth from bodily desires and the impulses of the flesh.”²⁷⁸ Origen is clear here and throughout his works that good and evil thoughts proceed from the heart.²⁷⁹ Indeed, every sin makes an impression on the heart.²⁸⁰

The passions constitute a living reality for Origen. This is interpreted differently by other theologians in this period. As we have seen, for Clement the ideal is to achieve the passionless state. The ideal of *apatheia* is central to his theology. The notion of *apatheia* is almost entirely foreign to Origen’s thinking. In Chapter Four I will show that Origen diverges significantly from his teacher on this matter.

Conclusion

This examination has served a twofold purpose. It has situated Origen within both the wider context of early Christian anthropology and hamartiology as well as his own writings. Some salient features have emerged. Scattered throughout his corpus one can detect that Origen is attempting to craft a coherent doctrine of sin. It remains somewhat inchoate. He will only achieve this fully in his *Commentary on Romans*. His consistent teaching on the

²⁷⁶ Origen, *hom. I–14 in Ezech.* 3.1.2 (Scheck, 55).

²⁷⁷ Origen, *hom. I–16 in Gen.* 1.17 (Heine, 70).

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.16 (Heine, 69).

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.8 (Heine, 57).

²⁸⁰ Origen, *hom. I–26 in Jos.* 16.10.3 (Bruce, 178).

preexistent fall of souls will later be complemented by a more terrestrial notion of Adam's fall. In terms of volitional sin Origen's robust understanding of natural law is maintained throughout his career. His early definition of sin in *On First Principles* will almost exactly mirror one of his later definitions in the *Commentary on Romans* and demonstrates a concern to elucidate clear parameters for volitional sin. Additionally, the passions play a significant role in his theology of sin and can be seen throughout his commentaries and his homilies, works with a decidedly exhortative tone.

We now turn to Origen's teaching on sin in the *Commentary on Romans*. In this commentary Origen will utilize many of the above themes while bringing them a great deal more theological cogency. But he will also diverge. A considerable point of divergence is his understanding of original sin. In the *Commentary on Romans* one encounters his most articulate expression of this doctrine to date.

CHAPTER TWO: ORIGINAL SIN

Introduction

The second century “hermeneutical map” of sin offered in Chapter One provides the context for the present examination of Origen’s understanding of sin in the *Commentary on Romans*. The first step in such an examination is to conceive of how Origen understands original sin. This conception will be understood along the following lines. The preexistent fall of souls is encapsulated in a mystical, yet historical, fall of Adam in the Garden. The taint of this sin is shared by all humanity *ab initio* and expresses itself through the loss of the image of God and the spread of corruption and death. Origen’s theology of infant baptism functions as a way of cleansing the birth stain as well as inherited sin from Adam. Such an anthropology therefore exhibits traits often thought to be characteristic of both Greek and Latin thought. The *Commentary on Romans* affords a unique glimpse into Origen’s thinking on original sin. As such, the following pages seek to offer the most comprehensive account of his teaching on this debated topic to date.

This chapter is divided into two main sections: an overview of original sin and my analysis of original sin. In this first section I will proceed along three broad lines. I will briefly survey Origen’s comments on Adam’s sin. I will then survey his teaching on infant baptism. This section will conclude with a survey of scholarship on Origen’s interpretation of these three references. The second section of this chapter will be much longer and will proceed along five broad lines. I will first demonstrate a plausible way to account for Origen’s integration of his doctrine of the preexistent fall and his theology of Adam in the commentary. Then I will offer a textual analysis of relevant “Adam” passages in the commentary in order to demonstrate further that Origen’s direct engagement with the Apostle caused a reevaluation of his own understanding of human nature. Next I will examine Origen’s theology of infant baptism and show how this teaching is necessitated by an understanding of inherited sin. Here I will demonstrate that Origen’s theology stands at a critical nexus in the church’s understanding of the innocence or sinfulness of children. In the fourth section I will explore original sin from the perspective of the image of God. This

chapter will conclude with an analysis of his theology of death and dominion in the commentary. An understanding of all of these elements will be critical in grasping Origen's teaching on original sin in the *Commentary on Romans*. These elements are not to be understood as disparate, but rather interwoven exegetical and theological threads, creating a deeper and more balanced articulation of original sin than offered in previous analyses of Origen's hamartiology.

Original Sin: Overview

The reading of Romans inevitably brings the reader into direct interaction with Paul's thought concerning human nature. Origen's interaction with the Apostle in the *Commentary on Romans* shows that the elucidation of human nature is one of our author's primary interests. Here Origen provides his most provocative and theologically penetrating insights in his entire corpus. In this section I will offer an overview of his statements on the sin of Adam, the need for infant baptism, and the responses this has engendered in patristic scholarship over the last two centuries.

Original Sin and Adam

In at least two places in his *Commentary on Romans* Origen seems to teach a very nascent doctrine of what can be described as inherited sin. Both of these are found in his exegesis of Romans 5:12-21. The first instance of this teaching is in his discussion of Romans 5:12-14: "Therefore, just as sin came into this world through one man, and death through sin, and so death passed through to all men in that (*in quo*)²⁸¹ all have sinned. For sin was in the world until the law. But sin is not imputed when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, in those who sinned in the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a type of that which was to come." Origen's exegesis of this passage is

²⁸¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:358; Scheck, 103:303), where I have retained both Hammond Bammel's text (*in quo*) and Scheck's translation ("in that"). In the footnote to this text Scheck notes, "Possibly 'in which' or 'in whom' or 'because.' Elsewhere (*Jo.* 20.39) Origen interprets the ἐφ' ᾧ of Rom 5.12 causally, i.e., 'because' or 'in that.' In the present section he is somewhat ambivalent. He seems to allow the interpretation of *in quo* as a relative clause, i.e., 'in whom,' namely in Adam. See 5.1 below. However nowhere does Origen develop the concept of guilt inherited or imputed from Adam, as taught by Augustine and Ambrosiaster in the subsequent doctrine of original sin."

the longest single chapter of the entire commentary and his approach is notably careful and methodical. In his elucidation of 5:12a he notes,

If then Levi, who is born in the fourth generation after Abraham, is declared as having been in the loins of Abraham, how much more were all men, those who are born and have been born in this world, in Adam's loins when he was still in paradise. And all men who were with him, or rather in him, were expelled from paradise when he was himself driven out from there; and through him the death which had come to him from the transgression consequently passed through to them as well, who were dwelling in his loins; and therefore the Apostle rightly says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." So then it is neither from the serpent who had sinned before the woman, nor from the woman who had become a transgressor before the man, but through Adam, from whom all mortals derive their origin, that sin is said to have entered, and through sin, death.²⁸²

Origen does not elaborate on this. Shortly after this he takes up the ἐφ' ᾧ (*in quo*) construction. As we will see later he interprets this construction in a *casual* manner.²⁸³ He understands the sins attributed to each person as his or her own volitional sins.

The second passage indicating a teaching on inherited sin is found in his comments on Romans 5:18: "Accordingly just as the trespass of the one came condemnation to all men, so also through the righteousness of the one comes the justification of life to all men." Here he revisits some of his previous language regarding Adam's sin.

And this was the condemnation for his transgression which doubtless spread to all men. For everyone was fashioned in that place of humiliation and in the valley of tears; whether because all who are born from him were in Adam's loins and were

²⁸² Ibid. 5.1: "Si ergo Leui qui generatione quarta post Abraham nascitur in lumbis Abrahae fuisse perhibetur, multo magis omnes homines qui in hoc mundo nascuntur et nati sunt in lumbis erant Adae cum adhuc esset in paradiso et omnes homines cum ipso uel in ipso expulsi sunt de paradiso cum ipse inde depulsus est; et per ipsum mors quae ei ex praeuaricatione uenerat consequenter et in eos pertransiit qui in lumbis eius habebantur; et ideo recte apostolus dicit: 'sicut enim in Adam omnes moriuntur ita et in Christo omnes uiuificabuntur.' Neque ergo ex serpente qui ante mulierem peccauerat neque ex muliere quae ante uirum in praeuaricatione facta est sed per Adam ex quo omnes mortales originem ducunt dicitur introisse peccatum et per peccatum mors," (Hammond Bammel, 33:368-9). Pelagius understands Romans 5:12 in the following manner: "By example or by pattern. Just as through Christ righteousness was recovered at a time when it survived in almost no one. And just as through the former's sin death came in, so also through the latter's righteousness life was regained. As long as they sin the same way, they likewise die," *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, translated and edited by Theodore de Bruyn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 92.

²⁸³ Here we must recall that "*in quo*" is Rufinus' 5th century Latin rendering of this clause (as it was for Augustine), and Scheck is correct in his English translation to render causally (i.e., "in that").

equally expelled with him or, in some other inexplicable fashion known only to God, each person seems to be driven out of paradise and to have received condemnation.²⁸⁴

This passage is of note because Origen makes a stronger connection between Paul's teaching on Adam in Romans to the Adam story in Genesis. In this context Origen treats Adam in largely historical terms.²⁸⁵ This is a rarity in his theology. I will revisit the historicity of Adam later in this chapter when I connect it when the preexistent fall.

This brief look at two comments in Origen's exegesis of Romans 5:12-21 demonstrates the need to examine carefully his language and theology regarding Adam and sin. It would be naïve and remiss to bypass these statements without considering very carefully Origen's exegetical approach and theological rationale. But these are not the only statements that require attentive examination. At least one more statement serves as a striking example that Origen is operating with a more thoroughgoing understanding of original sin.

Original Sin and Infant Baptism

The previous passages should remain in conversation with Origen's testimony to the practice of infant baptism. His defense of infant baptism comes within the context of his exegesis of Romans 6:6: "We know that our old man was crucified together with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." Here Origen labors over whether Paul's use of "body of sin" is metaphorical or literal. He concludes it is both. It metaphorically applies as the converse of the "body of Christ."²⁸⁶ It literally applies to the physical body born into the world under the auspices of sin.

For which sin (*peccato*) is this one dove offered? Was a newly born child able to sin (*peccare*)? And yet it has a sin (*peccatum*) for which sacrifices are commanded to

²⁸⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.4: "[E]t haec fuit delicti eius condemnatio quae in omnes homines sine dubio peruenit. Omnes enim in loco hoc humiliationis et in conuale fletus effecti sunt; siue quod in lumbis Adae fuerunt omnes qui ex eo nascuntur et cum ipso pariter eiecti sunt, siue alio quolibet inenarrabili modo et soli Deo cognito unusquisque de paradiso trusus uidetur et excepisse condemnationem," (Hammond Bammel, 33:407). Cf. *ibid.*, 3.2.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "Adamo," in *Origene: Dizionario la cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, edited by Adele Monaci Castagno (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2000), 3, "In due contesti, rispettivamente dal *CRm* e dal *Commento sulla prima lettera ai Corinzi*, il peccato di Adamo si configura come evento pienamente storico determinante nella definizione dell'attuale condizione umana, con specifico riguardo alla sfera delle nozze e della procreazione."

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:437-8; Scheck, 103:365).

be offered, and from which it is denied that anyone is pure, even if his life should be one day long. It has to be believed, therefore, that concerning this David also said what we recorded above, “in sins (*peccatis*) my mother conceived me.” For according to the historical narrative no sin (*peccatum*) of his mother is declared. It is on this account as well that the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to infants (*paruulis*). For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware that in everyone was sin’s innate defilement (*genuinae sordes peccati*), which needed to be washed away through water and the Spirit.²⁸⁷

Origen arrives at the latter, literal level by noting statements made by and about certain biblical figures.²⁸⁸ After postulating the need for infant baptism, his attention immediately turns to a spurious reading of this text offered by Basilides. His doctrine of μετενσωμάτωνσις is condemned as an unacceptable interpretation of “body of sin.” The soul did not commit sins while in another body.

These three provocative statements concerning the sin of Adam and the need for infant baptism deserve our careful attention. As I now turn to an appraisal of these and other statements from the perspective of modern scholarship we must note that they have elicited a number of different interpretations.

Origen on Original Sin: History of Scholarship

The question over whether or not Origen entertained or developed any doctrine of inherited sin has engendered vigorous debate over the past two centuries. Scholarship has reached no sustained or coherent consensus. In the following pages I would like to provide a map of various views on this issue in order to lay the groundwork for my own forthcoming conclusions. In addition to providing needed perspective on this issue, this map is necessary because many have been inclined to stereotype theological anthropology in the Greek patristic tradition. Such a stereotype stresses the spread of death and dominion and includes no notion of inherited sin.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 5.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:439-40; Scheck, 103:367), slightly modified.

²⁸⁸ David (Ps 51:5); Jeremiah (Lam 3:34-36); Adam and Eve (Gen 4:1); the Levitical Law (Lv 12:8); and Job (Job 14:4-5).

John Chryssavgis, in his essay “Original Sin—An Orthodox Perspective,” is a typical example of this phenomenon.²⁸⁹ Chryssavgis makes such a strong assertion at the outset of his essay.

As for the term “original sin” (*originalis peccatum*), it is in fact not to be found in the Greek patristic tradition of the first millennium and it would, therefore, be inaccurate to apply it to the theology of the Eastern Church.²⁹⁰

In his essay Chryssavgis traces the thought of Irenaeus, Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Maximus the Confessor. It is unclear whether Chryssavgis would include Origen as part of this tradition, but the great Alexandrian’s hamartiology is curiously absent from this survey. John Meyendorff’s great work on Byzantine theology demonstrates Origen’s formative influence—both positive and negative—throughout the Byzantine theological tradition. As with Chryssavgis, Meyendorff’s discussion of original sin also curiously fails to mention Origen.²⁹¹ In addition to this omission his conclusions regarding Greek anthropology and soteriology are offered without qualification. “As we have seen, the patristic doctrine of salvation is based, not on the idea of guilt inherited from Adam and from which man is relieved in Christ, but on a more existential understanding of both ‘fallen’ and ‘redeemed’ humanity.”²⁹² This same omission occurs in the work of Timothy Ware.²⁹³ Scholars in the Catholic tradition are no less culpable. Lyonnet, in the otherwise insightful essay, “Le sens de ἐφ’ ᾧ en Rom 5,12 et l’exegese des Peres grecs,” fails to mention Origen’s own interpretation of this passage.²⁹⁴ Paula Fredriksen’s recent book on sin in early

²⁸⁹ John Chryssavgis, “Original Sin—an Orthodox Perspective,” in *Grace and Disgrace: A Theology of Self-Esteem, Society and History*, edited by Neil Ormerod (Newtown, N. S. W.: E. J. Dwyer, 1992), 197-206.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁹¹ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 143-6.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁹³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 227-30. Cf. also V. Palachovsky and C. Vogel, *Sin in the Orthodox Church and in the Protestant Churches*, translated by Charles Schaldenbrand (New York: Desclee Company, 1966), 29-37.

²⁹⁴ S. Lyonnet, “Le sens de ἐφ’ ᾧ en Rom 5, 12 et l’exegese des Pères grecs,” *Biblica* 36 (1955): 436-56.

Christianity includes a chapter on Origen and Augustine entitled “A Rivalry of Genius.” But she too fails to account for several of Origen’s remarks on original sin, choosing instead to confine her comments to the preexistent fall in *On First Principles*.²⁹⁵ This brief glance demonstrates that a “clear picture” of anthropology in the Greek East often requires the occasional omission. Furthermore, restricting the *idea* of original sin to the presence of the *term* “original sin” is to answer one’s own question.

Origen’s provocative statements have been the subject of considerable debate in the Origenian literature, histories of doctrine, and focused studies on original sin. Although conflicting interpretations abound, these various studies have identified Origen as an important voice. Much of this interest in Origen derives from his provocative comments concerning Adam and infant baptism in the *Commentary on Romans*. Origen’s interpretation of Romans 5:12 was the subject of intense focus by Erasmus in the 16th century. Erasmus finds himself often vexed by Origen’s “slippery” language, but concludes that what first appears to be a doctrine of original sin is in reality Origen explaining that Paul seeks to exempt both the devil and Eve as the authors of sin.²⁹⁶ Scholarship in the 20th century would continue to find “Origen’s” language puzzling. J. N. D. Kelly admits that Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* produces a reading where all of humanity was present in Adam’s

²⁹⁵ Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 93-134. Fredriksen’s analysis of Origen’s understanding of sin is wholly inadequate. In her attempt to pit the two great theologians against each other she carefully omits anything that may disrupt her thesis. Her treatment of the soul in Origen is insufficient, she demonstrates little interest in the scholarship on Origen, and no mention is made of Adam, the image of God, infant baptism, or the *Commentary on Romans*! Concerning this latter omission, at one point (p. 99) she states, “Their (Origen’s and Augustine’s) shared focus on Paul and their mutual adherence to the principles of late Platonism notwithstanding, however, these two geniuses of the ancient church also disagreed sharply.” It is difficult to take such comments seriously when the reader sees no evidence of engagement with Origen’s exegesis of Paul which remains extant for the epistles to the Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. Furthermore, her curious methodology of concentrating on contrasts and disjunctures (p. 4) creates a work that tends to ignore anything that muddles her clear, preconceived picture of sin in early Christianity.

²⁹⁶ Robert D. Sider (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 56: Annotations on Romans*, translated and annotated by John B. Payne, Albert Rabil Jr, Robert D. Sider, and Warren S. Smith Jr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 142-3. Earlier (p. 139), however, Erasmus asserts that Origen begins a train of thought that includes Augustine, Ambrosiaster, and Ambrose. “As usual, he (Ambrose) followed Origen here too, philosophizing that the Apostle did not say ἐφ’ ἡ, that is, ‘in whom’ [feminine], but ἐφ’ ὧ ‘in whom’ [masculine], that is, in the man not the woman, because the man is the principal author of posterity, even though the woman was the first to fall.”

loins. But Kelly understands these statements as the result of textual emendations on the part of Rufinus.²⁹⁷ He emphasizes that Origen's true teaching is that humanity fell in the preexistence which is then sketched allegorically through Adam's fall in the Garden. Thus the true historicity and sinful collectivity through one man's fall (Adam) is minimized or altogether absent.²⁹⁸ Kelly concludes that Origen's teaching in the *Commentary on Romans*, and indeed in his entire corpus, is "that evil resides in the will alone."²⁹⁹ David Weaver, in his extensive essay on the interpretation of Romans 5:12 from Paul to Augustine, agrees with the main contours of Kelly's argument. Weaver admits that in Origen's interpretation of Romans 5:12, "he seems to propose an interpretation along the lines of Augustine's *in quo*."³⁰⁰ However, Weaver undermines this reading—like Kelly before him—by stating that we possess an unreliable translation by Rufinus.³⁰¹ In his own sketch of the history of doctrine Jaroslav Pelikan denied that Origen taught a doctrine of inherited sin.

Although Tertullian seemed to have the makings of a doctrine of original sin, he did not have its necessary corollary, the practice of infant baptism; while Origen, on the other hand, affirmed the apostolic origin of infant baptism, he did not formulate an anthropology adequate to account for it.³⁰²

Pelikan does not question the integrity of Rufinus' translation of the *Commentary on Romans*, but with the exception of this one brief instance, he simply ignores it altogether. Everett Ferguson acknowledges that many will be tempted to see Origen's passages on infant baptism as an early witness to the doctrine of original sin. His own analysis resists this temptation. He instead wants the reader to understand that "Origen...is working with the

²⁹⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958), 181-2.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁰⁰ David Weaver, "From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis," *SVTQ* 27 (1983), 196.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)," Volume 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 291.

category of ceremonial, bodily defilement from the Old Testament ritual law.”³⁰³ Georg Teichtweier, in his monograph *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, believes strongly that Origen nowhere teaches inherited sin. He gives five reasons for this conviction: 1) it is entirely incompatible with Origen’s doctrine of free will, 2) one never gets the idea that an act of Adam stands for the entire human race, 3) Adam is merely the prototype of the personal failures of every sinner, 4) Adam carries only allegorical significance in that the word means “man,” 5) the passages on infant baptism are always found in the context of filth associated with parental sexual activity.³⁰⁴ He concludes his investigation on this matter by asserting definitively that a doctrine of original sin from Adam’s lineage is unknown to Origen.³⁰⁵ In his survey of the *Commentary on Romans* Henri Rondet also cautions against reading too much into Origen’s statements in the commentary. Rondet says that Origen’s statement about solidarity in Adam refers to the way in which all bodies are “precontained biologically in Adam’s body. Adam is the father of a numberless progeny, but if there is a transmission of sin, it is only through the infection of souls by union with bodies of flesh.”³⁰⁶ Karl Schelkle likewise does not see Adamic solidarity in Origen’s statements.³⁰⁷ This brief survey displays the main arguments behind much of scholarship’s disinclination to see in Origen a doctrine of original sin.

³⁰³ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 368, seems to imply this position in an exclusive sense, leaving all discussion of inherited guilt to later theologians. He later says (p. 369) that Origen’s innovation is “to extend the baptismal forgiveness of sins to ceremonial impurity, particularly that associated with childbirth. It remained for a later age to extend the concept to inherited sin.” This does not seem to account for why the liturgical and confessional act of baptism for forgiveness existed if there was no inherited sin to forgive—only ceremonial impurity. For a similar approach to that of Ferguson see Jean Laporte, “Models from Philo in Origen’s Teaching on Original Sin,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, edited by M. E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 101-17.

³⁰⁴ Georg Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre Des Origenes*, 96-9.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 99, “Man muß also endgültig sagen, daß dem Origen die Lehre von einer Erbschuld aus der Geschlechterfolge Adams nicht bekannt ist.”

³⁰⁶ Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background* (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclesia Press, 1972), 81, refers only to Origen’s statement in 5.4.

³⁰⁷ Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter*, 163, asserts, “Origenes sagt also zwar hier nichts von einer persönlichen Sünde, durch die der einzelne erst aktuell unter das allgemeine Todesverhängnis geriete, wie es die meisten griechischen Väter nach ihm tun werden. Aber dennoch folgert auch er nicht eine Erbsünde aus den Paulusworten.”

There are many others who are inclined to look at Origen's statements differently. Caroline Bammel has no problem with the general sense of Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's exegesis of Romans 5:12ff.³⁰⁸ In her essay on the role of Adam in the theology of Origen, Bammel argues that a sinful tendency is inherited by all from Adam.³⁰⁹ Furthermore, Origen's exegesis of Romans 5:14 evinces a teaching regarding the "inheritance of sin."³¹⁰ Bammel concludes that Origen believed in "a succession of sin handed down from Adam to his descendents."³¹¹ N. P. Williams argues that Origen's close reading of the Epistle to the Romans "had the effect of diverting his mind into more characteristically Pauline channels."³¹² Williams notes the frequent use of *praevaricatio*, assuming the technical meaning of "the Fall"³¹³ and remarks, "the propagation of sin from Adam to his descendants is explained in terms of 'seminal identity.'"³¹⁴ Origen's references to infant baptism have only served to bolster this idea. Charles Bigg first proposed the theory that these statements on infant baptism were a result of Origen's move to Caesarea where he first encountered the practice of infant baptism, resulting in a more pessimistic view of human nature.³¹⁵ In his magisterial and hugely influential *History of Dogma*, Adolf von Harnack found Bigg's suggestion convincing. "In his later writings, after he had met with the practice of child baptism in Cæsarea and prevailed on himself to regard it as apostolic, he also assumed the

³⁰⁸ C. P. Bammel, "Adam in Origen," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, edited by R. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92 n88: "Rufinus abbreviates the exposition of Romans 5:12ff. particularly heavily, partly no doubt because Origen's exegesis was very full here...perhaps because he found some of the material unsuited to his intended readers. His selective approach may have resulted in some bias or distortion, but I see no reason to doubt that what he includes is derived from Origen."

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹² Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 227.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

³¹⁵ Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886), 202-3.

existence of a sort of hereditary sin originating with Adam, and added it to his idea of the preëxisting Fall.³¹⁶ N. P. Williams follows Bigg and Harnack.³¹⁷ Williams argues that such an exposure produced in Origen a “more thorough-going Fall-doctrine, adhering more closely to the Adam-story as interpreted by St. Paul, and assuming a graver judgment on the weakness of human nature.”³¹⁸ Joachim Jeremias comes to a similar conclusion. In his *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, Jeremias concludes that Origen’s references to infant baptism are attributed to the Alexandrian’s understanding of original sin.³¹⁹ Kurt Aland also admits that Origen’s passages on infant baptism presupposed a similar theology. “This interpretation Origen combats with passages of Scripture that emphasize the inclusion of newborn children in the guilt of sin.”³²⁰ Aland goes even further in aligning Origen’s theology of original sin with that of Cyprian. These two theologians are “fully harmonious” in their views that although the child has no sins of its own, it nevertheless has “sins of another” acquired from Adam that need to be forgiven through the cleansing found in baptism.³²¹ He concludes,

The statements of Origen are quite parallel: to objections against infant baptism he counters ever and again the view that the saying of Scripture (Job 14.4 f. etc.) applies even to the newborn, “No one is pure from stain, yea though he be but one day old.” From the first day of his life an infant participates in sin.³²²

In a bold statement near the end of his own analysis, F. R. Tennant says that in the *Commentary on Romans*, “Origen appears to treat the Fall-story as history, and to teach a doctrine of the Fall and of Original Sin resembling, with allowance for its greater

³¹⁶ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, translated by Neil Buchanan, Third German edition, 7 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1896), 2:365 n5.

³¹⁷ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 219-20.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

³¹⁹ Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, translated by David Cairns (London: SCM Press, 1960), 98.

³²⁰ Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 47.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³²² *Ibid.*, 103-4.

indefiniteness, that which subsequently reached its developed form in S. Augustine.”³²³ More recently Joseph O’Leary has surveyed various texts throughout Origen’s corpus, including some in the *Commentary on Romans*, and cautiously concludes, “It is conceivably possible that these texts may be a source for the later Augustine’s thinking on original sin. However, for Origen sin is transmitted less by generation than by bad teaching and example.”³²⁴ Thomas P. Scheck’s comments provide some further rationale for understanding Origen along these lines. In a footnote to his English translation of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* he cautiously asserts, “He seems to allow the interpretation of *in quo* as a relative clause, i.e., ‘in whom,’ namely in Adam.”³²⁵ In his published dissertation on Origen he retains this view.³²⁶ Recent New Testament scholarship has noted this as well. In tracing the history of the interpretation of Romans, Mark Reasoner has called Origen the “unacknowledged ancestor” of the subsequent hard fall view of Romans 5:12.³²⁷ No doubt more witnesses could be called forth for both sides. But this brief survey demonstrates the various ways Origen has been read in recent scholarship. There is absolutely no lack of consensus on this point in the literature and it is my aim to redress this through a careful examination of his *Commentary on Romans*. A close analysis of these and other statements will demonstrate that Origen is teaching a doctrine of inherited sin.

Sin and Human Nature: Analysis

In the following pages I will demonstrate that Origen taught a nascent but holistic doctrine of original sin that avoids facile attempts at categorization. It is nascent because he

³²³ Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, 303.

³²⁴ Joseph S. O’Leary, “Grace,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, edited by John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 116.

³²⁵ Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5*, 303 n1. But Scheck does not see Origen develop this idea in the commentary into a full-blown doctrine of original sin as found in Augustine and Ambrosiaster.

³²⁶ Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen’s Commentary on Romans*, 74-9.

³²⁷ Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 44.

does not elaborate much on his various intimations regarding the preexistent fall and Adamic solidarity. It is holistic because he joins this with themes such as the loss of the image of God and the spread of death and dominion. This fruit of his exegesis of Romans takes into account the entire epistle and weaves together previous threads of his theology. It also provides a more thorough theology of original sin than provided by the church up to his time. As we turn to this understanding of original sin we look first to his controversial yet consistent teaching with regard to the preexistent fall of souls.

The Preexistent Fall and the Commentary on Romans

The study of Origen's conception of human nature in the *Commentary on Romans* must remain in conversation with his understanding of the preexistent fall of souls. His theory of the preexistence forms an integral backdrop to the present work, particularly his theology of Adam, and therefore must inform our own reading of this commentary. It is part and parcel of his doctrine of original sin. In the following pages it will therefore be necessary to engage in a sort of preparatory excursus with regard to the salient features of this theory. Facile attempts to eschew or marginalize its importance only leave the reader with a truncated vision of sin. Confronting this theory is, however, no easy task. Scholarship is divided on critical aspects of Origen's doctrine of preexistence. One of the more important and vexing issues involved is the attempt to harmonize the cosmic and terrestrial dimensions of his hamartiology. This issue involves ceding to Origen's multivalent language when speaking about the Garden, Adam, and the Fall.

There are at least two interrelated reasons why Origen posited a preexistent fall of souls. In the Preface to *On First Principles* he remarks that the church has yet to formulate a definite teaching with regard to the origin of the soul.³²⁸ He seeks to fill this gap by offering an alternative to the prevailing options—theories now known as traducianism and

³²⁸ Origen, *princ.* Pref 5, "In regard to the soul, whether it takes its rise from the transference of the seed, in such a way that the principle or substance of the soul may be regarded as inherent in the seminal particles of the body itself; or whether it has some other beginning, and whether this beginning is begotten or unbegotten, or at any rate whether it is imparted to the body from without or no; all this is not very clearly defined in the teaching," *Origen: On First Principles*, translated by G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 4.

creationism. The second reason, and the one that drives the first, is to counter the Gnostic theory of predetermined natures. Origen sought a way to account for the origin of evil that relieved God of any culpability. This is an issue of theodicy. Extensive biblical support for this doctrine was always lacking. Proving controversial even in his own lifetime, Origen repeatedly offers the caveat that these are not to be understood as settled doctrines.³²⁹ This theory is, in the words of Henri Crouzel, an example of a “research theology.”³³⁰

Origen’s understanding of the preexistence is detailed most clearly in his early *On First Principles*. Such a theory seems to have been culled from Plato by way of his fellow Alexandrian, Philo.³³¹ In this work Origen argues that “intelligences” existed with God in the preexistent state. From their own free will, negligence, and slothfulness³³² at the contemplation of God, each and every one of the “rational creatures” fell away and sunk to lower levels.³³³ Marguerite Harl has demonstrated that Origen’s use of *koros* and *satietas* expresses boredom of contemplation akin to “accidie” which Eastern monks experience with

³²⁹ E.g., Origen, *princ.* 2.8.5. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 209, reminds the reader that “the pre-existence of souls is only to be understood along with the original fault that occurs with it.”

³³⁰ Crouzel, *Origen*, 163-9, 205-8, 217.

³³¹ There exists some debate as to the sources of Origen’s doctrine of preexistence. Older scholarship (e.g., Eugene de Faye, *Origen and His Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929)), saw it stemming exclusively from Plato. More recent scholarship (e.g., Gerald Bostock, “The Sources of Origen’s Doctrine of Pre-Existence,” *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2-6 September 1984)*, edited by Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tryolia-Verlag, 1987), 260), sees it stemming from Philo rather than Plato. For the most part Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 207, and Mark S. M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58-60, strike the appropriate balance by seeing both at work in Origen’s thought. Scott, 59, concludes, “While Origen’s allegorical interpretation of Genesis certainly mirrors Philo’s, his doctrine of pre-existence clearly finds its inspiration in Plato. Whether Origen encountered this doctrine first in Philo’s exegesis need not detain us here, since it ultimately derives from Plato and he quotes from Plato directly on this matter.” Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 4.40. Erasmus sees this as Platonic, cf. Robert D. Sider (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 56: Annotations on Romans*, 143.

³³² Origen, *princ.* 1.6.2 (Butterworth, 53-6).

³³³ *Ibid.*, 1.4.1 (Butterworth, 40-1). Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, “The Fall,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, edited by John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 100, summarizes, “The main premise underlying Origen’s explanation of the fall is that the spiritual intelligences, by their nature, functioned before, during, and after the fall predominantly by free choice. Souls move themselves, rather than being moved by reflex or the force of another...and accordingly are recognized as rational beings. The life of the soul is one of perpetual motion, which means the soul either chooses to ascend toward God or rejects God and declines farther from the divine communion...Origen’s overarching stress on the free choice of intelligences stems from his insistence, against the opposing contexts of Hellenistic determinism (particularly astrology) and gnostic and Marcionite views, that God is absolutely good and does not cause evil.”

the monastic life.³³⁴ Origen famously arrives at this position through a false etymology. He asserts that the word “soul” (*psyche*) comes from the idea of growing cold (*psychesthai*).³³⁵ These minds have thus “cooled” from their original intense devotion to God. In doing so they take on bodies suitable to the regions to which they descend: some are ethereal bodies, some are aerial, and “when they reach the neighbourhood of the earth they are enclosed in grosser bodies, and last of all are tied to human flesh.”³³⁶ He fully recognizes that this produces a human soul that is unstable and wayward.³³⁷ Origen’s language at times can even be coarse. In at least one place he asserts that God bound the soul to the body as a punishment.³³⁸ But to focus exclusively on the punitive dimension of his theory would be to miss its true pedagogical intent. This fall into the world is the *result* of sin, and it is also the *means* of advancement back to God. As Mark S. M. Scott aptly states, “material creation breaks our metaphysical free fall, enabling our ascent to God.”³³⁹

Some recent scholars have challenged the notion that Origen taught a theory of the preexistence as outlined above.³⁴⁰ Much of this interest is born out of a desire to see in

³³⁴ Marguerite Harl, “Recherches sur l’origénisme d’Origène: la satiété (*koros*) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes,” *StPatr* VIII (1966), 374-405. Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, 210.

³³⁵ Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3 (Butterworth, 124).

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.4.1.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.10.5.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.8.1.

³³⁹ Mark S. M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil*, 52. Cf. Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 140. Maurice Wiles, *The Christian Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 96, states, “Bodily existence may be a punishment for sin, but it is reformatory rather than simply retributive in intention. The body is not simply evil; it is a divinely intended spur to the soul to help it win its way back again to an eternal, spiritual existence in the heavenly realm. For Origen, therefore, every soul (except that of Christ) is a sinful soul before it ever enters upon the sphere of existence in this world. Sin is the very cause of there being any world of becoming at all.”

³⁴⁰ Cf. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 89, “[I]n my view, the evidence indicates that, except in a vestigial form that is not heretical, Origen never embraced this doctrine, either as an hypothesis or as an edifying myth,” and P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 65-118. Tzamalikos argues that a proper view of Origen’s understanding of time produces a reading where these “intelligences” are not individual existences at all. He stresses that before time only the Trinity exists. There is therefore no way “intelligences” can fall. These are instead “precious stones” (p. 93) or “ornaments” (p. 95) that find their real individual existence in space and time. Tzamalikos blames much of the confusion on Rufinus’ (supposedly) faulty understanding of particular Greek words. Tzamalikos excoriates nearly all of Origen scholarship over the last two hundred years for not reading our author carefully enough. Ironically, Edwards has

Origen a lack of philosophical dependency usually regarded as his besetting sin. The present claim does not deny that elements of this long-standing historiographical sketch of Origen are in need of revision. However, this revision must not be achieved at the expense of a fair appraisal of his extant writings. The evidence for my understanding of preexistence is compelling. After all, no less a champion of Origen's orthodoxy than Henri Crouzel assumes its abiding presence.³⁴¹ Marguerite Harl concurs. "Sans aucun doute, cette hypothèse est essentielle pour Origène, qui semble bien l'avoir toujours maintenue, du *Traité des principes au Contre Celse*, même si sa prédication en montre des formulations très atténuées."³⁴² Should Origen have renounced or greatly modified his theory later in life we no doubt would possess a record of it in his own or someone else's words.³⁴³ The relative paucity of references to it in later writings can be traced in part to its admittedly controversial nature as well as judicious editing on the part of Rufinus. But as we will see below, traces of this theory are still present in Origen's extant corpus.

The attentive reader of the *Commentary on Romans* will hear several echoes of Origen's theory of the preexistence of souls.³⁴⁴ These echoes are substantial insofar as they shed light on how he conceives of sin in the terrestrial realm. One such reference is found in Book Seven when Origen is commenting on issues related to predestination in Romans 8:28-30.

But even if "according to purpose" (cf. Rom 8:28) should be referred to God, that is, they are said to be called according to the purpose of God, who knows that a pious

been critical of Tzamalikos' work. Cf. M. J. Edwards in *JEH* 58 (2007), 109, where he notes that the premises put forth by Tzamalikos "distend the evidence."

³⁴¹ Crouzel, *Origen*, 205-18. Jean Daniélou also sees these themes in Origen's writings, *Origen*, translated by Walter Mitchell (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 75-6, 98.

³⁴² Marguerite Harl, "La préexistence des âmes dans l'oeuvre d'Origène," *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2-6 September 1984)*, edited by Lothar Lies (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 244.

³⁴³ Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'homme: Étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène*, 41-2.

³⁴⁴ Edwards nowhere discusses these passages in his treatment on Origen's doctrine of the soul. Cf. *Origen against Plato*, 87-122.

mind and *the longing for salvation is in them*, even this will not seem contrary to the things we have set forth.³⁴⁵

Caroline P. Hammond Bammel is correct to see this as a reference to the cosmic preexistence of souls. In her magisterial work on the commentary she observes how Origen says that longing for salvation “is in them” (*salutis inesse desiderium*), not “will be in them” (*fore/futurum esse*). With regard to the Latin translation she notes that Rufinus was still willing to translate this veiled reference to preexistence. She goes on to note, however, that Origen himself did not want too much emphasis placed on this doctrine.³⁴⁶ These echoes are heard more frequently and with more clarity in Book Five of the commentary as Origen is concerned to explain the sin of Adam. It is reasonable to assume, with Erasmus, that Rufinus omitted a portion of Book Five in which Origen was about to speak of the preexistent fall of souls.³⁴⁷ This omission occurs in the midst of lengthy comments on Romans 5:12 where Origen anticipates possible questions.

From where did sin enter this world? Where was it prior to its entrance here? Did it even exist at all? Or was it prior to him to whom it is said, “Up to this time when iniquities were found in you”; and, “for this reason I cast you to the earth”? But it is not safe for us to discuss these things further, because we may observe that the Apostle has scarcely touched these matters in individual discourses.³⁴⁸

Whether this last sentence is the product of Origen’s own pen or the editorial work of Rufinus does not matter. The fact that it is “not safe for us to discuss these things further” communicates the idea that it is best left hidden to the immediate audience. Here Origen has in mind (although truncated by Rufinus) a teaching of cosmic preexistence that is *falling into* an Adamic state in space and time. There is yet another reference to preexistence

³⁴⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.6, emphasis mine (Hammond Bammel, 34:591; Scheck, 104:90).

