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**Participation, Image and Likeness: A Comparative Demonstration  
of the Scriptural and Philosophical Basis of Origen's Theology of  
Deification**

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**Participation, Image and Likeness: A Comparative  
Demonstration of the Scriptural and Philosophical Basis of  
Origen's Theology of Deification**

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Providence College M.A. in Theology Program

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## I. Introduction and Premise of the Present Work

“May you too be a partaker and ever increase the participation, that you may say not only, ‘We have become partakers of Christ’ (Heb. 3:14), but also, ‘We have become partakers of God.’” (*Philocalia* 13.4; trans. Lewis, modified).<sup>1</sup> These words, written by Origen to his former pupil, Gregory Thaumaturgus, convey an idea that would, unlike other of Origen’s theological propositions, survive the rough waters of ecclesiastical scrutiny in which the early Church was submerged. Here an answer to the question of man’s intended relationship with God is presented: that Christ has been made man so that men may become gods, in other words, deification. Although deification is a theological concept that has not always remained in universal popularity among theologians, its presence in Christian thought, and particularly among the Church Fathers, is undeniable.<sup>2</sup>

In relation to the above, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the sources underlying Origen’s theology of deification. Specifically, this thesis explores the concepts of participation, image and likeness “to” or “in” God, along with their derived theological or philosophical meanings and usages, in Origen’s writings, in order to argue for the uniquely scriptural characteristics of Origen’s theology of deification. Origen of Alexandria, like other Christian thinkers of his era and cultural milieu, was determined to contribute to the authentic teaching tradition of the Church while “filling in the gaps” with the best that his philosophically imbued academic environment had to offer. A main objective of the discussion then, is to determine the extent to which Origen allowed philosophical concepts and terminology to affect his theological outlooks when interpreting Scripture and where he was consciously implementing these

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<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 141.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Roger E. Olson, “Deification in Contemporary Theology” *Theology Today*, vol. 64 (2007): 186 – 200 as well as the *Preface* to Russell’s *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*.

influences. Complementing this goal is the exploration of how Origen extrapolated the theme of deification from scripture, and which parts of scripture were foremost linked to his thinking on this subject.

In this regard, this paper draws upon various sources, all of which are connected via Platonism, as sources of comparison for Origen's thought. These sources deal with elements related to the concept of deification, as found in Platonism, Middle-Platonism, and Neoplatonism. Thus, in addition to discussing Origen's own philosophical and theological content we have brought in the following for comparison: (i) a short treatment of Plato's own works, which serves as a look at the foundation of deification in later Platonist writing, (ii) comparisons with Philo, especially in regards to Philo's conception of the soul, the image of God, the Logos, and likeness to God, and (iii) comparisons with Plotinus, particularly in regard to likeness, participation and Plotinus' conception of evil.

In establishing the above thinkers as sources for comparison, we can now properly introduce the role of another person in this study, Paul, in relation to Origen's exegesis of Scripture and the terms of deification described above. Concentration will be placed on Origen's references to and interpretations of Paul's writings in that Paul's terminology and theology deeply influenced Origen's theology, preaching and teaching.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the use of Paul as Origen's "exegetical lens" is threefold. First, Origen took quite deeply to Paul's writings. As Christoph Marksches points out, "Origen is convinced that Paul is 'a teacher of the Church' and that to differ from Paul is to 'aid the enemies of Christ' (*HomEx* 5.1)."<sup>4</sup> It can be said that Paul's influence on Origen increased during the last twenty years of his life, particularly in his

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<sup>3</sup> Christoph Marksches, "Paul the Apostle," *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

writing of multiple commentaries on Paul's epistles,<sup>5</sup> the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* being the only one of Origen's biblical commentaries to survive in a coherent form from beginning to end.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to our second reason for our choice of focus on Pauline theology: Paul's theology not only provides a point of reference by which to evaluate the degree to which Origen followed the lead of Scripture in his theology of deification but it is also comparable to Platonic anthropology. For his part, Van Kooten claims that, "the significant terminological similarities between Paul and Plotinus, must be due, in no small part, to a shared philosophical heritage," and thus goes on to compare Paul and Plotinus' evaluations of the "inner man" to quite an extent.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, the third reason for examining Paul from Origen's perspective is that the themes of participation, image and likeness are readily apparent in Paul. Thus we can also speak of deification, in a certain sense, in Paul: "an exclusive focus on sin and deliverance would suppress a crucial aspect of Paul's teaching: gaining an ability to discern the will of God, and being transformed into Christlikeness, which can truly be called *theosis*."<sup>8</sup> Therefore this paper will take the position of defending Origen's reading of an inherent theology of deification in Paul, which Paul supports through his usage of themes of participation and likeness to Christ. Origen's reading of Paul will be furthermore explored through his relating of Paul to other scriptural texts and themes, specifically the Gospel of John and the Logos, and how this supports Origen's reading of deification in both Paul and other biblical texts. Building on this, the discussion will allow us to bear fruit in determining how Origen depicts deification by means of Paul's theological anthropology and Johannine Christology.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas P. Scheck, "Introduction," in *Origen — Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 1-5*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 103, (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Finlan, "Can We Speak of Theosis in Paul," *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed., Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 78.

May it hopefully go without saying that the goal of this study is not to convince that Origen takes from the scriptures without adding to or developing them in innovative ways or that he in no way borrows from Platonic traditions; these assertions, of course, would be met with failure from the start. However, given Origen's emphasis on the centrality of scripture to the Christian life (he identifies "the 'deeper sense of the Scriptures,'" as the "ultimate goal of all theological teachers"<sup>9</sup>) and given his preoccupation with Paul, as identified above, the author of this thesis feels that an investigation into the scriptural basis of Origen's doctrine of deification can yield much fruit in regard to an understanding of Origen's overall theology, as well as modern day interpretations of scripture. With this in mind, the author intends to discern Origen's use of Platonic terminology and concepts in so much as they unpack central Pauline and biblical themes of participatory union with Christ or, as Origen would likely emphasize more readily in this context, the Logos. Such a study would additionally be beneficial in contributing to the discussion on deification as a legitimate and scripturally derived doctrine of the early Church, furthermore of its development by various Church thinkers, of the effects of Platonic philosophy on said development, and finally on its influence and significance to contemporary theological concerns.

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### Origen of Alexandria: His Life and Legacy

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<sup>9</sup> Marksches, "Paul the Apostle," 168.

## A Brief Biography

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Origen of Alexandria, or Adamantius, as he was sometimes called,<sup>10</sup> was one of the most prominent and influential Christian thinkers of his time. Having been born and raised in Alexandria, where there existed a thriving scene of theological and philosophical speculation,<sup>11</sup> his theological outlook combined a well-rounded grasp of Middle Platonism<sup>12</sup> and an exuberant love for all things Church, particularly God's holy scriptures. An early in-depth look at Origen's life and Christian witness has been handed down to us by Eusebius of Caesarea. As Heine relates, however, one must exercise caution in treating Eusebius' chronicle as an authentic depiction of Origen's activities. Not only does it have apologetic purposes, what with Eusebius having used the *Apology for Origen* as a source and being a "devoted Origenist," but much of it was also written via unconfirmed sources and hearsay.<sup>13</sup> For our purposes here, Eusebius' account, corrected where necessary, will be enough to relate a general account of Origen's early upbringing and background, in that "the following assertions about Origen's youth can be accepted as quite probably factual, based on their harmony with Origen's later achievements."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See Ronald E. Heine, "Introduction," in *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans., Ronald E. Heine, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 71, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 28-29; Benjamin P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 3, as well as Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.14 trans., Paul L. Maier, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 218.

<sup>11</sup> McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 17, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Heine, "Introduction," in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 3-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



The later details of Origen's travels and career in Palestine lean more heavily on McGuckin's and Heine's research, although they still rely upon Eusebius' account.

As Eusebius relates, Origen displayed a fiery zeal to do God's bidding from his youth. As a prime example, Eusebius relates an account of Origen attempting to join his father Leonides in martyrdom. Origen, upon learning that his father had been imprisoned during the persecution of Emperor Septimus Severus, which probably occurred sometime around 203 A.D, was only prevented from rushing out to his own martyrdom by his mother's hiding of her son's clothes, thus forcing the young Origen to stay at home.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, besides a hearty willingness for martyrdom, we are also told by Eusebius that the young Origen studied sacred Scripture "excessively." This was both due to his own inclination and at the behest of his father, who "insisted that he not devote time to the usual curriculum until he has mastered sacred studies each day through memorization and repetition."<sup>16</sup> It appears that as early as during this academic formation is when Origen started developing his allegorical approach to Scripture.<sup>17</sup> Eusebius relates further that after Leonides' martyrdom, Origen continued his secular studies with great enthusiasm until at the age of eighteen he became head of the catechetical school in Alexandria.<sup>18</sup> Origen was perhaps also a student of Clement at some point although we cannot accept Eusebius' claim that Clement also headed the same catechetical school.<sup>19</sup> There is additionally evidence that Origen was in fact a student of the Platonist

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<sup>15</sup>Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 6:2 (Maier, 208).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Heine, citing Pierre Nautin, relates, however, that Origen was approximately twenty-six rather than eighteen when he became head of the school. Heine, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 9

<sup>19</sup> G. Bardy "Aux origenes de l'ecole d'Alexandrie." *Reserches de science religieuse* 27 (1937) :65-90 as cited in Heine, "Introduction," in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 9-10; See also McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 5.

philosopher Ammonius Saccas, who also taught Plotinus.<sup>20</sup> Either way, during this time, Origen apparently attracted a great many followers through his teaching, at least one of whom he would accompany to their own martyrdom.<sup>21</sup>

Although Origen did not actually learn Hebrew to a great extent, it is also likely that in Alexandria, he met and learned from a Christian Jew from Palestine who was living there at the time. Origen refers to this person as “the Hebrew” and it is he who could be partly responsible for Jewish influences on Origen’s works.<sup>22</sup> Origen was also greatly influenced by Philo, who was active in Alexandria from 15 B.C. to A.D.50.<sup>23</sup> Origen is indebted to Philo for his method of allegorical exegesis, as well as his theological and philosophical motifs.<sup>24</sup> In these respects, it is not doubtful that Origen’s views on the central concepts of this thesis, namely participation, image and likeness and their relation to deification, were influenced by Philonic sources. Therefore, Philo’s influence will be briefly dealt with later on in discussing Origen’s exegetical approach, his sources, and the central themes of his writings.

Eventually, Origen drew away from his teaching of secular studies and began to focus primarily on theology and philosophy – handing off his teaching duties to his pupil Heraclas, who would himself later go on to become the archbishop of Alexandria.<sup>25</sup> This handing off of teaching duties, however, may also have been a reorganization of the school initiated by the current bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius. If so, it could have been a way for Demetrius to control Origen’s rising influence as a philosopher-theologian.<sup>26</sup> It is quite possible that around

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<sup>20</sup> McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.3-5.

<sup>22</sup> Heine, “Introduction,” in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> David T. Runia, “Philo of Alexandria,” *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 169.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>25</sup> McGuckin., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Heine., “Introduction,” in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 12-13.

this time, most likely between 222 and 229, Origen began composing his *Commentary on Genesis* and *On First Principles*, as Eusebius confirms for us, both of which would have the effect of damaging his relation with Demetrius.<sup>27</sup> It is also evident that Origen was dictating his *Commentary on John* during his time at Alexandria, as we may understand from his own words:

Although the storm at Alexandria seemed to oppose us, we dictated the words which were given us as far as the fifth book, since Jesus rebuked the wind and waves of the sea. But after we had proceeded for a while in the sixth book we were rescued from the land of Egypt, when the God who led his people from Egypt delivered us.

At that time, when the enemy had overrun us most bitterly by his new writings which were truly hostile to the gospel, and when he had stirred up all the perverse winds in Egypt against us, reason summoned me to take a stand in the struggle and guard my ruling principle, so that wicked thoughts could not also introduce the storm into my soul. I chose to do this rather than continue with the succeeding words of Scripture at an unreasonable time before my mind was tranquil again.<sup>28</sup>

A little later in this passage Origen makes it even more clear that he had dictated his first five books on the *Commentary of John* in Alexandria when he says: “And be aware that I make this second beginning of the sixth book very eagerly because what we dictated previously in Alexandria, for some reason or other, has not been brought.”<sup>29</sup> What was the reason for this “storm” at Alexandria? Given Origen’s reputation as a teacher and scholar through which he

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14. Heine, citing Nautin, explains that Origen’s allegorization of the creation story did not sit well with Demetrius. Thus, Origen wrote *On First Principles* as a defense of his methodology, the result of which was perhaps the unintended and unwanted effect that Demetrius’ suspicions of Origen’s “heterodoxy” were “confirmed.” See also Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.23-24.

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1-10*, 6.8-9. The translation used is that by Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1-10*, The Fathers of the Church 80 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 170.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 171.

became “prosperous, great and esteemed by all,”<sup>30</sup> we can possibly infer from Eusebius’ account that Bishop Demetrius found some fault with Origen’s pedagogy.<sup>31</sup> If this were the case, Origen’s philosophical speculations, his emerging Logos theology and allegorizing approaches to Scripture could be to blame for leading him into deep water in the “anti-intellectual” Alexandrian ecclesial environment.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever the cause, eventually the tension between the two Churchmen came to a head. After a brief stint in Arabia,<sup>33</sup> Origen left Alexandria for Palestine, sometime around 230,<sup>34</sup> where he settled in Caesarea. While there, he was asked to preach in the local church, with approval by the clergy, specifically the Bishops Alexander and Theoctistus, who defended this decision to Bishop Demetrius.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, however, Bishop Demetrius requested Origen’s return, and, with deacons urging him to go, Origen found himself back in Alexandria and resuming his work.<sup>36</sup> This sojourn would not last long, however, and Origen may have been forced to leave due to his conflicted relationship with Demetrius. Deciding to set out for Greece, perhaps with the intent to settle there long term, Origen was ordained during his visit to Caesarea on the way. Yet he stayed for only a short while in Greece before returning to and finally settling down in Caesarea, where he would live for the rest of his days. This may have been due to difficulties that likewise had been raised, perhaps not without Bishop Demetrius’ influence, in Athens in regard to Origen’s orthodoxy. Furthermore, a return to Palestine was logical for

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<sup>30</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.8 (Maier, 213).

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.8. That Eusebius believed Bishop Demetrius to be jealous of Origen’s reputation is evident.

<sup>32</sup> McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 8, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.19.

<sup>34</sup> Heine, “Introduction,” in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History* 6.19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.19.