³⁴⁶ Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbrieftext des Rufin und seine Origenes-Übersetzung*, AGBL 10 (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 65.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Robert D. Sider (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 56: Annotations on Romans*, 143.

³⁴⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:370; Scheck, 103:312-3). Henri Crouzel teaches that Origen’s tripartite anthropology of body, soul, spirit (to be explained in the next chapter), is the human makeup at every stage of existence. After the fall the soul still possesses its original, higher element (*hegemonikon*) and now possesses a lower (carnal) element. Origen alludes to this lower element in Book Seven: “It is possible, then, that there may also be from part of the soul another ‘life’ that acts with it in order to separate us from the love of God. This is the life of sin,” *ibid.*, 7.10 (Scheck, 104:101).

in Book Five. This reference will play a critical role in our understanding of Origen's conception of sin. Here he states,

But someone could reasonably, as I judge, suggest in this place, that when Adam had transgressed it is written that the Lord God expelled him from paradise and established him in that land opposite to the paradise of delights. And this was the condemnation for his transgression which doubtless spread to all men. For everyone was fashioned in that place of humiliation and in the valley of tears; whether because all who are born from him were in Adam's loins and were equally expelled with him or, in some other inexplicable fashion known only to God, each person seems to be driven out of paradise and to have received condemnation.³⁴⁹

N. P. Williams understands these to be two alternative methods of conceiving of a prenatal and transcendental Fall: a collective prenatal fall of the whole race, contained in Adam, from the heavenly place, and the theory from *On First Principles* of a never-ending series of falls into this vale of tears, which is the world of matter.³⁵⁰ A final echo of the preexistent fall from Book Five finds our author wrestling with the implications of Adam's fall.

Perhaps there were some, up to that time when men were living under law as under a pedagogue, who performed something similar to what Adam is said to have performed in Paradise, to touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil and to be ashamed of his own nakedness and to fall away from the dwelling in Paradise.³⁵¹

These examples provide ample evidence that Origen did not abandon his early theory of the preexistent fall. In fact, throughout the *Commentary on Romans* he is even inclined to incorporate language such as “negligence”³⁵² and “cooling”³⁵³ that is reminiscent of

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:406-7; Scheck, 103:340-1).

³⁵⁰ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 228. These should not be seen as alternatives, but complements.

³⁵¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:384; Scheck, 103:323).

³⁵² Cf. *princ.* 1.4.1 and *comm. in Rom.* 7.16 where he states, “Doubtless, he (God) knows that the human race is weak and susceptible to falling away through negligence” (*et ad lapsum proclive per negligentiam*), (Hammond Bammel, 34:631; Scheck, 104:123). See also *comm. in Rom.* 9.3 where Origen says, “Others have indeed received grace but have ruined it through the negligence of their mind and the laziness of their life... He (Jesus) knows that grace can be lost through negligence,” (Scheck, 104:206).

³⁵³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.5: “But in the hearts of sinners where there are anguished places, since they have given room to the devil to enter in, he does indeed enter, but not in order to indwell and walk about—for these are anguished places—but to lie hidden, as in a cave, for he is a serpent. In this way, then, the unfortunate soul, which has this evil serpent occupying it, grows stiff with a serpentine cold. It contracts and is compressed and is driven into extreme anguish,” (Scheck, 103:122).

his language in *On First Principles*. So the present claim moves forward in assuming that Origen not only taught the preexistence of souls in the commentary, but that this theory was integral to his understanding of sin. Let us now turn to a consideration of how the preexistent fall is reconciled with his teaching on Adam and sin in the *Commentary on Romans*.

We saw in Chapter One Origen's inclination to view Adam in less than historical terms. Faced with a textual dilemma brought on by the Apostle (see below), Origen must now account for Adam in more literal terms. Despite the present limitations in understanding how Origen conceived of Adam in both figurative and literal terms, the latter strategy is not necessarily incompatible with the former.³⁵⁴ The exigencies of the moment demand that his particular elucidation of Adam's sin need not be inclusive of every possible meaning. This being stated, it is incontestable that in the *Commentary on Romans* Origen posits a literal Fall by Adam in the Garden. Furthermore, the preexistent fall seems to function as a first Fall. These must be held in tension. Therefore, to call his Adamic theology in the *Commentary on Romans* a "double fall" would not be inaccurate.

One must begin with an understanding that Origen can approach a text from different angles. The allegorical approach need not be read to the exclusion of the terrestrial approach. Bammel's perspective is instructive.

The idea of a sinful tendency inherited from Adam is not intended by Origen to replace the concept of a previous fall of the individual soul but is considered alongside it...it remains an open question whether it is because of its own previous fall or because of the taint of birth in succession from Adam (or rather it is probably for both these reasons) that the soul is already polluted on arrival in this life and requires purification.³⁵⁵

She explains that Origen's reference (cf. Rom 5:14) to two different options as to why we are in Adam's line is best explained as *both* a previous fall *and* a taint of birth in

³⁵⁴ One should not jump to the conclusion that his disparate teachings on the first man are fundamentally unresolved in his thought: *Pace* Paolo Pisi, 328-9 and F. R. Tennant, 306, the latter of whom sees the cosmic and terrestrial dimensions as "very different, if not incompatible" in his thought. Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, 218, "[I]t is by no means sure that Origen, even as he allegorised them, did not see in Adam and Eve historical persons. Certain expressions seem to show this and, in any case, for Origen as for Paul, the allegorisation of a story is not incompatible with belief in its historicity."

³⁵⁵ Bammel, "Adam in Origen," 81-2.

succession from Adam.³⁵⁶ She concludes by noting, “There is no reason to suppose that the theory of a succession of sin handed down from Adam to his descendants is incompatible with that of the fall of the individual soul before entering the body, or that Origen ‘changed his mind’ on this subject.”³⁵⁷ Since both ideas are posited, we must assert that the preexistent fall *must* have had an effect on the terrestrial realm, beginning with Adam.

As I highlighted above, Origen speaks of the preexistence of souls at least four times in the *Commentary on Romans*. In three of these four passages he struggles to articulate how one should understand Adam’s Fall.³⁵⁸ These three passages all involve his exegesis of Romans 5:12-18 and will be the focus of the following discussion. It is plausible that Origen finds Pauline support for a preexistent fall in Romans. Since sin entered this world through one man, “it is certain” that Paul is referring to “the earthly world.”³⁵⁹ Origen then raises a series of questions about the aetiology of sin on which he will elaborate later in Book Five. He seems to favor an understanding that Adam’s sin represents all of humanity. This comes out in the second of the three aforementioned passages. Origen can only conceive of humanity sharing in Adam’s condemnation because “all who are born from him were in Adam’s loins and were equally expelled with him.” Any other option is simply “inexplicable.”³⁶⁰ Adam seems to represent the human race in both the preexistent realm and in the earthly realm. All of humanity is identified with Adam. I believe that Origen attempts to offer an awkward reconciliation of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Fall. The historical Adam seems to copy the sin that he committed in the preexistence. Humanity assumes this sin insofar as Origen (and Paul) speak of Adam in representative terms. The final passage offers possible explanations for the Fall. When Origen says that some “up to

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 83. She is careful to note that Origen does not dogmatize his teaching in this regard. Cf. Bammel, 93 n102, where she observes that Didymus had no difficulty accepting a preexistent fall of the soul with succession of sin from Adam.

³⁵⁸ The only passage in which he does not struggle is the first one that speaks only of how “the longing for salvation is in them” (7.6). No mention is made of Adam in this passage.

³⁵⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Scheck, 103:312).

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.4 (Scheck, 103:341).

that time (*usque ad illud tempus*) when men were living under law as under a pedagogue...performed something similar to what Adam is said to have performed in Paradise,” he is clearly referring to a time *before* the giving of the Law (i.e., preexistence).³⁶¹ His subsequent theory to explain this verse (Rom 5:14) is to offer a simpler (*simpliciter*) way—though not necessarily incompatible!—by postulating that the likeness of Adam’s transgression should be understood in terms of both descent and instruction.³⁶² These options seem to indicate these people copied Adam’s sin, and that this copying is not to be understood sequentially, but most likely necessarily. As a whole, these three passages seem to indicate that Adam functions as a representative head in both the preexistent state and the terrestrial realm. In the *Commentary on Romans* there seems to be no other way to understand these passages than to say that Origen is positing a double fall. That which Adam represents in the preexistent realm he also represents in the terrestrial realm. The terrestrial realm *necessarily* replicates that which has already occurred. Origen’s comments on Adam reflect a fallen condition that has *already taken place* in the preexistence and is *only now taking place* in the physical realm. The preexistent fall is *realized* in this world through Adam’s fall in the Garden. Origen is open to a both/and approach to understanding the aetiology of evil in the terrestrial realm. The birth stain/sin which must be washed away in baptism indicates a prenatal fall that is indicative of an Adamic fall. Thus Bammel suggests “that the soul is already polluted on arrival in this life and requires purification.”³⁶³ Adam’s sin in the preexistence had consequences. His sin is our sin.

My approach also borrows insights from Marguerite Harl. Harl’s assessment is that various statements throughout Origen’s corpus represent different “registers” of exegesis.³⁶⁴ It is true that Origen’s goals depended greatly on the particular genre in which he

³⁶¹ Ibid., 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:384; Scheck, 103:323).

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Bammel, “Adam in Origen,” 82.

³⁶⁴ M. Harl, 250. Later in the same essay (p. 257 n12) Harl confirms that Origen frequently operates with different registers of exegesis. “L’HomJr XII confirme la pluralité des registres sur lesquels on peut lire la ‘dispersion’ des hommes selon Gn 11,2. Le register historique présente cette dispersion comme un

was engaged. For example, juxtaposing the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Contra Celsum*—works written just two years apart—produces two “different” readings of Adam. But his mystical assertion in *Contra Celsum* (4.40) should be viewed in its proper context.³⁶⁵ Celsus has claimed that God was unable to keep even *one* man from falling into evil. Origen counters by claiming that *all of humanity* has fallen into evil and that Adam has always represented *all of humanity*. Origen is countering a false theology of Adam. He stresses that collectivity is a central motif of the Fall passage in Genesis. So even though Adam is understood mystically, it still lends support to the present argument that Adam in some sense *encapsulates* all of humanity. Whether this is done mystically and/or seminally is not parsed by Origen. These findings are critical in sketching Origen’s understanding of original sin. To restrict this doctrine to sinful inheritance or image or death would be to inhibit a true appreciation for his multifaceted approach.

What accounts for a more historical reading of Adam in the *Commentary on Romans* is his deep interaction with Paul’s text. The Apostle’s juxtaposition of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21 is not lost on Origen. This juxtaposition requires that if Christ is to be considered historical, then so too must Adam. The juxtaposition is thus maintained by way of “opposites,” and in one place he cleverly speaks of how Adam and Christ are similar in genus but contrary in species.³⁶⁶ There is little room for Origen to negotiate the language of Romans in a way that would not undermine the Apostle’s overall argument in the section. The docetic foil of the commentary (see Chapter Three) only strengthens Origen’s language regarding the historicity of these two figures. His consistent and unequivocal assertion of the physical nature of Jesus achieves some of its most thorough expression in his exegesis of

événement situé dans l’histoire de l’humanité: les hommes ont quitté l’Orient et furent dispersés. Ici, dans sa prédication, Origène ne donne pas ‘le sens secret’ de ce mouvement loin de ‘l’Orient’ qui ailleurs figure la chute des êtres préexistants: le register mythique est omis. Mais l’application du thème peut se faire pour tous les pécheurs: le peuple d’Israel fut ‘dispersé’ depuis qu’il a péché; Dieu ‘disperse’ tous les pécheurs (cela est vrai ‘pour nous tous’), tandis qu’il rassemble les bienheureux. Il les rassemble dans la ‘Jérusalem céleste’ (HomJr XII 3).”

³⁶⁵ Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 4.40, where Origen makes the point four times that we should understand Scripture to be speaking of all humanity, not just one human.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.2 (Scheck, 103:329).

Romans 5:12-21 and its immediate aftermath.³⁶⁷ He is therefore unable to read Romans 5:12-21 without seeing one of its obvious implications. Finally, it is important to note that Origen carries his understanding of the historical Adam beyond the confines of the fifth chapter of Romans.³⁶⁸

Textual Analysis of “Adam” Statements in the Commentary

A careful analysis of the statements made by Origen in regard to Adam’s sin will further substantiate the claim that he taught a nascent doctrine of original sin. As I stated earlier, these comments are so vivid that it has caused some to question the translation by Rufinus.³⁶⁹ But these comments should not come as a big surprise. Origen’s exegesis of Adam in Romans raises the question about the paucity of sustained reflection on Paul’s epistles in the second century. Adolf von Harnack famously quipped, “Marcion was the only Gentile Christian who understood Paul, and even he misunderstood him: the rest never got beyond the appropriation of particular Pauline sayings, and exhibited no comprehension especially of the theology of the Apostle.”³⁷⁰ Even if Harnack overstates his case, it nevertheless speaks to a reality for which modern scholarship must take account: there is little in the way of extended interaction with Romans in the second and third centuries.³⁷¹ Once interaction came by way of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* one begins to see an evolving perspective on human nature. His sustained reflection on Romans adjusted his exegesis and theology into a more Pauline vision of sin and human nature.³⁷² His capacious and fastidious exegesis of

³⁶⁷ E.g., Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.8, 9.

³⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.2 (Hammond Bammel, 16:213; Scheck, 103:196).

³⁶⁹ E.g., J. N. D. Kelly and David Weaver. I have already defended the translation by Rufinus in the Introduction.

³⁷⁰ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:89.

³⁷¹ The appearance of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* in 246 is the first attempt seriously to engage Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 385-6, places most of Origen’s Pauline commentaries in the Caesarean phase of his career, i.e., after 231.

³⁷² Cf. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 227, where he remarks, “The close study of the Epistle to the Romans, however, which was necessitated by the preparation of his great Commentary on that book, had the effect of diverting his mind into more characteristically Pauline channels;

Romans 5:12-21—as well as other aspects of the commentary—bear out this claim. Our author is not reticent to advance a sense of collectivity or solidarity in the first man’s sin. This originated, as we have seen, from the mystical solidarity in Adam through the preexistent fall. This is realized historically and physically in and through the progenitorial effects of Adam’s first sin. The forthcoming analysis and discussion of Origen’s exegesis will not answer all of our nagging questions. He is after all a man living before the nature/grace debates and stands immune to many of our preconceived notions.

Let us revisit the first text concerning Origen’s exegesis of Romans 5:12 where he speaks of Levi, Abraham, and Adam. In articulating the words found in 5:12 he claims that the language evinces a certain “defect of his style.”³⁷³ But Origen soon admits that such teaching is a “mystery,” noting that when the Apostle has “entered through one door, he departs through another.”³⁷⁴ After extensive comments on these stylistic matters he treats Romans 5:12 in two parts and lays the emphasis of sin’s inception in 5:12a, leaving 5:12b (ἐφ’ ᾧ/*in quo*) to a later discussion. What leads Origen to discuss the spread of Adam’s sin is not the seemingly critical construction of 5:12b, but instead an ascertaining of who sinned first: Adam, Eve, or the serpent. His answer is to argue that when the Apostle says sin is from Adam he is simply appealing to the “order of nature.”³⁷⁵ In order for Origen to extrapolate sin’s generational inception he uses the example of Levi (as mediated by Heb 7:9-10), who in Abraham’s loins, still paid tithes through Abraham. Origen continues,

If then Levi, who is born in the fourth generation after Abraham, is declared as having been in the loins of Abraham, how much more were all men, those who are born and have been born in this world, in Adam’s loins when he was still in paradise. And all men who were with him, or rather in him (*uel in ipso*), were expelled from paradise when he was himself driven out from there; and through him the death which had come to him from the transgression (*praeuaricatione*) consequently passed through to them as well, who were dwelling in his loins; and therefore the Apostle

and throughout *Comm. in Rom. V.*, which contains his exposition of the crucial passage Rom. v. 13-21, he accepts, in a general sense, the more normal Adamic theory as implied in the Apostle’s words.”

³⁷³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Scheck, 103:304). Origen is never reticent in pointing out Paul’s use of rhetoric and the onus this places on the reader: *ibid.*, 1.1, 11, 15; 3.1; 4.8, 9, 12; 5.1, 8; 6.3; 7.16.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:309).

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:310).

rightly says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” So then it is neither from the serpent who had sinned (*peccauerat*) before the woman, nor from the woman who had become a transgressor (*praeuaricatione*) before the man, but through Adam, from whom all mortals derive their origin, that sin (*peccatum*) is said to have entered, and through sin (*peccatum*), death.³⁷⁶

This critical passage in the commentary has generated a great deal of debate. A quick glance at this text brings into relief three major features. First, Origen’s indication that “So then (*ergo*) it is neither from the serpent...” demonstrates he is more concerned with *sequence* of sin than anything else.³⁷⁷ Second, Origen sees Adam playing some sort of a physical, spiritual, or cosmic progenitorial role for the whole human race. Third, Origen stresses how death is passed down to Adam’s descendents. But more is being said in this text. Concerning the third point, in both places where Origen stresses death as the *result*, transgression (*praeuaricatio*) and sin (*peccatum*) are always attenuated and serve as the *means* to this death. Therefore, it would be anachronistic for later interpreters to understand Origen as only concerned with corruption and death. Just because death is an emphasis, it does not mean that sin does not play a role and is not passed down from Adam in order to achieve such emphasis.³⁷⁸

Origen’s interpretation of Romans 5:12 should remain in conversation with his wider exegesis of Romans 5:12-14. This section (5.1) is significant in length and his statements have a way of balancing out each other. One of his central claims throughout is that sin is nothing short of universal—even for those for whom Scripture depicts as *righteous*. In what may be considered a paradigmatic statement for the whole of his exegesis of this section, he makes the following claim: “To be sure sin passed through even the righteous and grazed them with a certain light infection.”³⁷⁹ There are three interrelated

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33: 368-9; Scheck, 103:310-11).

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:369; Scheck, 103:311).

³⁷⁸ Thomas Scheck, in his comments in the footnote to this section, erroneously cites N. P. Williams (p. 217) as support for the idea that inherited guilt is nowhere found in Origen. However, the corresponding passage from Williams speaks to the Alexandrian phase of Origen’s career and writings, not his Caesarean output. Williams curiously omits this passage from his analysis.

³⁷⁹ “Peccatum etenim pertransiit etiam iustos et leui quadam eos contagione perstrinxit,” Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:383; Scheck, 103:322).

reasons why this statement is of such significance. First, he makes this statement in his exegesis of Romans 5:14 (“death exercised dominion from Adam until Moses”), but his language indicates he is thinking back to Romans 5:12 (“sin passed through”). Second, this statement immediately follows his assertion that death passed through to all. His structure, therefore, suggests a confluence of death and sin in his thought. They are either equated or inextricably linked. Indeed, this paragraph is about the spread of sin, not death!³⁸⁰ Third, there is a certain *passivity* to his tone. In Origen’s understanding the “righteous” are those for whom volitional sin is notably absent. Nevertheless, they still received a “light infection.” This passage is paradigmatic because it demonstrates that Origen is willing to admit a measure of inherited sin but unwilling to expound upon it. This is the case with all of these texts.

This idea comes out more clearly in his treatment of Romans 5:12b. Here Origen renders Paul’s words ἐφ’ ᾧ (*in quo*) not as a relative pronoun, but in a causal manner in order to express *extent*. On the surface this may seem awkward because in 5:12a he spoke of a sense of solidarity in Adam, but his causal rendering is more or less the same as that which would be frequently expressed later in the Greek East.³⁸¹ But Origen’s interpretation of Romans 5:12a and 5:12b should not be seen as conflicting. His is an attempt to be faithful to the language of Scripture. There is the impression that for Origen Romans 5:12b communicates the spread of *death* through Adam, which may also *imply* the spread of sin through the first man, but it is certainly not emphasized in this section. Instead the causal construction serves the purpose of expounding on universal and *individual* involvement in sin. He tells of how Old Testament saints renowned for their righteousness (Abel, Enosh,

³⁸⁰ “‘Death, therefore, exercised dominion from Adam,’ *who first opened up the passage-way for sin into this world* by his transgression, ‘until Moses,’ that is, until the law. For through the law the *cleansing of sins* began to be ushered in, and from a certain part of his tyranny resistance began through victims, various acts of expiation, sacrifices, and commands,” *ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:322), emphasis mine. By reverting back to the economy of salvation (“For through the law the cleansing of sins began to be ushered in...”) Origen betrays the fact that he is speaking of innate sin that all shared in the Garden with Adam.

³⁸¹ Although Origen’s exegesis of Romans is strangely absent from this discussion, Lyonnet’s essay provides more on the interpretation of this crucial text in the Eastern Fathers.

Enoch, Noah) all committed volitional sin.³⁸² He then summarizes his argument for sin's universal extent by quoting the authority of Job 14:4-5 (LXX): "No one is pure from uncleanness, even if his life should be one day long."³⁸³ His choice of this Job passage is illuminating. While he uses it to bolster the idea that sin is committed through the will, it does not always carry this exact nuance in his corpus. In his eight homily on Leviticus he uses Job 14:4-5 to prove sinfulness in infants and therefore their need for baptism.³⁸⁴ It is employed later when speaking of infant baptism in the *Commentary on Romans* where he duplicates his exegesis found in the Leviticus homily.³⁸⁵ Therefore, it is fair to say that Job 14:4-5 carries both innate *and* volitional meanings for Origen. His particular exegetical and exhortative contexts often determine which *emphasis* he will give it. Romans 5:12a and 5:12b are different ways the Apostle is talking about sin. For Origen the Apostle is stressing both innate and volitional sin, and the presence of both in one "verse" is incidental in Origen's thinking. As we will continue to see later in this study, he finds *both* these emphases on *both* the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels of the Apostle's thought.

Origen's second statement on original sin carries equal weight.

And this was the condemnation (*condemnatio*) for his transgression (*delicti*) which doubtless spread to all men. For everyone was fashioned in that place of humiliation and in the valley of tears; whether because all who are born from him were in Adam's loins (*in lumbis Adae*) and were equally expelled with him or, in some other inexplicable fashion known only to God, each person seems to be driven out of paradise and to have received condemnation (*condemnationem*).³⁸⁶

The present transgression (*delictum*) on the part of Adam provided a "certain access" (*aditus quidam*), language reminiscent of his exposition earlier in Book Five: death came into the world by way of "collusion with the guard" (*praeuaricatione custodies*).³⁸⁷ That

³⁸² Ibid., 5.1. Cf. Gen 4:3-4 LXX; 4:26; 5:22; Sir 44:16; Gen 5:24; 6:8; 9:21; 12:1.

³⁸³ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:315). Cf. *ibid.*, 5.5, 9; 7.16; *princ.* 4.4.4.

³⁸⁴ Origen, *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 8.3.5.

³⁸⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.9.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 5.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:407; Scheck, 103:341).

³⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:405-6; Scheck, 103:340); 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:381-2; Scheck, 103:321), respectively.

which gained access and spread to all men was “sin, or the death of sin, or condemnation.”³⁸⁸ He (or Rufinus) settles on condemnation (*condemnatio*) as the his choice of language, and this he equates with “that common death (*communem hanc mortem*) which comes to all and will come to all, even if they seem righteous.”³⁸⁹

Henri Rondet is correct to critique Georg Teichtweier for failing to put what Origen says concerning an original defilement into an overall view of the problem of original sin.³⁹⁰ Teichtweier does not adequately account for Origen’s comments regarding a terrestrial Adam. His insistence that original sin is incongruent with Origen’s doctrine of free will inhibits him from seeing any effect of the preexistent fall on the terrestrial life. The preexistent fall was far more than a spatial change. It was also, and more importantly, a spiritual loss *of and into sin*. But also stating that our collective presence in the Garden with Adam is merely biological (i.e., Rondet)³⁹¹ is to ignore the context of Origen’s discussion: sin and death. It is clear that “his (Adam’s) transgression” is the impetus and expulsion is the result. This expulsion is collective. It is also in the past. Origen circumscribes humanity in this passage and assigns it “in Adam’s loins.” There is no distinction of persons. Adam/humanity receive condemnation for this first transgression.

There are two more passages in the commentary that should be viewed alongside the aforementioned texts. In these passages Origen speaks of sin by connecting volition with nature.

Or perhaps it seems this ought to be interpreted in a simpler way and the likeness of Adam’s transgression (*praeuaricationis*) is to be received without any further discussion. This would mean that everyone who is born from Adam, the transgressor (*praeuaricatore*), seems to be indicated and retain in themselves the likeness of his transgression (*praeuaricationis*), *taken not only by descent from him but also by instruction*. For all who are born in the world are not only raised by their parents but

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.4 (Scheck, 103:340).

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.4 (Scheck, 103:340). This is evident by his discussion/defense of Enoch and Elijah, the two biblical figures who did not see death.

³⁹⁰ Henri Rondet, *Original Sin*, 84 n122.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 80-1. Rondet curiously ignores any reference to Origen’s provocative comments as seen in our first example (5.1: “how much more were all men...in Adam’s loins when he was still in paradise.”).

instructed as well; and not only are they sins' (*peccatorum*) children but also sins' pupils.³⁹²

Origen is offering one of several possible interpretations of Romans 5:14: "Death exercised dominion in those who sinned in the likeness of Adam's transgression." This is a verse that clearly vexed him. In Origen's mind the different interpretations mean different plausible ways of understanding Paul. Of interest in this comment is the language of "descent." Origen sees the Apostle saying that we not only sin through "instruction," that is, by imitation, but also by descent.³⁹³ He understands Paul to be saying that we are born sinful. In his exegesis of this passage Origen places volitional sin ("sins' pupils") on the same plane as innate sin ("sins' children"). Therefore, there is no reason to suggest that Origen is teaching volitional sin and not innate sin. Furthermore, this passage is found between passages where he offers a strong sense of Adamic solidarity (5.1, 4), and *directly after* his first theory already mentioned: "men...performed something similar to what Adam is said to have performed in Paradise, to touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil and to be ashamed of his own nakedness and to fall away from the dwelling in Paradise."³⁹⁴ His thinking is consistently pulled in the direction of solidarity. This solidarity is not one of biology or merely death. Rather, as Williams has rightly noted, Origen emphasizes *praevaricatio*.³⁹⁵ Death may have spread to all humanity in this fashion, but so too did sin. His hamartiology operates from a twofold standpoint. It operates in such a manner lest his audience think he only understands sin from the standpoint of nature. Origen is seeking to counterbalance his earlier emphasis on sinful human nature by now stressing the will. He does not want to sound like a Gnostic determinist. Nature and volition are attenuated.

³⁹² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1, emphasis mine (Hammond Bammel, 33:384-5; Scheck, 103:323).

³⁹³ José Ramón Díaz Sánchez-Cid, *Justicia, Pecado y Filiación: Sobre el Comentario de Orígenes a los Romanos*, 124, places too much weight on sin as imitation to the exclusion of inheritance.

³⁹⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Scheck, 103:323).

³⁹⁵ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 227.

We know the interpretation quoted above is entirely plausible for Origen because in our next quote he refers back to it in an attempt to connect the two. This quote, an exposition of Romans 5:15-16, offers a similar interpretation and is more assertive.

Certainly we have already said above that parents not only produce sons but they also educate them. And those who are born become not only sons of their parents but also their pupils; and they are not prodded into the death of sin so much by nature as by instruction.³⁹⁶

This comment seems to cut both ways. What is often seen as a “Pelagian” reading of the Apostle is in fact also an “Augustinian” reading. Once again the parallel is drawn between nature and volition. Origen’s reading of the fifth chapter of Romans is having a clear influence on him. The stress on volitional sin is a necessary component of the commentary to counter his deterministic adversaries. Furthermore, the phrase “death of sin” is not to be read simply as “death.” It is difficult to imagine how Origen, in speaking of volitional sin, would understand some to be prodded into *death*. One is prodded, i.e., instructed, into sin. This sin leads to death. After all, the emphasis of the whole section is on imitating the sins of our parents. If Origen uses “death” for “sin,” he does so because he desires to stay close to the Apostle’s language in Romans 5:12-21.

The presence of such texts is nothing less than extraordinary considering the background of the commentary. The trio of Basilides, Marcion, and Valentinus espoused a pernicious doctrine of natures. They taught, according to Origen, that souls were predetermined to perdition or bliss. This ongoing polemic against the Gnostic doctrine of natures is a dominant theme of the commentary and will be brought out in more detail in the next chapter.³⁹⁷ Such a doctrine was so abhorrent to Origen because it denied free will and undermined any case for ethics. So for him to communicate that we possess a sinful nature from birth is to come dangerously close to acquiescing to the theology of those for whom he set out to refute. He is, however, careful to temper his language and carefully navigate the

³⁹⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.2 (Scheck, 103:332).

³⁹⁷ Cf. also Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen’s Commentary on Romans*, 20-9, 52.

Apostle's language throughout the epistle. This deterministic background may constitute a main reason why Origen did not draw out his doctrine of original sin any further. Saying too much about the sin of Adam would have blurred the lines with the Gnostics. So he contents himself with such nuanced and pithy statements like: "...they are not prodded into the death of sin so much by nature as by instruction."³⁹⁸ Also, he *may not have known* how to strike the appropriate balance between Pauline hamartiology and Gnostic heresy. We must remember that despite Origen's considerable intellectual and theological skills, he was still a member of the church of the third century. We have seen his tremendous struggles to articulate that which he is reading in the Apostle. His inability to articulate this any further demonstrates itself in his simple pitting of nature against will. "Otherwise, if it were hostile by nature and not by its will, it (i.e., substance) would assuredly not receive reconciliation."³⁹⁹ Statements like this do not deny the inherent sinfulness of humanity, but instead highlight the false doctrine that a nature can *never be changed* by an act of the will toward Christ. If it is difficult to conceive of sin as anything except an *act* in Origen's theology, then we must recall that in his *Homilies on Ezekiel* he refers to sin as a "cancer."⁴⁰⁰

Let us now return to the exegesis of Romans 5:12. The standard account of the Greek patristic tradition emphasizes how these fathers better understood both the syntax of Romans 5:12 (ἐφ' ᾧ = "because" or "in that") as well as the Apostle's emphasis on the transmission of death ("*death* passed through to all men"). This produced a reading whereby death and corruption are diffused and considered cosmic diseases that lead people into sin. This same account argues that the Latin patristic tradition failed to see the ἐφ' ᾧ causally and instead translated it as the relative pronoun *in quo* ("in whom"). This produced a reading whereby everybody sinned *in Adam*, that is, in the Garden with Adam. Adam's sin was transmitted to his seed through this first transgression, and this inherited sin renders everyone

³⁹⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.2 (Scheck, 103:332).

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.12 (Scheck, 103:299).

⁴⁰⁰ Origen, *hom. 1-14 in Ezech.* 5.1.2; *Origen: Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel*, translated by Thomas P. Scheck ACW 62 (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2010), 79. Cf. *comm. in Rom.* 8.6, "burdens of sin" (*onera peccati*), (Hammond Bammel, 34:670; Scheck, 104:157).

guilty even before they willfully sin.⁴⁰¹ Even if one grants the truth of these premises, such a dichotomous rendering does not apply to our author. Origen's comments on this verse clearly indicate that he understands *both* sin *and* death to have passed through to all humanity. We have seen how death has passed through to all men. He states the passing through of sin emphatically in commenting on Romans 5:12. "But in those whom he (Paul) wants to be understood as men already, he says sin passed through, that is to say, it was indeed there but through the repentance of conversion it was expelled and passed through and did not remain any longer in them."⁴⁰² In comments on Romans 5:14, as I have already shown, he states, "To be sure sin passed through even the righteous and grazed them with a certain light infection."⁴⁰³ I will demonstrate below that Origen's tendency is to use death as a synecdoche. He further tends to alternate between innate and volitional sin in this section (5.1). He does not highlight sin at the expense of death, nor does he highlight death at the expense of sin. A reading such as his may perhaps confound the modern reader who is accustomed to such a taxonomy. But Origen precedes any Greek/Latin or East/West divergences and therefore sees little need to read this text according to a particular set of assumptions. So even though Origen takes the ἐφ' ᾧ causally ("in that" or "because"), it does not preclude a reading of this text within its wider context espousing a doctrine of original sin. Such an approach is common even in our own time. Modern commentators such as Hultgren,⁴⁰⁴ Moo,⁴⁰⁵ Nygren,⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ G. Bonner, "Augustine on Romans 5,12," *SE V*, edited by F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968), 242-7, argues that while Augustine ultimately misunderstood the Greek syntax of this verse and provided an erroneous translation and theological justification, he nevertheless defended his reading of the text by appealing to the ancient fathers of the church, including those of the East.

⁴⁰² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Scheck, 103:315-6).

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:322).

⁴⁰⁴ Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 221-4.

⁴⁰⁵ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 321, says, "If this reading of the structure of the verse is right, then v. 12d has the purpose of showing that death is universal because sin is universal: 'all sinned.' This means, in turn, that we are giving the opening words of this last clause (*eph' hō*) a causal meaning. This is the meaning adopted by most commentators and by almost all English translations." Despite this and with regard to original sin Moo argues, "If, then, we are to read v. 12d in light of vv. 18-19—and, since the comparative clauses in these verses repeat the substance of v. 12, this seems to be a legitimate procedure—'all sinned' must be given some kind of 'corporate' meaning: 'sinning' not as voluntary acts of sin in 'one's own person,' but sinning 'in and with' Adam. This is not to adopt the translation

Sanday,⁴⁰⁷ and Schreiner⁴⁰⁸ note the syntactical necessity of reading Romans 5:12 causally, yet still promulgate a doctrine of original sin based on the Apostle's wider thought in this passage. Erasmus anticipated this approach all the way back in the 16th century.⁴⁰⁹ There is no reason to assume that Origen did not provide the first exegetical rationale for such a trend.⁴¹⁰

This analysis need not end with the fifth chapter of Romans. Origen provides the reader with intriguing comments with regard to original sin later in his exegesis of Paul. The reader encounters these comments in Book Six where he exegetes Romans 7:8-10: "For apart from the law sin is dead. But I was once alive without the law. But when the commandment came, sin revived. I, however, died; and the very commandment that was unto life was found to be unto death to me." Origen responds to this puzzle in his typical manner. He asks how

'in Adam' rejected above. The point is rather that the sin here attributed to the 'all' is to be understood, in the light of vv. 12a-c and 15-19, as a sin that in some manner is identical to the sin committed by Adam. Paul can therefore say both 'all die because all sin' and 'all die because Adam sinned' with no hint of conflict because the sin of Adam *is* the sin of all. All people, therefore, stand condemned 'in Adam,' guilty by reason of the sin all committed 'in him.' This interpretation is defended by a great number of exegetes and theologians."

⁴⁰⁶ Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 214-5, asserts, "If we are to keep the translation 'because all men have sinned,' we shall have to understand it as Augustine did, 'all men have sinned in Adam.' In any case, this much is settled for Paul: humanity's fate rests on what happened in him who was its head and representative. Any interpretation that dilutes that thought, or departs from it, is definitely *false*."

⁴⁰⁷ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5th edition, in ICC, edited by S. R. Driver, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 133, says, "Though this expression (ἐφ' ᾧ) has been much fought over there can now be little doubt that the true rendering is 'because.'" But he goes on to assert (p. 146), "In some way or other as far back as history goes, and we may believe much further, there has been implanted in the human race this mysterious seed of sin, which like other characteristics of the race is capable of transmission. The tendency to sin is present in every man who is born into the world. But the tendency does not become actual sin until it takes effect in defiance of an express command, in deliberate disregard of a known distinction between right and wrong. How men came to be possessed of such a command, by what process they arrived at the conscious distinction of right and wrong, we can but vaguely speculate. Whatever it was we may be sure that it could not have been presented to the imagination of primitive peoples otherwise than in such simple forms as the narrative assumes in the Book of Genesis."

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, in BECNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 270-81, proposes that the ἐφ' ᾧ is causal, but insofar as death spread to all men from Adam we can assert that sin is a consequence of this death, and therefore, all sinned in Adam.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Robert D. Sider (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 56: Annotations on Romans*, 139-61, for his lengthy discussion on the matter.

⁴¹⁰ C. P. Hammond Bammel, "Rufinus' Translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* and the Pelagian Controversy," in *Storia ed esegesi in Rufino di Concordia* (Udine: Arti grafiche friulane, 1992), 131-42, specifically 133ff, gives evidence of the earliest manuscript of Rufinus' translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*. This fifth century manuscript, Lyons Bibliothèque de la Ville ms. 483, contains four marginal notes where this reader highlights the transmission of sin from Adam. For more on this manuscript see Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbrieftext des Rufin und seine Origenes-Übersetzung*, 110-13.

the law was to be considered dead for Paul when he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews and circumcised on the eighth day according to the precepts of the law” (cf. Phil 3:5).⁴¹¹ This leads him to conclude:

On the contrary, in the way in which we have said, in childhood he also once lived without natural law. *He did not say that sin did not exist in man at this time*, but that sin was dead and afterward revived when natural law came and began to forbid covetousness. This law raised sin from the dead, so to speak.⁴¹²

This text is interesting in its own right. Origen is willing to admit that children have sinned. But it is more interesting when juxtaposed with what he wrote on the same text (Rom 7:9-10) in *Contra Celsum* just two years later. Here it becomes even more significant for our purposes. In this context Origen is rebuking Celsus for his deficient understanding of virtue.

Celsus speaks out of mere malice against us, as if we asserted that *God will receive the unrighteous man if, conscious of his wickedness, he humbles himself; but as for the righteous man, though he may look up to Him with virtue from the beginning, God will not receive him*. We say that it is impossible for any man to look up to God with virtue from the beginning. For of necessity evil must exist among men from the first, as Paul says: ‘But when the commandment came sin revived and I died.’⁴¹³

In *Contra Celsum* we have a complementary text regarding Origen’s understanding of his exegesis of Romans 7:8-10. Our author certainly understands humans to be sinful from birth and exhibits this through both texts.