Origen given his acceptance there by the local clergy.<sup>37</sup> Once there, Origen began again to accept students and to continue to do what he did best: preach, teach, and write until his death around 254.<sup>38</sup>

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### Origen as Scriptural Exegete and the Central Themes of His Writings

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The above biographical vignette serves as basic introduction to Origen the teacher and preacher. Yet an authentic account of Origen's contributions to the Church cannot be completed without reference to the centrality of the scriptures in his career and personal spirituality. This section will delve into Origen as the scriptural exegete; that is, how he believed scriptural interpretation should be undertaken and the central themes he extrapolated from scripture. We know of the importance of scripture for Origen and which scriptures he was familiar with based on his own statements. Origen believed in the divine nature of the scriptures and generally recognized a certain division between what would later be canonized as the Old and New Testament. He also highly valued the relationship between the two, with the former serving as

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<sup>37</sup> Heine, "Introduction," in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 15-17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

the prophetic vehicle for the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ in the latter. For Origen, this revealing is, in fact, central to the scriptures, yet the details of which are hidden unless unlocked by Jesus himself.<sup>39</sup>

One of the hallmarks of Origen's methodology for scriptural interpretation was his reading of the different "levels" of scripture: essentially, the "bodily," the "soulish" and the "spiritual." Origen himself explains this method of interpretation in his *On First Principles*:

One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul, so that the simple man may be edified by what we may call the flesh of the scripture, this name being given to the obvious interpretation; while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul, as it were; and the man who is perfect and like those mentioned by the apostle: 'We speak wisdom among the perfect; yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory'<sup>40</sup> – this man may be edified by the spiritual law, which has 'a shadow of the good things to come'.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

Origen therefore sees the scriptures in a tripartite manner, consistent with man's makeup as body, soul and spirit. The level of the "body" presumably dealt with basic moral instruction and literal meanings such as those of historical narratives. "Spiritual" meanings were mystical meanings, intuited by the "advanced" Christian while contemplatively delving into the meaning of God's word. In a similar manner the spiritual level also dealt with the allegorical interpretation of

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<sup>39</sup> Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010), 132.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Cor 2:6-7.

<sup>41</sup> Heb 10:1.

<sup>42</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* IV.II.5. The translation used is that by G.W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles*, trans., G.W. Butterworth, (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), 277-278.

scripture. The “soul” level seems to have been somewhere in the middle. The following statement from Heine provides a good summary of this methodology:

Origen believed that the bodily or literal level of Scripture could be of benefit to simple folks, who were not advanced in the spiritual life. At the second, or psychic, level, Scripture delivered lessons to those who were moving toward perfection. Finally, at the spiritual level, Scripture deals with the mysteries of the Christian faith, such as the nature of the Son, his incarnation, the true nature of the world, and our place in it. Observers find it difficult to grasp what Origen meant by the psychic level. Some scholars suggest that this level had more to do with extracting “moral” meaning from the text, but there appears to be little support for such a view in Origen’s extant writings. One way to understand this level may be to see it as somewhere between the literal meaning and allegorical meanings that deal specifically with the mysteries of the faith.<sup>43</sup>

For Origen, the scriptures take a central role in his theological methodology. One of the features that gives them this prominence is their fathomless capacity to offer new Spirit-led insights into the divine wisdom. To paraphrase Heine, Origen sees the scriptures as offering a “depth of mystery,” which the human being can never fully penetrate. As a person advances in their comprehension of scripture, they will nevertheless see an infinite path of progress stretching out ahead of them.<sup>44</sup> Going further, Origen sees the scriptures as being purposefully “veiled,” — divine knowledge and mysteries hidden behind a surface level understanding of the text — a view already implicit in Alexandrian Christianity before Origen’s time.<sup>45</sup> This understanding contributes to Origen’s sense of the hidden, spiritual meaning of scripture, which must be drawn out by those with the capacity to do so.

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<sup>43</sup> John J. O’Keefe, “Scriptural Interpretation,” *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 194.

<sup>44</sup> Heine, *Scholarship*, 136.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

From Origen's point of view, this capacity is not just bestowed through mere intellectual ability but rather comes predominantly through Christ, who is the gateway for Scriptural interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, as the Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture, any part of Scripture has the possibility of a connection with the larger whole, with some parts being more readily applicable to others, even if they do not directly reference one another.<sup>47</sup> Examples of how Origen saw this to be an authentic mode of reading Scripture are seen throughout his writings and homilies; for example, when discussing Genesis 1:27 and the depiction of man as made in God's image, Origen relates the idea not only to Paul's "inner man," but also to parts of the Johannine Gospel which do not bear direct witness to the verse:

All therefore, who come to him and desire to become participants in the spiritual image by their progress "are renewed daily in the inner man" according to the image of him who made them, so that they can be made "similar to the body of his glory," but each one in proportion to his own powers. The apostles transformed themselves to such an extent to his likeness that he could say of them, "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." For he had already petitioned the Father for his disciples that the original likeness might be restored in them when he says, "Father," grant "that just as you and I are one so also they may be one in us."<sup>48</sup>

It can be noted here that Origen's ability to sift through and fuse together different readings of Scripture, such that they create a sum which is larger than its parts, may seem to be pushing the limits of biblical interpretation. This is particularly the case when compared to contemporary standards which emphasize historical-critical methods. Where Origen locks onto a certain theme, deification not the least of these, he is quickly able to provide support for his

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 135-136.

<sup>48</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13. The translation used is that by Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans., Ronald E. Heine, The Fathers of the Church 71, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002) 66. See also John 17:21-22, as noted by Heine in the same.



interpretations through “supporting” passages from almost anywhere else in the Scriptures. This process works synergistically with his allegorizing method in that by “spiritualizing” certain verses or Biblical ideas, those verses can more easily be brought to bear on other verses and ideas which may have been spiritualized themselves. Yet, even if Origen’s methodology was not completely in line with contemporary standards, as was of course the case for all early church theologians, it is remarkable because of the way he employed exegesis as a way of showing the scriptures as more than the sum of their parts, as the saying goes, and as a way of elaborating on what he saw as Christian truths hidden within the scriptures. Origen works interpretive wonders, such as when he allegorizes God’s creation of the sun and moon in the firmament in Genesis as a prefiguring of God’s creation of “Christ and the Church in us.” Origen says that God’s creation of the stars actually refers to the patriarchs and gives an explanation as to their role in regards to the Church and its members.

Just as the sun and moon are said to be the great lights in the firmament of heaven, so also are Christ and the Church in us. But since God also placed stars in the firmament, let us see what are also stars in us, that is, in the heaven of our heart.

Moses is a star in us, which shines and enlightens us by his acts. And Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaias, Jermeias, Ezechiel, David, Daniel, and all to whom the Holy Spirit testify that they pleased God. For just as “star differs from star in glory,” so also each of the saints, according to his own greatness, sheds his light upon us.<sup>49</sup>

Passages like these highlight Origen’s remarkable familiarity with Scripture. And although he was not employing the standards used for biblical scholarship that are used today, it can be noted that Origen was quite a critical Biblical exegete for his time. As exemplified by his work on the *Hexapla*, Origen devoted much time to attempting to discover the differences

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., I.7 (Heine, 55). See also 1 Cor 15:41, as noted by Heine in the same.

between the text and their effects on the meaning derived from them.<sup>50</sup> Yet, his writings also portray an exegetical methodology where the scripture is interpreted as more than the sum of its parts. Origen often seeks to find fulfillment of the New Testament in types represented in the Old Testament. In places where scripture conflicts or does not seem to establish any reasonable moral teaching, he often will turn to allegorization as a way of discerning the hidden, spiritual meaning of scripture. These considerations will therefore be taken into account and further explored in order to better discuss Origen's exegetical support of deification.

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### Deification in Platonism

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Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.<sup>51</sup>

At least at one time or another, for both Christians and Platonists, deification has been a proper understanding of the human being's purpose in life. Establishing his stance on the

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<sup>50</sup> O'Keefe, "Scriptural Interpretation," 193-194.

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A-B. The translation used is that by Harold North Fowler, *Plato: Theaetetus, Sophist*, trans., H.N. Fowler, (London, England:Harvard University Press; Great Britain, St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd, [1921] 1996), 126-129.

*Theaetetus* in the first century BCE, the Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria, “established ‘likeness to God’ as the *telos* of human life for all the Platonists who came after him.”<sup>52</sup> Eudorus, of course, was merely elevating a certain theme already inherent in Plato’s dialogues, that of *homoiosis theoi*, or likeness to the divine.<sup>53</sup> Besides the above-mentioned verse in the *Theaetetus* (176A-B), additional passages dealing with *homoiosis* include *Phaedrus* 245C-249A; *Phaedo* 64A-67E, 81A-84B; *Republic* 500C-501B, 611D-E, 612A-613E; *Philebus* 28C-30E; *Symposium* 207E-209E; *Timaeus* 41D-47C, 90A-D; and *Laws* 716C-D.<sup>54</sup>

Demonstrating Middle-Platonism’s awareness of the *homoiosis* tenet as part of the Platonic philosophical tradition, Christoph Jedan draws on the following passage from Arius Didymus from around the end of the first century BCE:

Socrates, Plato, just as Pythagoras [thought that] the goal (of life) was likeness to god (ὁμοίωσιν θεῷ). Plato described it more clearly by adding 'as far as possible' (προσθεῖς 'τὸ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν'), but it is only possible through understanding and that is living according to virtue (τοῦτο δ' ἦν τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν <ζῆν>) [As to what it is that should become as like as possible] with respect to god, it is the making and administration of the cosmos and with respect to the sage, it is the arrangement and conduct of his life. This is just what Homer hinted at, when he wrote 'he followed on the god's track' (κατ' ἴχνια βαῖνε θεοῖο). It was after him that Pythagoras said 'follow god' (Ἔπου θεῷ). It is clear that [with this he meant] not a visibly preceding [god], but [the god] found-by reason, who arranged the beautiful order of the cosmos.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 141.

<sup>53</sup> Christoph Jedan, “Metaphors of Closeness: Reflections on *Homoiosis Theōi* in Ancient Philosophy and Beyond,” *Numen*, vol. 60 (2013), 59-60.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Arius Didymus *ap.* Stobaeus 2.49.8-18 (ed. Wachsmuth 1884), as quoted in Jedan, “Metaphors of Closeness: Reflections on *Homoiosis Theōi* in Ancient Philosophy and Beyond,” 56.

What caused the Platonists to home in on divine likeness as a central thesis of Plato's philosophy? This question could require a whole thesis in its own right, and thus is not fully addressed here. Yet in order to understand how this theme was further developed by Middle Platonists and later, Philo and Plotinus, a brief consideration of the importance of divine likeness in Plato's own thought will be given. This purpose of all this is to serve as a helpful basis of comparison for discussing Origen's theology of deification and to demonstrate Origen's inheritance of the philosophical concepts and terminology of Plato, which had by that point been developed by Middle Platonists.

To begin with, in order that one know what is the proper *telos* in regards to the human life, one would need to know who or what exactly is man, and who or what exactly is the divine, such that there can even be a relation drawn between the two in the first place. To answer this, one can begin with a look at Plato's words in the *Phaedrus*:

Every soul is immortal. For that which is ever moving is immortal; but that which moves something else or is moved by something else, when it ceases to move, ceases to live. Only that which moves itself, since it does not leave itself, never ceases to move, and this is also the source and beginning of motion for all other things which have motion. But the beginning is ungenerated. For everything that is generated must be generated from a beginning, but the beginning is not generated from anything; for if the beginning were generated from anything, it would not be generated from a beginning. And since it is ungenerated, it must also be indestructible; for if the beginning were destroyed, it could never be generated from anything nor anything else from it, since all things must be generated from a beginning. Thus that which moves of itself must be the beginning of motion. And this can be neither destroyed nor generated, otherwise all the heavens and all generation must fall in ruin and stop and never again have any source of motion or origin. But since that which is moved by itself has been seen to be immortal, one who says that this self-motion is the essence and the very idea of the soul, will not be disgraced. For every body which

derives motion from without is soulless, but that which has its motion within itself has a soul, since that is the nature of the soul; but if this is true,—that that which moves itself is nothing else than the soul,—then the soul would necessarily be ungenerated and immortal.<sup>56</sup>

Plato identifies above that the soul is immortal and without a beginning, that is to say, ungenerated. For Plato, then, the soul is indestructible. This is also why, for Plato, the soul “remembers” abstract qualities that exist in their perfection in the time in which the soul exists, but is not in a body.<sup>57</sup> Below is the continuation of the above *Phaedrus* passage which further illustrates Plato’s understanding of this state, how it is attained to and lost, as well as a metaphorical example of the role played by the composition of the soul in this process:

Concerning the immortality of the soul this is enough; but about its form we must speak in the following manner. To tell what it really is would be a matter of utterly superhuman and long discourse, but it is within human power to describe it briefly in a figure; let us therefore speak in that way. We will liken the soul to the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the horses and charioteers of gods are all good and of good descent, but those of other races are mixed; and first the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed and character, but the other quite opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome. Now we must try to tell why a living being is called mortal or immortal. Soul, considered collectively, has the care of all that which is soulless, and it traverses the whole heaven, appearing sometimes in one form and sometimes in another; now when it is perfect and fully winged, it mounts upward and governs the whole world; but the soul which has lost its wings is borne along until it gets hold of something solid, when it settles down, taking upon itself an earthly body, which seems to be

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<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 245C-246A. The translation used is that by Harold North Fowler, *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans., H.N. Fowler, (Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd, [1914] 1982), 468-471.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 75C-76A. The translation used is that by Harold North Fowler, *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans., H.N. Fowler, (Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd, [1914] 1982), 262-265.

self-moving, because of the power of the soul within it; and the whole, compounded of soul and body, is called a living being, and is further designated as mortal. It is not immortal by reasonable supposition, but we, though we have never seen or rightly conceived a god, imagine an immortal being which has both a soul and a body which are united for all time. Let that, however, and our words concerning it, be as is pleasing to God; we will now consider the reason why the soul loses its wings. It is something like this.

The natural function of the wing is to soar upwards and carry that which is heavy up to the place where dwells the race of the gods. More than any other thing that pertains to the body it partakes of the nature of the divine. But the divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and all such qualities; by these then the wings of the soul are nourished and grow, but by the opposite qualities, such as vileness and evil, they are wasted away and destroyed.<sup>58</sup>

As indicated in the passage above, for Plato, the human soul consists of the components of a charioteer, and a noble and ignoble steed. Plato further elaborates on these components by positing that the wings of the soul allow it to soar upwards to where the gods dwell; meanwhile the wings of the soul are nourished by the “beauty, wisdom, goodness and all such qualities” of the divine. In this otherworldly depiction, Plato demonstrates that the human soul which has “lost its wings” will be born in a physical body. This soul that “lost its wings,” presumably means here the soul that allows the mortal or “evil steed,” to lead; and therefore allows the allure of sensual things to dominate and thus drag down the soul to an earthly abode.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Plato, *Phaedrus* 246A-E (Fowler, 470-475).