It is true that at times Origen draws a distinction between “sin was in the world” and “sin was in men.” One should not make too much of this distinction. He makes this distinction because he does not yet have a fully developed conception of inherited sin. For instance, he never uses the word “guilt.” To claim guilt is to say more than Origen is comfortable saying. He sees our inheritance as greater than a birth stain but somehow less than what would be developed later in the West. These are not easily untangled. The

⁴¹¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.8 (Scheck, 104:32).

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 6.8, emphasis mine (Scheck, 104:32-3).

⁴¹³ Origen, *Cels.* 3.62, italics in original (words of Celsus); (Chadwick, 170).

aforementioned texts have been illuminating in seeing the structure of Origen's thought. But they by no means exhaust the support for the present argument that Origen is operating with a nascent understanding of inherited sin. His defense of infant baptism also attests to this fact.

Sin and Infant Baptism

Origen's strong appeal for infant baptism in the *Commentary on Romans* further substantiates and amplifies the present claim that he taught a nascent doctrine of original sin.⁴¹⁴ This assertion is not without its difficulties. The theological milieu regarding the liturgical act of infant baptism in the early church is opaque and modern scholarship on the question is no less clear on the subject. One thing can be asserted as fact: explicit references to the practice of infant baptism in the early church are rare. So in the following pages I will seek to clarify both the early theological milieu as well as my own appraisal of existing scholarship on this topic.

Looking back to the church prior to the fourth century we can count at least six unequivocal references to infant baptism. Tertullian, writing at the end of the second century, offers the earliest clear witnesses to the practice, even if he personally disapproves.⁴¹⁵ Writing in the first half of the third century, Hippolytus includes the practice of infant baptism in his church order.⁴¹⁶ Cyprian offers a mid-third century witness to the practice and provides an early theological rationale: baptism wipes away Adam's sin and provides God's grace.⁴¹⁷ Origen's own three statements on infant baptism round out this six. In order to assess his contribution to this matter, Origen's doctrine must be situated within this wider theological milieu.

⁴¹⁴ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 306, cites Origen as the first author to affirm the apostolic command to baptize infants.

⁴¹⁵ Tertullian, *De bapt.* 18.

⁴¹⁶ Hippolytus, *trad. ap.* 21.

⁴¹⁷ Cyprian, *ep.* 64. Cyprian argues from the premise that infant baptism is correlative to the Old Testament rite of circumcision. When asked whether one should wait eight days after birth to baptize the child Cyprian argues forcefully that one should not delay the work of God's grace on the child.

As I stated earlier, Charles Bigg believes Origen was first exposed to infant baptism in Caesarea.⁴¹⁸ Adolph von Harnack and N. P. Williams followed Bigg's thesis. Williams is the most forceful of the three in seeing an historical precedent of infant baptism in the second century, even if he thinks Origen was not personally exposed to it until his move to Caesarea.⁴¹⁹ Joachim Jeremias takes an even bolder stance in his *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. He argues in favor of the practice of infant baptism from the New Testament through the entire early church. This thesis by Jeremias was immediately challenged. Kurt Aland's *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* serves as a point-by-point rebuttal of the work by Jeremias. Aland argues for a sheer lack of evidence for infant baptism in the early church.⁴²⁰ More recent scholarship has been equally skeptical. In his magisterial *Baptism in the Early Church* Everett Ferguson argues that evidence for the existence of infant baptism before the third century is dubious. He says the rise in infant baptism can be attributed to the prevalence of emergency baptism. With John 3:5 weighing heavily in the minds of early Christians who were subject to the high infant mortality rates in the ancient world, every precaution was taken to ensure that a gravely ill child would enter the kingdom of heaven. This practice gradually became normative even to those who were not in danger of death.⁴²¹

This lack of consensus as to when and why baptism emerged can be frustrating. For the sake of space I will not engage in a wholesale reappraisal of this period. Instead I will affirm that many of the arguments put forth by Jeremias are convincing, despite the careful

⁴¹⁸ Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 202-3, argues, "A further and still more serious difficulty arises out of the doctrine of Original Sin. This tenet is found in Irenaeus and Tertullian, but not in Clement or the *De Principiis*, and we may perhaps infer, that Origen did not seriously consider the question, or perceive its bearing upon his other views, till after his settlement at Caesarea. There he found the practice of Infant Baptism, with which the doctrine of birth-stain is closely connected, in general use, and the difficulty at once pressed upon his mind. The Church, he says, in obedience to a tradition received from the Apostles, baptizes even infants."

⁴¹⁹ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 222-3.

⁴²⁰ Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*.

⁴²¹ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 378-9.

rebuttal by Aland.⁴²² I believe we have sufficient evidence for the practice of infant baptism in the first and second centuries. But Aland brings to this issue an important insight. Although I disagree with Aland on the late emergence of infant baptism, I agree with him as to the theological rationale behind infant baptism in the third century. Aland reasons that the second century church held to the innocence of children and therefore saw no need for infant baptism. But when the idea of innocence became challenged, and the sinfulness of children was accepted, one then sees the emergence of infant baptism. This challenges the assumption put forth by Bigg, Harnack, and Williams that Origen was only exposed to the practice in Caesarea which subsequently caused him to develop a more pessimistic view of human nature.⁴²³ There is simply no evidence to suggest that Origen was first exposed to infant baptism after his move to Caesarea. This conjecture is based on the fact that all three of his clear references to infant baptism occur in his Caesarean writings. But this could be a mere coincidence born out of particular exegetical or homiletical concerns. One thing that can be asserted with more confidence is that certain pockets of the church during this period were beginning to question the innocence of children. Cyprian and Origen seem to testify to this fact.⁴²⁴ Origen did not arrive at a doctrine of infant baptism because he was newly exposed to the practice in Caesarea. Origen arrived at a doctrine of infant baptism because of his reading of Scripture. This is especially the case with his careful study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As we will see later, his exegesis of this epistle only intensified this teaching on

⁴²² Aland is to be commended for offering a corrective to some of Jeremias's conjectures. But notwithstanding these correctives, I find four of Jeremias's arguments particularly compelling: 1) he makes a strong case for the *oikos* formula in the Acts of the Apostles applying to all of the household, 2) it is highly unlikely that Polycarp's famous confession ("eighty six years I have served Christ") could have been uttered without the testimony of his baptism, 3) the evidence for a late second century Egyptian mummy of a child holding what appears to be a cross may speak to a Christian community during that period that saw fit to bury her as a Christian, 4) Origen's testimony that infant baptism is a custom of the church—a claim made by a man who had traveled to Rome, Greece, Western Syria, Cappadocia, and parts of Arabia. Henri Rondet, *Original Sin*, 84 n121, also finds the arguments of Jeremias convincing. Of course, all "evidence" requires interpretation—both Aland's and Jeremias's. Aland may be correct to undermine the more dubious claims put forth by Jeremias, but a reasonable interpretation of the latter's remaining claims speak to a more *plausible* case being made for the existence of infant baptism in this period. For more on the existence of infant baptism see Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 222ff.

⁴²³ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 219-20.

⁴²⁴ Possibly Hippolytus, too.

infant baptism. Origen thus stands at a critical juncture in how certain Christian communities were reconsidering the innocence of children and incorporating infant baptism as an appropriate theological response.

Why does Origen mention infant baptism in the *Commentary on Romans*? What in the text of Romans elicits such a resolute pronouncement? It derives from his reading of Romans 6:6: Paul’s depiction of the “body of sin.” This pronouncement must be viewed within the context of his wider theology of infant baptism as well as the immediate context of his exegesis of Romans 5-6. Let us first look at this wider theology. Origen approvingly refers to this practice at least three times in his corpus—all coming from the Caesarean period of his career: *Homilies on Luke* (14.5), *Homilies on Leviticus* (8.3.5), and *Commentary on Romans* (5.9).⁴²⁵ All three of these texts feature certain prominent themes: birth as a stain, the presence of sin at birth, and the use of Job 14:4-5 (LXX).

The first passage to consider is in the 14th of his *Homilies on Luke* where Origen is offering an exposition of the presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:21-24).

Little children are baptized “for the remission of sins” (*Parvuli baptizantur in remissionem peccatorum*) (Acts 2:38). Whose sins (*peccatorum*) are they? When did they sin (*peccaverunt*)? Or how can this explanation of the baptismal washing be maintained in the case of infants (*parvulis*), except according to the interpretation we spoke of a little earlier? “No man is clean of stain (*sorde*), not even if his life upon the earth had lasted but a single day.” Through the mystery of Baptism, the stains of birth (*nativitatis sordes*) are put aside. For this reason, even infants (*parvuli*) are baptized. For, “unless a man be born again of water and spirit, he will not be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Jn 3:5).⁴²⁶

Ferguson is correct in seeing this as situated within the context of ceremonial, bodily defilement from the Old Testament ritual law.⁴²⁷ This is probably Origen’s first

⁴²⁵ Three other passages have been cited as possible references to infant baptism: *Cels.* 7.50 (detailed below); *hom. I–26 in Jos.* 9.4: “When he spoke of infants (*infantibus*)—and in fact you yourself were an infant in baptism (*quod et tu fuisti infans in baptismo*)—he said that ‘their angels always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven,’” *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, translated by Barbara J. Bruce, FOTC 105 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 100; *Origène: Homélie sur Josué*, translated by Annie Jaubert, SC 71 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 252; *comm. in Mt.* 15.36.

⁴²⁶ Origen, *hom. I–39 in Lc.* 14.5, slightly modified; *Origène: Homélie sur s. Luc.*, translated and edited by Henri Crouzel, François Fournier, and Pierre Périchon, SC 87 (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 222.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 368.

pronouncement of infant baptism, and one gets the impression that he may have been confused as to its rationale. The next passage to consider is in the eighth of his *Homilies on Leviticus* where Origen is preaching on Leviticus 12:2, a text dealing with the stain associated with childbirth and the subsequent purification required. In this well-known homily Origen denounces the celebration of birthdays because “not one from all the saints is found to have celebrated a festive day or a great feast on the day of his birth.”⁴²⁸ But his idiosyncratic pronouncement has a deeper theological rationale: birth should be considered a somber occasion. He explains why with an appeal to infant baptism.

But if it pleases you to hear what other saints also might think about this birthday, hear David speaking, “In iniquity (*iniquitatibus*) I was conceived and in sins my mother brought me forth (Psalm 51:5 (50:7 LXX)),” showing that every soul which is born in flesh is polluted by the filth “of iniquity and sin” (*ostendens quod quaecumque anima in carne nascitur, ‘iniquitatis et peccati’ sorde polluitur*); and for this reason we can say what we already have recalled above, “No one is pure from uncleanness (*sorde*) even if his life is only one day long (Job 14:4-5)”. To these things can be added the reason why it is required, since the baptism of the Church is given for the forgiveness of sins (*remissione peccatorum*), that, according to the observance of the Church, that baptism also be given to infants (*parvulis*); since, certainly, if there were nothing in infants that ought to pertain to forgiveness (*remissionem*) and indulgence, then the grace of baptism would appear superfluous.⁴²⁹

Again we note that this passage—indeed the entire homily—fits within the context of the stain associated with childbirth. Ferguson is correct to see this. But what makes this passage expedient is that it amplifies his statement on infant baptism in the *Homilies on Luke*. Origen gradually turns his attention from the birth stain to the issues of sin and forgiveness.

Origen seems to be experiencing a personal transition in his theology at the same time as other elements of the church are experiencing a transition in their theologies. Origen is emphasizing infant baptism more in this period of his life. We know from Cyprian that other parts of the church are also emphasizing the sinfulness of children. Even Ferguson admits a modest shift in Origen’s theology. “Origen’s innovation is to extend the baptismal

⁴²⁸ Origen, *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 8.3.2 (Barkley, 156).

⁴²⁹ Origen, *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 8.3.5 (Barkley, 157-8); *Origène: Homélie sur le Lévitique*, edited by Marcel Borret, SC 287 (Paris: Cerf, 1981), 20.

forgiveness of sins to ceremonial impurity, particularly that associated with childbirth. It remained for a later age to extend the concept to inherited sin.”⁴³⁰ Ferguson sees Origen uniquely joining baptism and ceremonial impurity. But this does not go far enough. More is happening in the Leviticus passage—sin seems to take on a more prominent role. This momentum only increases in his third pronouncement. Infant baptism also appears in the *Commentary on Romans*:

For which sin (*peccato*) is this one dove offered? Was a newly born child able to sin (*peccare*)? And yet it has a sin (*peccatum*) for which sacrifices are commanded to be offered, and from which it is denied that anyone is pure, even if his life should be one day long. It has to be believed, therefore, that concerning this David also said what we recorded above, “in sins (*peccatis*) my mother conceived me.” For according to the historical narrative no sin (*peccatum*) of his mother is declared. It is on this account as well that the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to infants (*paruulis*). For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware that in everyone was sin’s innate defilement (*genuinae sordes peccati*), which needed to be washed away through water and the Spirit.⁴³¹

These are the three unequivocal references to infant baptism in Origen’s corpus. But there may be one more reference. There is a peculiar statement in the *Contra Celsum* that may also refer to this practice.

But the prophets, giving obscure expression to some wise doctrine on the subject of becoming, say that a sacrifice for sin (ἁμαρτίας) is to be offered even for new-born babes because they are not pure from sin (ἁμαρτίας). They also say ‘I was conceived in iniquity and in sins my mother bore me.’ Moreover, they declare that ‘sinners have been estranged from the womb’, and utter the startling saying ‘They were in error from the womb, they spoke lies.’⁴³²

Origen’s language in this passage is peculiar. He wrestles with the Psalmist’s “obscure expression” (ἀνιπτόμενοι ὅτι) and “startling saying” (παραδόξως λέγοντες).⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 369.

⁴³¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.9, slightly modified (Hammond Bammel, 33:439-40; Scheck, 103:367).

⁴³² Origen, *Cels.* 7.50 (Chadwick, 437); *Origène: Contre Celse*, edited by Marcel Borret, SC 150 (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 131-3.

⁴³³ Chadwick, 437; Borret, 130, 132, respectively. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), 90, curiously and erroneously reduces this to simply the “defilement attaching to the reproductive process.” This is curious because in his English translation of the *Contra Celsum* he refers to Bigg’s discussion of the matter

Even at this point in his career he is not sure how fully to understand sinfulness at birth. But he certainly affirms that we are indeed sinful upon entering this world. Moreover, a little later in this same section Origen seems to attempt a reconciliation of Adam with his earlier theory of the preexistent fall. “And it is a prophet who said, ‘Thou didst humble us in a place of affliction’, meaning by a place of affliction the earthly region into which Adam, which means man (ἄνθρωπος), came after being cast out of paradise for his sin” (διὰ τὴν κακίαν).⁴³⁴ Adam seems to represent all of humanity, and the sin in the Garden seems to be taken as a double fall.

Both Teichtweier and Ferguson have argued that Origen’s whole theology of infant baptism is best understood within the context of ceremonial, bodily defilement.⁴³⁵ Origen’s only innovation, according to Ferguson, was to extend baptismal forgiveness of sins to ceremonial impurity.⁴³⁶ But in what way is this an innovation? It is vacuous to say that baptismal forgiveness applies to someone who does not need forgiveness. Even at this early stage in the church a man of Origen’s theological acumen would have noticed the shortcomings of such an association. One cannot presuppose that allusions to ceremonial cleansing exclude the possibility for a deeper association with sin. Therefore, I would like to suggest that this washing *is extending into* a theology of the cleansing away of original sin. F. R. Tennant also admits the purification context of Origen’s statements on infant baptism but rightly notes that his use of *sordes* contains both physical and moral overtones.⁴³⁷ He further proves Origen’s multivalent use of *sordes* insofar as our author says this *sordes*

(Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 437 n3). Bigg argues forcefully that Origen espouses infant baptism in defense of a nascent doctrine of original sin. Perhaps Chadwick changed his mind on the matter in the years between the English translation of *Contra Celsum* and the publication of *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*.

⁴³⁴ Origen, *Cels.* 7.50 (Chadwick, 437-8; Borret, 133).

⁴³⁵ Teichtweier, 98-9; Ferguson, 368.

⁴³⁶ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 369.

⁴³⁷ Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, 300-1. Bigg first noticed this in Origen’s theology, cf. *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 203.

requires cleansing and “remission.”⁴³⁸ Tennant has identified key terminology in Origen’s baptismal excerpts. The use of *remissio* in the *Commentary on Romans*—indeed his entire corpus—is significant because it consistently pertains to the forgiveness of sins.⁴³⁹ The incorporation of *remissio* further demonstrates that Origen is experiencing a more negative picture regarding the status of children at birth.⁴⁴⁰

This picture becomes clearer as we turn to Origen’s use of Scripture. Scripture is the locus of his doctrinal justification for infant baptism.⁴⁴¹ What in Romans 6:6 leads Origen into an extrapolation and defense of infant baptism? The answer is that he now reads “body of sin” in light of Romans 5:12-21 and Genesis 4:1. This is a textual issue for Origen.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, 301-2. “Remission” is also found in the statements in *Homilies on Luke* and *Homilies on Leviticus*.

⁴³⁹ Cf., e.g., Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 3.6: “In accordance with this, then, that he is a sacrifice, propitiation is effected by the shedding of his own blood for the forgiveness (*remissionem*) of past sins. And this propitiation comes to every believer by way of faith. For unless he were to grant the forgiveness (*remissionem*) of past sins, the propitiation could not be proven to have been accomplished. But since forgiveness (*remissio*) of sins is being bestowed, it is certain that a propitiation has been performed by the shedding of his sacred blood. ‘For without the shedding of blood,’ as the Apostle says, ‘there is no forgiveness’ (*remissio*) of sins (Heb 9:22),” (Hammond Bammel, 16:244; Scheck, 103:223); *comm. in Rom.* 3.6: “Through the re-propitiation of Christ’s blood, then, comes the forgiveness (*remissio*) of past sins,” (Hammond Bammel, 16:246; Scheck, 103:224-5); *comm. in Rom.* 6.12: “For when the remission (*remissione*) of sins was granted to us, sin took to flight and was destroyed from our flesh,” (Hammond Bammel, 33:530; Scheck, 104:52). For the use of *remissio* in his wider corpus see, e.g., *comm. in Cant.* 3.14, “For sins are lopped and cut away from men when remission of sins is given in Baptism (*cum in baptismo donatur remissio peccatorum*), *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, translated by R. P. Lawson, ACW 26 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 243; *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, translated and edited by Luc Brésard, Henri Crouzel, and Marcel Borret, SC 376 (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 686; *princ.* 3.1.17: “For he (Jesus) feared that if they were speedily converted and healed, that is, if the forgiveness (*remissione*) of their sins were quickly obtained, they might easily fall again into the same disease of sin which they had found could be cured without any difficulty,” Butterworth, 191; *Origène: Traité des principes*, edited by Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, SC 268 (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 102.

⁴⁴⁰ With Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, 100-11, I agree, in general, that the church evolved in its views and began to question its earlier assumption of the sinlessness of children. I disagree, however, with his claim throughout the book that we have *no* proof of the existence of infant baptism prior to the first half of the third century.

⁴⁴¹ Pace Bigg, Harnack, and Williams, who argue on the basis that Origen changed his views on infant baptism when exposed to the ecclesial practice upon his arrival in Caesarea. The present author also disagrees with Tennant (p. 301) who is inclined to see Origen’s development not in ecclesiastical tradition or in the Apostle Paul, but *exclusively* through the Old Testament texts (Job 14:4-5 and Psalm 51:7).

⁴⁴² His reading of Paul only solidifies two years later in the *Contra Celsum*. Commenting on Romans 7:9-10 (3.62; Chadwick, 170; Borret, 144) he says, “We say that it is impossible for any man to look up to God with virtue from the beginning. For of necessity evil (*κακίαν*) must exist among men from the first, as Paul says: ‘But when the commandment came sin revived and I died.’” A little later in the same book (3.66; Chadwick, 172) he asserts that men have a “natural tendency to sin” and “sin by habit.”

Adam's progeny is definitely and inexplicably affected by his transgression. "Therefore our body is the body of sin, for it is not written that Adam knew his wife Eve and became the father of Cain until after the sin."⁴⁴³ This does not imply that flesh is evil.⁴⁴⁴ Rather, our particular entrances into this world carry the real effects of Adam's sin. An even closer look at Origen's use of Scripture will be more instructive. Psalm 51:5 (50:7 LXX) is invoked in the statements in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, *Commentary on Romans* (twice), and *Contra Celsum*. He is providing the biblical rationale that he lacked in the *Homilies on Luke*. In the *Homilies on Luke* he knows infant baptism is a common practice of the church, but he has yet to understand fully *why* it is a common practice. Even more illustrative is his use of Job 14:4-5: "No one is pure from uncleanness, even if his life should be one day long." This text is found in the *Homilies on Luke*, *Homilies on Leviticus*, and the *Commentary on Romans*. In the *Commentary on Romans* it is quoted five times and each instance is clearly within the context of the universality of sin.⁴⁴⁵ In his wider corpus Job 14:4-5 is cited no less than fourteen times and the overwhelming use is to defend the universality of sin.⁴⁴⁶

There is yet another angle from which to view Origen's comments in Romans. His statements on infant baptism evolve over the course of his Caesarean career. A quick glance at the dating of each work demonstrates that a significant amount of time has elapsed:

Homilies on Luke (233-234),⁴⁴⁷ *Homilies on Leviticus* (238-244),⁴⁴⁸ *Commentary on Romans*

⁴⁴³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.9 (Scheck, 103:366).

⁴⁴⁴ Pace Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 203, who remarks, "Occasionally Origen seems to apply these words to the material uncleanness of the body, for in his system the flesh is more nearly akin to evil than in that of Clement." In the following chapter I will demonstrate that this claim is not true in the *Commentary on Romans*.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1, 5, 9 (twice); 7.16.

⁴⁴⁶ E.g., *princ.* 4.4; *hom. I-39 in Lc.* 2.1; *comm. in Cant.* 10.3. In *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 12.4.1 Origen invokes Job 14:4-5 to speak of the birth pollution. Here he says only Jesus is without this pollution.

⁴⁴⁷ Joseph T. Lienhard, "Introduction," *Origen: Homilies on Luke*, FOTC 94 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), xxiv, sets them within 233-244. Both François Fournier (ed.), *Origène: Homélie sur s. Luc*, 81, and Hermann-Josef Sieben (ed.), *Origenes: In Lucam Homiliae. Homilien zum Lukasevangelium I*, Fontes Christiani, Band 4/1 and 4/2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1991-2), 30-1, share this dating of 233-234. Max Rauer (ed.), *Die Homilien zu Lukas in der Übersetzung des Hieronymus und die griechischen Reste der Homilien und des Lukas-Kommentars*, GCS, Origenes Werke 9 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), viii, dates them early in the period from 231-244. Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 411, dates them between 239-242.

(246),⁴⁴⁹ *Contra Celsum* (248).⁴⁵⁰ His weakest theological rationale for the practice is found in the *Homilies on Luke*. Indeed, at this early point (233-234) Origen labors to offer *any* justification for the baptism of infants! His stumbling includes an admission that Jesus has this birth stain but not innate sin, and he is very clear that there is a difference between the two.⁴⁵¹ It is not even evident why he introduces infant baptism in this passage. But what is most telling for our purposes is his very assertion that Jesus *has* the birth stain associated with Job 14:4-5.⁴⁵²

By the time he preaches his *Homilies on Leviticus* (238-244: at least four and possibly eleven years later), he flatly denies that Jesus has this birth stain! He has changed his mind. Job 14:4-5 is invoked once again and this time it carries much more hamartiological weight.⁴⁵³ This is why we see in the aforementioned eighth homily on Leviticus a more precise association of infant baptism with the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁵⁴ He has evolved on the issue. By the time he writes the *Commentary on Romans* (246) he continues to evolve and achieves even more clarity. Twice in the *Commentary on Romans* he speaks of the transmission of sin with regard to sexual reproduction. These passages (5.9 & 6.12) are intimately related in that they share common characteristics: identifying “body/flesh of sin,”

⁴⁴⁸ Gary Wayne Barkley, “Introduction,” *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus, I-16*, 20. Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 411, also dates these between 239-242.

⁴⁴⁹ Henry Chadwick, “Introduction,” *Origen: Contra Celsum*, xiv n2; Thomas P. Scheck, “Introduction,” *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5*, 1, 8-9. Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 386, dates it to 245. Internal evidence suggests that the *Commentary on Romans* (cf. 9.1) is later than the *Homilies on Leviticus*. Nautin concludes (p. 386), “D’autre part, le *Commentaire des Romains* renvoie à une exégèse antérieure du Lévitique... La même exégèse se trouve dans les homélies sur le Lévitique, et l’on en conclut généralement que le *Commentaire des Romains* est postérieur à ces homélies.”

⁴⁵⁰ Henry Chadwick, “Introduction,” *Contra Celsum*, xiv-xv, who tentatively sets the date between 246-8, preferring the later portion of this period. Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 412, suggests the year 249. Origen mentions his *Commentary on Romans* twice in the *Contra Celsum*: 5.47 and 8.65.

⁴⁵¹ Origen, *hom. I-39 in Lc.* 14.3.

⁴⁵² Origen says (14.5) offerings (Luke 2:24) that “cleanse stain” (*purgare sordes*) should be made in the case of Jesus because he “had been ‘clothed with stained garments’” (*sordidis vestimentis*), Crouzel, et al., *Origène: Homélies sur s. Luc*, 222.

⁴⁵³ Origen, *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 12.4.1.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 8.3.5.

a concern to maintain the impeccability of Christ, and a quotation from Psalm 51:5. His assertion in Book Six runs as follows.

He, however, who came to an immaculate body with no contact (*contagione*) from a man, but only by the Holy Spirit coming upon the virgin and by the power of the Most High overshadowing, did indeed possess the nature of our body, but he possessed in no respect whatsoever the contamination of sin (*pollutionem...peccati*), which is passed down to those who are conceived by the operation of lust (*concupiscentiae*).⁴⁵⁵

The contamination of sin is inevitable for all of humanity, save Christ. Sexual reproduction is not the efficient cause, but the formal cause of sin. He *applies* the inherent sinfulness of sexual intercourse to his conception of solidarity producing a strong sense of seminal identity. Sin is sexually transmitted, or to state it better, sin is *sexually* transmitted. The sexual union is viewed as a sort of hamartiological stain that is transmitted to the next generation, thus the “body of sin.” The Son of God avoided the sinful *contagio/pollutio* that results from the concupiscence of the parents *and* avoided the preexistent fall of sin.⁴⁵⁶ The transmission of sin for everyone else is twofold. Why do I mention this passage in a discussion of the evolution of Origen’s thought? He uses the same rationale in our text in the *Commentary on Romans*. When explaining the “body of sin” he notes that “it is not written that Adam knew his wife Eve and became the father of Cain until after the sin.”⁴⁵⁷ Sex is characteristic of *this* realm. This is the realm of sin and death, and sex is necessary for the survival of the race. Sex was not in the preexistence and will not be in the eschaton. It is bound up in the world of decay and is in some sense inherently sinful. It leads him to assert forcefully that this is the reason why infants are baptized—they cannot avoid the transmission of sin based on their parents’ concupiscence. And there is no doubt that Origen understands sin to have been transmitted to the child. For immediately after this he asserts with profound clarity: “And yet it has a sin for which sacrifices are commanded to be

⁴⁵⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.12 (Hammond Bammel, 33:525; Scheck, 104:49).

⁴⁵⁶ The Logos, according to Origen, came to this realm on his own volition and not because of any sin.

⁴⁵⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.9 (Scheck, 103:366).

offered.⁴⁵⁸ He is absolutely convinced that infants are sinful at birth and he is now even appealing to the apostolic tradition. Moreover, the unequivocal assertion in *Contra Celsum* that “a sacrifice for sin (ἁμαρτίας) is to be offered even for new-born babes because they are not pure from sin (ἁμαρτίας)”⁴⁵⁹ speaks volumes for the present claim that Origen has evolved on this issue. Our author is reassessing his understanding of the state of children at birth. Children need the baptism of *forgiveness*.

A final reason for suggesting the Romans passage on infant baptism refers to original sin is that it theologically complements other passages in the commentary. At least one other passage in the commentary suggests that Origen understands human nature to be inherently sinful and in need of the cleansing work of baptism. His exegesis of Romans 5:15-16 provides this warrant by showing that the twofold problem has led to a twofold cure.

For when he sent his own disciples to do this task, he did not merely say, “Go, baptize all nations,” but, “Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, because he knew that both were at fault, he gave a remedy for both, so that even our mortal birth would be changed by the re-birth of baptism, and the teaching of godliness might shut out the teaching of godlessness.⁴⁶⁰

The sins for which baptism is the remedy are both those inherent and those acquired later. Nature and volition are joined in one statement. This indicates that Origen is moving in a direction that lends more weight to finding a balance than in his other works. This balance is filled out through a stronger sense of solidarity. But this solidarity is challenged by several critics who have seized on his statement that no sins of the child are recorded, leading them to the conclusion that he does not believe the child is culpable. The attentive reader of the commentary, however, will note that our author does not always believe that a lack of personal sins absolves someone from culpability. It is reasonable to argue that Origen’s theology allows for solidarity in sin. For this we turn to Book Six in his

⁴⁵⁸ “Et tamen habet peccatum pro quo hostia iubetur offerri,” *ibid.*, 5.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:440; Scheck, 103:367).

⁴⁵⁹ Origen, *Cels.* 7.50 (Chadwick, 437; Borret, 130).

⁴⁶⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.2 (Scheck, 103:333).

exegesis of Romans 7:14-25 as he draws on the examples of David and Daniel. They are *personae* of sinners to instruct us of our own sin. Daniel is a fitting example.

For no sin of his is recorded, but nevertheless a confession is described with fastings and sackcloth and ashes, and a prayer of this kind in which, among other things, he says even this: “We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have acted unjustly, we have committed impiety and rebelled, and we have turned aside from your commandments and your judgments and we have not listened to your servants the prophets, who were speaking to us in your name, and to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and to all the people of the land. Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but shame falls on us.” Who can deny that in these words Daniel has taken on the *persona* of sinners, on whose account he seems to say these things as though on his own behalf?⁴⁶¹

Daniel shares in the sins of his people. Furthermore, in a footnote to this text the English translator, Thomas P. Scheck, astutely cites Jerome’s heavy reliance on Origen’s exegesis of Daniel as a possible window into his thinking on this text (Dan 9:5). Jerome asserts, “He reviews the sins of the people as if he were personally guilty, on the ground of his being one of the people, just as we read the Apostle does also in his Epistle to the Romans.”⁴⁶² Here we have evidence from Origen (and possibly Jerome) that his theology allows for participatory sin in the absence of personal sin. With regard to Daniel, Origen says, “no sin of his is recorded,” and with regard to infants he says, “For which sin is this one dove offered? Was a newly born child able to sin?”⁴⁶³ Both carry the sin of another.

Sin and the Image of God

Origen’s conception of original sin is not limited to inheritance of sin from Adam. The notion of inheritance is less emphasized in his theology than other aspects of original sin.⁴⁶⁴ There are in fact various existential themes that run through his writings that texture his

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 6.9 (Scheck, 104:42-3).

⁴⁶² Jerome’s *Commentary on Daniel*, translated by Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 91, quoted in Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10*, 43 n230.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9 and 5.9, respectively.

⁴⁶⁴ The present discrepancy in space allotted to a treatment of inherited sin versus the present treatment of sin and the image of God is due to the burden of proof on the former, not an undue relegation of the latter.

conception of original sin. This existential way of understanding original sin finds its greatest expression in his theology of the image of God. As a highly developed aspect of his overall theology, it plays a fairly important role in our present concern to elucidate his understanding of sin and human nature.⁴⁶⁵ Sin has corrupted the image of God to such an extent that it makes proper ethical decisions difficult in this life.

The fact that all humans are made in the image of God is axiomatic for Origen. In his *Commentary on John* he says the image of God is the fundamental characteristic of being a human.⁴⁶⁶ In the *Commentary on Romans* he offers some of his most insightful comments while at the same time truncating certain needed explanations. Origen is clear that every soul is made in God's image.⁴⁶⁷ Properly speaking this image is in fact an image of the true image of God, i.e., Christ.⁴⁶⁸ Insofar as the image of God is part of the "inner man,"⁴⁶⁹ it is considered invisible and incorporeal.⁴⁷⁰ The image of God is enhanced in the individual when one looks to Christ. Conversely, looking away from Christ, like looking away from a mirror, diminishes the image.⁴⁷¹ Among the many potential characteristics of the image of God, in the commentary Origen chooses to focus on it as the seat of rationality.⁴⁷²

As we turn to an evaluation of Origen's discussion of the image of God in relation to original sin we witness consistently strong statements. Due to the presence of sin and death

⁴⁶⁵ For a helpful summary of Origen's theology of the image of God see John A. McGuckin, "Image of God," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, edited by John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 131-4.

⁴⁶⁶ Origen, *Jo.* 20.22.[20].182.

⁴⁶⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.22.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.5; cf. *hom. I-16 in Gen.* 1.13; Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 71-128.

⁴⁶⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.22.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.2.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.8. This idea of a mirror would be taken up and expanded by later Greek theologians. For a succinct account of this development see J. Patout Burns (trans. and ed.), *Theological Anthropology*, in *Sources of Early Christian Thought*, edited by William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

⁴⁷² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.19; 7.2. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 209, comments, "Il ne l'est cependant pas comme un animal: un animal est sans raison par sa nature, l'homme par un acte de sa volonté libre."

in the world, Origen is inclined to characterize and identify people with the creation. “[H]e walks in the image of the earthly and thinks according to the flesh and considers the things that are of the flesh.”⁴⁷³ Furthermore, humans are naturally inclined toward the adoration of images of men and animals.⁴⁷⁴ Other comments on sin and the image fill out some of this picture. At times he narrows in and says that rather than worshipping the image of God (Christ), the soul fails to embrace him and “honor him as God or give thanks, but should become bankrupt in its thinking and exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of the image of corruptible man.”⁴⁷⁵ He repeatedly insists that sin is to abandon the Creator to worship the creation.⁴⁷⁶ This sin is often cast in terms of worshipping images. “You see, those who worship these things and who trust in them are dead and like images.”⁴⁷⁷ Human nature is inclined to persist in worshipping something: the image of God, i.e., Christ, or images of creation, i.e., idols.

Close attention to Origen demonstrates that he goes much further in his assessment of the image. Here we begin to see him stand anomalous to the wider Greek patristic tradition. Commenting on Romans 1:20-23 he says, “On this basis, then, men become without excuse, since although they knew God (since God made himself known), they have not, as is fitting, worshipped God or given thanks, but through their own futile way of thinking, while they seek after forms and images for God, they have destroyed the image of God within themselves” (*ipsis Dei imaginem perdiderunt*).⁴⁷⁸ This is a bold theological statement. The reader expects further elaboration on this remark and is left frustrated when nothing is provided. What exactly is *destroyed* or *lost* is curiously absent from his exegesis

⁴⁷³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Scheck, 103:312).

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.19.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.21 (Scheck, 103:95).

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.5 (Scheck, 103:264).

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.20 (Hammond Bammel, 16:86; Scheck, 103:92). For a discussion of the influence of this teaching on the Eastern theological tradition see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 43-84, 101-2.

partly because Origen never offers a full account of the image of God in the *Commentary on Romans*. Scholars like Arne Hobbel and Henri Crouzel have been reticent to give statements like this too much theological weight.⁴⁷⁹ After surveying several similar texts in Origen's writings the latter states,

Mais l'ensemble de la pensée d'Origène nous fera seul comprendre dans quel sens il dit cela. D'abord l'image de Dieu peut être récupérée par la pénitence, et, étant donnée le caractère nettement physique de la participation et de l'union au Logos, cette affirmation n'a rien à voir avec une justification extrinsèque: l'image recouvrée fait partie de la nature même de l'homme et la constitue au plus profond.⁴⁸⁰

Crouzel is largely correct. Origen is consistent in the hope of recovering the image of God. But I would stress something not stressed enough by Crouzel in Origen's theology. This statement speaks to one or two realities. The first would consider Origen assessing those referred to by Paul in Romans 1:20-23 as forfeiting their opportunity for redemption and dying in their sin. The second would take this statement at face value and evaluate it as one more example of how the exegesis of Romans is leading Origen into a more pessimistic understanding of human nature. Several aforementioned and future peculiar comments in his exegesis of Romans lead the reader to believe that this is the case.

The restoration of the image of God is possible and expected. This is a journey,⁴⁸¹ and the goal is to be "conformed and similar to his (Christ's) image and glory."⁴⁸² A failure to be conformed to the image is an act against the sovereign will of God. "Surely God did not make us in his own image in order that we should be subject to the servitude of the flesh...[but that we]...might make use of the service and ministry of the flesh."⁴⁸³ As the image relates to the "inner man" it is "being renewed through knowledge."⁴⁸⁴ This is an act of

⁴⁷⁹ Arne J. Hobbel, "The *Imago Dei* in the Writings of Origen," *StPatr* XXI (1989), 301-7; Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 206-11.

⁴⁸⁰ Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 207.

⁴⁸¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.5.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.5 (Scheck, 103:65).

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6.14 (Scheck, 104:58).

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.22 (Scheck, 103:101).

God's grace.⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, the image of God is at the forefront of Origen's thinking in his exegesis of a central text in our study: Romans 5:12. Here Origen asserts, "This is the passage where he encourages us to bear the image of the heavenly after casting off the image of the earthly; that is to say, by living according to the Word of God we are to be renewed and remade in the inner man after the image of God, who created him."⁴⁸⁶ Interestingly, this comes directly after his comments on Adamic solidarity. Those who fail to do so walk in the image of the earthly and thinking according to the flesh.⁴⁸⁷ Later in this same section Origen makes the distinction between "world" and "men." The latter are "those who are already beginning to know and understand that they have been made in the image of God."⁴⁸⁸

The fact that the restoration of the image of God is important to Origen's overall conception of human nature is testified by the fact that he makes consistent use of two biblical texts that speak in this regard—both from the Apostle Paul. Second Corinthians 3:18 ("And all of us, with unveiled faces, observing the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.") is cited four times in the commentary.⁴⁸⁹ Colossians 3:9-10 ("put on the new man who was created according to God and is being renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him.") is cited seven times in the commentary.⁴⁹⁰ These texts should be read alongside his exegesis of Romans 8:28-9 ("But we know that all things work together for good for

⁴⁸⁵ Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, 211, makes an interesting observation: "Si nous comparons la conception que se fait Origène de la récupération de l'image de Dieu avec celle de Plotin, nous trouvons entre elles quelque ressemblance. Pour Plotin l'âme n'est pas changée intérieurement par son attachement au corps, elle est seulement recouverte et salie par la matière: la catharsis ou purification lui fera retrouver sa pureté originelle. De même chez Origène, l'image de Dieu subsiste au fond de l'âme, cachée par celle du Terrestre: il faut enlever la seconde pour que la première apparaisse. Mais il y a entre eux bien des différences. D'abord pour Origène la purification de l'âme n'est que le début du progrès spirituel, qui s'accomplira d'une manière plus positive par la pratique des vertus. Ensuite et surtout, cette conversion est affaire de grâce, elle n'est possible que par la Rédemption du Christ, et son action qui se poursuit dans l'âme."