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., Harold North Fowler, in “Introduction To The *Phaedrus*,” in *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans., H.N. Fowler, (Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd, [1914] 1982), 409: “The two horses, then, represent not distinct parts of the soul, but modes of the soul as it is affected by its contact with the body; the good horse typifies the influence of the emotions, the bad horse that of the appetites, and the charioteer is reason. It is important to bear in mind that the description of the soul in the *Phaedrus* is figurative, otherwise we are involved in hopeless confusion in any attempt to determine Plato’s conception of the soul.” Incorporating later Platonists’ expositions, James Duerlinger, provides his own understanding of the role of the horses which seems to advance upon Fowler’s notions: “The gods are claimed (*Timaeus* 41a-47d, 89d-90d) to have combined this [mortal] soul, along with the body they created, with the immortal soul they received from God, so that the whole could receive sustenance and protection and the immortal soul might be able to release itself from embodiment. The other

Indeed, according to Platonic philosophy, the philosopher's goal while on earth is to separate the things of the soul, so much as is possible, from the things of the body. Plato has Socrates saying as much in the *Phaedo*, in which Socrates discusses the soul and its afterlife:

And does not the purification consist in this which has been mentioned long ago in our discourse, in separating, so far as possible, the soul from the body and teaching the soul the habit of collecting and bringing itself together from all parts of the body, and living, so far as it can, both now and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters?<sup>60</sup>

Socrates maintains that in keeping ourselves pure from the contaminating influences of the body, we can go on after our deaths to a pure spiritual afterlife; one in which we reach communion with that which is truly pure.<sup>61</sup>

Returning to our depiction of the soul as a charioteer and its horses from the *Phaedrus*, Plato goes on to show the soul's capacity for its *telos* by describing it in celestial imagery. For the gods, who live in heaven, enjoy always the "many blessed sights and many ways hither and thither within the heaven," but also, "the region above the heaven."<sup>62</sup> This region is characterized by the "colourless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned."<sup>63</sup> Only the "divine intelligence" can enjoy this vision which is further characterized by the qualities of "absolute justice, temperance and knowledge, and not

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powers of these immortal souls, we learn from Albinus, are actually the *forms* of the spirited and appetitive parts of the mortal soul. It thus appears that these are powers used by the immortal soul to move, from above, the self-sufficient bodies they possess, and that the gods created the mortal parts of the human soul in the image of these parts of the immortal soul. The unruliness of one of the steeds of the immortal part of the human soul does not, consequently, belong to the appetitive part of the embodied human soul, but rather to its form. Thus for the immortal part of the human soul to live the divine life it needs to become free of the impurity that led to its embodiment and to accomplish full contemplation of true being." James Duerlinger, "Ethics and the Divine Life in Plato's Philosophy," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall, 1985), 316.

<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 67C-D (Fowler, 232-233).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 67A-B.

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 247A-C (Fowler, 474-475).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 247C-D (Fowler, 474-477).

such knowledge as has a beginning and varies as it is associated with one or another of the things we call realities, but that which abides in the real eternal absolute.”<sup>64</sup>

Although Plato describes this vision as properly belonging to the gods, he hints that those who live the life of a philosopher can, at the least, gain a glimpse of this celestial vision. Socrates claims as much in *Phaedo*, where he looks forward with hope to his death, believing that he will soon be in the company of the gods.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Socrates indicates that for this reason the philosophic life is nothing other than a preparation for death.<sup>66</sup> For a philosopher, according to Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, is not at home in this world in the same way as most people are, yet knows the measure of things in ways that other persons, unaccustomed to philosophical enquiry, can scarcely grasp.<sup>67</sup> In order to live the life of a philosopher, two essentials are required: moral virtue, that is to say virtue which is cultivated in an ethical way of living, and contemplative knowledge or wisdom, which allows one to know of the divine by means of inquiring about the true nature of things.<sup>68</sup> Together these lead to a likeness to God.

What or who is God for Plato? Apparently it is not so clear, in that while Plato talks of the divine, he also often mentions “the gods” and does not seem to give any straightforward account of God in his dialogues. What has been received are Plato’s philosophical assumptions on the nature of the One or Good, as well as lines from Plato’s dialogues that qualify God. For example, according to Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, one of God’s, or “the Divine’s” attributes is his perfect righteousness: “God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly and perfectly righteous, and there is nothing so like him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 247D-E (Fowler, 476-477).

<sup>65</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 69A-E.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 64A.

<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 173C – 177C.

<sup>68</sup> Duerlinger, “Ethics and the Divine Life in Plato’s Philosophy,” 313-314.



perfect in righteousness.”<sup>69</sup> God is also clearly immortal, and seemingly intellectual and unchanging, in that our souls resemble the divine through these properties that it itself possesses.<sup>70</sup> A complete account of who or what Plato thought God was is unfortunately too much to address here. However, we can glean something rather easily of what Plato thought of God in the ways he envisioned what likeness to God entailed. As mentioned above, it is therefore by being “righteous and holy and wise,” through cultivated virtue and contemplated wisdom, that we become like God. In a general way then, we could say that God for Plato is the ultimate model or source for these qualities such as wisdom, righteousness, and virtue. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the concept of deification was most attractive not only to later Platonists but to the early Christians as well, who literally worshipped a God-man. With this point, we can now begin to look at how deification entered into and developed within the Christian tradition.

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### Deification in Early Christianity

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<sup>69</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 176C (Fowler, 128-129).

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 80A-80B, 106D.

As stated above, given the Revelation of Jesus Christ as God becoming incarnate, it was only a matter of time before the first followers of Christ were to recognize this process in reverse; that is, man becoming God, or rather becoming as much like God as possible. Furthermore, verses like those below, show that a seminal version of the idea was not lacking in scriptural writings:

The Jews again picked up rocks to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in the law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"<sup>71</sup>

And also:

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>72</sup>

In their essay entitled "The Scriptural Roots of Deification," David Vincent Meconi, S.J. and Carl E. Olson recognize in the Synoptics "three key themes relating to theosis: the Fatherhood of God, believers described as "sons of God", and mankind's participation in the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of heaven)." As they go on to point out, all three of these themes can be found in the Sermon on the Mount passage in Matthew's gospel.<sup>73</sup> In this passage, Jesus performs the role of a new Moses, extending the Covenant to all nations, while also

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<sup>71</sup> John 10:34-36, *The New American Bible*.

<sup>72</sup> Matt 5:48.

<sup>73</sup> David Meconi, S.J. and Carl E. Olson, "The Scriptural Roots of Deification," *Called To Be The Children Of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification*, eds., David Meconi S.J. and Carl E. Olson, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 23-24.

acknowledging his followers as children of the Father,<sup>74</sup> inasmuch as they imitate God's love toward others, particularly one's enemies.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile in Luke, divine son-ship becomes explicitly associated with resurrection (Lk: 20:35-36), while in Mark we find Jesus calling those who do the will of God, "my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk 3:35).<sup>76</sup> It is therefore clear that while these passages do not rise quite to the same level that the Church Fathers will take their deifying language, they nevertheless make apparent an affinity between God and man that is primarily characterized by a filial dimension, and secondarily by a familial dimension. This language is important in that it speaks of an underlying unity between God and man in which man has a capacity to act as God acts, and thus to share, at least in some respects, the attributes of God. This alludes to man's sharing of additional unearthly attributes such as immortality in the heavenly life, for example as alluded to above in Luke. As will be explored later on, the Church Fathers, Origen not the least of which, would develop stronger language to describe the deifying effects of man's affinity with God through the Son's incarnation, which would additionally be characterized by unitive and marital dimensions. For now, however, in returning to the filial dimension we discover that it becomes all the more prominent in John's Gospel.

Indeed, in John's Gospel, it is by partaking of this filial relationship which is made readily available by the Son through grace, in which human beings are spiritually reborn, that they become adopted sons and daughters of God. The adopted son-ship of human beings, who are separate from their Creator, does not allow one to claim for him or herself Christ's unique role of Son — to do so would be in error due to the nature of the relationship between man and

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

God, in which man receives the grace from God to become as he is but not essentially so.<sup>77</sup> John makes it clear in the prologue to his gospel that the “Word was God,” that through him “all things came to be,” that he grants the “power to become children of God,” and from “his fullness we have all received.” Furthermore the Son is the Father’s “only son,” and is able to fully reveal God to the world through the grace and truth that come through him.<sup>78</sup>

The theme of deification present in John was in no way lost upon Origen. Clearly exposing this theme for the purposes of his commentary, Origen makes clear efforts to extract a satisfactory explanation of man’s divine *telos* in relation to the incarnation of the Word. As such, this thesis will rely on Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, the history of the writing of which has already been briefly touched upon, as a central text in this study. For now, it is left to us to continue to another sacred Scripture writer who would appear to have a prominent effect on Origen’s thinking, including his theology of deification: St. Paul of Tarsus. Due to the importance of Paul’s writings on the formation of the Christian understanding of the soul and his own unique language concerning the divinization of the Christian, the next chapter will deal in somewhat more depth with what Paul had to say on these topics. This will better prepare us to understand Origen’s own perspectives on the same, given that Origen strove to maintain theological consistency with Paul, who, as will later be shown, he is often relying upon for his concept of the human soul while still attempting to utilize Platonic ideas.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 27, 28.

<sup>78</sup> John 1:1-18.

## II. Origen and the Human Person: Origen's Theological Anthropology as Fulfilled in the "Image of God" and Likeness to the Divine

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### Origen on the Human Soul: Platonist, Christian or Both?

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Gnostic, dualistic, Platonist; these traditional adjectives, and others suggestive of heterodoxy, were scholarly terms of choice to apply to Origen's theological anthropology, one which had been dismantled of any remaining Christian legitimacy by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. Nor was this assessment entirely incorrect in certain of these affirmations. Rather, it seems, the rock that was Origen's more ecclesiastic and Christological side was left unturned in favor of a status quo treatment which emphasized the speculative and philosophical, yet ultimately non-contributive, nature of an other-worldly quasi-theology. This thinking was to be disrupted, however, with the dawn of the *ressourcement* or *nouvelle théologie* scholarship, which contributed to the rehabilitation of Origen as a thoroughly ecclesiastic theologian mystic,

albeit one who, like other early Christian thinkers, did not eschew from drawing from his philosophical background in explicating spiritual truths.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary theologians and scholars have come to benefit from these developments in Origenian scholarship by gaining new insight into Origen the Churchman. For example, Benjamin P. Blosser begins his work “Become Like the Angels: Origen’s Doctrine on the Soul,” by identifying the importance of these developments in Origenian scholarship. The thesis of this work is that Origen’s entire systematic theology rests centrally upon his theological anthropology; and it is only by understanding Origen as biblical exegete and Christological thinker that this influential Christian theological anthropology starts coming through to us.<sup>2</sup> Blosser still recognizes Origen’s indebtedness to Middle Platonism, however, and thus his thesis involves the comparison of Origen’s doctrine of the soul to corresponding Middle Platonic positions.<sup>3</sup>

This section will likewise cover Origen’s doctrine of the soul in acknowledgement of the importance of this doctrine to Origen’s overall theology. Therefore, like Blosser, the section will deal with Origen’s theological anthropology by comparing it to Middle Platonic concepts of the soul. This will include views of division of the soul, as well as the relationship of the soul to body, mind and spirit. A point to note here is that Origen’s theological anthropology relates heavily to his usage of the terms “image” and “likeness” in their theological context. These

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<sup>1</sup> See also, e.g., Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., “In addition, many contemporary treatments of Origen’s anthropology have shown that his teaching ought not to be viewed primarily in light of the static conceptual models of the philosophical schools, but rather in light of the moral, mystical, and biblical concept of man’s creation in the divine image, along with his vocation to return to God. Past scholars were often too preoccupied, even obsessed, with controversies over Origen’s doctrine of preexistence of souls that they were prevented from developing an appreciation for Origen’s anthropology as a whole. It has emerged repeatedly that Origen’s anthropology is not as imbued with dualism as was previously suspected. Origen’s anthropology is far more informed by biblical motifs, and Christology in particular, than by Platonic philosophical assumptions.” 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

terms will not be a major focus of the below discussion however, since they are dealt with more in the following section.

To begin, it is important to outline the philosophical background in regards to the nature of the soul that Origen would have been exposed to in his time. As Blosser points out, the Middle Platonists did not have a straightforward account of the soul, nor were their views entirely “Platonist,” in the sense that they seemed not to represent Plato’s original thoughts on the matter. By contrast, the Middle Platonists had adopted both Peripatetic and Stoic philosophies, as a way to explain the soul’s bipartition or unicity, respectively. Tripartism, which Plato espoused in his Republic, was designated by a soul divided into a higher *logistikon* (the rational part), and the lower *epithumetikon* (the irrational part) and *thumoeides* (the spirited part). While Middle Platonists such as Alcinous and Antiochus of Ascalon, claimed themselves as adherents to the tripartist model, Peripatetic influences could be seen among the Middle Platonists, as well. The latter, for example, seemed to illustrate that Plato meant his tripartism in a mythological sense, and thus really taught a bipartite model in which there was a straightforward divide between the rational and sensible.<sup>4</sup>

Jewish biblical exegete and platonizing philosopher Philo, born sometime between 20 and 15 BC,<sup>5</sup> for his part, saw a bipartite division of the rational (*logikon*) and the irrational (*alogon*).<sup>6</sup> Whereas the *logikon* was associated with the intellect (*nous*), the *alogon* was to be identified with the physical senses.<sup>7</sup> Although not having a discernible influence on Middle Platonism itself, Philo did have a considerable one on Origen (as well as Clement for that matter).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18-24. Blosser cites Dillon in his conclusion concerning Antiochus’ bipartite view of the soul; Dillon however, rather seems to recognize a Stoic view of the soul in Antiochus, although he admits of there also being bipartite elements – this in addition to there still being a form of a tripartite view. See also John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 102, 174.

<sup>5</sup> Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Dillon, in fact, claims that as regarded Platonism, Origen was more dependent on Philo than any recent source of his time. Indeed, comparing the following passages from Philo and Origen, respectively, one can easily draw the conclusion that Origen took cues from Philo's own platonizing exegesis:

He shows here that there is a vast difference between the Man being fashioned now and the one that was created before 'in the image of God'. The one moulded now is perceptible by the senses, participates in quality, is a compound of body and soul, either male or female, by nature mortal. The one created 'in the image' is a sort of Idea or genus or seal (*sphragis*), intelligible, immaterial, neither male nor female, by nature imperishable.<sup>8</sup>

This quote from Philo shows that the rational, immaterial soul is starkly contrasted with the sensible physical component of man, both of which are created by God, but which are described separately in the two Genesis creation accounts. Origen, likewise, indicates something very similar in one of his homilies on Genesis, in which he, like Philo, designates between the forming or fashioning of the physical man versus the making or creating of the spiritual man, "in the image of God."

We do not understand, however, this man indeed whom Scripture says was made "according to the image of God" to be corporeal. For the form of the body does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man said to be "made," but "formed," as is written in the words which follow. For the text says: "And God formed man," that is fashioned, "from the slime of the earth."<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite his apparent bipartism, Philo also expresses tripartite and Stoic sensibilities in regard to his psychology. Ultimately, however, these categories fall away, in that the *epithumetikon* and *thumoeides* elements become yoked in opposition to the *logistikon*. Philo can

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<sup>8</sup> Philo, Opif. 134, as quoted in Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 176.

<sup>9</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 63).



even go so far as to say that there are in fact two souls in the human being, the rational and the irrational.<sup>10</sup> Although a thorough comparison of Philo and Origen's psychologies cannot be attempted here, it is notable that Philo mostly agreed with a bipartite view of the soul. As he was not only a fellow biblical exegete, but also a philosophical speculator immersed in the Middle Platonic tradition, it does not seem a stretch to say that Origen would have found somewhat of an affinity with his Alexandrian predecessor in regards to soul partition. Therefore what we find in Origen is already somewhat familiar to that which concerns us in Philo – a mostly bipartite concept of the soul that echoes the Middle Platonic tradition yet which has been sieved through the moral authority of the scriptures.

To show Origen's familiarity with Middle Platonist positions of his day, we can turn to Origen's most philosophical work, *On First Principles*, where his philosophical views on the soul are laid out for us in a reasonably straightforward manner. In *On First Principles* 3.4.1 - 3.4.4, Origen responds to three Middle Platonic designations of the soul: firstly, the idea that the soul is tripartite (in the original Platonic sense), secondly that there are two souls in man, and thirdly the idea that there is one soul but that it is divided between the spirit and the flesh. This last position, however, is depicted by Origen in a more Gnostic sense, and thus can be contrasted with Origen's actual position on the matter.<sup>11</sup>

To begin with, Origen starts out by dismissing tripartism of the soul, citing the lack of any confirmation of tripartism by divine scripture. In this case, it seems obvious that Origen is rejecting an ontological take of Plato's *Republic* IV. 436A-441C, since he mentions this view as belonging to "some Greeks" and characterizes it as dividing the soul into a rational and irrational part, with the irrational part further divided into "the two emotional elements of appetite and

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<sup>10</sup> Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 174-176. See also Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> See also Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 26-37.

passion.”<sup>12</sup> Origen has little else to say on the matter and, having swiftly dealt with this position, continues on to deal with the position that there are two souls in man.

In describing this position, Origen indicates that those who align themselves with it believe that there is a higher soul and a lower soul. The higher soul is that which is “good and heavenly” while the other soul is “lower and earthly.” In regards to the latter, it is maintained that those who hold this view believe that it cannot survive except in relation to the body. Origen does not mention explicitly who it is whose views he is describing here, however there are indications that he is no longer describing those of Middle Platonist philosophers, but rather other Christians. He mentions how the persons who believe in this theory use scripture passages to justify their view. The verses that Origen records which are used to support this theory are notably mostly Pauline; in fact, out of ten verses he mentions in support of this theory, eight are cited from Paul, and most of which are from Galatians or Romans. Most of these verses have to do with a fundamental opposition between the nature of the spirit and that of the flesh, such as the verse, “the flesh warreth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that we may not do the things that we will to do.”<sup>13</sup>

For his opponents, the bodily soul is the cause of moral evils, originating in the soul feelings that are diametrically opposed to the motivations of the higher soul which is distinguished by its capacity and affinity for spiritual things. Continuing on, the reader reaches a point where it is difficult at first to tell if Origen is actually agreeing with this view or rejecting it. This is rather due to, in typical Origenian fashion, Origen engaging with the theory in such a way in which he projects his own speculations onto it, thus modifying it in the process and recreating it in his own image. The switch occurs when Origen points out that we can say that the flesh and

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<sup>12</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* III.IV.1 (Butterworth, 230). See also the footnote on the same page citing the indicated passage in Plato’s Republic.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, III.IV.2 (Butterworth, 232). The verse is noted as a reference to Gal 5:17 in the same.

the spirit can be said to have their own wills – this would seem to indicate that, in order to each have a will, both the flesh and the spirit would each have their own soul. However, Origen never affirms that, but rather seems to posit that the “wills” of the flesh and the spirit are not wills in the true sense of the word. Furthermore, later on in the chapter when Origen has begun discussing the third position, mentioned above, on the soul, he points out that the flesh does not really have a “soul or wisdom of its own,” but that just as one can use figurative language such as in the phrase, “the ground is thirsty,” so also is this type of language used in scriptural phrases such as “wisdom of the flesh,” and “the flesh lusteth against the spirit,” which could otherwise imply an autonomous understanding of the flesh or spirit.

In furthering this point, Origen reveals his own hand in the matter by establishing that “the will of the soul is something intermediate between the flesh and the spirit, undoubtedly serving and obeying one of the two, whichever it has chosen to obey.”<sup>14</sup> He explains that this will of the soul is “above and beyond,” the wills which are said to belong to the spirit and to the flesh. Thus, it appears he maintains these wills but only in a metaphorical sense, in that they depict a certain moral orientation that the soul is liable to be drawn to one way or the other and which it is free to choose between. By turning towards one or the other in its moral decisions, the soul takes on the qualities and unites itself with the respective component. Thus, the soul may be said to either become “fleshly” or “spiritual.”

This assessment by Origen reveals to us a noticeably bipartite theorization of the soul, yet one in which the unity of the soul is preserved by the recognition that the bipartite element of the soul is the morally diametric position it finds itself in. That is to say, the soul has the bipartite option of choosing either the fleshly or the spiritual, based on its moral choices, yet will retain a unity while progressing in either one or the other direction. Blosser explains Origen’s account as

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<sup>14</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* III.IV.2 (Butterworth, 233).

that of “a simple soul with two possible lifestyles open to it, or even of dual external powers drawing it in two directions,” and that, “the language of partition is only one of many images utilized by Origen to describe the complex nature of the soul – it is doubtful that Origen intended it to be taken literally.”<sup>15</sup> As Blosser also relates, Origen typically describes the soul from a moral vantage point, and when he does appear to be talking about the soul from an ontological perspective, as with the passage from *On First Principles*, above, these two vantages points seem to merge.<sup>16</sup> This can likewise be attributed to Origen’s belief in the unity of the soul, but a soul which is conditioned or augmented by its moral choices.

Additionally, Origen couches his language in the context of spiritual combat, in which the flesh and spirit are at odds with one another. He employs terms such as “inner man” man and “outer man,” which do not depict two literal men or souls within the human person, but rather depict a specific moral orientation or status. The biblical terms “inner man” and “outer man” are important for our overall discussion and therefore are dealt with in more detail later. For our current purposes, however, it is beneficial to note that the orientation or status depicted by said terms is not only ushered in by the incarnation of the Logos, without which such an orientation would not be available to mankind, but also by the choice of the individual. Thus the soul is one, but it has the binary option of modifying its ontological reality based on its moral decisions. As Blosser describes it, Origen, “seems to defend the theory of a unified soul, using Stoic terminology, which seems incompatible with any model of soul division at all. And yet he does use language pointing to some sort of duality or tension within the soul, hinting at bipartition but avoiding the strict language of bipartition theory.”<sup>17</sup> This puts Origen in a separate position than

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<sup>15</sup> Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-37.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

that of his Middle Platonic companions, who either upheld a truly metaphysical bipartite option or that of a heavily Stoicized view of a soul devoid of any partition whatsoever.<sup>18</sup>

What could be said by Origen of the third option, presumably that of the Gnostics, which argues that the flesh pulls men down from spiritual things such that they are drawn away from God? Again, Origen seems to follow and agree with this reasoning up to a certain point. For example, as alluded to in our discussion above, he points out the verse “The wisdom of the flesh is enmity against God,” interpreting it, in agreement with the position he is describing, as referring to how it is a metaphor for how the body’s demands are in conflict with divine and spiritual things. Yet further on in the passage, Origen shows, in the same manner as with the second position, where he departs with this view. As Origen frames the argument, his opponents make the claim that because the mind of the flesh is at enmity with God it is therefore evil. Origen asserts that this kind of reasoning is “certainly satisfactory to none but the heretics, who because they cannot defend the justice of God by pious reasoning compose impious inventions.”<sup>19</sup> Origen’s point is that God cannot create something that is truly at enmity with himself since it would be an instance of God making something both evil and not subject to him, which would, “certainly appear absurd.”<sup>20</sup> He goes on to highlight that even if somehow God were to create a soul in such a way, that it was an evil soul at enmity with God, then this would result in the position that souls are diverse in their natures, with some created for salvation and some for damnation. This is a position which Origen clearly rejects, as he states immediately after.<sup>21</sup> In his assessment, Origen is therefore both defending the goodness of creation, specifically the body, as well as free will.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>19</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* III.IV.4 (Butterworth, 236).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., III.IV.4 (Butterworth, 235-236).

Interestingly, even after having revealed his own personal thoughts on the three positions in question, Origen ends the discussion by offering the reader the choice of which position is correct. Yet, through his corrections of a two souls theory and a theory of a singular soul which necessitates a fleshly component which is devoid of a “good” nature, Origen shows enough of his own position on the matter. Essentially, Origen shows that he agrees with a singular soul, one which is indeed drawn away from spiritual matters due to the earthly temptations of the body, but which was nevertheless created good in all of its aspects – body and spirit, included. Furthermore, he shows the importance of free will by his denial that some souls are created good and some bad, which supports his framing the argument in a moral context. This moral position allows Origen to argue for a singular soul with a soft bipartition in its ability to choose between the spiritual and fleshly in such a way that it is either dragged down by the flesh or lifted up by the spirit. It is not that the flesh is bad, but that there is a disorder when it is chosen over and against the spirit.

Nevertheless, Origen is clear that it is not the body which possesses the “image of God,” but the soul, and that the body is in fact inferior to the soul, diminishing the capacities that the mind and spirit are able to perform. Taking his cue from Paul, Origen uses the term “flesh” (*sarx*) to describe the body in its limitations, as opposed to the goodness of body which is conferred on it by God.<sup>22</sup> Although Origen differs from the Platonists on his account of the soul, can we still say his ambivalence toward the body here contains Platonic influences?

It is worth noting here again that for Origen, all points must agree with scripture for a theological theory to be considered sound. If this was not the case, he would not have abruptly rejected Platonic tripartism at the beginning of his discussion of soul partition in *On First Principles* on the basis that he did not observe this position to be “strongly confirmed by the

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<sup>22</sup> Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 47-48.

authority of divine scripture.”<sup>23</sup> Still there are some similarities with Platonic positions on the body. Mostly this has to do with Origen’s and Platonic positions emphasis on mistaking the material for that which is of the highest good, the divine. By centering one’s efforts on chasing mundane desires, one substitutes what should be their true *telos*, which is the divine, for a façade. Just as in Plato’s allegory of the cave, Origen also recognizes that earthly things are inferior when held up to the light of things divine.

In this manner, however, he shares just as much if not more with Paul, one of his favorite sources when it comes to matters of the soul and body, as he does with Plato. If Origen found a useful idea or two about a conflict between the flesh and the spirit in Plato, it is in Paul that he finds a confirmation and “fleshed-out” explanation of this tension.

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## The Pauline Elements in Origen’s Theological Anthropology

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To begin to assess the impact of Paul on Origen’s doctrine of deification, one first has to answer a deceptively simple-sounding question: Does Paul uphold, in the final analysis, a

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<sup>23</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, III.IV.1 (Butterworth, 231). See also *On First Principles* IV.I.1 (Butterworth, 256) where Origen states that, “Now in our investigation of these important matters we do not rest satisfied with the common opinions and the evidence of things that are seen, but we use in addition, for the manifest proof of our statements, testimonies drawn from the scriptures which we believe to be divine, both from what is called the Old Testament and also from the New, endeavouring to confirm our faith by reason.”

doctrine of deification? This question is specifically addressed by Stephen Finlan in his essay entitled “Can We Speak of *Theosis* in Paul,” and his answer, he maintains, is dependent on what is meant by the term *theosis*. The author is agreed with Finlan on this point, although Finlan limits himself to a central point of his essay that it is Paul’s theology of the spiritual body that allows us to confirm a form of *theosis* in Paul.<sup>24</sup> Although it will be argued further below that divinization in Paul can be discerned beyond his descriptions of the spiritual body, this theme is nevertheless an excellent place to start with, for the following reasons: firstly, deification necessarily entails transformation of the deified subject, the components of which (body, soul, or mind, if we are to speak of the theological anthropological components typically identified with the human person) are agents through which these transformations occur and manifest themselves. Secondly, the state of the spiritual body is an idyllic and celestial state of existence and thus, when discussing the possibility of deification of the human person, the spiritual body yields the most promise in being identifiable as a deified state, as such. This makes identifying essential elements of Christian deification, such as immortality, a matter of whether such elements are identifiable in the spiritual body and to what degree, in the sense that they reflect the corresponding Divine attribute. Thirdly, the spiritual body is a prominent theme in Paul, and has implications for his theological anthropology in general. Understanding Paul’s overall theological anthropology will be of use in evaluating Origen’s similarities with Paul.

To begin with, let us listen to Paul’s own words on the subject:

But someone may say, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come back?’  
You fool! What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be but a bare kernel of wheat, perhaps, or of some other kind; but God gives it a body as he chooses, and to each of the seeds its own body. Not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind

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<sup>24</sup> Finlan, “Can We Speak of Theosis in Paul,” 68.



for human beings, another kind of flesh for animals, another kind of flesh for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the brightness of the heavenly is one kind and that of the earthly another. The brightness of the sun is one kind, the brightness of the moon another, and the brightness of the stars another.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.<sup>25</sup>

From the above passage, it is clear that the heavenly and earthly bodies are of different kinds of brightness; the heavenly being incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual, while the earthly is corruptible, dishonorable, weak and natural. The qualities of the spiritual body mimic the divine attributes, and thus allow the redeemed human being to take part in the Resurrection event (1 Cor 15:50-58). Finlan points out that God is doing a “new thing” here; rather than resurrecting a physical body or transmitting the person into a disembodied ghost state, God is elevating the human person to an “*embodied* form that is not *physical*.”<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, I would agree that what Paul is trying to depict is not a transition from gross physicality to mere ethereality but a more complex process whereby the physical body is hierarchically transmuted into an elevated spiritual body, which is still a body as such. Origen would seem to agree with this assessment. Although Origen’s confirmation of the bodily resurrection<sup>27</sup> had a more orthodox grounding (particularly in respect to later doctrinal developments) than did his theory of pre-existence, it still came under attack from other Church

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor 15:35-44.

<sup>26</sup> Finlan, “Can We Speak of Theosis in Paul,” 71.

<sup>27</sup> This point is somewhat arguable, although I will attempt to show here why a reading of a confirmation of the Christian concept of bodily resurrection is indeed the case.

Fathers — in this case, most notably, Methodius and Epiphanius, who spurned Origen for what they perceived as a rejection of the bodily resurrection in his thinking.<sup>28</sup>

For Origen, however, much of his concern in relation to this matter dealt with an attempt to harmonize Paul's "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44) with a physical body in constant flux. The result was the insertion of philosophical nuances which Origen felt allowed for the maintaining of the Scriptural basis of the bodily resurrection. This "fleshed-out" theology of the body was therefore designed to answer the question of how a physical body, a composition of substances in constant flux, could keep an identity synonymous with a resurrected body, while still trying to show how the two are dissimilar.<sup>29</sup>

To solve this conundrum, Origen employs the idea of the *logos spermatikos*, a Stoic philosophical principle that, as Brandon Morgan states, "governs the growth of living organisms and determines the development of bodies."<sup>30</sup> This spiritual principle, or "life principle" maintains the identity from physical to spiritual bodily forms. As Morgan points out, Origen uses the following analogy to describe this phenomenon:

...although the bodies die and are corrupted and scattered, nevertheless by the word of God that same life principle which has all along been preserved in the essence of the body raises them up from the earth and restores and refashions them, just as the power which exists in a grain of wheat refashions and restores the grain, after its corruption and death, into a body with a stalk and ear...the life-principle before mentioned, by which the body is refashioned, at the command of God

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<sup>28</sup> Brandon Morgan, "'We Will All Be Changed': Materiality, Resurrection and Reaping Spiritual Bodies in Origen's *Peri Archon*," *American Theological Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2014), 13. Morgan notes in the same that "Many scholars agree that the most sophisticated statement Origen wrote on resurrection and bodies is in a brief excerpt of a commentary of Psalm 1, quoted in Methodius of Olympus' *On the Resurrection* and preserved in Greek in Epiphanius' *Panarion* 64," and that in Epiphanius' text, "the comments are meant to serve as examples of Origen's heterodox view of resurrected bodies...".