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:311-2).

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.1.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:315).

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.5; 4.8; 7.6; 9.1.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1.22; 2.9; 4.7 (twice); 5.1, 8; 7.2.

those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”).⁴⁹¹ The Apostle’s language regularly draws Origen to an assessment of the image of God.

The image of God is an important but not ubiquitous theme in the *Commentary on Romans*. His statements both conform to and deviate from what is now thought to be characteristic of the Greek patristic manner of articulating Christian anthropology. Calling the image “destroyed” is further than many of his contemporaries were willing to go. Its restoration is nevertheless expected and attainable by a combination of God’s grace and human effort. The reflection of the image of God is a fluid concept in Origen’s theology of regress and progress. One reason for such a fluid theology is his desire to avoid the static conception of human nature espoused by his deterministic adversaries. So at least once he declares that freedom of will *makes the nature* in each person.⁴⁹²

Origen’s exegesis certainly conveys the idea that sin diminishes the authentic, God-given life. Sin is a loss of participation in the divine life. Authentic existence is found only in Christ. But a desire to isolate the diminishment of the image of God from a theology of inherited sinfulness must be avoided. Origen’s understanding of human nature is pluriform and requires the reader hold together various features of such a complex theology. The integration of various threads gives his theology of the image more force. The spread of Adam’s sin gives Origen’s theology of the image a more justified rationale for his strong teaching on the destruction of the image of God in humanity.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 7.5.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.10.

Sin and Death

Origen's understanding of the image of God is complemented by the role death plays in his understanding of human nature.⁴⁹³ Death is perhaps the most significant motif in describing both that which is inherited as a result of Adam's transgression and that which characterizes the world in which we live. But an analysis of Origen's theology of death will yield that it is never divorced from his theology of inherited sin. The two run alongside each other.

Origen lays a great deal of emphasis on the fact that all humanity is under the rule of death. His comments on Romans 5:12-14 consistently betray his conviction that death passed through to all men.⁴⁹⁴ Death is not just a transitory phenomenon. It inhabits this world.⁴⁹⁵ It also characterizes our existence. He observes that "death has a place" in this earthly and bodily life.⁴⁹⁶ The created order is not immune insofar as Christ's work of creation is marred by death, as the latter is "laying waste to his own work."⁴⁹⁷ Bringing in support from Ephesians 2:5, Origen asserts that the coming of Christ found us in a condition of death, specifically, the death of the spiritual senses.⁴⁹⁸ He goes still further by showing that it not only had a place, but "death had conquered all."⁴⁹⁹ Origen consistently draws this condition of mortality back to the first man. The emergence of death came by way of "collusion with the guard (Adam)."⁵⁰⁰ Adam functions as the one by whom death gained an entrance,⁵⁰¹ and

⁴⁹³ For more on the theme of death in Origen's theology see Lawrence R. Hennessey, "Expressions of Death and Immortality in Homer, Plato and Origen of Alexandria: A Literary and Theological Comparative Study," Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1982.

⁴⁹⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:313).

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.2 (Scheck, 103:330).

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.5.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:315).

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:321).

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5.1.

Origen confidently asserts that our “mortal posterity” came from Adam.⁵⁰² Adam is indeed the cause of death for all others.⁵⁰³

What exactly does Origen mean by death? To what *kind* of death does he refer? His theology of death is nuanced and serves as another example of his homonymic reading of the Epistle to the Romans.⁵⁰⁴ The Apostle frequently conveys a number of ideas through a single word, and Origen sees at least five different meanings of “death” in Paul’s epistle: (1) the common death, (2) the death of the soul, i.e., separation of the soul from God, (3) the author of death (i.e., the devil), (4) the underworld, and (5) the death to sin.⁵⁰⁵ Since the common death (1) is “indifferent,”⁵⁰⁶ and the death to sin (5) is the positive spiritual act of denying sin, most of Origen’s references to death are found in the remaining three meanings. But it is important to note that these meanings are not always mutually exclusive. They often work according to a certain theological hierarchy. The need to distinguish is imperative, and his exegesis of Romans 6:9 is highly instructive in this regard. He wrestles with the Apostle’s assertion that “death will no longer have dominion over him (Christ).” To which death does this refer? Such a statement vexes the great Alexandrian as he seeks to uphold both the purity and authority of Christ while at the same time vindicating the Apostle’s words—words that he knows may be taken in a manner contrary to their original intent. So once again he draws careful distinctions between types of death in the epistle. He concludes by arguing that *all* humanity is subject to death. This death is the common (neutral) death that bodies naturally experience as a result of entering life in this world. Origen applies this to Christ, for “it does not seem absurd if he who took the form of a slave endured the dominion of death which,

⁵⁰² Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:310).

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 5.2.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Ibid., 1.1.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 6.6. For other clarifications on the word “death” see *ibid.*, 4.5; 5.10; 6.5.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 6.6. But in *comm. in Rom.* 5.4 he speaks of the common death as the result of the condemnation of transgression—even for the “righteous.” Cf. Henri Crouzel, “Mort et immortalité selon Origène,” *BLE* 79 (1978), 27-8.

doubtless, exercises dominion over everyone who is placed in the flesh in slave form.”⁵⁰⁷ Life in this world is characterized by the common death. Origen can safeguard the purity of Christ by affirming that this death does not imply original or volitional sin. But the fact of death, and indeed the presence of death in the world, implies that one *has* sinned and therefore allowed such a death even to exist. This death produced a world of limitation and corruption. It is inescapable and the very reason why Christ came to redeem the world in the first place! So differentiating the types of death can be difficult.

Origen’s theology of corruption and death sometimes finds recourse through the language of debt.

For we have become debtors according to him who originally lost the income he received of immortality and incorruptibility in Paradise by the serpent’s persuasion. And for that reason we all become debtors, however many in the likeness of Adam become implicated in the fate of transgression.⁵⁰⁸

But more often Origen stresses spiritual death in the commentary. It is a ubiquitous disease that infects and affects all humanity. This is caused by the willful sins of individuals in this life.⁵⁰⁹ The presence and prevalence of sin from the earliest ages and by all humans spreads the disease of death far and wide. Even though his exegesis of Romans 5:12 is largely volitional, it nevertheless appears that sin, and therefore death, are inevitable. Even the greatest saints—Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham—all committed sin and spread death around the world. Only by Christ was this death repulsed and broken.⁵¹⁰ Even the law produced death when in the fullness of time the “law began to be weak in the flesh.”⁵¹¹ Indeed, there is a connection between spiritual and physical death. Our own bodily death is a shadow of the spiritual death of the soul.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.10 (Scheck, 103:371). He anticipates and provides a measure of clarity for this discussion in *comm. in Rom.* 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:371; Scheck, 103:313).

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.14 (Scheck, 104:286).

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.1.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.1.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.7 (Scheck, 104:23). Cf. Rom 8:3.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 5.1. Cf. also 5.2, 4, 7, 10; 6.5.

The hold this death has on the world is broken only by Christ. Origen's theology of death quite frequently is juxtaposed with life. He asserts that, "[D]eath shall be swallowed up."⁵¹³ Life and death can also be personified. One has the ability to choose between the two: "Life, therefore, is Christ, and death refers to the last enemy, the devil."⁵¹⁴ To understand the nature of this juxtaposition is to understand their inability to coexist. "[L]ife is hostile to and opposed to death and light to darkness."⁵¹⁵ The two work with opposing motives and goals. "[T]he law of the letter kills and works death, but the law of the Spirit of life sets free from the law of sin and death."⁵¹⁶ One can see through this context that death is a great cosmic force that is only defeated by the providential and cosmic reign of Jesus Christ. In fact, in terms of the economy of salvation, one has already triumphed over the other. Origen remarks that "death was inevitably destroyed by life,"⁵¹⁷ and what is received in Christ is much greater than that which is lost through Adam.⁵¹⁸

We can see that death plays a formative role in Origen's understanding of sin and human nature, but it would be a misunderstanding to highlight death at the expense of sin in his theology. Sin and death are inextricably linked. He asserts this much in Book Five. "But if sin and death entered into this world and inhabit this world, it is certain that those who are dead to this world through Christ, or rather with Christ, are strangers to death and sin."⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, sin and death are equal parts of a kingdom ruled by the devil.⁵²⁰ Death, therefore, cannot be isolated and viewed to the exclusion of sin. Such a rationale requires that the reader consider "death" as a synecdoche in the *Commentary on Romans*, that is, "death"

⁵¹³ Ibid., 1.6 (Scheck, 103:67).

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 1.21 (Scheck, 103:95). Cf. *ibid.*, 5.6.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 3.1 (Scheck, 103:182). Cf. *ibid.*, 5.6.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 3.6 (Scheck, 103:229-30).

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:315).

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 5.3.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:312).

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 5.1.

is a part of the whole: the dominion of sin and death. Origen's exegesis of Romans 5:12-14 is instructive in this regard. In one breath Origen speaks of death as a tyrant, then elucidates that this tyrant is actually the "death of sin," and then concludes this thought by speaking once again of this tyrant simply as death.⁵²¹ Taking this a bit further we note that not only does death frequently encapsulate both sin and death, but more precisely death is the *result* of sin.⁵²² For example, in Book Six he states that "sin is the cause of death."⁵²³ Death does not exist without sin. Therefore, reading death in Origen's theology requires that we also read sin in the same. This resultant theology is all throughout the *Commentary on Romans*. In one place he asserts that the condemnation of sin is death.⁵²⁴ His exegesis of Romans 6:23 also demonstrates this fact. "So then, sin pays out fitting wages, namely death, to his soldiers, over whom he reigns. The death we are speaking of here is not bodily death, but the kind concerning which it has been written, 'The soul that sins shall die.'"⁵²⁵ The implications of this are significant on the macrocosmic level. God's natural order is perverted through sin. Nature is not inherently sinful. All this can be traced back to the first man.

The fact that sin and death are inextricably linked applies no less to the theology of Adam. In Book Five he states that "sin entered this world through one man,"⁵²⁶ and later affirms that Adam "first opened up the passage-way for sin (*peccato*) into this world by his transgression" (*praeuaricando*).⁵²⁷ If these passages speak to the entrance of sin into the world, several others speak to the diffusion of *sin*. In seeking to elucidate the meaning behind Paul's wording of "all" and "many" in Romans 5:15 in relation to problem and solution, Origen states, "And what he had elsewhere called 'all men,' he has designated here as 'many'

⁵²¹ Ibid., 5.1.

⁵²² Ibid., e.g., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:310-15, 321-3); 5.2 (Scheck, 103:330-1). Cf. *ibid.*, *Jo.* 20.388.

⁵²³ Ibid., 6.9 (Scheck, 104:42).

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 6.11.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 6.6 (Scheck, 104:17).

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:312).

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:383; Scheck, 103:322).

or ‘very many,’ where he makes a comparison between the sin and death, which was diffused from Adam to all men, and the justification and life which derived from Christ.”⁵²⁸ Here sin and death are equated and both are considered to have been diffused to all humanity. Later in Book Five he again equates several terms to indicate such diffusion. “We have already said above that by means of Adam’s transgression a certain access, as it were, was given by which sin (*peccatum*), or the death of sin (*mors peccati*), or condemnation (*condemnatio*), spread to all men.”⁵²⁹ In commenting on Romans 6:6 Origen equates the “body of sin” (*corpus peccati*) with the “body of death” (*corpore mortis*) of Romans 7:24.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, in the critical text of Romans 5:12 one reads Origen saying *sin*, rather than *death*, passed through to all men: *[N]ec multum interesse quod ibi in omnes homines dixerit pertransisse peccatum.*⁵³¹ At other times Origen appears strained in his attempt to grasp the effects of the first man’s sin. He once says that the death of sin “was ruling over all those who had fallen away by a transgression similar to that of the first man.”⁵³² Does he mean that Adam is a prototype of all future sin? Something akin to this peculiar saying appears a little later when he explores different ideas to make sense of how we sin in the likeness of Adam’s transgression (cf. Rom 5:14). “Perhaps there were some, up to that time when men were living under law as under a pedagogue, who performed something similar to what Adam is said to have performed in Paradise, to touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil and to be ashamed of his own nakedness and to fall away from the dwelling in Paradise.”⁵³³ To sin in the likeness of Adam’s transgression confuses our author and he admits it contains a “hidden mystery.”⁵³⁴ Despite his

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 5.2 (Scheck, 103:331).

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 5.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:405-6; Scheck, 103:340).

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 5.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:438-9; Scheck, 103:365-6).

⁵³¹ Ibid., 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:362; Scheck, 103:306). Cf. Hammond Bammel, *Römerbrieftext*, 333.

⁵³² Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:321).

⁵³³ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:323).

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:324).

difficulty grasping and articulating this section of the epistle, his variety of words and exegesis convey a basic idea: sin and death spread to all humanity.

Sin and Dominion

Origen's theology of original sin is brought to fuller expression through his understanding of dominion in the *Commentary on Romans*. All of humanity is under either righteous or unrighteous dominion. This original dominion, and indeed the kingdom in which many still find themselves, is a kingdom of sin and death.⁵³⁵ Every kingdom has a ruler, and for Origen the kingdom of sin and death is ruled by the devil. He refers to the devil variously as an "extremely wicked king,"⁵³⁶ a "tyrant,"⁵³⁷ and the "head" of the body of sin.⁵³⁸ This is the same ruler who tried to tempt Jesus,⁵³⁹ held people captive in their sins,⁵⁴⁰ and once held the power of death itself.⁵⁴¹ He is the author of sin, death, and desolation.⁵⁴² But dominion has an even fuller meaning in the commentary. Origen argues that we must make a distinction between death and dominion,⁵⁴³ arguing that the latter idea is further reserved for those who surrender themselves to sin and death with their entire mind and allegiance.⁵⁴⁴ For Origen

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 5.1.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 5.7 (Scheck, 103:350).

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 4.8; 5.1, 10.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 5.9. Here Origen also draws the metaphorical contrast with Christ as the head of the church.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 5.2.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.7.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 5.3, 10 (twice). In *comm. in Rom.* 8.8 Origen states, "For indeed there will be a conversion for them (Israel) at the end of the age, at that time when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and all Israel will be saved; but for that one who is said to have fallen from heaven, there will not be any conversion at the end of the age," (Hammond Bammel, 34:682-3; Scheck, 104:168). This sentence has been the subject of much debate. Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity*, 431 n5, sees this as an interpolation by Rufinus. F. W. Norris, "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell: Papers presented at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics*, edited by N. M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 48, sees this as the real Origen. For other instances of Origen denying the conversion of the devil see *comm. in Rom.* 5.1, 7.

⁵⁴² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.6.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 5.1.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

dominion language is kingdom language. The right to rule is reserved to the individual: those who choose the devil are ruled by him and receive death.⁵⁴⁵ No doubt the consequence of Adam's sin is the spread of death to all people.⁵⁴⁶ He affirms as much in his comments on Romans 5:17. "Therefore it seems plain that the soul had composed its own IOU with death by means of transgression, so that, having lost the freedom of immortality, it took up the yoke of sin and the dominion of death."⁵⁴⁷ As we have already seen, he describes the human race as "weak" and "susceptible to falling away through negligence."⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, before conversion our members were enslaved to sin.⁵⁴⁹ But he is also inclined to stress that dominion exists in those who *persist* in sinning—it is a state that can be conferred.⁵⁵⁰

But the power of the devil's hold on this dominion over humanity is broken by the atoning work of Christ.

If then we have been bought at a price, as Paul also confirms, undoubtedly we were bought from someone whose slaves we were, who also demanded the price he wanted so that he might release from his authority those whom he was holding. Now it was the devil who was holding us, to whom we had been dragged off by our sins.⁵⁵¹

This gives us the first of a few glimpses in the commentary of what is now known as the Ransom to Satan theory of the atonement. The devil's rule over humanity is broken when paid the ransom price by Christ's death on the cross.⁵⁵² In an ultimate sense the death of

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.6.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.1-3, 6.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.3 (Scheck, 103:336).

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.16 (Scheck, 104:123).

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.9.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.3.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 2.9 (Scheck, 103:161).

⁵⁵² One should note that Origen, like many other theologians in the Christian tradition, promulgated a theology of the atonement that does not easily fit into one particular category. Cf., e.g., *comm. in Rom.* 4.11: "And having taken the form of a slave, in accordance with the Father's will, he offered himself as a sacrifice for the whole world by handing over his blood to the ruler of this world," (Scheck, 103:297). Scheck notes the observation by W. Fairweather, *Origen and Greek Patristic Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 187ff: "Although Origen did not develop the conception of the vicarious character of Christ's sacrifice, as was subsequently done by Anselm, he undoubtedly took this view of it."

Christ puts to death hostility.⁵⁵³ He again says, “just as death had exercised its dominion in transgressions through the one, so also through the obedience of the one, life would reign through righteousness.”⁵⁵⁴ But the dominion of sin and death will not characterize this world forever.⁵⁵⁵ Death, while it exercised dominion when it was in a state of weakness and dishonor, in the future will no longer have dominion.⁵⁵⁶ Origen is insistent that the kingdom of death is certainly not of eternal duration in the same way as that of life and righteousness.⁵⁵⁷ The present time is best understood as one of war where the “future kingdom is being striven for.”⁵⁵⁸ Jesus Christ will not only destroy death, but also the power of death, i.e., the devil.⁵⁵⁹ Origen brings an already/not yet eschatology to bear on the text when he speaks of Christ’s present reign. These things are so because “the dominion of death is now broken in part and being gradually destroyed, a dominion which had previously spread itself out to all men.”⁵⁶⁰ He describes the present life as a period not of reigning, but of robbing. Although the devil’s power is broken, he nevertheless wanders through the “deserts and wastelands seeking to gather to himself a band of unbelievers.”⁵⁶¹ Origen’s language of sin and death is almost always juxtaposed with the perfection and life brought about through Jesus Christ. The dominion of sin means that Christ’s perfect reign that is exemplified in his kingdom is not yet present. Moved not by the compulsion of his nature but by compassion alone,⁵⁶² Christ’s work of reconciliation is greater than that which was caused by Adam. Paul

⁵⁵³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 4.12.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.2 (Scheck, 103:329).

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.10.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.7.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.3 (Scheck, 103:338).

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. *ibid.*, *Jo.* 20.365.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (Scheck, 103:338-9).

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Scheck, 103:325).

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.2.

“wants to show that life is much stronger than death, and righteousness than sin.”⁵⁶³

Furthermore, this redemption is greater because “[Adam] himself, from whom the death of sin was diffused to the others, is added to their number.”⁵⁶⁴ Again he reflects on the first man. “For he himself will be saved with all those whom he had made subject to his transgression.”⁵⁶⁵ Christ’s redemption is superior because not only is death replaced with life (Christ), but those in Christ will *reign* with him.⁵⁶⁶ Paul did this “to demonstrate how much more abundant the gift to all is than the transgression.”⁵⁶⁷ Origen clearly dispels any dualistic tendencies his audience may have previously entertained.

Origen fully recognizes that sin, death, and restoration all sound universal in this section of the epistle. So he frequently tempers the seemingly universalist language of Paul so that his readers may have no recourse to moral complacency. While sin and death are universal, restoration will require a great deal of “effort and sweat.”⁵⁶⁸ The Apostle’s linguistic maneuvers work to “confound” and “soften and weaken” his hearers by replacing “all” with “very many,” ostensibly to “roughen up, as it were, at least in some measure because of certain negligent hearers, what he said and to put some fear into those who are remiss.”⁵⁶⁹ This demonstrates how the quest for spiritual progress shapes Origen’s exegesis of sin in the commentary. The dual emphases on the universality of sin and the lack of universality of restoration help encourage the fight toward spiritual progress.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 5.2 (Scheck, 103:330).

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 5.2 (Scheck, 103:332). This may be a tacit rebuke of Tatian who denied Adam’s salvation.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.2 (Scheck, 103:332).

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.3.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.4 (Scheck, 103:340).

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:305).

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.1 (Scheck, 103:306). Cf. *ibid.*, 5.5.

⁵⁷⁰ This pastoral emphasis is one of the reasons why we don’t see more “theologizing” in this section. His goal is to encourage his audience toward righteous living, not give them a lengthy account of the nature of the image of God.

Conclusion

This examination of Origen's understanding of original sin has been a crucial step in understanding his entire conception of sin in the *Commentary on Romans*. The spread of sin is precipitated by his understanding of a cosmic preexistent fall of souls whose own sinfulness was played out in space and time through Adam's first sin. All humanity, save Christ, shares in the taint of sin as a result of Adam's transgression. This sin is passed down from Adam in a generative sense and is not to be confused by associating evil with matter. The spread of sin is further and more fully realized by the need for infant baptism—the remission of this innate sin. But Origen's understanding of original sin is holistic. Humanity has also experienced a loss of the image of God and stands in need of the restoration of the image in order to realize the true divine life. The loss of the image is joined by the thoroughgoing presence of corruption, death, and dominion in the individual. Humanity has thus experienced a debilitating and all-encompassing alienation from God.

Origen's understanding of original sin shares some commonalities with his predecessors but goes much further. The idea of Adam's sin as an act of youthful naïveté in the Garden—espoused by Irenaeus and Clement—fades with Origen. Origen, however, seems to share with Irenaeus a conception of solidarity with Adam. But we must be cautious. Language like “imputation,” “solidarity,” or “headship” were coined later and carry a certain amount of theological weight and sophistication. They are too anachronistic to be used in an unqualified manner. The point worth reminding is that anthropology in the third century was fluid. It would only begin to solidify into “Eastern” and “Western” conceptions later. After Origen the picture in the Greek East becomes more regulated. John Chrysostom's exposition of Romans 5:12 in the tenth of his *Homilies on Romans* provides a taxonomy indicative of this tradition.

He (Paul) enquires whence death came in, and how it prevailed. How then did death come in and prevail? “Through the sin of one.” But what means, “for that all have sinned?” This; he having once fallen, even they that had not eaten of the tree did from him, all of them, become mortal.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷¹ Chrysostom, *The Epistle to the Romans* 10 (NPNF¹ 11:401).

Throughout his homily Chrysostom maintains a clear emphasis on the spread of *death* resulting from Adam's fall. Death is understood to the *exclusion* of sin. This manner of exegeting the fifth chapter of Romans would better exemplify Greek patristic anthropology. Origen thus stands as a pioneer in his exegesis of human nature in Romans. In his *Commentary on Romans* Origen provides material for both of the anthropological strands in the Christian tradition.

Looking now to the West we can assert that there is no justifiable case for arguing that Origen provided the requisite exegetical material for the doctrine of sin sketched by Pelagius. It is true that Pelagius culled from Origen a thoroughgoing doctrine of the freedom of the will,⁵⁷² aspects of his doctrine of grace, and predestination based on foreknowledge. But this should not eclipse Origen's teaching on Adam—a teaching that affirms both the participatory and the personal dimensions of sin. Origen's emphasis on grace in the commentary also far outweighs anything Pelagius says on the subject.⁵⁷³ Furthermore, nowhere in the *Commentary on Romans* does Origen teach or even intimate the idea of sinlessness. The word *impeccantia* is not found in the commentary and the idea is foreign to Origen's thinking. In fact, in Book Three he explicitly denies the sinlessness of any human subsequent to Adam.⁵⁷⁴ His stronger language on sin is the result of his mind operating along Pauline channels at this point in his career. It would be left for others to provide a more thorough understanding of original sin with its attenuated effects.

⁵⁷² Scheck, "Introduction," *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5*, 16; de Bruyn, "Introduction," *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 17.

⁵⁷³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.3: "Even if someone should be perfect in faith among the sons of men, if he lacks the faith that is from your grace, he will be regarded as nothing. So also, though someone should be perfect in ministry, if he lacks the grace of ministry that is from God, he will be regarded as nothing. So also, if someone is perfect in teaching and lacks the grace of teaching that is from God, he will be regarded as nothing. And the same thing applies with everything that has been enumerated. Among the sons of men there is a certain perfection that people attain by their own effort and exertions, whether in wisdom or in teaching or in other duties; nevertheless, these things will be nothing if they do not have the grace given by God; for if the grace of the Spirit is absent from them, they cannot be members of the body of Christ," (Scheck, 104:208).

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.2: "It seems to me that no one could be said to have turned aside except one who, at one time, stood on the right path. From this observation it is clear that the original work of the rational nature which was made by God had been upright and was set on the right path as a gift of its Creator. But because he turned away from this to the wayward road of sin, he is now justly said to have turned aside. There is, for example, the case of the first man, Adam, who turned aside from the right road in Paradise, by the seductive deception of the serpent, to the wrong and tortuous paths of mortal life," (Scheck, 103:195-6).

In the next two chapters I will turn to Origen's understanding of volitional sin. One striking feature of this analysis will be to see Origen's unwillingness to draw out his teaching on inherited sin. His understanding of original sin is inchoate. Some aspects of this teaching are evident in his understanding of volitional sin (i.e., instability, weakened will). But even though Origen offers the church some early material for a holistic understanding of original sin, this material remains truncated. It would be for later theologians to draw out these implications. So as we turn to Chapter Three we will see how he understands the parameters of volitional sin. Here he sketches his anti-Gnostic account of how one should read Paul's teaching on the human constitution.

CHAPTER THREE: PARAMETERS OF VOLITIONAL SIN

Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that Origen has an understanding of original sin that includes both inheritance of sin from Adam *and* existential loss with regard to the image of God and the spread of corruption and death. The remaining two chapters of this study will examine the outcropping of this conception of original sin by analyzing his notion of volitional sin. Origen's understanding of volitional sin in the *Commentary on Romans* runs along the following lines. Over against Gnostic determinism Origen understands volitional sin as a misappropriation of the individual's tripartite makeup, a situation where God's law—natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel—is breached through the soul's lack of moderation, caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body.

This chapter will focus on Origen's broad conception of volitional sin. Only in the next chapter will a more narrow investigation of volitional sin be undertaken. So here I look at the possibility of sin and in the next chapter the practice of sin. Sketched here will be the parameters, structure, and conditions for sinning on a daily basis. This seeks to establish Origen's articulation of the possibility for sin and ethics. In dealing with the parameters of volitional sin the present chapter will isolate only the first portion the aforementioned claim. These parameters include the anti-Gnostic polemic, his clearly articulated response of a tripartite anthropology, the 'two ways' tradition, and an elucidation of the law. There is an inherent logic in how these concepts are interrelated in Origen's thinking. In response to the Gnostic denigration of material existence and determined natures, Origen argues for a tripartite makeup of all individuals: body, soul, and spirit. He understands the contours of sin according to his unique incorporation of the 'two ways' tradition, where the soul is free to choose between virtue (spirit) and vice (body). This tripartite structure functions as the apparatus through which to refract his incorporation of the prevailing 'two ways' tradition. Furthermore, all humans know right from wrong because all have access to God's law—natural, Mosaic, or gospel. Therefore sin is a violation of God's law by choosing the alternate

“way,” thus misappropriating the God-given tripartite structure. It is possible to breach these God-given parameters because of the detrimental effects of original sin. To the effects of this loss we now turn as we witness Origen and the Gnostics offering competing views on human nature.

Gnostic Determinism

The Gnostic threat looms in the background of almost all of Origen’s works. It is no less the case in his *Commentary on Romans*. Here Origen directs his ire against the Valentinian and Basilidean schools and frequently lumps Marcion into the debate—a choice that is not always entirely clear.⁵⁷⁵ The Gnostic foil guides Origen’s exegesis of Paul and brings to the surface at least two themes important to our present discussion. The first of these themes is the Gnostics denigration of the material order. This denigration includes both the created world and corporeal existence. The second theme found in Origen’s polemic against the Gnostics is their objectionable doctrine of natures. This doctrine is especially pernicious for Origen because it teaches that our natures are predetermined—fixed—from birth. Since nothing can be done to change this condition it undermines any basis for ethics and runs counter to Origen’s understanding of free will, sin, and grace. As we turn to consider these claims it is worth bearing in mind that Origen’s response to this teaching forms his fundamental conception of volitional sin in the commentary.

Origen repeatedly asserts that the Gnostics have a low view of God’s creation. Their denigration of the material order is a theme he explores throughout his reading of the epistle. His exegesis of Romans 14:14 is a good example (“I know and am confident in the Lord Jesus that nothing is common (*commune*) through itself except to him who thinks

⁵⁷⁵ The degree to which Origen and other the Church Fathers understood the Gnostics has been the subject of much debate over the last few decades. Additionally, the designation “Gnosticism” has been questioned by many. For various recent approaches to these questions see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2003); Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983); Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

something is common (*commune*), to him it is common (*commune*).”⁵⁷⁶ This text elicits a broad theological reading by our author as he uses it as a defense of the goodness of creation. “For none of the things God has created is unclean of its own nature—for it is an established fact that everything created by the good God is good and clean.”⁵⁷⁷ Later in the same chapter of Romans Origen revisits this doctrinal theme. When Paul asserts “all things are clean” (Rom 14:20) Origen refers back to his thoughts on Romans 14:14. “So then, according to their nature and the definition of creation, where everything that exists has been made by God, all things are clean, and there is nothing unclean or what is called common.”⁵⁷⁸ His later emphasis on acts of the will (e.g., “what is good of its own nature becomes evil because of the offence”⁵⁷⁹) demonstrates his desire to show that God’s creation, in and of itself, is not corrupt. “[U]ncleanness and defilement consists not in things and essences (*rebus uel...substantiis*), but in actions and thoughts less right.”⁵⁸⁰ Even if he only occasionally alludes to the Gnostics in these contexts, there is no doubt Origen has them at the forefront of his mind.

What draws Origen’s ire even more is the Gnostic doctrine of natures. This doctrine is not unrelated to their denigration of creation. But it takes a specific form that Origen finds entirely objectionable. The deterministic assumption behind the doctrine of natures runs counter to the whole of how Origen reads Scripture. He is opposed to all forms of determinism whether it is Gnostic or astrological.⁵⁸¹ Determinism runs counter to everything Scripture teaches about free will and moral obligation. Christians should “not

⁵⁷⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.42 (Hammond Bammel, 34:779; Scheck, 104:247).

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.42 (Scheck, 104:249).

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.3 (Scheck, 104:257). Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 130, demonstrates from various texts that Origen’s polemic against the Gnostic denigration of creation extended to the rationality of the heavenly movement: “Thus in several different contexts Origen adopts the traditional philosophical view that the orderly motion of stars and planets was proof of their immanent intelligence and high ontological status.”

⁵⁷⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 10.3 (Scheck, 104:257).

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.3 (Hammond Bammel, 34:791; Scheck, 104:258). Cf. *princ.* 4.4.8.

⁵⁸¹ “The determinism presupposed by astrology would empty all meaning out of Christ’s Redemption, the efforts of the apostles, human endeavour, and prayer, and would make God unjust,” Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 145.

bring forth worthless complaints as an excuse for sin: ‘I sinned because the devil made me do it!’ or, ‘under the compulsion of nature!’ or, ‘my fated condition!’ or, ‘[I sinned due to] the course of the stars!’⁵⁸² The imperatives of Scripture are rendered superfluous if our condition is fated. Countering this doctrine of natures is at the forefront of his mind and is one of the main reasons why he undertook the exegesis of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans in the first place. In the Preface to the commentary he states that heretics have attacked Paul’s letter by misreading it.

[B]ecause he (Paul) stirs up very many questions in the letter and the heretics, especially propping themselves up on these, are accustomed to add that the cause of each person’s actions is not to be attributed to one’s own purpose but to different kinds of natures. And, from a handful of words from this letter they attempt to subvert the meaning of the whole of Scripture, which teaches that God has given man freedom of will.⁵⁸³

Origen names Marcion, Basilides, and Valentinus as the chief architects of this heresy. They are the objects of his relentless scorn and opprobrium as he seeks to counter their doctrines through his exegesis. He wastes no time as he continues his assault. “The heretics, however, invoke this text (Rom 1:1c) for the purpose of calumny, saying that Paul was set apart from his mother’s womb because goodness was inherent in his nature.”⁵⁸⁴

The case of Paul demonstrates that Origen is unconcerned to classify whether humans are *either* inherently evil *or* inherently good. Both suppositions are incorrect. This idea is reiterated later in the commentary. “I do not know how those who come forth from the school of Valentinus or Basilides, failing to hear what Paul has said here, should imagine that there is a nature of souls that would always be saved and never perish, and another that would always perish and never be saved.”⁵⁸⁵ The issue is much more fundamental in his mind than to associate nature merely with sin. He clarifies this in comments on Romans 2:5-6. “In the first place let the heretics who claim that the natures of human souls are either good or evil be shut

⁵⁸² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.3 (Scheck, 104:7).

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.1 (Scheck, 103:53)

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.5 (Scheck, 103:64).

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.10 (Scheck, 104:175-6).

out. Let them hear that God pays back to each one not on account of his nature but on account of his works.”⁵⁸⁶ When Origen refers to “nature” he is speaking of something much more fundamental than sin or the absence of sin. He is speaking of a type of essence or quality the individual contains that is superior or inferior. To argue that a particular essence is saved or lost runs counter to any notion of reconciliation. “When he (Paul) says, ‘when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God,’ he plainly shows that there is no substance which, in accordance with Marcion’s or Valentinus’s definition, is naturally hostile to God. Otherwise, if it were hostile by nature and not by its will, it would assuredly not receive reconciliation.”⁵⁸⁷ Reconciliation is precipitated by free will and moral action in Origen’s thought. He defends moral action as the determining factor behind the nature of each person. “As for Marcion and all who...introduce the concept of different kinds of natures of souls, they are confuted in a most clear way in this passage (Rom 2:15b-16)...And it is revealed that each person must be judged not by the privilege of possessing a certain nature, but by his own thoughts, accused or defended by the testimony of his own conscience.”⁵⁸⁸ Reconciliation is impossible if “one’s nature were fighting against this.”⁵⁸⁹ The issue of the doctrine of natures is so paramount because according to Origen the Gnostics have an entirely different conception of God! Late in the commentary Origen makes the point of linking this doctrine of natures to their overall understanding of theology. “I say, does it not seem to you that Marcion, who has composed blasphemous writings against the Creator God, and Basilides and Valentinus and the other originators of depraved doctrines, would have been blessed if they had not possessed those eyes of the heart with which they understood

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.4 (Scheck, 103:111).

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 4.12 (Scheck, 103:299).

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.7 (Scheck, 103:135).

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.4 (Scheck, 104:12). “[C]ontra Gnostic theology, Christians are ‘sons’ by will, not nature,” J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 67.

things badly?”⁵⁹⁰ This receives some elaboration later in the commentary. These different natures of souls “have been constituted by different creators,” Origen polemically argues.⁵⁹¹

Origen argues forcefully that the Gnostics have an entirely different conception of nature. Our author offers a thorough rebuttal of these Gnostic teachings in an effort to grasp a true understanding of sin and ethics in Paul’s thought. This understanding of sin and ethics is expressed through the Pauline conception of humanity’s tripartite nature. In the forthcoming explication of Origen’s tripartite anthropology we will see how this refutes the Gnostics through a dual affirmation of the goodness of corporeal existence and a cogent and responsible pathway for ethics.

Tripartite Anthropology

The denunciation by Origen of the Gnostic denigration of matter and their doctrine of natures constitute some of the main foils in the *Commentary on Romans*. His response to this threat is to articulate a tripartite anthropology. In fact, this commentary represents Origen’s most thoroughgoing defense of this anthropology in his entire corpus. Such an anthropology is the essential framework for his understanding of sin and will remain at the forefront of our entire discussion in these last two chapters. For this reason I will offer a brief survey of his tripartite anthropology with a particular look at how he frames it in the *Commentary on Romans*.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 8.7 (Scheck, 104:163).

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.2 (Scheck, 104:204).

⁵⁹² The tripartite anthropology is a major motif in his *Dialogue with Heraclides*. “That man is a composite being (Σύνθετον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον) we have learnt from the sacred Scriptures. This spirit (πνεῦμα) is not the Holy Spirit, but part of the constitution of man (ἄνθρώπου), as the same apostle teaches when he says: ‘The spirit (πνεῦμα) bears witness with our spirit (πνεύματι).’ For if it were the Holy Spirit he would not have said: ‘The spirit bears witness with our spirit.’ So then our Saviour and Lord, wishing to save man in the way in which he wished to save him, for this reason desired in this way to save the body (σῶμα), just as it was likewise his will to save also the soul (ψυχήν); he also wished to save the remaining part of man, the spirit (πνεῦμα). The whole man would not have been saved unless he had taken upon him the whole man,” *Dialogue with Heraclides*, in *Alexandrian Christianity*, edited by J. E. L. Oulton and Henry Chadwick, LCC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 441-2; *Entretien d’Origène avec Héraclide et les évêques, ses collègues sur le Père, le Fils, et l’Âme*, edited by Jean Scherer (Cairo: L’Institut français d’Archéologie orientale, 1949), 136.

Origen's sketch of the tripartite structure is found in his early work *On First Principles*. Here it serves the purpose of expressing the threefold manner of biblical interpretation. "For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."⁵⁹³ In his later works he propounds this structure in order to exploit its specific anthropological value. Throughout his corpus he always insists that understanding the individual in a tripartite manner is a derivative of properly understanding the Apostle. At least three times in the commentary he appeals directly to 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (RSV).⁵⁹⁴ Origen explains that these are "three aspects" (*tria esse*) in each person.⁵⁹⁵ This principle is axiomatic for Origen and found several times in the commentary.⁵⁹⁶ This tripartite structure is found throughout his corpus with little deviation between his Alexandrian and Caesarean writings. It is a curious phenomenon that in our commentary—composed well into his Caesarean career—Origen is still countering this threat.⁵⁹⁷

Body and Flesh

Origen's attitude concerning body (*corpus*, σῶμα) and flesh (*carnis*, σάρκα) has led to careless attempts to relegate his teaching to a capitulation to Platonism. This critique sees in Origen an attitude that eschews corporeal existence and assesses it as inherently evil.