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

refashions out of the earthly and natural body a spiritual body, which can dwell in the heavens (*PA* II.10.3).<sup>31</sup>

As Morgan points out, this governing principle over the body functions in conjunction with bodily change such that the body is a means through which the purification of the soul can occur — the following resurrection is the merit of these actions.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, although Origen received criticism for not placing enough importance on the physical aspect of the bodily resurrection, it is nevertheless the case that Origen saw the necessity of maintaining the indissoluble relationship between body and spirit:

...there is not one body which we now use in lowliness and corruption and weakness and a different one which we are to use hereafter in incorruption and power and glory, but that this same body, having cast off the weaknesses of its present existence, will be transformed into a thing of glory and made spiritual...(*PA* III.6.6.).<sup>33</sup>

Thus it appears that Origen not only acknowledged the reality of the spiritual body but was determined to show, through philosophically supportive principles, how such a body simultaneously demonstrated the permanency of the human person and its capacity for *mimesis* of the divine. Yet in doing so, Origen is simply attempting to maintain the balance, on one hand, of a real deifying change taking place in the Christian believer while also not denying the

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<sup>31</sup> As quoted in Morgan, *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in Morgan, *Ibid.*, 18. There is debate, however, as to whether Origen fully agreed with the perpetuity of bodily existence; Morgan points out that Joseph Trigg argues that “If the end really is like the beginning...that material, bodily existence will cease when God is all in all – must be his preference.” As shown above in Morgan and others arguments for Origen’s confirmation of embodiment in all stages of spiritual life, however, Origen does require a specific bodily role in the hereafter, and given Origen’s emphasis on the spiritual body, as well as his maintaining of a mirroring of the beginning that occurs in the consummation of all things, then Origen must conform to the scriptural reference of bodily resurrection in his pre-existence theory; rational beings exist in some form of embodiment. Morgan chalks this up to a willingness on Origen’s part to “sideline a systematic commitment to the axiom (of pre-existence) in light of biblical revelation.” See Morgan, *Ibid.*, 18-19 for his statements quoted in this note and the related discussion.

essential role the body plays in the identity of the believer. In other words, he was attempting to stay true to paradoxical combination of polarity and unity that is found in Paul's description of the spiritual body, in which Paul repeatedly uses contrasting imagery to denote the disparity between the physical and spiritual bodies, without denying their interrelatedness.

This language of distinction shows up elsewhere in Paul — and neither is it lacking in Origen. The premise of deification depends strongly on a fundamental change taking place in the human person which is due to a primarily spiritual influence but which at the same time has an effect on the physical dimension. This is most prominent in the transition from a physical to spiritual body but changes in the earthly life of the believer are also evident:

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Finlan notes that this transition presently takes place for the Christian and is one of multiple examples in the Pauline literature of *anastiform* living: "living as though already in the kingdom of God and receiving eternal light and truth."<sup>35</sup> He goes on to sum up his essay with the following takeaway:

It proves to be impossible, therefore, to discuss *theosis* in Paul without considering, however briefly, the sacrificial interchange accomplished by the death of Christ, and without spelling out the believer's necessary participation in the Savior's cruciform life so that one may also share in his *anastiform* living. Since the *anastiform* benefits begin already in this lifetime, an exclusive focus on sin and deliverance would suppress a crucial aspect of Paul's teaching: gaining an ability to discern the will of God, and being transformed into Christlikeness, which can truly be called

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<sup>34</sup> 2 Cor 3:18; see Finlan's discussion of this verse and its relation to *theosis* in Finlan, "Can We Speak of Theosis in Paul," 75-77.

<sup>35</sup> Finlan, "Can We Speak of Theosis in Paul," *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 76-77.

*theosis*. Thus, *theosis* in Paul always involves both cruciform and *anastiform* living, but points to a thoroughly *anastiform* destiny, when the believer will “be with Christ” (Phil 1:23).<sup>36</sup>

Origen takes up the theme of *anastiform* living throughout his writings, often as a way of showing the progress that the spiritual believer can make as they develop into an image of the Word. A notable example of this is Origen’s concept of “spiritual senses”. For Origen, as the believer comes to be deified, partaking more deeply of the life of God, it follows that there is an increase in one’s spiritual awareness. The opposite is also true, in that as one becomes more spiritually aware, they are able to further partake of *anastiform* living.

The following passage from Origen’s *Commentary on The Song of Songs*, is an interesting depiction of this phenomenon. In it, Origen digresses on the topic of spiritual senses, based on the verses 1:3-4 of The Song of Songs.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Paul is primarily referenced, and Solomon, who Origen understood as the inspired author of The Song of Songs, secondarily, to authenticate this concept. We will quote Origen in length in order to better convey the full meaning of this unique passage:

Wherefore we also, from the position where we find ourselves, earnestly beg the hearers of these things to mortify their carnal senses. They must not take anything of what has been said with reference to bodily functions, but rather employ them for grasping those divine senses of the inner man; as Solomon himself teaches us saying: *Thou shalt find the divine meaning*, and as Paul also writes to the Hebrews, as we remarked before, about the perfect who have their senses trained to discern good and evil. He points out that there are other senses in man besides these five bodily senses; these other senses are acquired by training, and are said to be trained when they examine

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>37</sup> “Thy name is as ointment emptied out. Therefore have the maidens loved Thee, have they drawn Thee. We will run after Thee into the fragrance of Thine ointments.” As quoted in Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4. The translation used is that by R.P. Lawson, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, trans., R.P. Lawson, (Mahwah, New Jersey: The Newman Press, 1956), 74.

the meaning of things with more acute perception. For what the Apostle says about the perfect having their senses trained to discern good and evil must not be taken carelessly and in any sense one likes.

To make its meaning clearer, therefore, let us if you like take an example from these bodily senses, and thus we shall come at length to those divine senses which Scripture calls those of the inner man. If, then, the bodily eye has the faculty of sight and there is no obstacle in the way, it will perceive the colours and sizes and qualities of bodies in their entirety and without any deception; for if the power of sight be hindered either by dimness or by any other weakness, so that it thinks a white thing to be red or a black one green, or that a crooked twisting thing is straight, the mental judgement undoubtedly will be disturbed, and one thing will be done in place of another. And in the same way, if the interior vision, instead of being trained by learning and diligence so as to acquire the power of discerning good and evil through much experience, gets its eyes misted as it were by ignorance and inexperience, or bleary as from the feebleness induced by some disease, it cannot manage to discern good from evil by any means at all. And so it happens that it does bad things instead of good, and rejects the good in favour of the bad. And if you apply this analogy, of which we have treated in regard to the sight of body and soul, to hearing, and taste and smell and touch also, and work out the parallel between all the several powers of the bodily senses according to their kind and the corresponding powers of the soul, you will then clearly perceive what training should be undertaken in each case, and what correction ought to be set going.

We have digressed somewhat over this, because we wished to show that the sense of smell, by which the Bride and the maidens perceived the fragrance of the Bridegroom's ointments, denotes not a bodily faculty, but that divine sense of scent which is called the sense of the interior man. This power of perception, therefore, having once picked up the scent of Christ, in so far as it is sound and healthy leads on thenceforward from life unto life. But if, on picking up the scent of Christ, it be not healthy, it casts a man down from death unto death, according to him who said:

For we are the good odour of Christ, to some from life to life, but to others the odour of death unto death.<sup>38</sup>

It may seem that Origen is stretching the originally intended meaning of The Song of Song verses on which he elaborates, as well as the way in which he incorporates other scriptural verses to support his exegesis. That Origen is taking some liberties is not argued against here. Yet there are a few things that might suggest why Origen explained these verses this way and which actually supports his “spiritual senses” concept as in keeping with a scriptural and specifically Pauline approach. The first is that in his commentary above, Origen references Hebrews, which he understands as a Pauline text, in order to explain how only those who are “perfect” through training are able to truly discern the good from the bad. Origen tends to place the concept of moral perfection within a spectrum of “maturity” elsewhere in his writings, such as in his treatise *On Prayer*, where he relates this theme to similar passages in which a relationship is forged between a specific stage of spiritual maturity and the type of spiritual sustenance corresponding to that stage. Thus, there is “milk” for the “babes,” “solid food” for the “perfect,” “food for an athlete” for the “more perfect” and even “vegetables” for the “weak man.”<sup>39</sup>

The concept of spiritual maturity, present in both Pauline scripture<sup>40</sup> and Origen’s writings, implies that some kind of change can take place in the believer that puts them further along the Christian path (setting their stage of maturity) and thus establishes them as better able to take in the truths and teachings of God (the type of food they can “consume”). It would be

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<sup>38</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 79-81).

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* XXVII.3-5. The translation used is that by Rowan A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, trans., Rowan A. Greer, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979), 138-139.

<sup>40</sup>E.g., 1 Cor 3:1-3 is referenced in Greer’s translation in Origen, *On Prayer* XXVII.5 (Greer, 139). See also Phil 3:12-15.

necessary that this maturity be associated with the inner man or, for Origen, the “spiritual man,” since it is the inner man that is to be associated with that which is spiritual. This brings us to our second point.

The key Pauline phrase “inner man” is used not only once in the above passage but three times (albeit once it is translated here as “interior man”). Here, Origen is identifying the inner man with the spiritual man. For Origen, it is obvious that just as the physical body has physical senses, so the inner man or spiritual aspect of man must have spiritual senses. Combining this with the concept of spiritual maturity and discernment, and looking to develop a type from the Old Testament Song of Songs that fulfills the new, Origen assumes “spiritual senses” as agents of *anastiform* living and thus of the deifying process:

But to those who follow the leading of their subtle spiritual sense and perceive that there is greater truth in the things that are not seen, than there is in those that are seen, and that the things, invisible and spiritual are closer to God than are the bodily and visible, this kind of interpretation will doubtless commend itself as that which they should follow and embrace; for they recognize that this is the way of understanding truth that leads to God.<sup>41</sup>

A takeaway from Origen using Pauline elements to showcase his spiritual senses concept is that Origen recognizes, to use Finlan’s terminology, an *anastiform* motif in Paul. Origen is showing the effects that take place in the life of the believer as a result of grace and as a pre-figurement of the life to come, and has no issue with bringing in the words of “the Apostle” to substantiate his claims, in that he sees Paul doing the same.

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<sup>41</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 81).



The “odour” verse is referenced earlier in the commentary by Origen, however, where he relates it to a few lines in The Song of Songs which deal with the “ointment” of the bridegroom. This passage of Origen’s commentary introduces the maturity theme discussed above, all the while describing the position and development of either the soul or, at one point in the passage, the Church, in its relationship with God. At its conclusion, the passage confronts the reader with the possibility of divine assimilation within a human-divine spousal relationship. This passage is also important here in that it builds upon our above-mentioned points, particularly in relation to Paul’s “inner man” and the anastiform life. Here, however, Origen goes further in identifying the *telos* of the deifying process:

‘Thy name is as ointment emptied out. Therefore have the maidens loved thee, have they drawn thee. We will run after thee into the fragrance of thine ointments.’ The literal interpretation, which we followed in treating the foregoing passages, holds good also for that which is before us now, until some change occurs between the characters; the dramatic sequence, which we accepted in this interpretation, in fact requires this. We may well see in these words a certain prophecy, uttered by the Bride herself concerning Christ, to the effect that at Our Lord and Saviour’s coming it should come to pass that His name should be so spread abroad throughout the globe and over the whole world, as to make it an odour of sweetness in every place; as the Apostle also says: *We are the good odour of Christ in every place; to the one indeed the odour of death unto death, but to the others the odour of life unto life.*<sup>42</sup>

With the introduction of this verse, Origen notes the introduction of “the maidens,” the allegorizing of which he will take up throughout the next six paragraphs. As mentioned above, Origen is also looking to develop a type from the Old Testament which is to be shown to be fulfilled in the New; here he does so by identifying what is spoken about the key theme of “odor”

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., (Lawson, 74-75). See also 2 Cor 2:14-16, as noted in the same.

in The Song of Songs passage as a prophecy which is echoed and authenticated in a Pauline verse that bears a similar metaphor. The “fragrance of thine ointments,” in The Song of Songs passage and the “good odour of Christ,” in the Pauline verse describe the ubiquity of the name of Christ throughout the whole earth. We can perhaps assume that Origen is here referring to, even in his own day, both the tremendous success of Christianity as a burgeoning religion and the expectation of its continued growth, specifically by means of Christian believers who were called by Christ to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”<sup>43</sup>

For, had it been the odour of life unto life for all men, we should surely have read in this place too: ‘They have all loved Thee and have drawn Thee.’ But now it says that when ‘Thy name’ has been emptied out as ointment, ‘have they loved Thee,’ not those little old souls clothed in the old man, nor yet the spotted and wrinkled, but that ‘the maidens’ have done so—that is to say, the young souls growing up in years and in beauty, who are always being made new and renewed from day to day, as they put on the new man, who is created according to God.<sup>44</sup>

Origen continues his commentary by explaining the meaning of the maidens – they are the “young souls”, identified with the “new man,” as opposed to the “old souls” who are identified with the “old man.” As with before, the Pauline terminology is on full display here – the young souls are the believing Christians who are growing in their faith, as evidenced by the statement that they are “renewed,” “putting on the new man,” and are “created according to God.”<sup>45</sup> This is another description of *anastiform* living. Origen references the Pauline verses in

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew 20:19-20.

<sup>44</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 75).

<sup>45</sup> “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” 2 Cor 4:16; “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is

Ephesians of the new man being a creation made according to the likeness of God in order to describe how the growing Christian makes real spiritual progress in realizing his or her potential as an image of God. In fact, in a homily on Genesis, when discussing man as being made according to the image of God, Origen also references 2 Corinthians 4:16 as evidence for the role of spiritual progress in allowing one to fulfill this potential.<sup>46</sup>

After this, Origen changes gears in order to explain the role of the Word in this process. Specifically, how the Word made himself flesh and “emptied himself out” so that the young, maiden souls would be able not only to love God, but also *draw him to themselves*, to the point that the Word would become ingrafted onto their minds, such that they are not only able to penetrate the meanings of the divine mystery of the Word’s coming in the flesh but also to grasp the love whereby “the Immortal” would die for the salvation of all men on the cross. Presumably, to draw the Word to one’s self would require some action on the part of the believer. Origen doesn’t elaborate on this point, but does maintain that “every soul draws and receives to itself the Word of God according to the measure of its capacity and faith,” thereby precluding a God who takes total responsibility for the spiritual development of the Christian; it’s at least somewhat on the individual to grow in their faith, at least inasmuch as they are able to.

Even attempts at the fulfillment of this responsibility are bolstered by God’s grace, however, in that God makes himself attractive to the young soul, thus allowing it to be filled with a certain vigor for Him. Allegorizing the fragrances of the bridegroom as the divine mysteries of

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being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Eph 4:20-23. Both verses, as well as the suggested connection to Genesis (Gen 1:26 is specifically referenced) are referred to in a note by Lawson within the corresponding paragraph in Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 75). Additionally, 2 Cor 4:16 is referred to in a note by Heine in the corresponding passage in Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 66).

<sup>46</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 66).

the Word, experienced by the maiden souls, Origen references Paul's running of the race metaphor to support the idea that the maiden souls, having caught the "fragrance" of God, build momentum and now begin to run towards Him. Finishing his line of thought, Origen links back to the phrase "Thy name is as ointment emptied out," in order to speculate on the difference in effect between the name of the Word and the Word's very self. The result is that Origen can conclude that if the name has such an effect, as explained above, how much more will the Word's very self effect certain changes in the believer?<sup>47</sup>

But let me ask you this: if His Name only, that became as ointment emptied out, had such effect and stirred the maidens so, that first they drew Him to themselves and then, when they had got Him with them, perceived the fragrance of His ointments and ran after Him forthwith; if all these things, I say, were brought about by virtue of His Name alone, what do you think His very Self will do? What strength, what vigour will these maidens get from it, if ever they are able by some means to attain to His actual, incomprehensible, unutterable Self? I think myself that if they ever did attain to this, they would no longer walk or run, but, bound as it were by the bands of His love, they would cleave to Him, and would have no further power ever to move again. For they would be one spirit with Him, and that which is written: *As Thou, Father, in me and I in Thee are one, so may these also be one in Us*, would be fulfilled in them.<sup>48</sup>

In analyzing this passage, and in the context of the preceding points laid out above, it is evident that the relationship between the Christian and God is a mortal-divine give and take, whereby the Word ultimately empowers the believer in their choice to pursue Him. Origen thus sustains the implicit free will of the human person, while maintaining the central function of God's grace, manifested most fully in the incarnation of the Word, in the life of the believer.

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<sup>47</sup> Origen. *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 74-77).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, (Lawson 77).

By interpreting the Johannean verse, “As Thou, Father, in me and I in Thee are one, so may these also be one in Us,”<sup>49</sup> as a prophetic depiction of the deification, via a permanent mortal-divine union, of future Christ-followers, Origen brings his readers face to face with the *telos* of the Christian life. Although not able to describe by what means this union would become possible, Origen undoubtedly confirms it here not only as a possibility, but necessarily as the relationship that God desires to have with those who follow him. It should be noted that this seems to be a choice verse for Origen in substantiating his claim for the deified and union-based form of the Christian *telos*, in that he also alludes to it in an identical sense in a discussion of the final consummation of all things in *On First Principles*.<sup>50</sup>

As before with the Pauline term “inner man” Origen connects this Johannine verse to man’s creation story in Genesis:

All therefore, who come to him and desire to become participants in the spiritual image by their progress, “are renewed daily in the inner man” according to the image of him who made them, so that they can be made similar to the body of his glory,” but each one in proportion to his own powers. The apostles transformed themselves to his likeness to such an extent that he could say of them, “I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” For he had already petitioned the Father for his disciples that the original likeness might be restored to them when he says: “Father,” grant “that just as you and I are one so also they may be one in us.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” John 17:20-21. See also Lawson’s footnote that references John 17:21 in the corresponding passage in Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 1.4 (Lawson, 77).

<sup>50</sup> I.e., “The Lord himself also in the gospel points out that these things will not only come to pass but will come to pass by his own intercession, when he deigns to make this request to the Father for his disciples: ‘Father, I will that, where I am, they also may be with me’, and, ‘as I and thou art one, so they may be one in us’. Here indeed the likeness seems, if we may say so, to make an advance and from being something similar to become, ‘one thing’; for this reason undoubtedly, that in the consummation or end God is ‘all in all’.” Origen, *On First Principles* III.VI.1 (Butterworth, 245-246).

<sup>51</sup> Origen., *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 66).

This quote serves as a good example of how Origen distinguishes between “image” and “likeness.” A further indication of Origen’s delineation between the two is again found in his *On First Principles*, in his eschatological discussion of the final consummation of all things in God. Since for Origen, the end is to be like the beginning, there is a need to explain how God’s making man, “in the image of God,” is to be eschatologically fulfilled.<sup>52</sup> “Likeness,” becomes for Origen the fulfillment of “image.” While all rational creatures possess the image of God, God allows those who strive to imitate him to come to bear his likeness. It is fitting therefore that a perfect likeness is reserved for the end times, when the likeness advances to a unitary participation in God as He is “all in all.”<sup>53</sup>

Of note to our discussion is that Origen determines “likeness” similarly to Plotinus, as we can see from Plotinus’ own words:

But when he reaches higher principles and different measures he will act according to these. For instance, he will not make self-control consist in that former observance of measure and limit, but will altogether separate himself, as far as possible, from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to good men, that we are to be made like. Likeness to good men is the likeness of two pictures of the same subject to each other; but likeness to the gods is likeness to the model, a being of a different kind to ourselves.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> I.e., “If then the end is renewed after the pattern of the origin and the issue of things made to resemble their beginning and that condition restored which rational nature once enjoyed when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so that all consciousness of evil has departed and given place to what is sincere and pure and he alone who is the one good God becomes all things to the soul and he himself is all things not in some few or in many things but in all things, when there is nowhere any death, nowhere any sting of death, nowhere any evil at all, then truly God will be all in all.” Origen, *On First Principles* III.IV.3 (Butterworth, 248).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, III.IV.1 (Butterworth, 245-246).

<sup>54</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* I.2.7. The translation used is that by A.H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus, Ennead I*, trans., A.H. Armstrong, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989), 146-147. Cf. the same passage from *Enneads* I.2.7 as found in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, ed., Lloyd P. Gerson, trans., George Boys-Stones et al, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 62; “But advancing on to the greater principles, and the other measures, he will act according to those. For example, he will not locate the act of self-control in imposing a measure, but in separating himself entirely as far as possible, absolutely not living the life of the good human being, which civic virtue values, but leaving this, and opting for another, the life of the gods. For assimilation is to the gods, not to

As with Origen, for Plotinus likeness to God is not only possible but the ideal. Also similarly, Plotinus advocates a mastery over one's lower nature in order to achieve this objective. For his part, however, Plotinus stresses a complete separation from this nature, whereas Origen is more inclined to stress an ordering of one's lower, physical nature beneath that of the spiritual. It is also interesting to note here that while Plotinus is not using the biblical term "image of God," he notes that "likeness to the gods is likeness to the model." Thus also for Plotinus, there is an archetype the nature of which is altogether different than human nature, but which humans may grow in resemblance of nevertheless.

The above section has served to highlight Origen's theological anthropology as supported through his interpretation of Paul, and how this has contributed to his concept of deification. Essentially, Origen takes the concept of Paul's "inner man" and relates it to the philosophical notion of the spirit of man. Therefore, this "inner man" is placed above the "outer" or physical aspect of man's being, that which is concerned with pleasing the body over and above the spirit and therefore subject to sin. By taking on the "inner man," one is able to re-establish one's spiritual senses and thereby commune with the Word. By being "spiritual" and practicing virtue, this communication with the Word results in progressive steps towards a greater degree of spiritual maturity. This is made possible through the grace of God but also due to God's making man in his image, and allowing him to grow in likeness of him. The end result of this process is a cleaving to God, not unlike that of a marital union, whereby God and the believer become one.

The above verses from The Song of Songs serve as an example of how Origen often refers back to Pauline scripture in order to authenticate the claims he is making. Here, we have

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good human beings. Assimilation to good human beings is making an image of an image, one from another. But the other assimilation is like making an image according to the paradigm."

shown that Origen relies on Paul for supporting themes of his theological anthropology, namely: the role of the inner and outer man, spiritual maturity (involving a progression in the spiritual life), spiritual senses, and *anastiform* living, or a living of the life of the Resurrection here and now, which signifies the glorified life to come. All of these themes relate to the *telos* of union with God, which is essentially the goal of deification.

In the next section, we will deal further with how Origen treats the role of the Logos, which was touched upon in this section. There is still the question of, for Origen, who or what the Logos was, how does the Logos relate to the Trinity, how does it relate to Jesus, and furthermore, what role does its agency play in the deification of the believer? In this way, we will build upon the above and will later be able to connect in more detail the agency of the Logos to the central components of Origen's theological anthropology. With this in mind, let us delve into possibly one of the richest areas of Origen's theology.



### III. Origen and the Role of the Logos

Above has been presented Origen's views on the human person and their capacity to reflect God's image and likeness. Here we will examine how this is possible, specifically through the agency of the Logos. As Joseph S. O'Leary points out, the Logos plays a central role in Origen's thought. Meanwhile, he describes the Logos in Hellenistic philosophy as:

...a stable cosmic principle (*arche*), [which] was the central mediating instance between the empirical world and the realm of ultimate reality, and at the same time was the unifying bond of the cosmos and of human society. In the Hebrew Scriptures the creative divine Word, or Logos, had a semiautonomous existence (Isa. 55:11; Wis 18:15) and became identified with Wisdom (Sir. 24:3)... whose mediating role in creation and salvation was assigned, in the Johannine prologue and the Christological hymns of Colossians and Ephesians, to Christ, the Logos made flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Philo saw the Logos as the actualizer of the divine Ideas as well as the instrument of God through which the world is made. The Ideas resided in this divine-reason principle as *logoi spermatikoi*, the seeds which the Logos would "plant" in order to bring about the created cosmos.<sup>2</sup> The Logos was also for Philo an *eikon* or image of God, himself the source or paradigm of the Logos, while all created things are an image of the Logos, itself being the archetype.<sup>3</sup> In these respects, one can see that Origen is similar to Philo in his understanding of the relation between God and the Logos. A crucial distinction comes in the Christian connotations that Origen received and applied to the term, themselves coming from the usage of the Logos in the Gospel of John. In a typical Origenian methodological fashion, Origen sought

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. O'Leary, "Logos" *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 142-143.

<sup>2</sup> Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 159-160.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

to detect the presence and influence of the Logos throughout the scriptures, particularly through typological constructs.

In a way similar to Philo, Origen views the Logos as Wisdom communicated to the world. This Wisdom has its subsistence in the Father, from which it is born, while the Logos has its subsistence in Wisdom. This means essentially that the Son, while receiving his being from the Father, is Wisdom in that it is the hypostasis in which the ultimate pattern of all things is contained, while the Logos is the term used to describe the same hypostasis but as communicated to the world. As an example of this, Origen points out that based on the biblical account, God made all things in wisdom through the Word.<sup>4</sup> Here we are not far from Philo's Ideas (Wisdom) as activated by the Logos who as divine Reason is itself an instrument and Image of God. A major distinction of the identity of the Logos for Origen and Philo, however, comes down to Christological ramifications. Furthermore, Origen recognizes the Logos' role as a hypostasis, and explicitly defines what he means by referring to Wisdom's hypostatic existence in *On First Principles* I.II.2:

Let no one think, however, that when we give him the name 'wisdom of God' we mean anything without hypostatic existence, that is, to take an illustration, that we understand him to be not as it were some wise living being, but a certain thing which makes men wise by revealing and imparting itself to the minds of such as are able to receive its influence and intelligence.<sup>5</sup>

Origen clarifies immediately after this statement that he is defining the only begotten Son of God as "God's wisdom hypostatically existing."<sup>6</sup> It is to be noted here that Origen is not simply couching Wisdom as a component of God's being but retaining it as a personal being; it may be

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<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 2.90 (Heine, 117).

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* I.II.2 (Butterworth, 15).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the case here that his expression that “we understand him to be not as it were some wise living being,” is not so much to de-emphasize the personhood of the Logos but rather to emphasize the Logos’ role as God’s begotten Wisdom and to point out that God’s wisdom, as the basis and source of all wisdom, is something substantially different than a supremely wise intellect. That Origen gives the terminology of the “Son” a preeminent place in his hierarchy of names, would suggest that for Origen, the personhood of the *deuteros theos*, or Second God, is of the highest value and most suitable in identifying the precise nature of the Logos.<sup>7</sup>

Origen, commenting on the first verses of John, also posits similar opinions to Philo concerning the Logos’ role in creation. This can especially be seen in the way that Origen and Philo similarly theorized the role of the Logos in regards to the creation of human beings:

When Origen expounds Scripture, and the books of Moses in the Pentateuch, he habitually takes over themes that are found in Philo. This starts with the interpretation of the creation of the world and of humankind, and the fall of the first humans into sin. Unfortunately most of the *Commentary on Genesis* is lost, but the remaining fragments suggest heavy use of Philonic themes...Just as Philo did, Origen attaches great importance to the biblical doctrine that human beings are created “according to the Logos,” which means they are not the direct *image of God*, but first, images of his Logos. For Origen, however the Logos is identified with both the preexistent Christ and the historical person of Jesus, a doctrine that Philo would not have understood.<sup>8</sup>

In reference to Scripture, Origen puts forth that all things have come to be according to the thoughts of what will be, which were prefigured by God in wisdom. In relation therefore, to

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<sup>7</sup> See O’Leary, “Logos,” 144. Speaking of Origen’s depiction of the Logos, O’Leary posits in the same that “The name of Son is the principal name of Christ, the one identifying him as a person in relation to the Father. The other names nest within this, as it were. In the chain of *epinoiai*, the title Wisdom precedes that of Logos. Their relation again suggests the Stoic concept of immanent and expressed Logos.”

<sup>8</sup> Runia, “Philo of Alexandria,” 170-171.

John 1:1, it is the Word which transmits wisdom and is received as the beginning of all things.<sup>9</sup> The Word acts as a creator, and also as the firstborn of Creation; the Word is the image of the invisible God, and the Father is his beginning.<sup>10</sup> Human beings, meanwhile, are images of Christ. So to put it in a formulaic sense, what Origen would say is as follows: Human beings are the image of Christ while Christ is the image of the Father. This formula gives a basic understanding as where to start to apply the human person's image and likeness of God in its relation to the Logos or Word. Below I will posit three examples from Origen's writings to showcase this relationship and how Origen envisions it.

For the first we will go back to the Genesis creation account, specifically Origen's homily on the first creation story where it describes man as being made according to God's image. As Origen here explains, Christ, who is the firstborn of all creation, is really the image of the Father. Man therefore, really images the Word, through whom the Father is seen, but does not image the Father in the same way that Christ images the Father. Men become partakers in the imaging of the Father, however, inasmuch as they partake of Christ, the image of the Father and the true contemplator of the Father. Origen additionally brings in the condescension of Christ to our present state by pointing out that Christ's redemptive actions towards us were due to compassion on account of seeing humans lay aside their Christ-like images for images of the evil one. Origen goes on to conclude that therefore all who go to Christ and contemplate him will surely advance in being transformed into the likeness of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In his *Treatise on Prayer*, Origen lays out a formula similar to the formulaic expression mentioned above, saying that when Christians come to imitate Christ, "the image of the Man

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<sup>9</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 1.111 (Heine, 56-57).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.104 (Heine, 55).