⁵⁹³ Origen, *princ.* 4.2.4. This threefold anthropological reference is not drawn directly from Paul (cf. 1 Thes 5:23), but only inferentially. His only other allusion to the tripartite structure in *On First Principles* is in 3.4.1 where it serves the basis for exploring the 'two souls' theory. For more on the 'two souls' theory see Chapter Four. For more on Origen's tripartite anthropology see *Jo.* 1.229; *hom. 1–14 in Ezech.* 7.10.4.

⁵⁹⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.12, 21; 7.1. With regard to Origen's biblicism Christoph Marksches remarks, "Offensichtlich spielen biblische Texte mitsamt ihrer Begrifflichkeit für die Entfaltung der Anthropologie bei Origenes eine gewichtigere Rolle als in der Gotteslehre," *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 101.

⁵⁹⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.12 (Hammond Bammel, 16:69; Scheck, 103:79)

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 1.21; 6.1; 9.25.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, 198, "Whether there were actual persons menacing the faith of the Christians in Caesarea by teaching this, or whether this was a leftover theme from Origen's memories of Gnostic groups in Alexandria is not known."

This tendency is typified by an almost exclusive focus on his early treatise *On First Principles*. A perceived dualism characteristic of this work should be tempered by Origen's other extant writings. Even in *On First Principles* the emphasis is not on a duality of matter and spirit, but on corporeality as estranged, alienated existence apart from God, and the potential for creatures to find redemption.⁵⁹⁸ However, confusion over Origen's understanding of corporeal existence is not wholly unfounded. Even Henri Crouzel laments, "Origen's notion of the body is not easy to pin down and shows many ambiguities."⁵⁹⁹ It is therefore incumbent to understand carefully his language in the commentary and provide a clear path in order to understand his theological anthropology.

Crouzel is correct that Origen is ambiguous. This ambiguity persists if we attempt to systematize Origen's thought. But a delimited and careful examination of the *Commentary on Romans* yields a fairly positive and consistent teaching on the body and flesh. On the broadest level Origen understands the body as both a physical and a theological concept. But the flesh is *almost exclusively* a theological (and negative) concept—except with reference to Christ where it is *exclusively* a physical (and positive) concept. Although this is a notoriously difficult and nuanced area of his thought, some measure of clarity is obtained by making the critical distinction between body *qua* body as opposed to body *qua* flesh. The latter is a distinct theological concept that refers to the world of sin, corruption, and death as a consequence of Adam's transgression, as well as the emulation of this condition in our daily lives. Origen strikes a remarkable balance throughout the commentary. He never capitulates to a wholly derisive attitude towards the body, nor does he fail to recognize the body's tenuous place in the economy of salvation. This balance is the product of a careful crafting of anthropology over the course of many years against his Gnostic opponents. The *Commentary on Romans* provides a much fuller, clearer, and higher picture of human corporeality in his thinking.

⁵⁹⁸ Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 60-2.

⁵⁹⁹ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 90.

Body and Flesh of Christ

In contrast to his Gnostic opponents Origen does not regard matter as intrinsically evil. It cannot be evil because it became the abode for our Savior. The enfleshment of Jesus Christ confirms the goodness of God's creation and the dignity of human corporeality. Origen's approach to the Incarnation is instructive. His rebuttal of the Gnostic denigration of matter and corporeality provides a framework for understanding that enfleshment is not sinful.

The manner in which Origen speaks of the body and flesh of Jesus ostensibly serves the purpose of countering a docetic Christology found in his opponents. This anti-Gnostic hue shapes his reading of Paul's epistle as he approaches his Christology from every stage of the Lord's ministry. At one point in the commentary he demonstrates through the Incarnation the superiority of the gospel in relation to the law:

Now the death of that [first husband] occurred through the coming of Christ and his assuming a body (*corporis*), through which you became another's, i.e., you were joined to another husband, namely, to that one who rose again from the dead and who no longer receives the death that that former husband, i.e., the law, received.⁶⁰⁰

He is at pains to make sure the Incarnation is understood with absolute theological clarity. Christ came "to an immaculate body (*corpus immaculatum*) with no contact from a man...[and]...did indeed possess the nature of our body" (*corporis*).⁶⁰¹ Here we have evidence that Origen is careful in how he articulates his language with regard to corporeality. His desire to refute the docetic threat continues throughout his exegesis. "But certain heretics who do not understand this have tried to assert from this passage of the Apostle (Rom 6:5-6) that Christ did not truly die, but had the likeness of death and that he appeared to die rather than truly died."⁶⁰² But Origen sometimes moves beyond the docetic threat to a consideration of the Incarnation in relation to the Jews. The Jews misunderstood what they saw. Even

⁶⁰⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21).

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.12 (Hammond Bammel, 33:525; Scheck, 104:49).

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.9 (Scheck, 103:362); cf. also 9.2.

though they were “seeing Christ in the body (*corpore*) and hearing his teaching,” they were unwilling to believe and obey.⁶⁰³

Origen’s preferred manner of speaking of the corporeality of Christ is to speak of his *flesh*. Since Christ is without sin—a case Origen makes repeatedly throughout the commentary⁶⁰⁴—there is no theological distinction between body and flesh.⁶⁰⁵ Rather than the latter being a term of opprobrium as it is with the rest of humanity, the body and flesh of Christ are equated and expressed in wholly positive terms. In distinguishing between a “sign” and a “seal,” Origen likens Jonah to Jesus. “Flesh was perceived, and God was believed.”⁶⁰⁶ Later in the same book he says, “Another glory was furnished at the coming of the Savior in the flesh” (*carnali*).⁶⁰⁷ Sometimes Origen simply apes the biblical formula when he remarks, “the Word that was made flesh” (*uerbum carnem factum*).⁶⁰⁸ Furthermore, Christ’s national identity is reaffirmed. He is from the Israelite race “according to the flesh” (*secundum carnem*).⁶⁰⁹ Origen will repeat his charge against his enemies. “Moreover, they who deny that he came in the flesh and was born of a virgin but rather assign to him a heavenly body (*eum in carne uenisse et natum esse ex uirgine sed caeleste ei corpus assignant*) are wiser than they ought to be in respect to Christ.”⁶¹⁰ Additionally, in being our mediator “he had taken on the flesh of our nature” (*carnem naturae nostrae*).⁶¹¹ Once again, “The name ‘Christ’ is a

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 8.7 (Hammond Bammel, 34:674; Scheck, 104:160).

⁶⁰⁴ E.g., *ibid.*, 4.7, 12; 5.9. Cf. 1 Peter 2:22: “He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips” (RSV). Origen refers to this text at least seven times in the commentary.

⁶⁰⁵ Richard A. Layton, “*Propatheia*: Origen and Didymus on the Origin of the Passions,” *VC* 54 (2000), 262-82, has demonstrated the manner in which Origen understands Christ to be without passion through his incorporation of the Stoic concept of *propatheia*. Cf. *hom. I-16 in Lev.* 9.2.4; Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 23.

⁶⁰⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 4.2 (Scheck, 103:249).

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 4.8 (Hammond Bammel, 33:334; Scheck, 103:284).

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 10.14 (Hammond Bammel, 34:826; Scheck, 104:286).

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 7.11 (Hammond Bammel, 34:614; Scheck, 104:109).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:723; Scheck, 104:201).

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 3.5 (Hammond Bammel, 16:239; Scheck, 103:219).

designation pertaining to his unique character as the Word who was placed in flesh” (*carne*),⁶¹² and his ministry identified with Israel and us, “because he himself (Christ) received circumcision in his own flesh” (*carne*).⁶¹³ The extension of this thought continues through Christ’s ministry insofar as “he lived in the flesh” (*carne*),⁶¹⁴ and many “saw Jesus in the flesh” (*carne*).⁶¹⁵ Furthermore, Christ “invites and provokes the Israelites, who see these things, who were his kinsmen according to the flesh” (*carnem*).⁶¹⁶ “Tax was exacted even from our Lord Jesus Christ when he was in the flesh” (*carne*).⁶¹⁷ The human nature of Christ even serves to make a hermeneutical point. According to the Apostle Paul in Hebrews, the appearance of Christ in the flesh rendered the law something which must now be spiritually understood, for the “inner curtain” is “the flesh of Christ” (*carnem Christi*).⁶¹⁸ Crucial to Origen’s thought is the physicality of Christ’s atonement. “By means of this sacrifice of his own flesh (*carnis*), therefore, which is said to be for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (*carne*).⁶¹⁹ He asserts this once again in the following book when he says, “but Christ is said to have died not according to God, but according to the flesh” (*secundum carnem*).⁶²⁰

This brief survey of Origen’s strong affirmation of Christ’s corporeal nature suggests he is seeking to dispel any docetic threats that may have made their way into the third century church of Caesarea. It also demonstrates that matter and corporeality are not intrinsically evil in Origen’s thought. The Incarnation affirms the goodness of matter. Matter is not intrinsically sinful. As we turn to Origen’s view of the rest of humanity we will

⁶¹² Ibid., 9.41 (Hammond Bammel, 34:775-6; Scheck, 104:245).

⁶¹³ Ibid., 10.8 (Hammond Bammel, 34:809; Scheck, 104:272).

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 8.4 (Hammond Bammel, 34:654; Scheck, 104:144).

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 8.7 (Hammond Bammel, 34:679; Scheck, 104:165).

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 8.9 (Hammond Bammel, 34:690; Scheck, 104:174).

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 9.30 (Hammond Bammel, 34:755; Scheck, 104:228).

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:490; Scheck, 104:25).

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 6.12 (Hammond Bammel, 33:526; Scheck, 104:49).

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 7.4 (Hammond Bammel, 34:582; Scheck, 104:83). Cf. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 190-2.

continue to note his high view of matter and corporeality. Origen can affirm corporeality as both the result of the preexistent fall while still maintaining its positive qualities. In the *Commentary on Romans* he is tempered in his language with regard to the nature of our bodies and prefers to highlight the remedial function of the terrestrial realm.

Body and Flesh of Humanity

Origen's appraisal of corporeality is at least neutral, if not altogether positive, in the *Commentary on Romans*. He has turned away from his previous language in *On First Principles* by speaking of bodies as "gross and heavy" or as "prisons."⁶²¹ He now prefers to use language that indicates a greater reflection on the thought of the Apostle. The body is to be thought of as good while the flesh is thought of as bad. The latter is a direct result of the presence of sin in our lives.

Body of Humanity

Nowhere in the commentary does Origen offer an unqualified denigration of corporeal existence. This view was not the philosophical consensus of his time. Late Stoic authors expressed a certain disdain for the body. Marcus Aurelius approvingly quotes Epictetus by lamenting that ours is a "poor soul burdened with a corpse."⁶²² Epictetus says that the last garment is the poor body.⁶²³ He also calls bodies "the measly houses of men,"⁶²⁴ and elsewhere refers to them as "trivial."⁶²⁵ While Origen incorporates Stoic concepts in other aspects of his theology, it must be asserted that he has a much higher conception of the body. It serves an essential purpose in uniting us to God.

⁶²¹ Origen, *princ.* 1.7.4, 5, respectively.

⁶²² *Med.* 4.41; *Marcus Aurelius: Meditations*, translated by Maxwell Staniforth (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), 73.

⁶²³ *Epict. diss.* 1.25.21; *Epictetus: Discourses Books 1-2*, edited by G. P. Goold and translated by W. A. Oldfather, LCL 131 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 163.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.28.18 (Oldfather, 183).

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.13.17 (Oldfather, 93).

Origen operates from the assumption that God is Creator of the soul and the body.⁶²⁶ The assertion by Paul in Romans 1:25 that people exchange the truth of God for a lie leads him to conclude that the goodness of the body is the predicate for its corruption. When people exchange the truth about God for a lie “they mutually devote their own bodies (*corpora*) to impurity and defilement.”⁶²⁷ He displays an exhortative tone by asserting that bodies are not by nature corrupted, but instead *become* corrupted. “[W]e must take heed not to sit down at the table of wisdom with unclean and filthy garments, that is to say, with a defiled body (*corpore*) or heart.”⁶²⁸ He later notes the strenuous teaching of Paul in Romans 7:14-25. The struggles of the body and flesh should not cause despondency. Origen reassures his readers in that “no one should feel ashamed of the nature of his body” (*corporis naturae*).⁶²⁹ This can be taken even further when we consider his conception of the spiritual life. True spirituality does not preclude bodily existence. It is instead intimately bound up with spiritual progress. “Then it is the undefiled body (*corpus*) that will chiefly seem to be a sacrifice that is living and holy and pleasing to God.”⁶³⁰ The Apostle’s warning in Romans 1:24-5 gives Origen pause to consider that we should “preserve our bodies (*corpora*) in all holiness and purity.”⁶³¹ Again, the body is not incidental to spiritual advancement. He exhorts his audience to personal holiness in the body.⁶³² He even weighs in on the Apostle’s body, saying that through affliction he “bears within himself for the sake of the self-control of his body” (*corporis*).⁶³³ These unqualified and positive references to the body should always remain in conversation with a broader view of material existence. We saw above how Origen

⁶²⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.21 (Hammond Bammel, 16:86; Scheck, 103:93).

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.7 (Hammond Bammel, 34:680; Scheck, 104:166).

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:518; Scheck, 104:43).

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.1 (Hammond Bammel, 34:714; Scheck, 104:194).

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.21 (Hammond Bammel, 16:91; Scheck, 103:97).

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 4.6. Elsewhere (2.5) Origen says, “So then, when a person remains uncorrupted in body and spirit from the things which we have mentioned above, he is said to seek incorruption,” (Scheck, 103:117).

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 4.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:343; Scheck, 103:291).

affirms the goodness of the material order over against Gnostic denigration of it by arguing that no substance is naturally hostile to God.⁶³⁴

The Gnostic trio of Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion are always behind Origen's exegesis of Romans. Their denigration of material existence, and particularly the human body, shapes Origen's exegesis by creating an atmosphere where he can offer more pronounced observations about the goodness of God's creation and corporeal existence. The one-sided impression one gains from reading *On First Principles* begins to fade through a reading of the *Commentary on Romans*. The body's goodness is teleological. It is a God-given means to unite us back to Him. Having established the role of the body in Origen's thinking in the *Commentary on Romans* we now turn briefly to a consideration of the flesh. Here we begin to see more clearly the flashpoint of his thinking on sin.

Flesh of Humanity

Origen's tone shifts in a decidedly negative direction when he considers the flesh. Flesh has a range of uses in his exegesis—almost always negative.⁶³⁵ For instance, he frequently refers to the fleshly interpretation of the law.⁶³⁶ He is also inclined to speak of how the devil and his powers support the flesh against the spirit.⁶³⁷ This leads us into an area of thought where we begin to see that flesh is a more nuanced depiction of human nature in his thinking. It is not to be confused with the body. Flesh connotes volition more than ontology. Therefore when used with the appropriate prefixes or modifiers it always indicates a body that has been given over to the unruly passions. His language is instructive for how he conceives of sin: “vices of the flesh,”⁶³⁸ “works of the flesh,”⁶³⁹ “desire(s) of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁰ “law

⁶³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.12.

⁶³⁵ A major exception being the aforementioned use of the term in relation to Jesus Christ.

⁶³⁶ E.g., *ibid.*, 6.12.

⁶³⁷ E.g., *ibid.*, 1.21. For an understanding of the devil in Origen's theology see Gerald Bostock, “Satan – Origen's Forgotten Doctrine,” in *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer*, edited by Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 109-23.

⁶³⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9 (Scheck, 103:158); 4.8 (Scheck, 103:281); 5.10 (Scheck, 103:369); 6.3 (Scheck, 104:8). Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:10.

of the flesh,”⁶⁴¹ “councils of the flesh,”⁶⁴² “incentive of the flesh,”⁶⁴³ “deeds of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁴ “lusts of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁵ “wisdom of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁶ “frailty of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁷ “will of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁸ “pleasure(s) of the flesh,”⁶⁴⁹ “mind of flesh,”⁶⁵⁰ “fruits of our flesh,”⁶⁵¹ “weakness of our/the flesh,”⁶⁵² “struggles of/against the flesh,”⁶⁵³ “treachery of the flesh,”⁶⁵⁴ “enticements of the flesh,”⁶⁵⁵ and “sins of the flesh.”⁶⁵⁶ Origen takes the Apostle’s metaphors and extends them to fill out the picture for his audience. Also, since sin’s habitation is cast in *active* or *metaphorical* terms, the solution to such a calamity is also cast in *active* or *metaphorical* terms: one must undergo the “*mortification* of the flesh.”⁶⁵⁷

The body is a distinct physical and theological concept in Origen’s thinking that serves to counter Gnostic teaching by upholding the goodness of God’s creation. The flesh is

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 1.15 (Scheck, 103:84); 6.1 (Scheck, 104:1); 9.33 (Scheck, 104:232).

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.21 (Scheck, 103:96); 5.6 (Scheck, 103:347); 6.1 (Scheck, 104:2, 5); 6.9 (Scheck, 104:41).

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 1.1 (Scheck, 103:57).

⁶⁴² Ibid., 1.21 (Scheck, 103:96).

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 2.9 (Scheck, 103:155).

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.9 (Scheck, 103:146); 6.13 (Scheck, 104:54-5).

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.8 (Scheck, 103:280); 6.9 (Scheck, 104:41).

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.8 (Scheck, 103:280).

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.11 (Scheck, 103:295).

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 5.6 (Scheck, 103:346). Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.7 (Scheck, 103:350); 9.42 (Scheck, 104:252).

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.1 (Scheck, 104:1).

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 6.5 (Scheck, 104:15).

⁶⁵² Ibid., 7.4 (Scheck, 104:81); 8.8 (Scheck, 104:168).

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 7.4 (Scheck, 104:81).

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.10 (Scheck, 104:104).

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.10 (Scheck, 104:104).

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.6 (Scheck, 104:212).

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.1 (Scheck, 103:55); 9.39 (Scheck, 104:240); 9.40 (Scheck, 104:241), emphasis mine.

a distinct metaphorical and theological concept that seeks to counter the Gnostic doctrine of natures by positing its ability to admit sin. The difference between body and flesh has to do with moral *action*. This is why Origen can attribute goodness to Christ's flesh. Christ is always conformed to God's law and exhibits continuous goodness in the flesh. His life falls outside the auspices of Paul's diatribe on the "flesh" in Romans. So it can be affirmed that Origen does not denigrate the body as such. He denigrates the immoral actions expressed through the body. The soul is not sinful because it is embodied.⁶⁵⁸ It is a condition based on an act. Despite all this Origen makes every effort not to acquiesce to his deterministic adversaries through their espousal of a doctrine of natures. Looking at this from a broad perspective we see that the body is both a *result* of the fall and a *promise* of restoration. The body is a good, or at least neutral, creation of the benevolent creator God. Enfleshment is the result of sin, not inherently sinful in itself. "Surely God did not make us in his own image in order that we should be subject to the servitude to the flesh, but instead in order that our soul, by serving its Creator devotedly, might make use of the service and ministry of the flesh."⁶⁵⁹ Our enfleshment serves as a vehicle to unite us back to God. This is accomplished in as much as Christ's enfleshment serves as the mediating presence to lead us back to God. This present analysis of flesh must be curtailed for the moment until a more thorough analysis can be undertaken in Chapter Four with respect to the practice of volitional sin.

Soul

The parameters of volitional sin are inextricably bound up with Origen's conception of the tripartite anthropological structure. This leads us to a consideration of the second part of this structure, the soul. Space does not allow for a thorough analysis of Origen's conception of the soul. But at this point at least three things are in need of clarification: a brief sketch of his understanding of the soul, how the soul is situated within the wider tripartite anthropology, and in what manner this contextualizes the present analysis

⁶⁵⁸ Stephen Thomas, "Anthropology," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, edited by John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 54.

⁶⁵⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.14 (Scheck, 104:58).

of sin. Origen's teaching on the soul is fairly consistent throughout his corpus, so I will incorporate elements from his other writings to help clarify.

Important aspects of Origen's doctrine of the soul have already been elaborated in Chapter Two and therefore need not detain us long. I argued in the previous chapter that throughout his career Origen never wavered in his conviction that the soul once existed in a cosmic preexistent state of perfect union with God. At some point each of these "intelligences" or "minds" fell from this state and took on earthly bodies.⁶⁶⁰ His (erroneous) etymology leads him to understand the fall of the soul (*psyche*) with its growing cold (*psychesthai*), akin to the coldness of serpent.⁶⁶¹ In Book Two of *On First Principles* Origen offers what is his most direct and succinct definition of the soul.

For the soul is defined thus, as an existence possessing imagination and desire, which qualities can be expressed in Latin, though the rendering is not so apt as the original, by the phrase, capable of feeling and movement.⁶⁶²

Origen understands the soul as the seat of thought, decision, and personality. While incorporeal, it is diffuse in the body and is the source of all movement and directs every operation.⁶⁶³ In the *Commentary on Romans* Origen asserts that the soul is the seat of rationality,⁶⁶⁴ serves to vivify the body,⁶⁶⁵ and even though it has fallen from its original state—an idea largely muted in our commentary—it nevertheless remains a good creation of God. But this statement must be qualified. The soul is good but not in good standing. At best

⁶⁶⁰ Pace Edwards, *Origen against Plato* and Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*. Recall the positions taken on the work of Edwards and Tzamalikos in the previous chapter. For the preexistent fall in *On First Principles* see 1.6.2; 1.7.4; 1.8.1; 2.1.1; 2.8.3; 4.4.8.

⁶⁶¹ Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3. Cf. Revelation 12:9; 20:2. In the *Commentary on Romans* Origen sometimes associates sin with coldness. "In this way, then, the unfortunate soul, which has this evil serpent occupying it, grows stiff with a serpentine cold," *comm. in Rom.* 2.5 (Scheck, 103:122), and elsewhere speaks of the mind (*mens*) as "hardened by the ice of wickedness," *comm. in Rom.* 2.4 (Hammond Bammel, 16:103; Scheck, 103:106).

⁶⁶² Origen, *princ.* 2.8.1, glossed by Rufinus.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, *princ.* 2.8.5.

⁶⁶⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.19; 7.2.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.2. Cf. *princ.* 3.4.1.

it retains a somewhat neutral quality,⁶⁶⁶ at worst some readers have detected a more negative tone in Origen's writings.⁶⁶⁷ This negativity can be traced to its fall and subsequent instability, and this instability is the result of the joining of its higher and lower elements or tendencies. Origen speaks to these two elements in Book Two of *On First Principles*.

[W]hen the mind (*mens*) departed from its original condition and dignity it became or was termed a soul (*anima*), and if ever it was restored and corrected it returns to the condition of being a mind (*mens*).⁶⁶⁸

This lower element of the soul has been added in *this* world. The connotations of such an addition give the soul a somewhat pejorative tone in his writings. This idea will become clear shortly when its relation to sin is explored.

The soul is always to be understood within the context of the wider tripartite structure. Origen describes the soul as a *medium* between body and spirit.⁶⁶⁹ But this idea of a *mediam* should not be understood horizontally, but rather vertically. Origen operates from the assumption that the tripartite structure should be understood according to gradations. The spirit, the soul, and the body do not stand on equal ground.⁶⁷⁰ The soul is not as pure as the spirit, nor is the body as pure as the soul. The taint of corruption and sin is always on our author's mind. Despite these gradations, the soul and the spirit are created in the image of God, thus representing the "inner man."⁶⁷¹ Furthermore, it is evident that Origen's teaching on

⁶⁶⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9.

⁶⁶⁷ Maurice Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 33: "It (the soul) stands... in a mid-way position between the weak flesh and the willing spirit, capable of turning either to good or to evil. Yet it is not entirely a neutral concept morally. It may not have the strong downward pull of the flesh, yet it is normally spoken of in Scripture in terms not of praise but of censure." Wiles no doubt has in mind comments like the following made in *On First Principles*. "Finally, see whether you can easily find in the holy scriptures a place where the soul is described in real terms of praise. Expressions of blame, on the contrary, occur frequently," *princ.* 2.8.3; Butterworth, 125.

⁶⁶⁸ Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3; *Origène: Traité des principes*, edited and translated by Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, SC 252 (Paris: Cerf, 1978), 348.

⁶⁶⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:458). Cf. *ibid.*, 1.7, 21; *princ.* 2.8.4.

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.12; 7.2; 9.25.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.22 (Hammond Bammel, 16:97; Scheck, 103:101). Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 6.63: "[T]hat which is made in the image of God is to be understood of the inward man, as we call it, which is renewed and has the power to be formed in the image of the Creator, when a man becomes perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect,

the tripartite structure can lead some to infer that he postulated a tripartite soul. He explicitly rejects this Platonic assumption in *On First Principles*.⁶⁷² Henri de Lubac argues convincingly against those who still entertain such a notion.⁶⁷³

Origen indeed says, like Paul, *pneuma* and not *nous*. It is because they did not sufficiently distinguish between these two concepts that several have identified the *pneuma* of the anthropological trichotomy with the preexisting *nous* and have made it the higher (*intellectus*) part of the soul—unless, in order better to distinguish between *pneuma* and *psyche*, they reduced this latter to its sensible part.⁶⁷⁴

In his essay de Lubac correctly makes the case that spirit and soul are distinct elements in Origen's anthropology. Despite this clarity he has, unfortunately, conflated two separate issues in Origen's anthropology. This distinction between spirit and soul does not necessarily preclude the fact that Origen still arrives at a bipartite view of the soul with a position that lends itself to having a higher element known as the *nous* (intellect). Therefore, Origen says *pneuma* in the context of his wider tripartite anthropology (e.g., *pneuma*, *psyche*, *soma*), but he says *nous* in the context of his more narrow bipartite view of the soul. While these parts of the soul have an ontological substrate, they are better understood according to their tendential or dynamic characteristics.⁶⁷⁵ The bipartite view of the soul is critical to understanding Origen's conception of sin.

This sketch of Origen's understanding of the soul is already clarifying how it is to be properly contextualized within our analysis of sin. The higher element is that which

and when he hears 'Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy', and when he learns the saying 'Become imitators of God' and assumes into his own virtuous soul the characteristics of God. Then also the body of the man who has assumed the characteristics of God, in that part which is made in the image of God, is a temple, since he possesses a soul of this character and has God in his soul because of that which is in His image," Chadwick, 378-9.

⁶⁷² Origen, *princ.* 3.4.1.

⁶⁷³ Among those who have done so are Adolf von Harnack, *Précis de l'histoire des dogmes* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1893), 106 and F. Prat, *Origène: le Theologien et l'exegete* (Paris: Bloud and Co., 1907), 176.

⁶⁷⁴ Henri de Lubac, "Tripartite Anthropology," in *Theology in History*, translated by Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 138. Cf. also Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène," 36-57; *ibid.*, *Origen*, 87-92; *ibid.*, *Origène: Traité des Principes*, edited and translated by Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, SC 269 (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 87. However, Origen may not have been entirely consistent in expressing this doctrine throughout his career. Cf. *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 1.16.1.

⁶⁷⁵ Crouzel, "L'anthropologie d'Origène: de l'archē au telos," 37.

existed in the cosmic preexistent state,⁶⁷⁶ and is now known as the mind, intellect, heart, or *hegemonikon* (Latin: *principale cordis*).⁶⁷⁷ The lower element has been added in this world and is understood better in light of its post-Adamic existence. This cohesion is the result of the prenatal fall into this world. So the “soul” is now usually a term designating the whole of these two parts or elements, and it is, properly speaking, the term reserved for the post-lapsarian, post-Adamic, terrestrial state. This constitution is both unfortunate and fortunate. It is unfortunate because it is the result of a sinful fall in the preexistent state—duplicated in time and space through Adam—and marks every person as rebellious against God and standing under his judgment. It is fortunate because it is now the God-given means by which we may be united back to Him. This restorative idea is made clear in *On First Principles*. “Mind when it fell was made soul, and soul in its turn when furnished with virtues will become mind.”⁶⁷⁸ The speculative nature of all this is not lost on Origen.⁶⁷⁹ Now both the bipartite nature of the soul and the situatedness of the soul within the tripartite structure always leave the individual on the precipice of sin. The soul’s bipartite nature continuously lends itself to uneasiness or imbalance. Since this lower “Adamic” element is that which has been added in this realm it possesses a somewhat negative quality insofar as it is disposed (or exposed) to evil. Additionally, the lower element of the soul is the source of the instincts and the passions.⁶⁸⁰ But as we will see in the next chapter it is often quite difficult to separate the soul’s lower element from the body/flesh in Origen’s thinking.⁶⁸¹ It is a very fine line. The

⁶⁷⁶ Crouzel, *Origen*, 89.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁷⁸ Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3 (Butterworth, 127).

⁶⁷⁹ “This statement of ours, however, that mind is changed into soul, or anything else that seems to point in that direction, the reader must carefully consider and work out for himself; for we must not be supposed to put these forward as settled doctrines, but as subjects for inquiry and discussion,” *ibid.*, 2.8.4 (Butterworth, 127).

⁶⁸⁰ Crouzel, *Origen*, 89.

⁶⁸¹ Cf., e.g., Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9; 5.7; 6.9; 8.10. It can also at times be very difficult to distinguish the soul’s higher element from the spirit in the person. “But if the Spirit indeed teaches, and our spirit (*spiritus*), i.e., our mind (*mens*), should by its own fault not follow, then the teacher’s lesson becomes unfruitful to it,” *ibid.* 7.4 (Hammond Bammel, 34:580; Scheck, 104:81). Origen is not always consistent in his terminology, cf. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 62 n95.

lower element of the soul is so inclined to acquiesce to the body (or flesh) that it is often identified with it as the seat of the passions. One can begin to see why Origen postulates gradations within his tripartite structure. These gradations serve an important functional purpose in providing options for the soul. This idea will be explored shortly when assessing his use of the ‘two ways’ tradition.

Spirit

The human spirit is the third part of the tripartite structure in the individual. Origen asserts that the spirit (*pneuma/spiritus*) is the best part of man.⁶⁸² He identifies it with the conscience (*conscientia*),⁶⁸³ says it acts as a pedagogue to the soul,⁶⁸⁴ performing this function insofar as “it rebukes and convicts the soul to which it cleaves.”⁶⁸⁵ He is also inclined to refer to it as the intellect.⁶⁸⁶ Despite some confusion when reading Origen there *is* a distinction between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸⁷ In at least one place in the commentary Origen draws a clear distinction.

But when the Spirit of God sees our spirit exerting itself in the struggle against the flesh and cleaving to him, he lends a hand and helps its weakness... In this way as well then, when the Holy Spirit sees that our spirit is being harassed by the struggles of the flesh and does not know what or how it ought to pray, he, like the teacher, first

⁶⁸² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.12 (Hammond Bammel, 16:69; Scheck, 103:79); 9.25 (Bammel, 34:748; Scheck, 104:222).

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.7 (Hammond Bammel, 16:136-7; Scheck, 103:132-3).

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.7 (Hammond Bammel, 16:137; Scheck, 103:133): “The conscience functions like a pedagogue to the soul, a guide and companion, as it were, so that it might admonish it concerning better things or correct and convict it of faults.”

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.7 (Scheck, 103:133).

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:565; Scheck, 104:69).

⁶⁸⁷ Origen is not always clear in distinguishing the ontology and activity of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. For the relationship between the two see Maureen Beyer Moser, *Teacher of Holiness: The Holy Spirit in Origen’s Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 55-69, where she concludes (68), “The human spirit is the individual person’s potential for participation in God’s Spirit, a participation that must be learned and developed over a lifetime. For this reason, the human spirit itself is never opposed to God’s Spirit, rendering such distinctions irrelevant in Origen’s descriptions of the human spiritual journey.” Cf. also *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 2.3.3.

says the prayer that our spirit, if it longs to be a pupil of the Holy Spirit, should imitate.⁶⁸⁸

The human spirit is the point of divine contact in the individual. As such Origen can affirm that the human spirit is capable of participating in the divine Spirit.⁶⁸⁹ The human spirit performs its proper function when united to the Holy Spirit to guide the soul in fulfilling the virtues. Thus the teleological function of the soul is to associate itself with the spirit in the individual. This theme is explored at length by Origen in other works. It is lacking in the *Commentary on Romans*. One of the overriding concerns of the Apostle in the epistle to the Romans is to elucidate the origin and nature of sin. As such it precludes any sustained reflection by Origen with regard to the spirit's role in these mystical themes. Being the divine element in man, the spirit is responsible for moral instruction, and where this fails, it remains in a state of quiescence. An analysis of Origen's conception of sin therefore restricts the role the human spirit plays in this study.

Conclusion

A glimpse of his tripartite anthropology allows the reader of Origen to be in a better position to articulate his teaching on sin. The tripartite anthropological structure is both the result of the preexistent fall of souls and the provisional state of return to God. Its composition has been given by God as a gift of remediation. But even though this is *now* "natural," there is still a significant disadvantage inherent in this structure. It always puts the individual on the precipice of failure because it exists in a world dominated by sin, corruption, and death. The image of God in us is defaced to such an extent that recognizing the divine requirements for this proper structure is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the structure is to be maintained and to do contrary is sin. Now that the main ontological aspects of the tripartite structure have been established we are in a position to view its tendential

⁶⁸⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.4 (Hammond Bammel, 34:580; Scheck, 104:81). Cf. Origen, *comm. in Mt.* 13.2 cited in Henri de Lubac, "Tripartite Anthropology," in *Theology in History*, 138: "The Spirit of God, even when it is present in us, is one thing, and the *pneuma* proper to every man, that which is in him, is something else... The Apostle clearly affirms that this spirit (this *pneuma*) is different from the Spirit of God, even when the Holy Spirit is present in us, over and above the spirit of man that is in him."

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.7; 4.9; 7.4; Jacques Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme: Etude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène*, 90-109, especially 97-8.

character in the next section. Here I will analyze how Origen understands the broad outlines of sin as his ethic is sketched through his unique incorporation of the existing ‘two ways’ tradition.

Sin and the ‘Two Ways’ Tradition

Drawing from the Old and New Testaments as well as extra-biblical sources, Christians in the early church often framed the ethical life in categories or ways opposed to one another. As we saw in Chapter One, this ‘two ways’ teaching showed a measure of elasticity in meeting the needs of different communities. By the third century Origen takes the ‘two ways’ tradition in yet another direction. As we have seen, his lifelong polemic against various shades of determinism found its greatest expression in his *Commentary on Romans*, a work he admits is composed to counter the Gnostic doctrine of natures espoused by the trio of Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion.⁶⁹⁰ In this commentary the ‘two ways’ ethic emerges as a way to articulate his doctrine of free will over against Gnostic determinism. He understands Paul’s moral exhortations to imply that the soul must adjudicate between opposing moral paths, and these paths are often understood through our own tripartite makeup, that is, the soul chooses between flesh and spirit. Through the exhortations and the tripartite anthropology the ‘two ways’ tradition now has both the impetus and functional apparatus appropriate to such an ethic. Below I would like to examine two key passages and a few ancillary texts where Origen uses the ‘two ways’ to advance his doctrine of free will.

The first salient reference to the ‘two ways’ occurs early in the commentary through his exegesis of Romans 1:24, where God is said to have “handed them over to the desires of their hearts to impurity, to the mutual degrading of their bodies.” This language of God’s judgment recalls for Origen the profound differences between Gnostic and Christian conceptions of God. Marcion’s failure to acknowledge the goodness of God through his judgment is for Origen the manifestation of a deficient anthropology. Origen’s answer is to

⁶⁹⁰ Henri Crouzel rightly questions the extent to which Origen had first-hand knowledge of these three “Gnostics,” *Origen*, 153-4. For Marcion as a proponent of the Gnostic doctrine of natures see *comm. in Rom.* 2.7. For the Gnostic doctrine of natures elsewhere see *princ.* 2.9.5; 3.1.8.

explain that every individual is made up of spirit, soul, and flesh,⁶⁹¹ and this anthropological structure gives the ‘two ways’ a tangible, if still tendential, mode of expression.

[A]s we find in many scriptural passages, there are angels who are patrons and helpers for both sides, or rather for the two ways (*utriusque viae*). For the devil and his angels and all the evil spirits in the heavenly regions together with all the principalities and powers and rulers of the infernal parts of this world against whom human beings must do battle support the flesh in its lust against the spirit. But on the other hand, all the good angels support the spirit as it struggles against the flesh and attempt to summon the human soul, which is intermediate, to itself.⁶⁹²

By arguing that the soul has morally opposing *ways* to follow spirit or flesh,⁶⁹³ Origen places the onus on the individual instead of God. Whereas Marcion locates evil in the deity, Origen locates it in the free choices of a soul. Here the dynamic quality of Origen’s anthropology comes to the forefront because the soul is always measured exclusively through its moral action.⁶⁹⁴ Since this anthropology values choice and action, the ‘two ways’ ethic marks out clearly delineated courses for action as we can see from his use of Scripture. He cites Deuteronomy 30:15: “See, I have set before you life and death” and Sirach 15:16: “[he has placed] fire and water [before you],” to buttress his argument that the soul is always presented with clearly defined options or ways, and is free and expected to respond to one of them.⁶⁹⁵ What remains central is the soul’s freedom of choice and the ‘two ways’ ethic simply functions as the necessary outcropping of such an anthropology.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.21.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.21 (Hammond Bammel, 16:88-9; Scheck, 103:94-5).

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ Crouzel, *Origen*, 88, is careful to note that Origen’s anthropology retains its ontological basis. See also Jacques Dupuis, *L’Esprit de l’homme*, 62; Theresia Heither, *Translatio Religionis*, 198.

⁶⁹⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.21 (Hammond Bammel, 16:89; Scheck, 103:95). For the use of Deuteronomy 30:15 to promote free will see Philo, *Deus* 50; Clement, *Prot.* 10; Origen, *princ.* 3.1.6; *dial.* 27.9-15: “Let us therefore take up eternal life. Let us take up that which depends upon our decision. God does not give it to us. He sets it before us. ‘Behold, I have set life before thy face.’ It is in our power to stretch out our hand, to do good works, and to lay hold on life and deposit it in our soul,” Chadwick, 454. Sebastian Brock argues that the ‘two ways’ tradition has its roots in Jewish reflection on Deut 30:15, 19, “The Two Ways and the Palestinian Targum,” *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays in Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, edited by P. R. Davies and J. L. White, JSOTSup 100 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 139-52. Sirach 15:16 appears only here in Origen’s corpus.