<sup>11</sup> Origen., *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 63-67).

from heaven, who is Himself the image of God, is in them (those who imitate Christ). The saints therefore, are an image of an image, since the son is the image.” Origen goes on to conclude that it is possible therefore, by the coming of the Word of God to our souls, to become children of God, so long as one partakes of this Word of God.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore Origen says in his commentary on John that “the saint alone is rational,” precisely because it is the saint who fully participates in the Word of God, the Word synonymous with reason.<sup>13</sup> As Origen explains in his Commentary on John 2.17 and 2.18, the Word of God is in unceasing contemplation of God the Father, who is the source of the Logos’ divinity. Therefore, participation by human beings in the Word of God is as a participation in this unceasing contemplation of the Father. Henceforth, the soul is divinized through this (participated in) contemplation. Interestingly, Origen differentiates between God the Father or Source of divinity and the Logos based on the greek article *ho*, which precedes *theos* in the Biblical text in John when describing the Father.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, this is what garners the name of *deuteros theos* for the Logos when speaking of the Logos in reference to the Father, who is correspondingly given the moniker of *autotheos*.<sup>15</sup> The Father is “*the* God” while the Logos is simply “God.” Origen concludes from this that therefore all who participate in “*the* God’s” (the Father’s) divinity are rightly called God. The first among these, however, is Christ, who is an archetype for all other “images” of God:

*The* God, therefore, is the true God. The others are gods formed according to him as images of the prototype. But again, the archetypal image of the many images is *the* Word with *the* God, who was “in the beginning.” By being “with *the* God” he always continues to be “God.” But he would

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<sup>12</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* XXII.4 (Greer, 124-125).

<sup>13</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 2.114 (Heine, 124-125).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.17-18 (Heine, 98-99).

<sup>15</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 145.

not have this if he were not with God, and he would not remain God if he did not continue in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father.<sup>16</sup>

Origen recognizes here the boldness of his statements, particularly in the declaration of other “gods,” and how this may cause offense. To remedy this he immediately qualifies his statements. It is beyond our scope here to go into a full account of how he does this but we can essentially refer back to what has been said earlier that in order to avoid putting human beings into the same classification of Christ, humans must first receive the Word in themselves, who is the source of reason, in continual contemplation of the Father, and the archetype. He is also the *autologos*, in relation to the *logos* in each rational being.<sup>17</sup> Yet it is *the* God, the Father, who is the source of divinity, from whom ultimately the possibility to become god-like, or if one will, gods, stems from — yet, again, only through the mediation of the Word.

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<sup>16</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 2.18 (Heine, 99).

<sup>17</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 142.

#### IV. Unpacking Deification's Role as Doctrine in Origen's Theological Framework

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##### Origen's Terminology of Deification

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Above has been related Origen's theological anthropology, with its Pauline basis and added Platonist inspired elements, as well as his Christology, which is Johannine in its nature, albeit again with some Platonist inspirations. These Platonist elements have much to do with how Origen assembles his cosmology, however, which in turn has effects on his overall Christology and theological anthropology. In this section, we will delve further into how Origen synthesizes all of these components to form an authentic doctrine of deification, one that differs markedly from that of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus. Furthermore, this section will identify Origen's own self-awareness of the deification doctrine based on the terminology he utilizes when discussing deifying themes or principles.

Origen, as a whole, rarely uses specific terms to describe deification, and even when he does his usage is more limited than that of his predecessor, Clement. For example, Origen does not use the terms ἀποθέωσις or θεόω. Origen, like Clement, does prefer the term θεοποιέω, although only uses it eight times in his writings in a Christian context. As discussed earlier, Origen does not shy away from using the term gods (θεοί) as a way of describing the deified Christian.<sup>1</sup>

Norman Russell has pointed out in his *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, that Origen's use of deifying terminology is not philosophical, but biblical. As an example, he states that Origen does not use deifying terms in the more philosophical *On First Principles*, but rather in works of biblical exegesis. Russell also notes that Origen's deification is less focused on dispassion, or ἀπάθεια, than is Clement's. Rather, Origen's is more intellectually based, and further stresses participation in the eternal, as opposed to the incarnate Logos, although both recognize the initial need for the Word of God to initiate the deifying process in the believer. As previously explored in this thesis, Origen's focus is on the intellectual participation in the Logos' own contemplation of the Father, with the Logos performing the role of *autologos*, or source of reason.<sup>2</sup>

Notably, when comparing the above perspectives, one can see a more Stoicised influence in Clement, with his emphasis on ἀπάθεια while Origen seems to be more representative of a Platonist view in which one scales the hierarchy of being through intellectual contemplation. This harkens back to Plato's depiction in the *Phaedrus* of the metaphorical charioteer that scales the heights to a beatific vision, achieved through intellectual contemplation. While Origen's

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.



process of deification resembles Platonism in this respect, his view of the philosophical connotations of divinity and participation does in fact have some Stoic influence, as well. In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Origen cites the Stoic Herophilus in his distinction between that which is God ontologically, and that which is god via participation in God.<sup>3</sup> Thus for Origen, deification has entirely to do with participation, a theme we will now explore in some depth below.

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### Participation in the Divine

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Origen's doctrine of deification is rife with a sense of participation (μετοχή), yet he never specifically defines the term in any of his works. However, it is not difficult to piece together a working definition of how Origen understood the term based on how he uses it in certain of his texts. Russell identifies three implications from Origen's discussion of participation which we will take up in turn and discuss below. They are as follows: (i) the non-corporeal nature of participation; (ii) the fundamental kinship between participant and participated; (iii) the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 145.

distinction between a participation which is natural or ontological and one which is supernatural and dynamic.<sup>4</sup>

Before beginning this discussion, it should also be added that, regarding participation, as Russell puts it, “Origen is the first to integrate the concept into a coherent structure of Christian thought. In other words, he is the first to give the Pauline image of participatory union in Christ a metaphysical rationale.”<sup>5</sup> This is a noteworthy observation for a few reasons and has implications for our discussion. First, it suggests that Origen is employing participation as a philosophical concept, but one that is of soteriological significance, and therefore of consequence in a life directed towards fulfilling the statutes of Christian virtue.<sup>6</sup> Following this, it implies that Origen is taking it as a given that Paul teaches a doctrine of deification, even if in a latent form, and is using the concept of participation as a way to understand this concept inherent in the Pauline texts further. Deification in Paul, as Russell points out, consists of Pauline imagery – that of, for example the “inner man” of 2 Corinthians 4:16 and the “renewing of the mind in the spirit” and “new self” of Ephesians 4:20-23. In these depictions, Paul for his part, encourages and teaches his ecclesial audiences by means of elaborating on what their new status as Christian converts entails and the spiritual benefits and responsibilities derived thereof. Origen, in turn, strives to give a metaphysical context to Paul’s supernatural imagery of the Christian life, specifically participatory union, and, as Russell maintains, is the first major Christian thinker to do so.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Origen can find authentication of his participatory theology in Paul, even if Paul does not go into detail about it or if Origen needs to use philosophical concepts to further support this doctrine.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

An example of this comes from Origen's *Commentary on the Romans*. In it, Origen elaborates on the theme of renewal in the Pauline texts, reflecting on both the verses noted above,<sup>8</sup> as well as Colossians 3:10<sup>9</sup>:

For you must not imagine that the renewing of the life, which is said to have been done once, suffices. On the contrary at all times and daily, this newness must, if it can be said, be renewed. For this is what the Apostle says, "Even if he who is our outer man is being corrupted, but he who is inner is being renewed from day to day." For just as the old is constantly aging and from day to day becoming older, so also this new one is constantly being renewed and there is never a time when his renewing is not increasing...So then let us walk in newness of life, showing ourselves daily to him who raised us with Christ as new persons and, so to speak, as increasingly more beautiful people, uniting the beauty of our face with Christ, as in a mirror and, beholding the Lord's glory, let us be transformed into the same image by which Christ, rising from the dead, has ascended from earthly lowliness to the glory of the Father's majesty.<sup>10</sup>

Here Origen is presenting the concept of renewal as a daily growing in the likeness of God. He employs language that is suggestive of action on the part of the believer, but which has the effect of enabling participation, i.e., "showing," "uniting," and "beholding," have the effect of transforming the believer into "the same image by which Christ, rising from the dead, has ascended from earthly lowliness to the glory of the Father's majesty." The expression "the same image" could possibly represent the archetypal image which Christ possesses and which we discussed earlier in this thesis. That is, this image is the direct image of the Father, and thus Origen is encouraging believers to be transformed into a Christ-like image which perfectly images the Father through virtuous efforts of uniting oneself to and making oneself like Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> I.e., Eph 4:20-23 and 2 Cor 4:16.

<sup>9</sup> "...who is being renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him." This verse is as taken from Scheck's translation and which is footnoted as Col 3:10 in the same. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 5.8.12 (Scheck, 359).

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 5.8.13 (Scheck, 359-360).

An important note in regard to the above commentary is that Origen is also explicitly stating that renewal is a daily process. There is no “once and done.” Rather, each day one must make efforts to grow more like Christ. This complements Origen’s idea of spiritual maturity, in that each day any believer could find themselves in a different place on the spiritual path, depending on their efforts. Origen therefore understands participation as a daily process with ever more possibility to grow in the likeness of God.

To return to our three main implications of deifying participation, we begin with the first point, that of “the non-corporeal nature of participation.” Here we can hearken back to the point, discussed above made in Origen’s commentary on Genesis, that man made in the “image of God” refers to the spiritual component of man, since it would be impious to relate the physical aspect of man to God, who is purely spiritual. It is understandable for Origen, therefore, that the deification process should be considered a primarily spiritual endeavor, which affects the transfiguration of man’s soul, as opposed to anything corporeally related. Indeed, Origen seems to be taking his cue from Philo, who previously had stated that “it is in respect of the mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word ‘image’ is used,” and that neither the image or likeness refers to human bodiliness.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, “participation implies some kind of kinship both among co-participants and between participant and participated. It has, as it were, both a horizontal and a vertical dimension.”<sup>12</sup> The horizontal dimension consists of some kind of shared nature between the participant and the participated in. In Origen’s exegesis, the image of God or likeness to God in

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<sup>11</sup> George H. Van Kooten, *Paul’s Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity*, (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 57. Quote taken from *De opificio mundi*, as quoted in the same.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 148.

human beings is the divine spark that allows for a sharing in that which is truly divine. Some further elements of the human soul that make this relationship possible are that it possesses an immortality and incorruptibility; it is also capable of reason and “the contemplation of the intellectual light (i.e.) the divine nature.”<sup>13</sup> From the vertical dimension, it is evident that man is participating in a supreme power, one that, in its existence, is superior to his or her own existence, and upon which their being, as well as deification, depends. Russell points out that while during the first Origenist Controversy, Origen was accused of teaching that man and God held the same nature in common, his critics missed that in order for man to share in God’s divinity, the two must also be at the same time distinct from one another.<sup>14</sup> Thus Origen does not envision deification as an absorption into divine “oneness,” and never does he describe it as such. Indeed, even in his most Platonist aspects, Origen never approaches an idea of the annihilation or total transcendence of the individual into divine unity. The closest to this that he affirms, is the indication that God is to be “all in all” in the final restoration of things, or *apokatastasis*.

The third point follows closely upon the second in that Origen shows a distinction between a dependency on God and participation in God that is supernatural or dynamic. The first of these has to do with a dependency on God for our very being; it is God to whom we owe our creation and thus we take our life from his divine power which sustains us. Our natural existence, therefore, and all that belongs to it, comes from God’s sustaining providence. Additionally, we receive spiritual faculties in a more latent or potential sense. Meanwhile, the latter point refers to our own ability to choose and God’s actions of bestowing grace on us that allows us to participate further in God’s attributes. This is that which fulfills in us the “likeness” of God and therefore is properly called deification.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 148.

It is this latter dynamic aspect that Russell claims is only found in Origen when compared to his Neoplatonist contemporary, Plotinus:

When Origen's use of participation is compared with that of his contemporary, Plotinus, it is striking that while they both share the same understanding of the ontological aspect of participation, the dynamic aspect is found only in the Christian writer. Plotinus illuminates the nature of participation with the image of the circle. The radii cannot exist without the central point. They take from it their origin and their being and therefore 'participate in the point' (*Enn.* IV.I.I. 25-30). The point itself, however, remains 'in itself' and without division. In one sense it is the end of each radius; in another it is independent of the radii without extension or place. The One is analogous to this. It is not part of any being but 'rides, so to speak, on all beings at once' (*Enn.* IV.I.I 21-2). Everything as a series of 'ones' participates in the undivided One in accordance with its capacity, so that the One can be said to be omnipresent by participation (*Enn.* III.8.9. 22-4). The goal of the philosophical life is ascent to the One that is not one by participation (*Enn.* V.5.4 1-5). That is to say, philosophy prepares the individual intellect to receive the One not as a dim reflection in accordance with the intellect's capacity but in its fullness and entirety. The One, however, is totally detached from human affairs and takes no initiative in the process.

The additional presence of a dynamic participation in Origen is to be attributed to the *personal* nature of the Christian divine hypostases. As Crouzel has suggested, 'the "gods" do not merely receive into themselves something of the reality of the Father and of the Word, the sons and the *logika*, are not merely the reflections of the Unique Son and the Logos, but they are made gods and sons and *logika* by the voluntary action of the two divine Persons' (Crouzel 1956:173)...The Holy Spirit sanctifies those who choose to participate in him by faith, enabling them as they make progress in wisdom to participate more and more in Christ. By proceeding along 'the steep path of virtue' they become through imitation of Christ 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

In other words, Origen's concept of participation differs from Plotinus' in that it is at its core relational, in the sense of being *Personally* relational, by sharing in the same relation as that which exists between and among the Persons of the Trinity. Neither is it simply a beholding of or illumination from the divine, although those parts are certainly present, but a true becoming of the divine in the sense of an actively participated in sanctification of one's human nature to the divine nature.

Thus are the points which Russell maintains by which Origen understands participation. We are agreed here on these points and in their establishment for further understanding what Origen is meaning by participation. However, the most important here, for our purposes, has to do with what has been mentioned above in the second point, namely that Origen maintains the distinction between the participant and that which is participated in. This is important in that, for Christian doctrine, it would be essential that Origen maintained such a distinction.