⁶⁹⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.21.

The second conspicuous ‘two ways’ text is found in Book Six of the commentary and follows another protracted explication of his tripartite anthropology that seeks to counter these deterministic schemes.⁶⁹⁷ Paul’s dichotomy in Romans 6:19, where the Apostolic exhortation takes the form of transitioning from “slaves to impurity” into “slaves of righteousness,” affords Origen the opportunity to incorporate an apparent baptismal catechesis of unknown provenance. Thus the Pauline dichotomy is for Origen the occasion for exploiting the ‘two ways’ tradition for its latent exhortative power. For example Origen’s form of this catechesis begins,

A little while ago your feet were running off to the temples of demons; now let them run to the Church of God. Previously they were running off to shed blood; now let them run out to save it. Earlier your hands were stretched forth to plunder the property of others; now stretch them forth to lavish your own goods upon others. Previously your eyes were looking around for a woman or some property to lust after; now let them look around for the poor, the weak, the needy, in order to show them mercy. Your ears were formerly thrilled by listening to worthless talk and derogatory remarks about good men; let them now be converted to hearing the word of God, to the explanation of the law, and to receiving wisdom’s instruction. Let the tongue, which was accustomed to abuse, cursing, and obscene speech, now be converted to blessing the Lord at all times. Let it bring forth wholesome and sincere speech so that it might give grace to the hearers and speak truth with its neighbor.⁶⁹⁸

This passage is noteworthy for its strong conversion language, and this language alerts the reader to how the ‘two ways’ ethic becomes a demonstrable defense of his anthropology.⁶⁹⁹ Having already situated his tripartite anthropology (6.1) he now offers the reason for the inclusion of this ‘two ways’ catechesis.

Moreover, observe how everywhere through these matters he (Paul) notes the freedom of the will (*arbitrii libertatem*) and shows that everyone has it within his own power (*in sua potestate*) that the services he was previously paying out to iniquity for iniquity should be paid out to righteousness and sanctification, once one’s purpose

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 6.1, 3.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.4 (Scheck, 104:11).

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.12, where Origen argues that the Gnostics have no theology of reconciliation and therefore fail to account for Paul’s teaching in Romans 5:10.

has been converted to better things. This could not be done at all if one's nature were fighting against this, as some think, or if the course of the stars opposed it.⁷⁰⁰

Both here and his earlier reflections on this matter in Book Six show a dual concern for a close reading of Paul and a lack of compulsion through nature or astrological determinism.⁷⁰¹ This ongoing polemic continually frustrates Origen insofar as his Gnostic opponents fail to deduce free will from Scripture's abundant exhortative language.⁷⁰²

These two examples show Origen's familiarity with and exploitation of an abiding 'two ways' tradition. He has of course already utilized this tradition in his Alexandrian work *On First Principles* as well as his more recent *Homilies on Numbers*.⁷⁰³ These two works show a greater emphasis on the role of good and bad angels acting to advise and "provoke" the soul.⁷⁰⁴ Though we have seen that Origen mentions angelic activity in our first text, he finds little use for it in the commentary.⁷⁰⁵ Instead, he is more inclined to *interiorize* these

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:471; Scheck, 104:12). Cf. *hom. I-14 in Ezech.* 1.10.2. For the philosophical and theological background of stars in Origen's thought see Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*.

⁷⁰¹ "Therefore it is established from these words in which Paul says, 'To whom you present yourselves for obedience as slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin or of righteousness,' that we present ourselves by our own accord, with no one forcing us either to serve sin or righteousness, through our obedience. Therefore we ought always to remember these things and not bring forth worthless complaints as an excuse for sin: 'I sinned because the devil made me do it!' or, 'under the compulsion of nature!' or, 'my fated condition!' or, '[I sinned due to] the course of the stars!' Rather, listen to the frank opinion of Paul in which he says, 'To whom you present yourselves for obedience as slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin or of righteousness,'" *comm. in Rom.* 6.3 (Scheck, 104:7).

⁷⁰² Ibid., 6.3.

⁷⁰³ Pierre Nautin dates the *Homilies on Numbers* between 238-244, *Origène: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 405. For a brief overview of the 'two ways' tradition in early Christianity see William S. Babcock, "Sin," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, edited by Everett Ferguson, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1059-60.

⁷⁰⁴ Origen, *hom. I-28 in Num.* 20.3.7: "for the soul obeys either good or evil advisors of its own accord," *Homilies on Numbers/Origen*, translated by Thomas P. Scheck, ACT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009). In *princ.* 3.3.4-5 (Butterworth, 226-8) he says that either "wicked spirits" take possession of the mind, thus "persuading it to evil," or that man receives "energy, i.e., the working, of a good spirit, when he is stirred and incited to good, and is inspired to heavenly or divine things; as the holy angels and God Himself wrought in the prophets, arousing and exhorting them by their holy suggestions to a better course of life."

⁷⁰⁵ Origen offers one more allusion to angelic activity in the *Commentary on Romans* when commenting on Romans 2:5-6, and speaking of the eschaton, he remarks, "Now whether those who are now with Christ, do anything and labor on our behalf in imitation of the angels who attend to the service of our salvation; or, on the other hand, whether even sinners, themselves without bodies, do anything in accordance with the intention of their own mind in no less imitation of the evil angels with whom they are to be cast into the eternal fire, as was indeed said by Christ; let this too be kept among the hidden things of God," *comm. in Rom.* 2.4 (Scheck, 103:111). Despite the lack of emphasis on angels and demons in the 'two ways' teaching in the

advisors insofar as the *body* and *spirit* act as the soul's "counselors."⁷⁰⁶ Since body and spirit serve as useful images of vice and virtue, every articulation of his tripartite anthropology is also an exercise in ethics. So when he explains how the soul stands midway between flesh and spirit, it "*joins* itself either to the flesh, thus becoming one with the flesh, or it *associates* itself with the spirit and becomes one with the spirit."⁷⁰⁷ Again in Book Six he calls the soul a mean between flesh and the Spirit, and says, "if it *unites* itself with the flesh to obey the desire of sin, it becomes one body with it; but if it *unites* itself with the Lord it becomes one spirit (*spiritus*) with him."⁷⁰⁸ For Origen, to choose spirit is to choose life, that is Christ, and to choose flesh is to choose death, that is the devil.⁷⁰⁹

The 'two ways' ethic is woven seamlessly into the commentary as Origen uses a variety of images to convey the different ways. So as body and spirit recede into the background other concepts take their places for the free soul to choose. In the eleventh chapter of Romans he finds Paul's teaching on the olive trees to serve as a rebuttal to the doctrine of natures espoused by Valentinus and Basilides as well as being an expression of the 'two ways.'

[S]ince there is one nature for all rational beings, the choice of each—the liberty of the impulse of each is distributed equally—when summoned by the power of choice, and by guiding the soul subjected to them either toward *virtue* or toward *evil desire*, creates the species of a *good tree* or an *evil tree*... And in this way, each

Commentary on Romans, they do play a considerable role in his overall theology. Cf. Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, translated by John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 434-41; *Origène* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 219-47.

⁷⁰⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.21.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.7 (Scheck, 103:71), emphasis mine. Cécile Blanc explains, "On ne peut donc jouir à la fois des délices de la chair et des délices de l'esprit, car ce qui est avantageux à l'un est nuisible à l'autre: de même que les desirs de la chair s'opposent aux desirs de l'esprit, de même la loi qui est dans nos membres s'oppose à loi de notre raison," in "L'attitude d'Origène à l'égard du corps et de la chair," *StPatr* XVII (1982), 850.

⁷⁰⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:458; Scheck, 104:3), italics mine. Paul's language in Romans 8:4 ("who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit") brings to the forefront the opposing ways of interpreting Scripture. Origen says the law of Moses has been placed in the middle "between us and the Jews." The one who understands the law according to the flesh "does not come to Christ who is life." But the one who spiritually interprets the law "possesses life and peace, which is Christ," *ibid.*, 6.12 (Hammond Bammel, 33:527; Scheck, 104:50). Cf. also *ibid.*, 1.12.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.21. See also *ibid.*, 3.2: "Pax nostra Christus est; uia ergo pacis uia Christi est," (Hammond Bammel, 16:219).

person, according to the impulses of his own purpose, will be designated [either] a good olive tree, if he *travels down the road of virtue*, or a wild olive tree, if he *follows the opposite [path]*.⁷¹⁰

Finally, many of Origen's reflections on Paul's teaching regarding sinful humanity reveal a conscious attempt to clarify his theology in relation to the Gnostics. In his exegesis of Romans 3:12 he is careful to state that our rational natures were a good creation and were set on the right path (*uia*) as a gift from the Creator. But Adam turned from the "right road" (*uia recta*) in Paradise to the "wrong and tortuous paths of mortal life" (*prauas et tortuosas mortalis uitae semitas*).⁷¹¹ Consequently, all who come in succession from Adam (*ex ipsius successione*) have turned aside and follow the opposing way, leading him to remark, "[N]o longer do they open their mouths and express the word of God, the living word, but instead they open their throats and express the dead word, the word of the devil."⁷¹² Origen sketches his doctrine of sin through the opposing ways in a similar fashion in his long reflection on Adam's transgression in Romans 5:12-14. Since humanity is both descended from and instructed by Adam, choosing the way of the Lord is not guaranteed. Adam's example, coupled with individual freedom, produces a person who "either goes the way (*uiam*) of his fathers, as is written of several kings, or... advances along the road (*uia*) of his Lord God."⁷¹³ The 'two ways' dilemma thus derives from and finds its exemplar in Adam. In this life and for these reasons the conflicted soul must continuously choose between opposing ways. Free will is only fully restrained in the eschaton, to those for whom the will finds fulfillment through the complete love for God, thus rendering impossible any ability to sin.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 8.10 (Scheck, 104:176), italics mine. Cf. *ibid.*, 8.10 (Scheck, 104:178) where Origen insists that "freedom of will always abides in this nature." For examples of how free will operates in Origen's writings see e.g., *hom. 1-9 in Jud. 6.2; princ. 3.1.1-24; hom. 1-14 in Ezech. 1.3.8.*

⁷¹¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom. 3.2* (Hammond Bammel, 16:213; Scheck, 103:196). Cf. also *ibid.*, 8.7 (Scheck, 104:162): "Each person uses bodily eyes for looking either at good things or evil things, and he has it within his power either to lift up his eyes to heaven and, through what he sees, to perceive his Maker and give praise to his Creator, or he can lend his eyes to the public shows of the circus or to the theater or to the amusements of any other filthy sights in which the soul would be set on fire with lust or greed or any of the other vices."

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 3.2 (Hammond Bammel, 16:215-6; Scheck, 103:198).

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:385; Scheck, 103:324). Cf. also 1 Kings 15:26, 34.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.10.

This ‘two ways’ teaching is ubiquitous in the *Commentary on Romans* and to a large extent characterizes Origen’s approach to ethics.⁷¹⁵ The emphasis on contraries gives strength to his doctrine of free will and makes explicit what was usually implicit in second century expressions of this tradition. But this emphasis on anthropology and ethics always serves the greater purpose of advancing a cogent theodicy in response to his adversaries. By placing the emphasis on the free will of the soul to choose, Origen’s refutation of the Gnostic doctrine of natures successfully navigates this theodicy in the direction of absolving God of any evil while highlighting his providential care for creation.⁷¹⁶

This condition no doubt makes ethical decisions more difficult, but Origen insists that free will is preserved in the individual and it serves as a dominant motif in the commentary in his effort to refute his deterministic adversaries.⁷¹⁷ This refutation is further accomplished by refracting his doctrine of free will through the tripartite composition: the soul must always choose between virtue (spirit) and vice (body/flesh). Origen’s hamartiology is a pronounced theme in the commentary and one major reason for this is found in the stark clarity in which he presents the ethical life: the individual is either progressing in virtue or regressing in vice.⁷¹⁸

Sin and the Law

One final aspect of Origen’s understanding of the parameters of volitional sin is his understanding of the law. If the tripartite anthropology is the essential framework through which to understand his conception of volitional sin, his conception of law is inextricably bound up with this anthropology. This study of law has the added advantage of leading us to

⁷¹⁵ “This is why it seems to me that the Apostle understood that either righteousness or unrighteousness must dwell in a person who has cognizance, through being old enough to distinguish good and evil. If this is so, no soul can be found without one of the two dwelling in it; and it is certain that if that [soul] should desist from evil, it would then be found in the good,” *ibid.*, 4.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:279-80; Scheck, 103:244-5). Cf. *ibid.*, 4.7. For free will as fundamental for ethics see, *ibid.*, 1.21.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.1, 3, 7; 8.8; *princ.* 3.3.5.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 1.1, 19, 21; 4.10, 12; 5.3, 10; 6.1, 3, 4; 7.6, 14; 8.4, 8, 10, 12; 9.2, 3.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.21; 4.1, 7.

three crucial passages in the *Commentary on Romans*. Origen offers three definitions of sin in the commentary and each definition suggests that a violation of God's law constitutes sin.

The first is in Book Four:

[A] matter can be called 'sin' if it is wrongfully committed, contrary to what nature teaches or what the conscience convicts us of.⁷¹⁹

The second is in Book Six:

This (natural) law raised sin from the dead, so to speak. In fact this is the nature of sin, if what the law forbids to be done happens.⁷²⁰

The third is in Book Nine:

One should know, however, that other learned men use this definition as well, that the nature and cause of sin is in whether something is added to or subtracted from the virtues.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 4.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:282; Scheck, 103:246). This definition of sin is found in his exegesis of Romans 4:7-8, a text Paul takes from David (Psalm 32:1-2). In this Psalm David pronounces blessed those whose iniquities are forgiven, sins covered, and for whom the Lord will not impute sin. Origen understands this as stages in spiritual progress: 1) conversion and forgiveness of iniquities is achieved through the abandonment of evil, 2) the covering of one's sins is achieved through "a quantity of goods more numerous than the evils which had existed," and 3) perfection reached by having no trace of sin. Thus Origen makes a distinction between iniquity and sin, recognizing the former as that which is *committed contrary to the law* (Hammond Bammel: *contra legem committitur*), or perhaps preferably, *committed apart from the law* (Migne (966): *sine lege committitur*), hence, ἀνομία. By "law" Origen presumably means natural law, that is, knowledge of God apart from special revelation. Thus the nature of Origen's teaching on spiritual progress parallels, conversely and positively, the economy of God's assessment of sin as seen through Scripture. Iniquity then functions as some sort of preliminary stage to the full flowering of sin that will be realized later. Interestingly, this discussion of iniquity is limited to this brief section and plays no real part in the rest of the commentary. In fact, despite these philological quibbles his *de facto* usage is entirely interchangeable. Cf., e.g., *princ.* 1.5.2; *Cels.* 4.99. See also Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 9.1 (Staniforth, 137): "Injustice is a sin. Nature has constituted rational beings for their own mutual benefit, each to help his fellows according to their worth, and in no wise to do them hurt; and to contravene her will is plainly to sin against this eldest of all the deities. Untruthfulness, too, is a sin, and against the same goddess. For Nature is the nature of Existence itself; and existence connotes the kinship of all created beings. Truth is but another name for this Nature, the original creator of all true things. So, where a willful lie is a sin because the deception is an act of injustice, an involuntary lie is also a sin because it is a discordant note in nature's harmony, and creates mutinous disorder in an orderly universe. For mutinous indeed it is, when a man lets himself be carried, even involuntarily, into a position contrary to truth; seeing that he has so neglected the faculties Nature gave him that he is no longer able to distinguish the false from the true."

⁷²⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.8 (Hammond Bammel, 33:502; Scheck, 104:33). This statement is part of Origen's exegesis of Romans 7:9-10. In *Cels.* 3.62 he uses Romans 7:9-10 to refute the claim of Celsus that man can be born virtuous. "We say that it is impossible for any man to look up to God with virtue from the beginning. For of necessity evil must exist among men from the first, as Paul says: 'But when the commandment came sin revived and I died,'" (Chadwick, 170).

⁷²¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:722; Scheck, 104:200).

These are his clearest and most succinct assertions on sin in the commentary. The definitions make it evident that Origen is organizing his thoughts around the idea of natural law and its relationship to the individual. Through this he makes use of Stoic and Aristotelian ideas, although he does not supplant the authoritative role Scripture plays in his theology of sin. He remains disciplined in his plan to unfold the Apostle's train of thought in the epistle and seeks to elucidate sin in light of the economy of salvation. To bring about the compatibility of these definitions alongside his numerous other excursions on the subject I will now turn to his understanding of law and how this informs our reading of Origen's conception of volitional sin.

Origen's understanding of salvation always corresponds to his cosmology, which in turn is always inextricably linked to personal responsibility. This is demonstrated in his understanding of the Apostle's use of homonyms in the epistle, specifically the homonym "law."⁷²² Origen recognizes that the Apostle's use of law changes according to context. The "law" cannot always refer to the Mosaic law (e.g., Rom 2:14; 5:13, 20). Rather these are best understood as references to natural law. Accordingly, Origen offers several sustained reflections on natural law in the commentary, as he is the first Christian author to speak at length on the subject. Natural law is a gift of God for everyone (including angels) to convict all of sin.⁷²³ Ascertaining natural law, that is, the ability to be "capable of reason" (*rationis capax*), steadily grows in the individual,⁷²⁴ and the goal of this "reasoning capacity" is "to teach him that what he is doing ought not be done."⁷²⁵ Those for whom natural law brings an awareness of sin and its subsequent moral corrective are said to exhibit better both the image

⁷²² For a more extended treatment of Origen's homonymic use of "law" in the *Commentary on Romans* see Reimer Roukema, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988). Cf. also *comm. in Rom.* 1.1; 3.3.

⁷²³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.1: "[T]he Apostle is saying these things about the law which every being, both men and angels, bears naturally within itself by a certain divine dispensation and gift" (Hammond Bammel, 33:380; Scheck, 103:320). Cf. *ibid.*, 3.3.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Hammond Bammel 33:376-77; Scheck, 103:317-18, respectively).

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:377; Scheck, 103:317). Later in the commentary (6.8) he notes that those too young to apprehend natural law are characterized as being "before the mind within us grows vigorous when it reaches the age of reason" (Hammond Bammel, 33:501; Scheck, 104:32).

of God and their own awareness of this image.⁷²⁶ Like the Apostle before him, Origen wants to communicate that those without access to the Mosaic law (or gospel) are without excuse, for a transgression of natural law leaves the individual no less culpable than a transgression of the Mosaic law.⁷²⁷ But this reflection on natural law is always attuned to the needs of his audience. A misunderstanding of natural law is a misunderstanding of God's economy of salvation. This is precisely the message he desires to convey to an audience that may have fallen under the influence of Basilidean teaching. Interestingly, two of Origen's longest digressions of natural law in the *Commentary on Romans* (5.1 & 6.8) serve the purpose of castigating the Basilidean doctrine of μετενσωμάτωσις. He insists that Basilides grossly misinterprets the Apostle's declaration, "But I was once alive without the law" (Rom 7:9). This does not refer, as Basilides supposes, to an absence of law altogether and its concomitant implication that our souls existed and were living in various animals before arriving in our present human bodies. Rather it refers to natural law, that is, to the law given by God before the Mosaic law. This is how we are to understand the Apostle's teaching in light of the economy of salvation.

Although Origen remains committed to expounding the Apostle's thought in Romans, this does not preclude his incorporation of Stoic concepts for further clarification.⁷²⁸ The Stoics consistently taught that the ethical ideal is to live in accordance with nature. The first century Stoic author Arius Didymus argued that the aim of all virtues is to live

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 5.1.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 5.6: "Yet I do not know what time period they could find prior to the giving of the law which was void of sins. When Cain was murdering Abel and defiling the earth with his brother's blood... was not sin abounding?" (Hammond Bammel, 33:412; Scheck, 103:345). Origen's first discourse on natural law (commenting on Romans 1:18-19) leads him to say that natural law is "what can be perceived about God by way of inference from the creation; from the things which can be seen, his invisible things ought to be recognized... To worship anything besides the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is a crime of ungodliness," *ibid.*, 1.19 (Hammond Bammel, 16:83-4; Scheck, 103:90).

⁷²⁸ In *Contra Celsum* Origen admits to having read Chrysippus (1.64, 5.57, 8.51) and Epictetus (6.2). The Stoic dependence in Origen's exegesis has been demonstrated by Richard A. Layton, "Propatheia: Origen and Didymus on the Origin of the Passions," *VC* 54 (2000), 262-82, esp. 265, and Ronald E. Heine, "Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John," *JTS* 44 (1993), 90-117. For Origen's relationship to Stoic thought in *Contra Celsum* see Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa," *JTS* 48 (1947), 34-49. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 157, summarizes their influence: "As for the Stoics, their morality is accepted, but their cosmology and their theology are regarded as materialist and Origen pokes fun at their cyclical view of time."

“consistently with nature,”⁷²⁹ and “that every virtue which is associated with man and the happy life is consistent with and in agreement with nature.”⁷³⁰ Marcus Aurelius asserted, “Reserve your right to any deed or utterance that accords with nature,”⁷³¹ and conversely, doing wrong is “willing something else that was at variance with nature.”⁷³² “For if we wish in every matter and circumstance to observe what is in accordance with nature,” says Epictetus, “it is manifest that in everything we should make it our aim neither to avoid that which nature demands, nor to accept that which is in conflict with nature.”⁷³³ But Origen is not alone in appropriating Stoic ethics in such a manner. His understanding of sin as a violation of nature is consonant with the Alexandrian theological tradition. His predecessor Clement utilized a similar definition in his own theology, even identifying reason (or nature) with the Word, or Christ.⁷³⁴ Origen never explicitly makes such an identification, but would no doubt agree with his teacher.⁷³⁵

⁷²⁹ Arius Didymus, *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*, edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy, Texts and Translations: Graeco-Roman Series 44/14, edited by Elizabeth Asmis and John T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 5b3.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 6. Cf. also 7b; 10a. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 116, admits some Stoic influence on Origen despite his overall aim to refute the Hellenistic charges against him. “Origen definitely moves in a Stoic vein in taking the view that created rationality is always and necessarily embodied in matter. This Stoic tenet was an aspect of their doctrine that matter is permeated and controlled by a rational principle...[T]he cosmos as a whole exhibits a rational structure and governing principle, but obviously some parts of it are distinguished by having a rationality of their own, and are called ‘microcosms’ on this account.” Cf. *hom. 1–16 in Gen.* 1.11, where Origen refers to humans as a microcosm of the universe.

⁷³¹ Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 5.3 (Staniforth, 78).

⁷³² Ibid., 5.9. The references to living according to nature or reason on the *Meditations* are numerous: 6.33; 7.11, 74-5; 8.12; 11.20; 12.5, 26.

⁷³³ *Epict. diss.* 1.4.18, 1.26.1-3, respectively (Oldfather, 33, 109, respectively).

⁷³⁴ Clement, *Paed.* 1.13 (Roberts, 235; *Clément d’Alexandrie: le Pédagogue*, edited by H.-I. Marrou and M. Harl, SC 70 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 290-2): “Everything that is contrary to right reason is sin. Accordingly, therefore, the philosophers think fit to define the most generic passions thus: lust, as desire disobedient to reason; fear, as weakness disobedient to reason; pleasure, as an elation of the spirit disobedient to reason. If, then, disobedience in reference to reason is the generating cause of sin, how shall we escape the conclusion, that obedience to reason—the Word—which we call faith, will of necessity be the efficacious cause of duty? For virtue itself is a state of the soul rendered harmonious by reason in respect to the whole life. Nay, to crown all, philosophy itself is pronounced to be the cultivation of right reason; so that, necessarily, whatever is done through error of reason is transgression, and is rightly called (ἀμάρτημα) sin...for he who transgresses against reason is no longer rational, but an irrational animal, given up to lusts by which he is ridden (as a horse by his rider). But that which is done right, in obedience to reason, the followers of the Stoics call προσήκον and καθήκον, that is, incumbent and fitting.” Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1, Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*, edited by A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1:63C, (hereafter, L&S), quotes Chrysippus as saying,

This concern for the standard of natural law is limited if the individual's ability to adduce such a standard is lacking. He addresses this by finding recourse in the individual's constitution by arguing that reason is implanted in the soul.⁷³⁶ Even though Origen rejects the Stoic materialist conception of the soul, he nevertheless retains their particular language of governance within the soul. He insists that aid in adducing natural law is found *within*, insofar as this law "has been inscribed by the one who created man in the beginning on the governing part of man's heart" (*principali cordis*).⁷³⁷ As I alluded to earlier, the *principale cordis*, or its Greek equivalent *hegemonikon*, is the Stoic term used to designate the higher or ruling part of the soul that serves the purpose of ordering the lower parts.⁷³⁸ For the Stoics the *hegemonikon* perceives—or better registers and unifies—that which the senses detect.⁷³⁹ In this same passage Origen equates *hegemonikon* with "mind" (*mens*) and elsewhere refers to the soul's rational power as the "heart" (*cor*).⁷⁴⁰ Henri Crouzel fills out the picture by noting

"Therefore, living in agreement with nature comes to be the end, which is in accordance with the nature of oneself and that of the whole, engaging in no activity wont to be forbidden by the universal law, which is the right reason pervading everything and identical to Zeus, who is this director of the administration of existing things."

⁷³⁵ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.5 (Hammond Bammel, 16:116; Scheck, 103:117), where he asserts that the one who dishonors wisdom, justice, and truth, dishonors Christ. Further, it is important to note that Origen does not operate with a strong distinction between the law and the will of God, and in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* he is concerned to state that "the will of God is always the same and never changes," (Lawson, 205).

⁷³⁶ Origen has already shed some light on this in *princ.* 3.1.2-3 and *or.* 6.1.

⁷³⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.6 (Hammond Bammel, 33:414; Scheck, 103:346).

⁷³⁸ P. Aloisius Lieske, S. J., *Die Theologie der Logos-mystik bei Origenes* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1938), 104-5, identifies three functions of the ἡγεμονικόν in Origen's thought: (1) the cradle of the intellectual life, (2) the operation of freedom or self determination of the will, particularly in regard to the religious life, and (3) the communion of the soul with the Logos that establishes religious significance. However, Lieske nowhere develops a relationship between the *hegemonikon* and sin nor does he speak of its role in the *Commentary on Romans*. Stoics understood the soul to be composed of eight parts: five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell), voice, reproduction, and the *hegemonikon*. Cf. L&S, 1:53H; Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 61; Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 29, but Inwood clarifies (p. 33) that figures like Chrysippus (and possibly Zeno) can affirm a monistic soul insofar as "the various powers of the soul all function together harmoniously, with no internal conflict or opposition."

⁷³⁹ Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 62-3.

⁷⁴⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.7 (Hammond Bammel, 16:136; Scheck, 103:132). Cf. *ibid.*, *princ.* 1.1.9, "That heart (*Cor*) is used for mind (*mente*), that is for the intellectual faculty (*intellectuali virtute*), you will certainly find over and over again in all the scriptures, both the New and the Old," Butterworth, 14; *Origène: Traité des principes*, edited by Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, SC 252, 110. Cf. also Origen,

how Origen (in the Latin translation of Rufinus) can also refer to this part simply as “soul” (*anima*), while reserving an alternative Latin term for “mind” (*sensus*) to refer to the lower element of the soul.⁷⁴¹ So we have in Origen several terms used to designate the ruling part of the soul—the interior locus of the law. The interiorizing of natural law provides the theological rationale for the ethical standard and therefore emphasizes personal responsibility. This moral onus is intensified through his later assertion that natural law and divine law are one and the same. “*God speaks...in the governance of the heart*” (*principali cordis*).⁷⁴² Origen does not hesitate to equate the law of the mind with God’s law,⁷⁴³ and such agreement between the two is also basic to the Stoic philosophical tradition.⁷⁴⁴ Indeed, Crouzel has observed that for Origen the *hegemonikon* “dirige son activité et que est une parcelle ou une émanation de la Raison universelle.”⁷⁴⁵ As “l’organe de la contemplation divine,” the *hegemonikon* contains both an intellectual and moral sense, and is the principle of the supernatural realities.⁷⁴⁶ Thus the function of the *hegemonikon* in appropriating Origen’s ethics is difficult to overstate. Yet another instance of the term demonstrates this interplay between its rational and moral facets. He notes that the Apostle admonishes Christians to provide food and drink to the enemy in an effort to “heap burning coals on his head” (Rom 12:20). Origen makes the point that this desired repentance in the enemy is located in his “head.” “‘Head’ is the name given to the governing part of the heart (*principale cordis*), and it is rightly called the head since from its intelligence and wisdom all the members are guided.”⁷⁴⁷ Thus the operations of *intellectus* and *prudentia* are instrumental in

comm. in Rom. 3.3; *Cels.* 6.69: “He (God) may be perceived by those who can perceive with the heart, that is the mind, though not with an ordinary heart, but with a pure heart,” Chadwick, 383.

⁷⁴¹ Crouzel, *Origen*, 88-9. Cf. Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3 for the distinction between “mind” and “soul.”

⁷⁴² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.16 (Hammond Bammel, 34:633; Scheck, 104:125), emphasis mine.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.12.

⁷⁴⁴ For the Stoic equation of the two see, e.g., Richard A. Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” *HTR* 71 (1978), 35-59.

⁷⁴⁵ Crouzel, “L’Anthropologie d’Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel,” 12.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.23 (Hammond Bammel, 34:746; Scheck, 104:220).

fulfilling the ethical life, for the *hegemonikon* is responsible for the actions of both the soul and the body.⁷⁴⁸

As we can now see more clearly the act of sinning is not necessarily dependent upon possessing the Mosaic law or the gospel. “God has implanted into the soul”⁷⁴⁹ this “internal law”⁷⁵⁰ and it is therefore “naturally innate within men.”⁷⁵¹ It is now evident why Origen crafts his first two definitions of sin around acts that are contrary to nature. Both the standard and the means of discerning such a standard work in concert with each other. But this act of violating nature is a complex ontological and ethical problem that necessitates further reflection and will require that we turn in the next chapter to his understanding of the passions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I laid out the parameters of Origen’s conception of volitional sin. The Gnostic denigration of the material world and their attenuated doctrine of natures is a large part of the theological milieu in which Origen is writing. His response to this foil allows him to draw out themes directly related to the present study. He refutes the Gnostics by offering a resounding defense of the goodness of God’s creation, especially the creation of the body. Corporeal existence is not evil. His argument is extended through a consideration of humanity’s tripartite constitution. The tripartite structure gives him the necessary framework to demonstrate how the soul adjudicates between spirit and flesh. Origen here incorporates elements of the ‘two ways’ tradition to explain the act of sin and his own

⁷⁴⁸ There are indications in the commentary that Origen sees the *hegemonikon* as even *desiring* the good. Cf. *ibid.*, 6.12; 7.6.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.19 (Hammond Bammel, 16:83; Scheck, 103:90). Elsewhere (3.3) he speaks of the law being “ingrafted” (*inseruit*), (Hammond Bammel, 16:225; Scheck, 103:206).

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:376; Scheck, 103:317).

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.3 (Hammond Bammel, 16:223; Scheck, 103:203). Roukema, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen’s Commentary on Romans*, 81, notes, “[I]n this *Commentary* Origen often interprets *nomos* in the epistle to the Romans with regard to the natural law in order to demonstrate that God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also (Rm 3,29). For it is evident that all texts which deal with the natural law pertain also to the Gentiles. His interpretations, which have been criticized since his own time...can be understood as an effort to actualize the Pauline principle ‘for the Jew first and also for the Greek.’”

defense of free will. Furthermore, no one can avoid culpability in God's sight. The fact that natural law has been implanted in the soul of everyone makes the standard for sin perceivable so that it excludes no one. These are the parameters of volitional sin.

This analysis provides the possibility for a conversation about sin and ethics. By establishing these parameters for volitional sin we are now in a place to turn to the practice of volitional sin. Here I will narrow in on the ontological and dynamic aspects involved in the soul's relationship to the body. Our aforementioned parameters will be aligned with certain salient, practical volitional themes such as the passions, the lack of moderation, a weakened will, and the imitation of Adam's transgression. The practice of volitional sin will come to the forefront as we consider the act of sinning in daily life.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICE OF VOLITIONAL SIN

Introduction

We are now in a position to move from an analysis of the parameters of volitional sin into the practice of volitional sin, thus culminating the study of sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*. Let us once again revisit the present argument. Origen understands volitional sin as a misappropriation of the individual's tripartite makeup, a situation where God's law—natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel—is breached through the soul's lack of moderation, caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body. In the previous chapter I analyzed the first half of this definition. In the present chapter I will focus on the latter portion of this claim: Origen understands sin to arise from irrational impulses found in the lower element of the soul. Such impulses are in close relationship to the body and become passions, and therefore sin, when admitted by the soul's higher element. This conception is governed by a lack of moderation and is precipitated by spiritual weakness. To understand the passions and moderation is to understand how one commits sin. To understand spiritual weakness is to understand why one commits sin. Here we have the locus of Origen's understanding of sin based on his reading of the Apostle in Romans.

Sin and the Passions

In order to situate this analysis of sin and the passions we will recall the previous discussion of the law in Chapter Three. God has given the law to each individual through the higher element of the soul, the *hegemonikon*. As this law has been inscribed on each heart the individual is left with no excuse for ethical decisions, and within the economy of salvation this ability to discern God's will has only been strengthened through the Mosaic Law and the gospel. The soul must therefore continuously adjudicate between spirit and flesh. The failure to adjudicate properly is the subject of the following pages.

In this section I will argue that Origen understands sin to arise from irrational impulses found in the lower element of the soul. Such impulses are in close relationship to the body and become passions, and therefore sin, when admitted by the soul's higher

element. Once again the tripartite structure of his anthropology, and indeed the ruling function of the *hegemonikon*, play a crucial role in helping us to understand the nature of the rise of the passions. Origen's manner of speaking about the passions is varied. From time to time he simply echoes the language of Scripture (cf. Rom 1:26). For instance, prior to our conversion "we were being impelled by the passions (*passionibus*) of sin and of the flesh. These passions (*passiones*), because of the law in our members, were bearing fruit, not for God but for death."⁷⁵² This rather typical account of the passions in the commentary is helpful but by no means exhaustive of what he thinks of this phenomenon.

To gain greater clarity we must remain cognizant that Origen is drawing freely from an existing philosophical and theological tradition. With regard to the philosophical tradition it is important to be mindful that here and elsewhere Origen does not see this as the impetus for his discussion of sin nor does it supplant the authoritative role Scripture plays in his hamartiology.⁷⁵³ The passions is derived largely from the Stoics and is a notoriously difficult idea to describe with precision. This doctrine was articulated by the Stoics as part of their moral psychology to explain irrationality and the presence of (excessive) emotion in the

⁷⁵² Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21). Cf. also *ibid.*, 1.22; 5.10; 6.3.

⁷⁵³ Older scholarship tended to see Hellenistic influences that often eclipsed Origen's Christian confession (cf., e.g., Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*; de Faye, *Origen and His Work*). Recent scholarship has tended to see Origen as a man guided by Scripture *over against* most Hellenistic influences (cf., e.g., Edwards, *Origen against Plato*; Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*; *ibid.*, *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007)). The primary focus of this recent scholarship has been to exonerate Origen from the alleged Platonist influence on his thinking. These works have attained a certain degree of success by clarifying misconceptions and properly situating Origen within a Christian context. But their achievements are limited in that their claims are often overstated (cf. the judicious review of *Origen against Plato* by Maurice Wiles in *JTS* 55 (2004), 340-4, as well as the telling review of *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* by Edwards in *JEH* 58 (2007), 109-10). This relationship is best understood in a manner that does not see Origen as compromising his Christian confession nor steering clear of any philosophical categories altogether. His tempered incorporation of philosophical ideas serve the purpose of clarifying obscure aspects of Christian revelation. But philosophy remains an incomplete discipline in Origen's thinking in that it is insufficient to lead anyone to salvation. Henri Crouzel, for the most part, strikes the appropriate balance with regard to this relationship. He argues that Origen favors some schools over others: Platonism and Stoicism over Aristotelianism and Epicureanism. But no school of thought is without critique and, with the exception of Epicureanism, Origen can find some elements in each school to clarify the intent of Scripture. With special attention to the Stoics Crouzel aptly states, "Certes l'intention du Stoïcien, motivée par le sens du bien commun et le respect d'autrui dans la justice, appartient à une moralité authentique. Mais elle ne suffit pas au chrétien dont l'amour de Dieu doit inspirer toute la vie. Le Seigneur doit être le but unique de son activité, l'amour du prochain et tous les autres amours, le sens du bien commun, étant intégrés à l'amour de Dieu," *Origène et la Philosophie* (Paris: Aubier, 1962), 101.

individual. Broadly speaking, early Stoics understood the passions as judgments of the soul while later Stoics understood them as movements of the soul. Arius Didymus defines a passion as “an impulse which is excessive, disobedient to the choosing reason or an <irrational> motion of the soul contrary to nature (all passions belong to the controlling part of the soul).”⁷⁵⁴ The Stoics understood four cardinal passions: appetite, fear, pleasure, and distress. The debt Origen owes to Stoic thought seems to be mediated by the debt he owes to his predecessor Clement of Alexandria. Origen works within an existing tradition and this tradition is evident in Clement’s *Stromata*. I will now revisit Clement’s definition of a passion.

Appetite is then the movement of the mind to or from something. Passion is an excessive appetite exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the word. Passions, then, are a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason. But revolt and distraction and disobedience are in our own power, as obedience is in our power. Wherefore voluntary actions are judged. But should one examine each one of the passions, he will find them irrational impulses.⁷⁵⁵

Clement offers themes we have already seen and others to be explored in this section. What captures our attention presently is his language of appetite (ὄρμη), impulses (ὀρέξεις), and perturbation (κίνησις). This language is not peculiar to Clement. Several times in the Latin translation of Rufinus we see the presence of the terms *motus* (appetite/movement/impulse), *cogitationes* (thoughts), and *suggestiones* (suggestions). Although the careful definition of such terms is crucial in ascertaining Origen’s conception of sin, this has not always proven to be an easy undertaking. Richard Sorabji has noted Origen’s tendency in *On First Principles* to conflate first movements (*primi motus*) with thoughts (*cogitationes*), resulting in statements where he affirms that pleasure (*hēdonē*) is experienced

⁷⁵⁴ Arius Didymus, *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* 10. J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 39, defines passions as “impulses (ὀρμαί) which have got out of hand, or as irrational movements of the soul.”

⁷⁵⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 2.13 (Roberts, 361); *Clément d’Alexandrie: les stromates*, edited by P. Th. Camelot and Cl. Mondésert, SC 38 (Paris: Cerf, 1954), 82.

before assent is given.⁷⁵⁶ One gets the sense that the mere thought about sinning is sin itself. While this may be the natural conclusion from select comments in *On First Principles*, it is certainly not the picture painted in the *Commentary on Romans*.

Reading the commentary in light of his understanding of “impulse” (*motus*) produces a measure of clarity. Origen praises the Greek, who through the work of natural law in his heart “and moved by natural reason” (*naturali ratione motus*), is able to “hold fast to justice or observe chastity or maintain wisdom, moderation, and modesty.”⁷⁵⁷ He says God has given all men “every disposition and every drive (*omnes affectus omnesque motus*) by which he can press forward and advance toward virtue.”⁷⁵⁸ In these texts Origen understands *motus* as an impulse to be followed because it accords with God’s law. But not all impulses are equal. Some of these suggestions are made by the devil, angels, and evil spirits.⁷⁵⁹ However, more often Origen speaks of impulses that seem to derive from ourselves. In Book Four he speaks hypothetically of the man who possesses natural law and is faced with sexual temptation. “[B]y a judgment of his own mind” (*mentis*), Origen says this man “refused even to permit his thoughts (*cogitationes*) to consent to this sort of defiling activity.”⁷⁶⁰ This text yields two interrelated points in Origen’s hamartiology. This particular *suggestion* of a defiling activity is at odds with God’s law, and these impulses are mediated, judged, and rejected by the rational faculty of the soul. In the commentary he clearly affirms that while many suggestions are irrational, one is not culpable until deemed so by the rational faculty of

⁷⁵⁶ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 346-51. Sorabji sees examples of this in *princ.* 3.1.4; 3.2.4; *comm. in Jos.* 15.3; *comm. in Mt.* 21; *comm. in Cant.* 3.

⁷⁵⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.5 (Hammond Bammel, 16:128; Scheck, 103:125).

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.3 (Hammond Bammel, 16:223; Scheck, 103:204).

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.21. Elsewhere (4.8) Origen makes the point that resisting the temptations of the devil is actually evidence of peace. Cf. Origen, *princ.* 3.2.4.

⁷⁶⁰ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 4.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:298; Scheck, 103:257). Cf. *ibid.*, 1.21, where he gives an illustration of the soul that receives counsel from virtue and vice, but makes clear that the choice is subsequent to the counsel.

the soul.⁷⁶¹ The thoughts are *declared* evil when the soul is moved to recognize these irrational impulses. Now to understand the origin of these impulses we turn once again to the nature of the body and soul. I recall the previous distinction between body *qua* body and body *qua* flesh, and this helps to understand how *flesh* is understood almost exclusively in negative terms.⁷⁶² This terminological transition is inextricably linked to the nature of the soul. The soul is unstable, and the reason for its instability is twofold: the exterior attraction to opposing options and the interior opposing tendencies. Henri Crouzel has noted this characteristic in Origen's theology. "[T]he soul is both the scene and the stake...[and]...by reason of the two elements or tendencies that divide it, the soul is in league with both sides."⁷⁶³

There seems to be here at least a tacit recognition of irrationality on the part of the lower element of the soul. So we remind ourselves that just as the higher element of the soul is in close relationship to the spirit, the lower element of the soul in close relationship to the body. The relationship between the lower element of the soul and the body is evident throughout his exegesis in the commentary. This point is illustrated in his explanation of the spiritual meaning of circumcision.

Circumcision means to cut off a certain part of the genital organ through which the succession of the human race and fleshly propagation is served. I judge that, through this, something is indicated in a figurative sense: namely, that if some uncleanness cleaves to the soul by association with the flesh, if someone has covered his soul (*anima*) with a mind (*sensus*) that is set on seductive desire, these things

⁷⁶¹ Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, 106, clears up the common misconception that "irrational" impulses are devoid of reason. Rather, the distinction is one between good reason versus bad, inadequate reason.

⁷⁶² The exceptions, possibly owing to the Latin translation by Rufinus, are found in *comm. in Rom.* 3.2; 4.2; 6.1, 9, 14; 7.2, 9, 10, 13, where *body* and *flesh* are equated. Conversely, *body* can mean *flesh* (4.6). References to the *flesh* of Christ are entirely positive and ostensibly serve the purpose of warding off a docetic threat.

⁷⁶³ Crouzel, *Origen*, 92. The lower element is attuned to the things of this world while the higher element is attuned to the things of God. His teaching in *On First Principles* accords with the evidence found in the *Commentary on Romans*. "When the sensitiveness of the soul has grown duller through its subservience to the passions of the body, it is weighed down by the mass of its vices and becomes sensitive to nothing refined or spiritual. It is then said to become flesh, *taking a name from that element in which it exercises the greater part of its vigour and effective purpose*," *princ.* 3.4.5; Butterworth, 236, italics mine. This statement is couched within quotes from Romans 7:23 and 8:7.

ought to be cut off from it. The reason why the cutting is inflicted upon the genital organs and not upon the other bodily parts is to clarify that the vices of this sort do not come to the soul from its own essence (*animae non ex propria substantia*) but rather by an inborn impulse (*genuino motu*) and by the incentive of the flesh (*incentiuo carnis*).⁷⁶⁴

Here our author identifies three distinct actors in the drama of sin: (1) “its own essence” (*propria substantia*, viz., soul’s higher element/*hegemonikon*), (2) “an inborn impulse” (*genuino motus*) or “mind” (*sensus*, viz., soul’s lower element), and (3) “the incentive of the flesh” (*incentiuo carnis*, viz., body).⁷⁶⁵ First, recall that *sensus* usually refers to the lower element of the soul, and with this in mind, it should also be understood as this “inborn impulse” (*genuino motu*). Furthermore, the “inborn impulse” and the “incentive of the flesh” do not stand in apposition, but refer instead to two distinct but closely related ideas. Hence we have two actors seeking to overtake the soul: *sensus* or *genuino motu* and the *incentiuo carnis*. Such a manner of expressing the aetiology of sin was not quite as clear to Origen earlier in his career. *On First Principles* 3.4.1-5 chronicles his struggle to account for the duality of will insofar as we possess *within us* a will to sin. He offers three possible solutions: Plato’s tripartite division of the soul, the ‘two souls’ theory (viz., one superior or heavenly and one lower or earthly), and finally a single soul possessing a good will while the flesh possesses an evil will.⁷⁶⁶ He rejects the Platonic theory for lacking Scriptural support. He explains the merits of the ‘two souls’ theory and leaves it open ended. He also leaves the

⁷⁶⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:164; Scheck, 103:155). Cf. Origen, *princ.* 2.10.4 (Butterworth, 142) where he asserts, “From which we understand that in the very essence of the soul certain torments are produced from the harmful desires themselves that lead us to sin.”

⁷⁶⁵ By referring to the *hegemonikon* as simply ‘soul’ Origen is employing a common Stoic linguistic maneuver. Cf. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 29-30.

⁷⁶⁶ For various assessments of Origen’s exploration of the ‘two souls’ doctrine see José Antonio Alcáin, *Cautiverio y Redención del Hombre in Origenes* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1973), 113-7; Benjamin P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen’s Doctrine of the Soul*, 60-76; R. Ferwerda, “Two Souls: Origen’s and Augustine’s Attitude toward the Two Souls Doctrine: Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy,” *VC* 37 (1983), 360-78; G. G. Stroumsa and Paula Fredriksen, “The Two Souls and the Divided Will,” in *Self, Soul & Body in Religious Experience*, edited by Albert I. Baumgarten, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 198-217. Cf. Origen, *princ.* 2.1.3 where he affirms the existence of only one soul. Cf. also Clement, *strom.* 2.20, where he cites Basilides’ son Isidorus as an adherent of the ‘two souls’ doctrine.

soul/flesh theory open ended with the caveat that it implies God created something at odds with Himself.⁷⁶⁷

What eluded Origen in *On First Principles* seems to achieve a greater measure of clarity in the *Commentary on Romans*. Here he may be drawing the present distinctions *in order to counter* the ‘two souls’ theory and predetermined natures. These two works should be placed alongside the biblical text that first brought Origen into this quagmire and appears no less than seven times in *On First Principles* 3.4.1-5: Galatians 5:17 (“The spirit warreth against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit, so that we may not do the things that we will to do.”). What may have once suggested to him that humans are endowed with a second soul now seems to suggest something different. In at least two places in the commentary (1.21 & 6.1) he uses Galatians 5:17 to prove his tripartite anthropology, an anthropology that possesses only one soul. He seems more content to understand that as a result of the Fall the lower element of the soul and the body have acquired sinful tendencies and are said by the Apostle to have a will of their own. These two entities belong to a world dominated by sin, corruption, and death. They are entities characteristic of *this* realm and therefore do not make God culpable for their existence as such.⁷⁶⁸ He makes this clear in Book Seven:

[J]ust as the common death separates the soul from the body, so also it strives to separate the soul from the love of God; and this surely is the death of the soul. It is possible, then, that there may also be from part of the soul another “life” that acts with it in order to separate us from the love of God. This is the life of sin.⁷⁶⁹

In *On First Principles* Origen struggles to articulate a proper dissociation of sinfulness from createdness. He is now able to do so in the *Commentary on Romans* because

⁷⁶⁷ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 315, both clarifies and obscures the problem. He acknowledges that Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen spoke of and were faced with the heretical teaching of a second soul that is material, has a will of its own, and directed towards evil. He is also correct to note that Origen rejects this teaching. However, Sorabji’s conclusion is that Origen posits a higher will of our spirit and a lower will of our soul, support for which he curiously finds (n66) in the notoriously *inconclusive* passage in *On First Principles* 3.4.1-5.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.12. Interestingly, once in the commentary Origen speaks of the “burdens of sin,” 8.6 (Scheck, 104:157). This may lend weight to more of an *ontological* conception of sin in his thought. This could be read in light of my aforementioned reference to the *Homilies on Ezekiel* (5.1.2) where he likens sin to cancer.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.10 (Hammond Bammel, 34:604; Scheck, 104:101).

flesh is not created, it is acquired. Furthermore, the will of the flesh need not be personified in order to communicate these sinful tendencies. Origen's exegesis exhibits a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, he insists that the higher element of the soul is not in its essence corrupt or reprobate, a lesson he repeats *ad nauseam* throughout the commentary.⁷⁷⁰ The essence of the soul (*hegemonikon/mens*) is pure. On the other hand, he must acknowledge the presence of sinful tendencies in the lower element of the soul. Without capitulating to his deterministic enemies, he must nevertheless paint a negative picture regarding the soul's proclivity to be led into sin.⁷⁷¹

A consideration of Origen's exegesis of Romans 7:14-25 sheds more light on the complex relationship between the law, the *hegemonikon*, and impulses. In taking on the *persona* of the weak man in order to instruct the church in these matters,⁷⁷² "Paul" says, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man; but I see in my members another law fighting against the law of my mind, leading me away as a captive to the law of sin that is in my members" (Rom 7:22-3). He continues:

This will for the good he designated as the law of the mind (*mentis*), which law of the mind (*mentis*) agrees with the law of God and consents to it. But the impulses (*motus*) of the body and the desires of the flesh, on the other hand, he calls the law of the members, which leads the soul away captive and subjects it to the laws of sin. For it is certain that the desires of the flesh drag the soul toward sin and subject it to its laws. And just as the law of the mind (*mentis*), which agrees with the law of God, if it can take possession of the soul, leads it to the law of God, so also the law that is in the members, and the lust of the flesh, if it seduces the soul, would subject it to the laws of sin.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.1; 2.4, 7; 4.12; 8.10.

⁷⁷¹ There is no hint in the *Commentary on Romans* of the existence of two souls in the individual. In fact, his most explicit assertion of the singularity of the soul—"one and the same soul" (*anima una eademque*)—is found within the context of his clearest definition of sin, *ibid.*, 4.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:281; Scheck, 103:246).

⁷⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 6.9.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:514-5; Scheck, 104:41).

Here the function of “law” is: natural law = law of the mind \approx law of God.⁷⁷⁴ So once again, the “law of the mind” is the higher element of the soul (*hegemonikon*). What Origen means by “law of the members” is what our previous text called “incentive of the flesh.” What is assumed in this excerpt is once again the presence of the lower element of the soul as an actor in the drama of sin. This is so because he says the “law of the mind” (*hegemonikon*) must “take possession of the soul.” This suggests, as Crouzel has maintained, that the soul is in league with both sides: spirit and flesh. Sin has occurred when the *hegemonikon* no longer has possession of the soul. Here the lower element is active in preventing the soul from agreeing with the law of God. Its presence is always one of a familial relationship with the body, and if I can be so banal as to say, the lower element of the soul sympathizes with the body in its desires. As such the soul is always on the precipice of inciting the passions. Conversely, as Origen states elsewhere in the commentary, sin is eliminated when “this soul *comes back to itself* and opens the door of its mind once again to piety and the virtues.”⁷⁷⁵ Thus we see how the lower element, by virtue of its fallen nature,⁷⁷⁶ associates itself with the law of the members.

Origen does not consider the impulses (*motus*) of the body and the desires of the flesh to be *ipso facto* evil. After all, the Apostle endured both external and internal afflictions “for the sake of the self-control of his body and his endeavors for the highest instruction.”⁷⁷⁷ Conversely, the one who sins is the one who is “ensnared by the allurements of the present life.”⁷⁷⁸ What is evil, and therefore sin, is when the soul, seduced by such an attraction, moves in the direction and thus under the domain of these bodily desires and impulses. If Origen

⁷⁷⁴ Sometimes the two are described as *virtually* the same and brought together seamlessly (5.6; 6.9) and other times they are basically equated at the outset (6.9, 12).

⁷⁷⁵ “Quodsi in semet ipsam regressa haec anima pietati rursus et uirtutibus mentis suae ianuam pandat none ingressa pietas impietatem continuo depellet...”, *ibid.*, 2.1 (Hammond Bammel, 16:100; Scheck, 103:103), emphasis mine.

⁷⁷⁶ That is, it was added to the “mind”/“intellect” as a result of the preexistent fall. Cf. Origen, *princ.* 2.8.3.

⁷⁷⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 4.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:343; Scheck, 103:291).

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:349; Scheck, 103:295).

attributes evil to the impulse he does so knowing, from extensive experience and speaking after the fact, that to follow such an impulse *will lead* to evil.⁷⁷⁹ To acquiesce in such a persistent manner to these inclinations is to be under the dominion of sin. This concept is exemplified when he explains Paul's meaning of "living to sin" (Rom 6:1-2).

The Apostle says...that sin has...established a throne and a seat of its dominion in our body. For that part of the [man's] substance is more familiar to it and [forms] a kind of friendly association with the pleasure of the flesh. From this bond of friendship, while employing the opportunities given to it by nature's inducement, by means of a small detour it turns the order of nature over the precipice of death.⁷⁸⁰

The order of nature is usurped when the soul inclines itself to the desires of the body. Furthermore, such repetitive behavior makes it easier to sin, and dominion is said to exist in that the body's suggestions (impulses) are never denied, and therefore rendered untamable. We live on the precipice of death, for "nature's inducement" needs only a "small detour" to be rendered sinful. Such a detour is the capitulation of the soul which causes the harmonic function or order of nature to be "turned over." This failure to control properly nature's inducement is characteristic of the body *becoming* flesh. It is an act first suggested by the flesh's cohort, the lower element of the soul. In an of itself the body does not have its own "will," but as we have seen its "will" is the personification of the lower element of the soul due to their close association. When these two usurp the order of nature then sin is said to establish dominion.

Despite the familiarity with sin that some people exhibit, the activity of the moral life is not predetermined. The Apostle neither teaches nor intimates that the body and the soul are destined for a certain fate irrespective of people's desires. "[T]here is one nature for all men," Origen asserts against his deterministic opponents, "...and it is suited equally for salvation and, if it becomes negligent, for perdition."⁷⁸¹ He continues:

⁷⁷⁹ The law of the members is always "suggesting the desires of the flesh" (*desideria carnis suggerens*), and waiting for decisive action on the part of the soul, *ibid.*, 5.6 (Hammond Bammel, 33:414; Scheck, 103:347).

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:418; Scheck, 103:350).

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.10 (Hammond Bammel, 34:692; Scheck, 104:176).

[S]ince there is one nature for all rational beings, the choice of each—the liberty of the impulse (*motus*) of each is distributed equally—when summoned by the power of choice, and by guiding the soul subjected to them either toward virtue or toward evil desire, creates the species of a good tree or an evil tree. . . . And in this way, each person, according to the impulses (*motus*) of his own purpose, will be designated [either] a good olive tree, if he travels down the road of virtue, or a wild olive tree, if he follows the opposite [path].⁷⁸²

Origen is clear: the impulse is only evil when the rational faculty makes a choice that is contrary to the law of God. All rational beings possess the ability of “guiding the soul.” Therefore, the soul becomes evil by following an impulse, that if carried to its fulfillment, will lead to moral failure. In fact, any good or evil moral action taken in this life, according to Origen’s reading of Romans 2:15-16, makes an indelible imprint on the soul to accuse or defend them on the day when God will judge the secrets of men.⁷⁸³ Those who consistently fail in this regard are said to lack the second (spiritual) circumcision and are “enslaved to Egyptian customs and barbaric mental inclinations” (*motus animi barbaros seruet*).⁷⁸⁴

Origen’s tripartite anthropology is essential in understanding his teaching on sin. The lower element of the soul acts in collusion with the body to provide the initiation of sin. The body’s role in this act is theologically so intimately bound up with the lower element of the soul that making distinctions is of little importance to him. The passions are incited when the *hegemonikon* makes an improper judgment to acquiesce to these impulses and moves in the direction of the body. Next I will move from an emphasis on some of the ontological aspects of sin to a more thoroughly ethical discussion.

Sin and Moderation

My investigation of volitional sin in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* has testified to some reliance on Stoic thought forms. But as Origen continues to wrestle with the Apostle’s thought in Romans this reliance begins to fade in favor of the path laid out by the

⁷⁸² Ibid., 8.10 (Hammond Bammel, 34:693; Scheck, 104:176).

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 2.7; 9.41; *princ.* 2.10.4.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:168; Scheck, 103:158).

Peripatetics. His incorporation of the Aristotelian conception of moderation plays a decisive role in his understanding of volitional sin in the commentary. Simply stated, one violates nature, and therefore incites the passions, when one lacks moderation. Here I recall Origen's third definition of sin: "One should know, however, that other learned men use this definition as well, that the nature and cause of sin is in whether something is added to or subtracted from the virtues."⁷⁸⁵ This definition is found in the midst of a protracted exhortation on the value of the virtue of moderation (*temperantia*).⁷⁸⁶ Although his immediate reflections are based on the Apostle's words in Romans 12:3 ("Do not be wiser than you ought to be, but be wise in moderation"), they nevertheless reflect his measured admiration of the Greek philosophical tradition.

Origen asserts that virtues become vices when not governed by moderation. Thus the over-realization of justice leads to injustice and the over-realization of prudence leads to imprudence. He borrows a page out of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* when the great philosopher argues that excess and deficiency destroy perfection, while adherence to the mean preserves it.⁷⁸⁷ Aristotle says, "Now we have said that Temperance (*σωφροσύνη*) is the observance of the mean (*μεσότης*) in relation to pleasures."⁷⁸⁸ The point is emphasized by Aristotle throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*. "[F]or to eat or drink to repletion of ordinary food and drink is to exceed what is natural in amount, since the natural desire is only to satisfy one's wants. Hence people who over-eat are called 'mad-bellies,' meaning that they fill that organ beyond the right measure."⁷⁸⁹ The virtue of *σωφροσύνη/temperantia* plays a significant role in Origen's theology of sin throughout the commentary. Like Aristotle, our

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:722; Scheck, 104:200).

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:723; Scheck 104:202). The theme of moderation is also found in *princ.* 3.2.2.

⁷⁸⁷ *Eth. Nic.* 2.6.9 in *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by H. Rackham, LCL 19 (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 93.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.10.1 (Rackham, 173).

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.11.3 (Rackham, 179-81). Cf. 3.12.9; 4.4.4.

author also finds meaningful and practical applications for incorporating this ethic. The virtues are at the forefront of his mind in expounding the Apostle's thought.

But virtue is always rooted in cosmology and Origen consistently reminds his readers that a proper understanding of the virtues is a proper understanding of the law of God.⁷⁹⁰ We begin to glimpse how the third definition complements the first two by considering how moderation, as dictated by natural law (i.e., philosophers knew this) and confirmed in Paul, plays a significant role in delineating virtue and vice in Origen's thought. But the immediate arena of the outworking of moderation is the human body. Since nature provides discernable bounds of right and wrong (further illumined by Scripture⁷⁹¹), his ideal of moderation precludes the existence of excess (or deficiency) in a manner that violates nature and allows the soul to succumb to the excessive needs of the body. The absence of moderation indicates the presence of the passions. Therefore as Origen considers Romans 6:1-2—living and dying to sin—he makes the argument that living in sin is indicative of an unstable soul that usurps the law of nature and inflames the passions.

The flesh has natural appetites for food and drink which need to be kept within certain limits of satisfaction. But if someone, by the enticement of sin, should exceed these limits, he is no longer yearning after food and drink, a flesh which suffices nature, but after excess and drunkenness. In a similar way there even exists in the flesh a natural drive by which it demands to be united with a woman for the sake of procuring offspring. But if he should be turned aside from the law, sin enticing in this occasion, and his impulses (*motus*) of natural lust should be roused to illicit things, he lives to sin, since he is not obeying the law of God in these instances but the persuasions of sin (*peccati persuasionibus*).⁷⁹²

We now begin to see more clearly the confluence of Origen's three aforementioned definitions of sin. The first two definitions bring into sharp relief that any act contrary to nature (natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel) is a sin. These are otherwise rather

⁷⁹⁰ E.g., Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.5. Origen makes the distinction between knowing God and knowing God's will. The former is discernable through nature while the latter is attained only through the law and the prophets.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:418; Scheck, 103:350). Cf. Origen, *princ.* 3.2.2; *Med.* 5.1 (Staniforth, 77): "...but repose has its limits set by nature, in the same way as food and drink have; and you overstep these limits, you go beyond the point of sufficiency; while on the other hand, when action is in question, you stop short of what you could well achieve."

banal or austere descriptions of sin. What brings out their force, and therefore their theological color, is how he complements them with a theology of moderation. This all comes together in the above text. Origen here repeats that the standard of nature is not to be breached, and if it is breached one has allowed otherwise innocuous impulses to be “roused to illicit things.” Moderation cuts the Gordian Knot of ethics. This much is evident by the overwhelming emphasis he places on the concept throughout the commentary. Provision within the bounds of moderation is the focal point of his exegesis of Romans 8:12-13 when encountering the warning not to “live according to the flesh.”

What it means to live according to the flesh it has already been frequently discussed. It is to indulge in the desires of the flesh. It is in this respect, then, that he is denying that we are debtors, as he also says elsewhere, “Make no provision for the flesh in respect to its lusts.” He is not absolutely denying that provision should be made for the flesh in respect to necessary matters, but only in respect to its lusts.⁷⁹³

Likewise, his comments on Romans 13:14 demonstrate his emphasis on this delicate ethical balance.

The Apostle practices his customary moderation; he does not forbid provision for the flesh to be made through all things. For certainly it must be provided with necessities. But with respect to pleasures and excess and every kind of lust, provision is to be absolutely excluded.⁷⁹⁴

Moderation is the goal of ethical living. The standard of nature—indeed nature itself—is usurped when the impulses are roused to excessive measures. Once again I need to draw attention to the fact that our author does not suggest that nature’s inducement is evil. Nature’s inducement is what maintains life: food and drink for the body and a natural drive for reproduction.⁷⁹⁵ Provision is requisite for the terrestrial life. Too much or too little provision is sin, or as Lorenzo Perrone has aptly stated, sin is the abandonment of the “virtuous ‘golden mean.’”⁷⁹⁶ Achieving the “golden mean” is difficult enough for the

⁷⁹³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.14 (Hammond Bammel, 33:539; Scheck, 104:58).

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.34 (Hammond Bammel, 34:761; Scheck, 104:233). Here Origen once again uses *flesh* in an equivocal manner denoting both *body* and *flesh*. For more on excess and moderation see *ibid.*, 1.21; 2.1.

⁷⁹⁵ Cf. Origen, *princ.* 3.2.2.

⁷⁹⁶ Lorenzo Perrone, “Peccato,” in *Origene: Dizionario la cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, ed. Adele Monaci Castagno (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2000), 346, “Soggiacendo agli impulsi della carne, l’uomo

Christian and nearly impossible prior to conversion. Before conversion we were “impelled by the passions...[and]...bearing fruit...for death.”⁷⁹⁷ “[O]verwhelmed” by vices, we were nevertheless “not without our own active engagement in sin.”⁷⁹⁸ Free will is present but considerably weakened.⁷⁹⁹ Thus the will’s inability to choose virtue consistently, in true Aristotelian fashion, stems from its lack of habitual training.⁸⁰⁰ The soul in the habit of practicing vice finds it difficult to eschew its former life and turn to the practice of virtue.⁸⁰¹ Furthermore, any struggle to maintain the “golden mean” is a struggle consonant with no less than the vicissitudes of the body. The ideal is always in jeopardy because the struggle to survive necessitates subjecting the soul to testing on a regular basis. The *hegemonikon* is incessantly active in making ethical decisions, for “it is impossible that a soul exists at any time without having a ruler.”⁸⁰² Just as the advanced climber continuously makes decisions and transmits those decisions—almost unconsciously—to the arms and legs, so also the advanced soul is characterized by the filling of the mind with virtue and Christ in order to ward off the continuous impulses of the body that would suggest otherwise.⁸⁰³

Origen, however, is always cognizant that God’s purpose for our terrestrial life is to train us in the virtues and unite us with Him.⁸⁰⁴ Spiritual progress is realized when the soul

soddisfa in eccesso i propri bisogni naturali (*Prin* 3, 2, 2), come più in generale il peccato s’identifica con l’abbandono del «giusto mezzo» virtuoso (*CRm* 9, 2).” Cf. Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, 183-4.

⁷⁹⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21). Cf. *ibid.*, 2.5 for an exception to this rule.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck, 104:38); 5.2 (Hammond Bammel, 33:398; Scheck, 103:333), respectively. Cf. also *ibid.*, 5.3, 10.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.9.

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 2.1.3; 7.10.4.

⁸⁰¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9; 6.10-6.11, where Origen admits that the will struggles to choose the good in the early stages of conversion because it is not in the habit of practicing virtue.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.6. “The fundamental sense of human life and nature taught by Origen was therefore one of motion, either toward God or away, a motion which determined the qualities of the individual,” Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 63.

⁸⁰³ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.9; 5.6, 10.

⁸⁰⁴ “The clothing of the fallen rational beings in bodies could be an expression of God’s mercy towards the fallen beings, because the bodies seem to be necessary for the return of the beings to their former condition,” Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen, “Origen on the Human Body,” 649. Henry Chadwick, “Origen,

brings these impulses into conformity with the law of God. Once the soul is “converted to better things,” the “will for the good is (now) present in him.”⁸⁰⁵ When one is circumcised in the heart, Jesus “cuts off the habits and passions of the old man and the vices of the flesh.”⁸⁰⁶ Such progress finds further expression in the filling of the Spirit, a process that weakens the deeds of the flesh, corresponding in large measure to the degree to which repentance is exercised in the individual.⁸⁰⁷ The “golden mean” is made possible through grace. Furthermore, this theology of grace in the ethical life leads us to a critical difference between Origen and his predecessor. Clement followed the Stoics in seeing the goal of progress in this life as achieving *apatheia*, freedom from the passions. Origen, on the other hand, is more realistic by adducing *metriopatheia*, a restraint to be imposed on the passions.⁸⁰⁸ One does not therefore find any references to the eradication of the passions in the *Commentary on Romans*. Rather, the existence of the passions is assumed and their restraint is exhorted.

Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body,” *HTR* 41 (1948), 86, notes, “Origen begins from the basic fact that the nature of σῶμα is impermanent; it is in a continual state of change and transformation, caused by the food which is eaten, absorbed by the body, and turned into tissue.” Cf. Origen, *or.* 6.1, in *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, translated by Rowan A. Greer, CWS (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 93, where he refers to our bodies as “in a state of flux and...wasting away.”

⁸⁰⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.4 (Hammond Bammel, 33:471; Scheck, 104:12); 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:515; Scheck, 104:42), respectively. In 5.9, Origen draws the distinction between the old man and the new man, the former characterized by members that were enslaved to sin.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:168; Scheck, 103:158). Margeurite Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe incarné*, *Patristica Sorbonensia* 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1958), 321, observes, “Origène est un optimiste, pour qui la lutte contre les passions est une première étape, vite dépassée, de la progression intérieure.”

⁸⁰⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.14. Cf. Origen, *princ.* 3.2.2, where Origen says that mere human will is incapable of completing the good act, for it must be brought to perfection by divine help.

⁸⁰⁸ “While Clement always speaks of *apatheia* as the essential virtue of the spiritual man, occurrences of *apatheia* and *apathes* in Origen’s writings can be counted on the fingers of one hand and his teaching is nearer to *metriopatheia*, the restraint to be imposed on the passions, rather than *apatheia* itself,” Crouzel, *Origen*, 7. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 2: The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1953), 96, perhaps laying more emphasis on the ascetic program per se, is not sufficiently judicious in evaluating Origen’s material when arguing, “The goal is the complete freedom from passions, the ἀπάθεια, the total destruction of πάθη. In order to reach it, there must be a perpetual mortification of the flesh.” Cf., e.g., Clement, *strom.* 3.7.57; 4.23.152 and Origen, *Cels.* 1.64. Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: II. Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1985): 77-8, notes Jerome’s characterization and vitriolic critique of Pelagian sinlessness being an outcropping of the Stoic idea of *apatheia*. Colish calls into question both Jerome’s understanding of Origen as a proponent of *apatheia* and the general teachings of the Stoics and Pelagians in this regard. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 315.

One final exhortation to the life of moderation provides Origen the opportunity to situate it within the context of our created identity.

These are the works of darkness that are also called the works of the flesh in those who surrender their flesh to excess and debauchery, neither to holiness nor to the Lord. For what else will follow revelry, i.e., disgraceful and extravagant feasts at which the utterly shameful drunkenness is inevitably a companion, if not fornication and debauchery? “Fornications” have received their name from filthy acts of lying down together, which seem more befitting of wild animals and beasts than rational (*rationabilibus*) human beings.⁸⁰⁹

Origen provides further reasoning why a lack of moderation is sin: it denies the image of God in the person. Being “rational and intellectual” (*rationabilis et mens*) the “inner man” is able to have knowledge of God and has the capacity for receiving the Holy Spirit.⁸¹⁰ Therefore a lack of moderation runs counter to one of the defining characteristics of humanity: rationality. Irrationality keeps the image from congruence with God’s law. The body’s natural desires are variegated and impetuous—indeed often irrational—unless controlled by *intellectus* and *prudentia*.⁸¹¹ Therefore, sin is to favor the irrational, indeed it gives credence to that which is irrational and disorderly, and the soul is characterized as *fleshly* when it gives its assent to that which is fluctuating and ephemeral. Having done so the soul now wishes to be identified as vice, irrationality, and death. The soul that associates itself with that which is irrational, ephemeral, and excessive, explains the notable absence of any mention by Origen of the human spirit. As I stated earlier, when the soul does not follow the spirit’s persuading influence, the latter simply recedes into the background and remains in a state of dormancy.

⁸⁰⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.33 (Hammond Bammel, 34:760-1; Scheck, 104:232). Cf. Clement, *Paed.*, 1.13.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:565; Scheck, 104:69). For rationality as integral to the image of God see *ibid.*, 1.19; 5.1; 7.2 and *princ.* 1.8.4.

⁸¹¹ Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.23 (Hammond Bammel, 34:746). Cf. *ibid.*, 1.20 (Hammond Bammel, 16:86; Scheck, 103:92).

But does such an emphasis on the abiding existence of the passions lead Origen to a disparaging theology of the body akin to the very adversaries he seeks to challenge?⁸¹² Select passages may suggest there is something inherently wrong with the body. Unqualified remarks creep into the commentary where he seems both to affirm and deny what nature dictates with regard to sexual reproduction.⁸¹³ Furthermore, his proclivity to play up the “inner/outer man” distinction reinforces this assumption, for he asserts unequivocally that the “inner man” is made in the image of God,⁸¹⁴ while the “outer man” is formed from the mud of the earth.⁸¹⁵ But this is not the whole picture. Origen’s rhetoric often betrays his intent. So while he at times agrees with the Stoics that some matters pertaining to the individual are “indifferent,”⁸¹⁶ many of the very needs of the body that sustain life are also a vexing reality of life in this world because the body *must always* be kept within certain limits. This is a

⁸¹² Cécile Blanc, “L’attitude d’Origène à l’égard du corps et de la chair,” *StPatr* XVII, 848, notes, “Il arrive cependant à Origène de manifester à l’égard du corps et de la chair un mépris qui peut être dû à la fois à l’influence des gnostiques et à sa lutte contre eux.” Blanc, however, provides little warrant for this claim. For a more balanced appraisal see Christoph Marksches, “Gnostics,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 106, where he states, “During recent decades of scholarly debate, the question whether Origen adopted elements of gnostic thought from his opponents, unconsciously or deliberately, was a passionately controverted subject. A careful look through his texts shows that the influence on him of specific gnostic teaching has often been overestimated by modern researchers. Origen’s concern as a theologian-philosopher ought to be contextualized more in the tradition of Jewish-Hellenistic biblical exegesis (modeled on Philo’s attempt). His goal is to interpret the Hebrew Bible within the matrix of a Platonic cosmology and to expound the Christian doctrinal system in the framework of a critical debate with contemporary Platonic philosophers. To be sure, to imagine that Origen was simply one more of a long line of Christian apologists struggling against heterodox Gnostics, using the canons of the rule of faith and the ancient preaching of the church...as his primary weapons, is a position that is far too simple, but the same charge of oversimplification can be leveled also at those who have claimed to see in Origen’s corpus of writings a systemic ‘gnostic structure’ of thought.”

⁸¹³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.2 (Hammond Bammel, 34:566; Scheck, 104:70), where he also laments, “what great futility is contained in these things.” For more on the exegesis of this section see Paul Lebeau, “L’interprétation origénienne de Rm 8. 19-22,” in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, edited by Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), 1:336-45. For this same tension in Clement see John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 148. For other problematic passages on Origen and the body see *comm. in Rom.* 3.2; 10.1.

⁸¹⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.9.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:338; Scheck, 103:287), “Other things, however, are indifferent (*indifferentia*), that is to say, they are to be designated neither good nor evil, as are wealth, physical beauty, strength, height, and those things which serve the needs of the body.” Cf. also *ibid.*, 6.6; 10.3; *Cels.* 4.45; Georg Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, 176ff. For more on the Stoic conception of “indifferents” see, e.g., Arius Didymus, *Ecl.* 5a; 7a; Epictetus, *Epict. diss.* 1.30.3; 2.9.15; Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 6.45; 11.16.

standing temptation insofar as the complete elimination of sin and death in the believer is an expectation only of the future kingdom.⁸¹⁷ Furthermore, often he employs rhetoric to indicate a body that has *already* committed the sin, and is therefore understood as *flesh*. But this rhetoric does not undermine a basic fact: sin derives not from the body, but from the heart.⁸¹⁸ There are, in fact, several positive affirmations of the goodness of the body.⁸¹⁹ But insofar as he is fully aware that “all creation groans,” this goodness can, admittedly, be difficult to see without the eyes of faith. We are reminded that the body is a gift of God to unite us with him and is therefore necessary for this pilgrimage. If bodily existence emerges as a source of frustration, it is also a challenge, for as Peter Brown remarks, it is “a frontier that demanded to be crossed.”⁸²⁰

So the body is no more culpable than anything else that lacks rationality or free will. The decision to sin belongs to the soul. The soul, as it were, allows access for the body to exceed the bounds of nature. Such is the effect of the first sin. Original sin produced a great deal of instability. Recalling Crouzel’s observation that the soul is in league with both sides, we can deduce that it is therefore no neutral bystander. Its inherent instability makes it both an advocate for virtue and a willing partner for vice. Despite its instability and repeated failure to do the good, Origen often emphasizes the desires of the body *over against* the soul in order to avoid any denigration of the latter that may have a familiar ring to his deterministic adversaries. Although the “noble and rational” soul is subjected unwillingly,⁸²¹ it nevertheless implicates itself through its choice to acknowledge the veracity of the irrational impulses of the body. “[I]t is the thought and the mind (*mens*) that fail to perceive correctly what defiles the man.”⁸²² The soul must therefore make provision for the body

⁸¹⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.3, 9, 10.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.9.

⁸¹⁹ E.g., *ibid.*, 1.14; 6.9; 9.42.

⁸²⁰ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 164. Cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 3.2.

⁸²¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.2, “soul” (*animae*), (Hammond Bammel, 34:566; Scheck, 104:70).

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 9.42 (Hammond Bammel, 34:785; Scheck, 104:252).

without validating these irrational impulses that seek to bring the individual into disrepute. Moral decisions define the soul.⁸²³ To choose sin is to characterize the soul differently than God intends. Such a state is at odds with God's design for the creature,⁸²⁴ and results in nothing less than the dulling of the spiritual senses.⁸²⁵ A retrogression of this sort is the willful forfeiture of the contemplation of the cross of Christ.⁸²⁶

Let us now take a step back to consider a broader application with regard to sin as the soul's acquiescence to the flesh. The soul can identify with the flesh even in the realm of biblical interpretation. Origen's tripartite understanding of biblical exegesis provides the rationale for the reader to seek the higher, spiritual senses that contain the full meaning of the text.⁸²⁷ When the soul makes the transient and irrational decision to interpret the law in a fleshly manner it eschews the spiritual interpretation that leads to Christ.⁸²⁸ From time to time over the course of the present study I have alluded to Origen's concern to draw out the relationship between Jew and Gentile in Paul's epistle to the Romans. A major theme of the

⁸²³ Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, 2.1; 7.14.

⁸²⁴ Cf. Origen, *princ.* 3.4.5.

⁸²⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 3.2; 4.5; 6.8. Cf. John M. Dillon, "Aisthêsis Noêtê: A Doctrine of Spiritual Senses in Origen and in Plotinus," in *Hellenica et Judaica*, ed. André Caquot, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 443-55; Karl Rahner, "The Spiritual Senses in Origen," *Theological Investigations 16: Experience of the Spirit*, translated by David Morland O.S.B. (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1979), 81-103, esp. 90-1, originally published in expanded form as "Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 13 (1932), 113-45. The motif of the spiritual senses finds some of its greatest expression in the *Commentary on Song of Songs*. "And in this way he who has reached the peak of perfection and beatitude will be delighted by the Word of God in all his senses," *comm. in Cant.* 1.4; Lawson, 79.

⁸²⁶ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.1. Cf. also Origen, *princ.* 3.4.4, where he asserts that this is how we are to understand Romans 8:7 ("The wisdom of the flesh is enmity against God").

⁸²⁷ The literature on Origen's exegesis is extensive. The following works give the best assessments of Origen's exegetical procedure even though their particular approaches may differ. R. E. Heine, "Reading the Bible with Origen," in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, edited and translated by Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 131-48; Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Karen Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Structure in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986).

⁸²⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.12. Physical circumcision, for example, holds value not for justification, but only in the manner in which this bloody act foreshadows the bloody sacrifice of Christ. Spiritual circumcision correlates with baptism and consists in the cleansing of the soul and casting away of vices, *ibid.*, 2.9.

Commentary on Romans is Origen's depiction of how the Jews committed this very sin of improper biblical interpretation. The sin of the Jews is not based on race.⁸²⁹ It is instead their failure to apprehend God's revelation in Christ by understanding the spiritual nature of the law. By interpreting the law in a fleshly manner the Jews lacked belief in Christ,⁸³⁰ rejected him,⁸³¹ and ultimately crucified him.⁸³² Origen recognizes the distinct advantage the nation of Israel had in terms of God's revelation,⁸³³ but their consequent lack of belief discontinued this favor.⁸³⁴ Origen stresses the punitive dimension by saying that Jews stumbled on Christ and crucified their only hope,⁸³⁵ allowing the Gentiles to benefit.⁸³⁶ Thus the sin of the Jews (or Israel) has its aetiology in exegesis and its teleology in the lack of faith in the Messiah.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 8.6. Cf. *princ.* 4.2.6, and commenting on Romans 11:4-5, where Origen refers to Israel as the "divine race."

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 8.7.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 7.17; 8.8.

⁸³² Ibid., 7.17. Origen's evaluation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans is that Christ has brought about the spiritual understanding of Old Testament religion, and this of course refashions his understanding of "Israel." Origen summarizes, "In the entire preceding text of the epistle the Apostle had shown how the essence of religion has been transferred from Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from the letter to the Spirit, from shadow to truth, from fleshly observance to spiritual observance," *ibid.*, 9.1. For other thematic summaries in the *Commentary on Romans* see 1.1 and 3.1. For more on this see Theresia Heither, *Translatio Religionis*. Origen is thus able to offer a strong juxtaposition of physical and spiritual Israel, preferring the latter to the former (1.1; 2.9; 7.12; 8.6).

⁸³³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.*, 2.10; 8.7.

⁸³⁴ Ibid., 3.1; 8.6.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 7.17; 8.7, 8. Cf. *Cels.* 4.22 (Chadwick, 198-9): "I challenge anyone to prove my statement untrue if I say that the entire Jewish nation was destroyed less than one whole generation later on account of these sufferings which they inflicted upon Jesus. For it was, I believe, forty-two years from the time when they crucified Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed, ever since the Jews existed, it has not been recorded in history that they were ejected for so long a time from their sacred ritual and worship, after they had been conquered by some more powerful people. Even if sometimes they did seem to have been deserted on account of their sins, nevertheless they were under God's care and returned to resume their own property and to perform the customary ritual without hindrance. Accordingly, one of the facts which show that Jesus was some divine and sacred person is just that on his account such great and fearful calamities have now for a long time befallen the Jews. We will go so far as to say that they will not be restored again. For they committed the most impious crime of all, when they conspired against the Saviour of mankind, in the city where they performed to God the customary rites which were symbols of profound mysteries. Therefore that city where Jesus suffered these indignities had to be utterly destroyed. The Jewish nation had to be overthrown, and God's invitation to blessedness transferred to others, I mean the Christians, to whom came the teaching about the simple and pure worship of God. And they received new laws which fit in with the order established everywhere. Those which had previously been given were intended for a single nation ruled by men of the same nationality and customs, so that it would be impossible for everyone to keep them now."

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 7.16; 8.8.

Origen is always imploring his audience with the words of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 3:6: “The letter kills but the Spirit gives life.”⁸³⁷ To stop at the letter is sin because it does not see the spiritual fulfillment in Christ. But Origen notes that their sin is to be considered a stumble rather than a fall.⁸³⁸ While this stumble opened the door for the salvation of the Gentiles,⁸³⁹ a remnant of Israel will believe in Christ and so attain salvation⁸⁴⁰—with some indication that this belief may be universal in scope.⁸⁴¹ This brief consideration helps bring into focus how Origen’s tripartite anthropology informs his exegesis. It also demonstrates that he does not merely understand sin in atomistic terms that eschews any consideration of its corporate dimension. This fuller explanation of sin also shapes his exegesis of Romans.

Sin and Spiritual Weakness

Up to this point I have explained how the soul sins, but I have not yet sufficiently explained why it sins. There exist at least two reasons why the soul the soul sins: the weakness of the will and the imitation of Adam’s transgression. These two concepts are distinct but related in Origen’s theology and therefore must be kept in close proximity to one another. Additionally, both of these concepts are directly related to my discussion of original sin found in Chapter Two. The prenatal fall, coupled with the duplication of this fall in the terrestrial realm, have imbued the soul with sin and death. The fall had detrimental effects on the soul. So even though our terrestrial existence is one of remediation—our tripartite anthropological structure being a gift of such remediation—this existence nevertheless

⁸³⁷ Ibid. 1.12; 2.9, 10; 3.1, 6; 6.1, 7, 9, 11, 12; 7.3. R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory & Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 251, notes that for Origen, “The kingdom of God often means the Scriptures, and to repent at the coming of the kingdom means to change from the literal to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture.”

⁸³⁸ Ibid., 8.8.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 3.1; 8.1.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.1; 8.8.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 4.2; 8.1. The universalistic tone of Origen’s eschatological evaluation of Israel in the *Commentary on Romans*, controlled largely by his reading of Romans 11:26, has been noted by scholarship. Cf. Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), 81; Jeremy Cohen, “The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation: Romans 11:25-26 in Patristic and Medieval Exegesis,” *HTR* 98 (2005), 247-81, esp. 261-3; Jaubert, *Origène, Homélie sur Josué*, 12, n3. Cf., however, *Cels.* 4.22.

remains in a state tainted by this original loss. The effects of this loss affect the soul in negative ways, or stated differently, weakness and imitation result from sin, and in turn, cause further sin. In the next two subsections I will explore these ideas and demonstrate how they inform and sufficiently conclude our understanding of Origen's conception of volitional sin in the commentary.

Weak Will

The first reason why one commits sin is because the will is weakened. The presence of sin and death have impaired the will resulting in its diminished ability to adjudicate properly between good and evil. Here we see a rare strain in Origen's theology that stems directly from his response to the particular theological emphases propounded by the Apostle in Romans. This thread of his exegesis is once again an important reason for the delimitation of the present study. The weakness of the will is a phenomenon that has been overlooked by studies focused on his doctrine of free will.⁸⁴² Georg Teichtweier's own study on sin does not account for this important aspect in Origen's thought even though he devotes a section to the relationship between sin and the will.⁸⁴³ This is a glaring and curious lacuna in the literature on Origen that needs to be redressed more fully than even the forthcoming analysis will be able to show.

Most readers of Origen have simply overlooked what is an otherwise astonishing teaching throughout the commentary. Because he labors with such diligence to offer an unequivocal defense of free will against the Gnostic determinists, his teaching on the will's restrictions has simply eluded most readers.⁸⁴⁴ Ironically, this commentary produces his

⁸⁴² For Origen's understanding of free will see, e.g., J. M. Rist, "The Greek and Latin Texts of the Discussion of Free Will in *De Principiis*, Book III," *Origeniana: Premier Colloque International des Etudes Origeniennes*, edited by Henri Crouzel, et al. (Bari: Instituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1975), 97-111; Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 115-20. I will often use "soul" and "will" interchangeably because of their close proximity. Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, 88, "The soul is the seat of free will, of the power of choice and so of the personality."

⁸⁴³ Cf. Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes*, 77-85.

⁸⁴⁴ For a discussion of the unity of the nature of humanity in relation to God in the Greek East see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 138-50; 176-8.

strongest statements regarding the will's impairment in his entire corpus! A weakened will is one of the clearest effects of original sin. This condition leaves the soul in the precarious position of further capitulation to sin. The destabilizing effects of original sin keep the soul from properly understanding its natural position within the tripartite structure. While the tripartite anthropological structure is a gift from God that must be used according to its purpose, the soul does not always recognize this gift due to the influence of sin and death. Origen admits the difficulty associated with understanding such a situation. In Book Seven he asserts that the soul is subjected against its will to the body.⁸⁴⁵ Here he intends his audience to understand that the soul is tethered to the body with all the latter's needs, desires, vicissitudes, and corruption. This is so because the soul must work with the body to struggle for survival and salvation.⁸⁴⁶ Only conversion can strengthen the will, mitigate its tendency to commit further sins, and begin the restoration of the image of God leading to a more harmonious tripartite structure.

Since Origen's exegesis is marked by a desire to exhort his readers to spiritual growth, his emphasis often centers around the struggle against sin. He identifies with the difficulty of this struggle, and more often than not, speaks in a very general manner with regard to this situation. So in some cases he is not inclined to specify as to whether he is speaking in terms of a pre-conversion or post-conversion struggle of the will. But he does at times make clear distinctions in the commentary that help clarify his teaching in this regard. Commenting on those whom the Apostle characterizes as worshipping the created order instead of the creation (Rom 1:24-5), Origen remarks that a soul such as this is "resisting or reluctant" (*obsistentem...ac reluctantem*) to the things of God.⁸⁴⁷ Furthermore, throughout the commentary he is also inclined to speak of a weakness of the flesh,⁸⁴⁸ and as I mentioned above there is even a certain weakness of the flesh with regard to biblical interpretation. The

⁸⁴⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 7.2.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.9.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.21 (Hammond Bammel, 16:90; Scheck, 103:96).

⁸⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 6.4; 7.4; 8.8.

law is said to be weakened through the flesh (cf. Rom 8:3) when one approaches its interpretation in a fleshly (i.e., literal) manner.⁸⁴⁹ Again, it is worth recalling that “flesh” is a wide concept in Origen’s thinking. Spiritual vitality is needed for right ethical decisions. Right ethical decisions begin with and conclude with correct biblical interpretation. So the will is characterized as weak when it is unable to see Christ in the Scriptures.

But Origen’s manner of speaking about the will gets more precise as the Apostle concentrates on the struggle against sin. Origen’s careful exegesis of Romans 5-7 produces his clearest and most insightful thoughts on the weakness of the will in the entire commentary. Once again his thinking with regard to the will comes into sharp relief: there is a marked difference in the ability of the will before and after conversion. Prior to conversion the will is seriously impaired. Our first condition in this life is to serve sin.⁸⁵⁰ The pre-conversion life is characterized as being “impelled (*urgebamur*) by the passions of sin and of the flesh.”⁸⁵¹ In this unconverted state sin is said to have a seat and kingdom in the body.⁸⁵² Sin is the ultimate goal of the will prior to Christ. Occasionally, the reader even gets the impression that Origen lacks any concern that his exegesis of the Apostle may echo the Gnostics’ teachings on fixed natures. Despite some lack of conceptual clarity he always comes back to his starting point and insists that free will abides in nature.⁸⁵³ He is clear enough that the will is fundamentally free even if his language makes it difficult to see how it is capable of pursuing Christ and the virtues.

These foregoing quotes, however, pale in comparison to that which will occupy his mind in his exegesis of Romans 7:14-25. This well known passage details the Apostle’s struggle with sin—a struggle that often manifests itself in doing what he does not want (cf. Rom 7:16). Origen cleverly states, however, that this cannot be the Apostle’s own struggle.

⁸⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, 2.9; 6.7, 12.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.3. Cf. *Cels.* 3.62.

⁸⁵¹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:485; Scheck, 104:21).

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.7; 6.1.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.10.

Since Paul was “more perfect in this letter than in the others,”⁸⁵⁴ he is instead employing a common rhetorical device by speaking under the *persona* of himself in order to identify with *our* struggle against sin.⁸⁵⁵ While Origen understands Paul’s “I” as referring to non-Christians in this passage, he certainly sees an application for Christians as well.⁸⁵⁶ Origen is not reticent to describe the pre-conversion state in thoroughly negative terms. Such an individual “is conquered by the vices and, against his will (*inuitus*), is overwhelmed.”⁸⁵⁷ His only defense against the onslaught of vice is the instinct of natural law. But even this proves to be impotent in its ability to conquer vice. Origen continues to elaborate on the power of sin over the individual. “This is what frequently occurs, for example, when someone resolves patiently to endure another who is inciting him, but in the end is overcome with wrath and suffers this against his own will” (*inuitus*).⁸⁵⁸ The pre-conversion state finds the individual in a situation where the will is simply not “strong” or “robust” enough.⁸⁵⁹ The will is incapable of avoiding sin without Christ. “The person who is not yet spiritual but fleshly is therefore conquered by each individual [vice], even contrary to his will” (*contra uoluntatem*).⁸⁶⁰ It is not only the presence of sin but the very practice of sin that keeps the will in bondage. “He had shown that a soul may be carried off to sin’s jurisdiction, even against the will (*contra uoluntatem*), through the desires of the flesh by the very practice of sinning.”⁸⁶¹ Indeed, “the captive (*captiua*) soul is led away to the law of sin and is put under its yoke” (*sub iugo*).⁸⁶² Unless

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.1 (Hammond Bammel, 16:37; Scheck, 103:53). Cf. also *ibid.*, 10.14.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.9. To make sure his audience does not miss the point, here in his exegesis of Romans 7:14-24 he speaks of Paul speaking under a *persona/ae* at least ten times. Cf. also *ibid.*, 2.8.

⁸⁵⁶ Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter*, 242-3, is correct to note this.

⁸⁵⁷ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck 104:38).

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck 104:38).

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck 104:38), “quia uoluntas ista nondum ita fortis et ita robusta est ut definiat apud se usque ad mortem pro ueritate certandum.”

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:510; Scheck, 104:38).

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:515; Scheck, 104:41).

⁸⁶² Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:515; Scheck, 104:41-2).

Christ dwells in the individual then the grace of God does not yet work in the individual.⁸⁶³ These are remarkable statements from someone who is casually referred to as the champion of free will. But these statements must be viewed within the context of Origen's conviction that the Apostle believes the will to be incapable of pursuing righteousness or attaining perfection absent the grace of God. Sin has undermined the will's ability to pursue the virtues in any meaningful way, and the weakness of the will leads to more and more sin. Modern day readings of Origen must content themselves with the knowledge that our author found these two "competing" themes compatible during his own time.

Sin only begins to be mitigated when Christ begins to dwell in the individual. Origen fully recognizes that Christ died for those who are now "weak" (*infirmos*),⁸⁶⁴ so one must then be converted to better things.⁸⁶⁵ Only conversion allows for God's grace to work rather than the workings of sin. Conversion changes one's affections.⁸⁶⁶ In his familiar dichotomous fashion Origen says that *either* death and sin *or* life, grace, and righteousness reign in the individual.⁸⁶⁷ There is no middle ground. The will continuously strives for one or the other. Conversion changes the will when the acquisition of the virtues of Christ and the filling of the Spirit expel the presence of sin and death. A pre- or post-conversion either/or is a consistent theme. "Now if to live to sin means to do the desires of sin, then to die to sin must refer to not carrying out sin's desires and not obeying its will."⁸⁶⁸ A little later he says, "For unless we first die to sin through repentance, we cannot live to God through righteousness."⁸⁶⁹ The cleansing of sin and the love of God reorients the will to better things.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., 6.9.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:349; Scheck, 103:295).

⁸⁶⁵ Cf. Ibid., 1.1; 5.1; 6.4, 7; 8.10.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.1, 7.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.6. The degree to which this dichotomous thinking comes out in the commentary may be the result of the influence on Origen of the Adam/Christ dichotomy as presented by Paul in Romans.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.7 (Hammond Bammel, 33:418; Scheck, 103:349-50). The lack of sacramental emphasis in this passage has been noted by Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter*, 197.

⁸⁶⁹ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.5 (Hammond Bammel, 33:475; Scheck, 104:14).

At conversion men and women “have been set free (*liberati*) from sin and have become slaves to God.”⁸⁷⁰ The sacrifice of Christ makes this possible by condemning sin. “For when the remission of sins was granted to us,” Origen says, “sin took to flight and was destroyed from our flesh, and the justification of the law began to be fulfilled in us.”⁸⁷¹ If one desires to live not according to the flesh (cf. Rom 8:13) one must repent.

Origen is a realist. The presence and effects of sin are significant. The will struggles after conversion because in this terrestrial life we are “compelled by weakness” (*infirmirate cogente*) and we desire things that are contrary to our salvation.⁸⁷² “The will is a fast-working thing and is converted without hindrance; but the work is slow because it requires practice and skill and effort for working.”⁸⁷³ We continue to sin because we are in the *habit* of sinning.⁸⁷⁴ The grace of God must work deeply in the individual to change the habits and therefore change the will. And in an effort to encourage his audience through his experience and pastoral sensitivity, he forewarns his readers who may fall into despair should a relapse occur. “For the weakness in those who receive the beginnings of a conversion is of such a nature that when anyone wants to do all at once everything that is good, the accomplishment of this may not immediately follow the will.”⁸⁷⁵ The power of conversion to change the will is an axiom that is found in various places throughout the commentary. Through repentance one is filled more and more with the Spirit, and the deeds of the flesh are said to grow weaker and decay (*tabefacio*)—gradually.⁸⁷⁶ The eradication of sin is a long and arduous journey. One cannot be said to be without sin until he or she has achieved a twofold

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.5 (Hammond Bammel, 33:474; Scheck, 104:13).

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 6.12 (Hammond Bammel, 33:530; Scheck, 104:52).

⁸⁷² Ibid., 7.6 (Hammond Bammel, 34:578; Scheck, 104:80).

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:513; Scheck, 104:40).

⁸⁷⁴ G. Bostock, “The Influence of Origen on Pelagius and Western Monasticism,” *Origeniana Septima*, edited by W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 389, is correct to note that Origen emphasizes sin as a habit, but he does not sufficiently account for sin’s activity with regard to the weakened will.

⁸⁷⁵ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:511; Scheck, 104:39).

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., 6.14 (Hammond Bammel, 33:541; Scheck, 104:59).

perfection: the satisfying of the virtues and advancement to the point where it is impossible to fall away.⁸⁷⁷ Sin and the will are inextricably bound up with the strength of one's faith,⁸⁷⁸ or to state it another way, the will is tied in with progress (or regress) in the spiritual life. The pervasive spread of sin, corruption, and death stemming from the first man, coupled with a lifetime of sinning, create a constant struggle for the avoidance of sin and the attainment of virtue. The will's new focus must be cultivated. Immediately after conversion "it must not be imagined that all at once, when a person expresses the will, he immediately becomes transferred into Christ Jesus from the slavery of the law of sin, so that he would possess nothing in him any longer that could serve as ground for sin's condemnation."⁸⁷⁹ This is a process that requires "constant practice," "training," and "vigilant effort."⁸⁸⁰ Progress is possible and attained when the virtues themselves "examine their portions in the individual. If they will have discovered that things are holding together in the individual rightly and with integrity, then the person will be reckoned to be in Christ and to have no condemnation."⁸⁸¹ The will must be trained in the virtues. Only Christ's death and the Spirit's filling can overcome the domain and power of sin in the individual. Free will is only *absolutely* restrained in the eschaton when the fullness of God's love keeps it from falling into sin, as the Apostle has promised in Romans 6:8-10.⁸⁸² This future reciprocal love between God and the soul is perfect and sustained for eternity.

The degree to which Origen affirms an impaired will in the commentary lends more weight to the present thesis that he is now operating from the assumption of a hard fall. The Apostle's teaching on acquired sinfulness from Adam in the fifth chapter of Romans

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., 1.1. Origen offers some clarity on this in Book Two (2.9) when he says that one cannot be perfect if he simply does no evil, but he must also do good. There is also talk of Christ restoring us to our "original freedom" (*pristinæ libertati*), *ibid.*, 3.4 (Hammond Bammel, 16:234; Scheck, 103:215).

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., 4.6.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:520; Scheck, 104:45).

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:521; Scheck, 104:46).

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 6.11 (Hammond Bammel, 33:521; Scheck, 104:45-6).

⁸⁸² Ibid., 5.10.

plays into Origen's reading of subsequent chapters of this epistle. His exegesis of these portions of Romans affirms that the effects of original sin are manifested in the weakness of the will today and leads to further sin due to its entrenchment. He is confronting language in this epistle that forces him into greater doctrinal clarity, thus arriving at a more pessimistic view of human nature in this commentary than in previous works. At this point it would be prudent to rule out one assumption as well as one conclusion. The assumption to rule out is that these are interpolations by Rufinus. I have already given sufficient reasons to suggest that Rufinus did not tamper with the commentary with regard to sin. One more reason could be adduced presently: an interpolation would require that Rufinus elided Origen's *entire* exegesis of Romans 7:14-25 (and other texts!) and replaced it with his own. This is implausible. Now the conclusion to rule out is the facile attempt made by some to align Origen as a precursor to Pelagius with regard to the will. Even though both theologians championed the freedom of the will—a common theological motif in the early church!—the affinities between Origen and Pelagius are limited. The evidence suggests that Origen's position is much more complicated. To oversimplify the “Eastern patristic position” with regard to the will is to answer the question before it is asked. Details of third century Christian anthropology were fluid and should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. After all, the Eastern Christian tradition itself admits a certain degree of weakness of the will.⁸⁸³ Despite the weakened will there is no indication that our author entertained any notion of total depravity. Even a figure as evil as Judas retains some elements of good.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸³ “Having turned away from God, the source of life, we are subject to moral and physical disintegration and to death. Yet we still remain free, though it is more difficult to choose good,” Nonna Verna Harrison, “The human person as image and likeness of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, edited by Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 81; “And because he still retains the image of God, man still retains free will, although sin restricts its scope,” Chryssavgis, “Original Sin—An Orthodox Perspective,” 201.

⁸⁸⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 9.41. At all stages of this investigation we must remain cognizant that second and third century theologians are not operating with the same parameters that would become solidified in 5th or 16th century anthropological debates.

Imitation

The second reason why one commits sin can be traced to the idea of imitation. Our inherited weakness results from, and is furthered by, a continual imitation of Adam's transgression. Even though the will is free, the effect of Adam's sin is such that we find ourselves openly mimicking his transgression. This idea is not found often in Origen's corpus and is once again an important reason for the present delimited study on sin in his *Commentary on Romans*. The idea of imitation can be found several times in Book Five of our commentary. At one point Origen tersely states, "And it (sin) reigned in those who pursued the imitation (*similitudinem*) of Adam's transgression."⁸⁸⁵ A little later in the same book he asserts that "Adam offered sinners a model (*formam*) through his disobedience."⁸⁸⁶ Close interaction with Paul's epistle to the Romans steers Origen's language and theology in the direction of seeing Adam as a prototype for every sin we commit. Adam has given us an example whereby we may know how to sin. However, it is not only Adam that we imitate, but also the architect of sin, the devil.⁸⁸⁷ At times Origen even provides both his understanding of sin and sanctification in the same passage. "It spreads to the perfection of life by means of the perfecting of the virtues, just as formerly a beginning of death had spread by means of the imitation (*similitudine*) of transgression and by the carrying out of the vices."⁸⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is in this very territory of imitation that Origen tips his hand with regard to his wider theology. In a crucial passage he remarks, "Moreover he designates the class of sin by assigning to each individual an imitation (*similitudinem*) of Adam's transgression, granted that he did not consider it safe to speak out more openly about the question of where, when, or how this imitation (*similitudo*) of Adam's transgression may have been committed by each person."⁸⁸⁹ This seems to be a tacit admission that he is trying

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.2 (Hammond Bammel, 33:400; Scheck, 1:335)

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., 5.5 (Hammond Bammel, 33:411; Scheck, 1:344).

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.1.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.2 (Hammond Bammel, 33:398; Scheck, 103:333).

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.2 (Hammond Bammel, 33:398; Scheck, 103:334).

to connect his doctrine of the preexistent fall with that of the fall of Adam, as well as those who sinned after Adam. Origen is hesitant (unable?) to articulate this doctrine to such an extent that puts words in the Apostle's mouth. He is either vexed or cautious with regard to the Apostle's language, but nevertheless revisits this idea later in the same book.⁸⁹⁰ But even though this imitation of sin is universal and seemingly inevitable, not everyone should be considered a sinner. For Origen those who habitually repeat Adam's transgression are those to whom Paul refers in Romans 5:19 as "sinners."⁸⁹¹

One should not view the language of "imitation" to the exclusion of everything else Origen says about sin. It is a necessary but not sufficient component to his teaching. Thus to argue too strongly that Pelagius' famous exegesis of Romans 5:12 ("By example or by pattern.") stems directly from Origen would be short-sighted.⁸⁹² As I have argued throughout this thesis, Origen sees both volition and inheritance at work even though he emphasizes the former more than the latter. But Origen's theology of imitation also works conversely. The imitation unto righteousness applies to the example of Christ.⁸⁹³

Conclusion

This chapter has taken us to the heart of Origen's understanding of volitional sin. Our author gives us a clear understanding of how sin occurs. The passions arise when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and pays undue attention to the body. This could be restated by saying that sin occurs when the irrational impulses are given

⁸⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 5.4 (Scheck, 103:340-1): "But someone could reasonably, as I judge, suggest in this place, that when Adam had transgressed it is written that the Lord God expelled him from paradise and established him in that land opposite to the paradise of delights. And this was the condemnation for his transgression which doubtless spread to all men. For everyone was fashioned in that place of humiliation and in the valley of tears; whether because all who are born from him were in Adam's loins and were equally expelled with him or, in some other inexplicable fashion known only to God, each person seems to be driven out of paradise and to have received condemnation."

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.5.

⁸⁹² De Bruyn, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 92.

⁸⁹³ "[I]t is not possible for us to die that same death which Jesus died to sin, so that we would be completely unacquainted with sin. However it is possible for us to possess the likeness so that, by imitating (*imitantes*) him and following in his footsteps, we may keep ourselves from sin," *comm. in Rom.* 5.9 (Hammond Bammel, 33:433; Scheck, 103:362). Cf. *ibid.*, 3.1; 7.7.

credence by the *hegemonikon*. This internal experience of sin is delineated by a thoroughgoing conception of moderation as the governing factor of whether or not this has occurred. As to why sin occurs we are given at least two indicators: a weakened will and a tendency to imitate Adam's transgression. These are both results of sin and causes of further sin.

This in-depth exploration of the mechanics of the practice of volitional sin warrants a brief glance back at his entire conception of volitional sin—both parameters and practice. Here I once again state the present thesis. Origen understands volitional sin as a misappropriation of the individual's tripartite makeup, a situation where God's law—natural law, Mosaic law, or gospel—is breached through the soul's lack of moderation, caused when the lower element of the soul usurps the higher element and gives undue attention to the ephemeral needs of the body. The previous two chapters tie together in the following ways. In response to Gnostic determinism, the tripartite anthropological structure is both the God-given means of remediation *and* the necessary ethical paradigm whereby one pursues virtue or vice. These two aspects are important. A failure to maintain the God-given means of remediation leads to the destruction of the basic integrity of this tripartite structure. This is sin. So for instance Origen can say that warring with the flesh (or devil) leads to peace with God.⁸⁹⁴ By this he means we are not to *capitulate* to the flesh. Such a capitulation destroys the God-given balance by usurping the spiritual aspect of this structure.⁸⁹⁵ But since the body (or flesh) is an option, then ethical neutrality is nonexistent. This brings us to the second aspect of the tripartite structure. This aspect highlights the *dynamic* quality of this constitution. Virtue and vice are always theological attenuated in that they function in a diamagnetic manner—one repels the other. Comparing it to light and darkness and life and death, he sees

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.8.

⁸⁹⁵ Once again it must be asserted that the body is a good creation of God. But since sin is carried out in the body (gluttony, lust, etc.) Origen must continually warn against giving into its desires. Since our natural inclinations are to favor the body over the spirit, Origen's exegesis sometimes seems imbalanced with regard to the body leading the casual reader to think he disparages it.

no union between the two and the gain of one is ultimately the loss of the other.⁸⁹⁶ He uses the metaphor of a house to represent the soul who can allow residence to only virtue or vice, but never both.⁸⁹⁷ The idea is ubiquitous. He asserts that “no soul can be found without one of the two (good or evil) dwelling in it,”⁸⁹⁸ and elsewhere he claims that unless one hates vices one cannot love virtue.⁸⁹⁹ The soul longs to worship because God created it to worship. “For whatever each person worships above all else is his god.”⁹⁰⁰ Since God knows of its desire to worship he has provided the soul with various guides to direct its worship: natural law, Mosaic law, and gospel. To violate these guides is to usurp not only these God-given parameters for proper worship but also the God-given tripartite anthropological structure. The parameters are thus set and the soul chooses to cast its eyes on either the face of God or the ephemeral creation. Origen argues that whatever the individual worships above all else—Jesus Christ, appetite, greed, glory, or power—is his God or god.⁹⁰¹ The soul always worships *something*. But appropriate worship has been directed by God. Any worship that is not to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is ungodliness.⁹⁰² This ‘two ways’ teaching provides the ethical means whereby one may understand God’s cosmological program. This dichotomy is presented in his own summary of the Epistle to the Romans. “In the entire preceding text of the epistle the Apostle had shown how the essence of religion has been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, *from the letter to the Spirit, from shadow to truth, from fleshly observance to spiritual observance.*”⁹⁰³ It is important to be mindful that

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.7. Cf. *ibid.*, 1.22; 4; Dupuis, *L’Esprit de l’homme: Étude sur l’anthropologie religieuse d’Origène*, 180.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 1.21.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 4.1 (Hammond Bammel, 33:280; Scheck, 103:245).

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 9.5.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.9 (Hammond Bammel, 16:67; Scheck, 103:77).

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 1.11.

⁹⁰² Ibid., 1.19.

⁹⁰³ Ibid., 9.1, italics mine. “Let us then take it that true gold denotes things incorporeal, unseen and spiritual; but that the likeness of gold, in which is not the Truth itself but only the Truth’s shadow, denote things bodily and visible,” *comm. in Cant.* 2.8 (Lawson, 152).

this is a *spiritual* observance. Such observance requires faith, and the absence of such faith is the proof of sin (cf. Rom 14:23).⁹⁰⁴ Conversely, the proof of true faith is that sin is not being committed,⁹⁰⁵ and it is only the person who possess a “complete faith” that is incapable of stumbling into sin.⁹⁰⁶ But the presence of sin in the life of a Christian is an unfortunate reality. At times Origen feels the need to push back against either Montanists or Novatians when he argues that the presence of sin does not necessarily preclude fundamental Christian belief.⁹⁰⁷ Even though sin indicates a lack of belief, it does not necessarily mean a wholesale lack of belief. Origen strongly asserts with the Apostle John (1 John 1:8) that no one is without sin.⁹⁰⁸ Sin is therefore a failure to look beyond the ephemeral, deceitful, and sensory world to the world of the stable, true, and spiritual. This failure results in ensnarement in the vicissitudes of this world of corruption. Sin is a total disassociation with the things of God. It is therefore easy to see how Origen can say that sin shows a complete disregard for the conquering work of Christ Jesus through his death.⁹⁰⁹

This conception of volitional sin grows out of Origen’s understanding of the condition found as a result of Adam. Inherent sinfulness, weakness of the will, and repeated imitation of Adam’s sin leave humanity in a disadvantaged state. Some second century authors alluded to these themes. For various reasons these authors were either unwilling or unable to draw them out to the extent that we find in Origen in his *Commentary on Romans*. Origen’s ability to weave together an intricate and multifaceted account of sin provided this emerging anthropological and hamartiological tradition with more coherence and depth. In

⁹⁰⁴ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 10.5.

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.1.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.6 (Hammond Bammel, 33:314; Scheck, 103:269). Origen offers Paul and Stephen as examples of those who had attained perfection, *ibid.*, 5.8.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.5. Cf. H. Windisch, *Taufe und Sünde im ältesten Christentum bis auf Origenes* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1908), 480.

⁹⁰⁸ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.5.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.7.

the conclusion I would like to offer some thoughts on how Origen's hamartiology shaped subsequent Christian thought and how it may inform theological inquiry today.

CONCLUSION

The impetus behind this thesis was a fifth century monk from southern Gaul, Vincent of Lerins. In his *Commonitorium*, he excoriates Augustine's *novel* understanding of original sin. Vincent saw no precedent in the early church for Augustine's position. He concluded that it must be rejected in favor of the church's *standard* teaching on the subject. Vincent's subsequent proposal, *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*, became a clarion call for discerning orthodoxy. After this study of sin in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* I have found Vincent's claim wanting. Origen offers a third century witness against it. Nor can we offer a facile categorization of Origen as a forerunner to Pelagius. The present thesis has demonstrated that in certain critical areas Origen differs sharply from Pelagius. For instance, Adamic solidarity is entirely foreign to Pelagius' theological system. Origen further testifies to a weakness of the will that is absent in the British monk. But Pelagius certainly culled from Origen aspects of his doctrine of free will, imitation, and predestination—support for which could be found in a number of theologians between the second and fourth centuries. Overall, Origen evinces a balance and sensitivity to the needs of his audience. He bequeathed to the church an influential interpretation of the Apostle that may have had an influence on both Pelagius and Augustine.⁹¹⁰ The addressing of this considerable lacuna now better situates Origen within the early church. This can also offer a contribution to dogmatic theology. The exegetical roots of the great Alexandrian's theology give greater shape to Adamic solidarity that can be useful today. His emphasis on a weakened will—finding application in the seventh chapter of Romans for Christians *and* non-Christians—gives our own reading of Paul some room for growth. This study of the *Commentary on Romans* may help encourage others to explore various themes relevant

⁹¹⁰ For more on this relationship see C. P. Bammel, "Augustine, Origen and the Exegesis of St. Paul," *Augustinianum* 32 (1992), 341-68; *ibid.*, "Justification by Faith in Augustine and Origen," *JEH* 47 (1996), 223-35; C. P. Hammond Bammel, "Rufinus' Translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* and the Pelagian Controversy," in *Storia ed esegesi in Rufino di Concordia*, 131-42; Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine*; Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*, 63-103; Alfred J. Smith, "The Latin Sources of the Commentary of Pelagius on the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans," *JTS* 19 (1917-18), 162-230; 20 (1918-19), 55-65; 127-77.

today. There are indications of increasing interest in Origen as a student of Paul. Studies of Origen's interaction with the Pauline corpus have gained traction and continue to provide much insight into the great Alexandrian's thought.⁹¹¹

My hope is that this study has shed needed light into dark corners of patristic scholarship. It has been an arduous task. Emil Brunner once stated, "Only he that understands that sin is inexplicable knows what it is."⁹¹² In many ways Brunner's insight runs against the very grain of this project. My attempt to understand Origen's hamartiology has sought to make explicable that which is inherently inexplicable. Such is the nature of theology. Encounters with deep mystery, utter darkness, irrepressible light, and even outright irrationality frequently characterize the discipline of theology. But we must study sin. Other doctrines suffer when articulated to the exclusion of hamartiology. They lose their proper relationship and force. So we press forward seeking a measure of clarity and coherence with regard to sin. This carries with it the knowledge that our transgressions are not the whole story. Hopelessness and irrationality cannot be the last word. The gospel triumphs over sin. This is Origen's message. At the very end of his longest discourse on sin in his entire corpus he leaves the reader with hope.

Now precisely what it is that would restrain the freedom of will in the future ages to keep it from falling again into sin, the Apostle teaches us with a brief statement, saying, "Love never falls away." For this is why love is said to be greater than faith and hope, because it will be the only thing through which it will no longer be possible to sin. For if the soul shall have ascended to this state of perfection, so that it loves

⁹¹¹ For studies on Origen as a reader of Paul see, e.g., Francesca Cocchini, *Il Paolo di Origene*; Judith L. Kovacs, "Servant of Christ and Steward of the Mysteries of God: The Purpose of a Pauline Letter according to Origen's *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*," In Dominico Eloquentio – *In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, edited by Paul M. Blowers, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 147-71; Richard Layton, "Origen as a Reader of Paul: A Study of the Commentary on Ephesians," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996; Christoph Marksches, *Origenes und Sein Erbe*, 63-90; *ibid.*, "Paul the Apostle," *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 167-9, where he succinctly states (p. 167), "Origen's 'Paulinism' is expressed not so much through a number of dogmatic sentences, but rather through a chain of relations: first, the relation that Paul proclaims between Christ and himself; second, the relation that Origen perceives between Paul and himself; and third, the relation that Origen would like to establish between Christ, Paul, and his readers."

⁹¹² Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), 132.

God with all its heart and with all its mind and with all its strength, and loves its neighbor as itself, what room will there be for sin?⁹¹³

⁹¹³ Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.10 (Hammond Bammel, 33:451; Scheck, 103:376).

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