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### Origen and the Role of the Holy Spirit

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Up until this point, little has been said of the Holy Spirit's place in Origen's theological framework or the Holy Spirit's role in his doctrine of deification. Although Origen seems to have upheld, in certain measures, a subordinationism of the Trinity, in other ways it is evident that he attempted to counterbalance this by clearly stating the Holy Spirit's position as a hypostasis, and that the Trinity should be understood as devoid of "internal subordinate distinctions."<sup>16</sup>

Although we have focused heavily on the role of the Logos, to whom belongs the position as source of reason and eternal contemplator of the Father, for Origen, the integration of the Christian in the life of the Trinity could not be said to take place without the activating influence of the Holy Spirit. Even though for Origen, the Holy Spirit is quite dependent upon the Son, both for its existence and for its virtuous elements, it is also the hypostasis that "delivers" the "goods" of sanctification. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies persons in order that they become saints. This is why, Origen explains, Christ speaks of the possibility of forgiveness of sin against himself, but that there is no forgiveness when one blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit only helps those whom have already "been considered worthy" of him; therefore when they fall away, their sin is much greater since they have been offered privileged divine gifts and should know better, particularly due to the "counsels of the Spirit which is in them," than to reject the Holy Spirit's assistance.<sup>17</sup>

For those who do not reject the Holy Spirit's assistance, they do not only receive gifts from him<sup>18</sup> but also are able to participate in him. Origen does not elaborate on the latter point

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<sup>16</sup> Christoph Marksches, "Trinitarianism," *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 209.

<sup>17</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 2.80 (Heine, 115).

<sup>18</sup> "I think, if I may put it this way, that the Holy Spirit supplies the material of the gifts from God to those who are called saints thanks to him and because of participation in him. This material of the gifts which I mentioned is made



but he does say elsewhere in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* that the Holy Spirit itself participates in the “aspects of Christ” such as his wisdom and justice.<sup>19</sup> In this way it seems evident that the Christian believer is able to participate in the Logos through the assistance of the Holy Spirit and thus come to imitate the archetypal image of God. Without the Spirit, however, this would seemingly not be possible.

Interestingly, in Origen’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, there are echoes of the *Phaedrus*’ figurative language of the soul’s “wings” in Origen’s description of the role of the Holy Spirit’s effect on the believer:

For I think that just as those who accept the death of Christ and mortify their members upon the earth are made partakers of the likeness of His death, so also those who receive the power of the Holy Spirit and are sanctified by Him and filled with His gifts, themselves become doves, even as He Himself appeared in the form of a dove. And so, *uplifted on the Holy Spirit’s wings, they fly from earthly and corporeal places to celestial ones.*<sup>20</sup>

Here, however, it is not the soul’s own wings that uplift them, as in the *Phaedrus*, but rather those of the Holy Spirit. Origen maintains that, like those who are partakers of Christ’s death receive the likeness of it, so those who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit themselves become “doves.” Here we again see a transformation in the life of the believer, but expressed in the context of the third person of the Trinity, similarly to how one becomes like Christ by participating in the Son. There is still a strong similarity to Plato’s account, however, in the final lines where one leaves “earthly and corporeal places,” by flying to “celestial ones.”

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effective from God; it is administered by Christ; but it is subsists in accordance with the Holy Spirit.” *Ibid.*, 2.77 (Heine, 114).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.76 (Heine, 114).

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* 3.14 (Lawson, 240) (emphasis mine).

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## The Johannine and Pauline Emphasis in Origen's Doctrine of Deification

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For Origen, the economy of God revolves around two things: the archetypal Logos which is in continual contemplation of the Father and the rational element of man which allows him or her to participate in said Logos (and hence its contemplation). In essence, Origen finds these two elements in the Christological theology of John and in the participatory and anthropological accounts of Paul. We believe that it can be argued that Origen's whole theology of deification, and in fact his entire systematic theology, rest on these two areas of focus as their center. In effect, then, this section serves as a summation of everything preceding in this thesis, and our objective here is to show how Origen blended the Logos theology of John with the theological anthropology of St. Paul as a way of introducing the Christian world to an increased understanding of the participatory nature of the divine economy.

Our above conclusion can be supplemented by additional scholarly opinion, although we first have to take a side-step back to Philo in order to show how this is the case. Concerning Philo, although he did not have recourse to New Testament texts, he tends to link the “image of God” and the “Logos” synonymously. Regarding Philo’s synonymous identification of the terms, Van Kooten makes the point that:

The fact that the ‘image of God’ is the equivalent of ‘Logos’ is extremely significant, as it shows a fundamental similarity between Pauline and Johannine theology. In Philo, Paul’s language of the image of God and John’s terminology of the Logos meet. The similarity between John and Philo also extends to the Platonic concept of the true, invisible light (see *Phaedo* 109E). According to Philo, this invisible light is not equivalent to the Logos, but is ‘an image of the Logos the divine Logos.’ In John, however the two terms have become synonymous because Christ is both characterized as the Logos (e.g., John 1.1) and the true Light (John 1.9). Using Philonic writings as a sort of ‘conversion table’, it now becomes possible to see that the way in which John phrases his Christology in terms of Logos and the true light is essentially the same as the manner in which Paul talks of Christ as the image of God. It is Philo who shows that the image of God is closely related to the true, invisible light (*De opificio mundi* 31) and equivalent to ‘the Logos by whom the whole universe was framed.; (*De specialibus legibus* 1.81).<sup>21</sup>

Here we see in Philo that there is already an understanding of the Logos being the “image of God.” Later on, Van Kooten explains that, in the case of man, Philo did not consider man as an actual image of God, but rather as a sort of impress that gave man an authentic *likeness* to God. He does this by pointing out that every image falsifies the original, but that there is still a real likeness between God and man, and that this resides in the non-corporeal element of man.

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<sup>21</sup> Van Kooten, *Paul’s Anthropology in Context*, 56.

This explanation of Philo’s linking of the “image of God” with the “Logos” is indeed likewise “extremely significant” to our current discussion on Origen. Given that Origen did not shy away from drawing on Philo, and given that he likewise explicitly related the “image of God” with the Logos, we can see that what Van Kooten postulates as a “conversion table” scenario of reading Philo is actually the case for our later Alexandrian author.

A key difference, however, is that Origen goes further than Philo does in classifying man as an “image of the image” of God. Man is an image of the Logos, whereas in Philo, he is an impress; this is likely due to Origen’s understanding that Christ must take up everything that is of man if man is to be likewise deified. Therefore, there is no longer an obstacle to man being an actual “image” of God, presumably due to the mediating role played by the Logos. Pauline theological anthropology thereby can be explicitly related to the Logos theology of John, resulting in the creation of a major cornerstone of Origen’s doctrine of deification.

Besides Paul’s influence on his theological anthropology, other scholars have noted the importance of Origen’s reading of Paul in general for his doctrine of deification. Joseph W. Trigg, for example, notes the following concerning Origen’s Pauline exegesis:

For Origen, rather, Paul was the apostle of spiritual transformation – the transformation of human apprehension of God from the oldness of the letter to the newness of the Spirit and the transformation of the believers into the image of Christ. Paul was also the preeminent theoretician of spiritual interpretation of Scripture, which for us, is necessary for such transformation.<sup>22</sup>

Norman Russell additionally states that,

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 49.

Although Origen adopts Clement's vocabulary, his more ontological and dynamic participation through the Logos in God's very life is new. Clement's use of 'participation' is close to that of Plato and Philo. It expresses the way in which creatures come to possess attributes which belong properly to a higher level of being. Participation in the attributes of God is the means by which likeness to God is brought about. Origen uses participation in a more dynamic way to signify, 'living with the life of God'. God reaches out actively to human beings whose response, through participation in the life of the Trinity, makes them spirits, christos, and gods. Indeed Origen's doctrine may be said to be the re-expression in metaphysical terms of the Pauline metaphors of participatory union with Christ. This is fitted into a highly speculative spiritual anthropology, but nevertheless was to prove highly influential.<sup>23</sup>

Note here Russell's points out that, "Origen's doctrine may be said to be the re-expression in metaphysical terms of the Pauline metaphors of participatory union with Christ." These observations indicate a reading of Paul that did not fit the mold of later, western interpretations, such as those of Augustine and Luther, that focused on justification and salvation through grace.<sup>24</sup> Instead, these observations highlight that Origen locks onto concepts in Paul that themselves aren't dissimilar to Origen's Platonic-Alexandrian philosophical heritage. To return to our earlier usage of the term, one of these Pauline concepts is that of *anastiform* living, fulfilled in Christlikeness, which is mirrored by the virtuous ascent of the philosopher and his quest to "become like God so far as possible," in Platonism. Yet just as is pointed out by Russell, Origen takes this concept further inasmuch as the believer becomes a "christ," and enters into an intimate communion with God as a part of this dynamic process.

We could suggest here that rather than Origen reading Platonism into Paul, Origen's Platonic heritage impressed upon him, whether consciously or unconsciously, the need to

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<sup>23</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers*, 49.

emphasize correlative scriptural themes. For example, in contrast with the above-mentioned later, western theologies, Origen's soteriological content does not err on the side of salvation from sin as a singular concept but rather depicts said notion as a deficiency of a positively conceived re-integration of one's true supernatural nature. In effect, a major strength of Origen's position is that it rigidly maintains the metaphysical status of evil and sin as the absence of God's goodness. It does this by showing not only what one is saved from, but rather, by describing how much good there is to be gained (and therefore lost). In this manner, one is confronted with a distinct choice — does one “gain” by serving God through the pursuit of spiritual excellence and thus attain to greater and greater perfection or does one forego and thereby “lose” such things in the pursuit of lesser, earthly desires which do not satisfy the requirements of one's godly potential? This again shows Origen's insight into Pauline themes of deification which were overlooked by later theologians, while also displaying his commitment to provide a Christian alternative to Platonist notions of noetic perfection.

To demonstrate Origen's willingness to combine Pauline and Johannine themes in order to better explain his theology of deification, an example can be found one of Origen's homilies on Genesis. Previously quoted in this thesis, it is a prime example of Origen's willingness to relate Pauline themes such as renewal, participation and Paul's theological anthropology to Johannine Christology as a way to explain the process of deification.

All therefore, who come to him and desire to become participants in the spiritual image by their progress “are renewed daily in the inner man” according to the image of him who made them, so that they can be made “similar to the body of his glory,” but each one in proportion to his own powers. The apostles transformed themselves to such an extent to his likeness that he could say of them, “I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” For he had already

petitioned the Father for his disciples that the original likeness might be restored in them when he says, “Father,” grant “that just as you and I are one so also they may be one in us.”<sup>25</sup>

To summarize, the above shows how Origen’s take on Paul allowed him to merge participatory theological anthropological motifs in Paul with Johannine Logos theology, the result of which is a major cornerstone of Origen’s doctrine of deification. The believer, in potential an “image of God,” is transformed into an “image of the image,” the latter being the Logos, who is the perfect archetype for divine-man communion. This transformation requires participation in the Logos, which allows the believer to take on the *anastiform* life, a mode of living that characterizes the progressively deified spiritual subject.

For both Platonists and Christians, however, there has always been a tendency to compare the godly life with that which is its opposite. As such, we will devote our next section to Origen’s conception of evil, and how this impacts his doctrine of deification. This approach will be beneficial for a few reasons. First, an exploration of Origen’s conception of evil will help to clarify any remaining obscurities regarding why Origen upholds deification as the *telos* of the Christian life. This will occur by defining said *telos* in a negative way, by explaining what it is not and why it is necessary as a result of the way, in fact, evil operates in Origen’s cosmology. Secondly, this will be our final section in this thesis in that it will lead into a brief discussion of Origen’s eschatology and final restoration theology. These latter elements play a role in Origen’s theology of deification but are also perhaps the most controversial elements of his theology, imbued as they are with Platonic similarities. Therefore, we would be remiss if we were to ignore these elements as if they did not, in fact, have an impact on Origen’s theology of

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<sup>25</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 66). See also 2 Cor 4:16, Phil 3:21, John 20:17, and John 17-21-22, as cited in the original quote.

deification. Yet in doing so, we will uncover the tenets of Origen's theodicy that allow him to see evil, not as meaningless misfortune, characterized by destruction and chaos, but, surprisingly, as an "unwilling" agent to deification.

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### Origen's Theodicy: The Role of Evil in the Journey of the Soul

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Now according to us who boast that we belong to the Church, it is the good God who speaks these words. This is the same God the Savior honors when he says, "No one is good except the one God, the Father." "The one who is good," therefore, is the same as "the one who is." But evil or wickedness is opposite to the good, and "not being" is opposite to "being." It follows that wickedness and evil are "not being."<sup>26</sup>

This quote, taken from Origen's *Commentary on John*, can be found in a larger section in the Commentary which seeks to explain the phrase, "without him nothing was made," as found in John 1:3. The quote is useful to begin our discussion with as it sets clear the status quo from the outset: good and evil are opposites where good is "being" and evil is "not being." What more is to be said concerning the metaphysical status of evil? In Origen's opinion, quite a bit more.

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<sup>26</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 2.96 (Heine, 119). See also Mark S.M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24.



Indeed, the views as expressed in this reference are the backbone of Origen's cosmic theodicy, and branching out from this backbone is the grand narrative of a cosmic opera: an epic that spans multiple aeons, and which tells the story of how each individual soul had enjoyed an unadulterated contemplative union with their Lord before falling from grace, only to be "caught" in "garments of skins," — and all this before the dawn of realization of what a predicament they had gotten themselves into. From there, the story can go in a myriad of directions – but there is for all the same ending, to return to the beginning, yet only after facing many trials and by completing the journey, the ascent back to one's heavenly home.

Reading contemporary understandings back onto Origen's view on evil, one could conclude that, at its core, Origen's foundational position is quite an orthodox one. That good and evil are opposites is in agreement with, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, who quoting Dionysius, states that "Evil is neither a being nor a good."<sup>27</sup> Indeed Aquinas defines evil specifically as the absence of good, the latter of which is being.

Yet just as Aquinas draws upon Aristotle in relating his theological propositions on evil, so we can find a correlation between Plato and Origen in regard to Origen's position on evil. Indeed, Plato notes in the *Theaetetus* that, "God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly perfect and righteous, and there is nothing so like him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly perfect in righteousness."<sup>28</sup> Plato's conception of evil seems to have more to do with the soul's bodily entrapment within the material realm, which causes it to lose sight of the divine good that it should be in pursuit of. The soul's position in this situation is one in which the body is constantly impinging upon true philosophizing, through its "passions and

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, q. 48, a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 176C (Fowler, 128-129).

desires and fears,” and causes us to be “slaves to its service.”<sup>29</sup> While we have established that Origen views the body in a more positive light, there is still a sense both in Plato and Origen that that which is farther removed from the divine is less “real” and that this is especially true in regards to that which is considered evil.

This similarity between Origen and Plato, however, perhaps becomes more apparent in light of the Middle-Platonic inheritance that Origen received and how Plato was interpreted by the philosophers of Origen’s time. For example, concerning Plotinus, Mark S.M. Scott notes that:

Plotinus poses the question of whether evil “really exists.” It cannot be classified as a Form, he says, but rather as the absence of every sort of good,” and as such it cannot have positive metaphysical status. Plotinus, then defines evil as “privation” (στέρησις) and “the lack of the good” (ἡ ἄλλειψις τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). Since existence, emanating from the One, is fundamentally good, evil cannot “really exist,” since it does not participate in existence but rather vitiates being. Thus, it must be defined negatively as “nonexistence” (μὴ ὄντι) and “nonbeing” (μὴ ὄν): “So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence, and pertain to one of the things that are mingled with nonbeing or somehow share in non-being.”<sup>30</sup>

It is apparent here that Plotinus and Origen conceive of evil in a remarkably similar manner, no doubt due to their shared Platonic inheritance. For his part, Origen finds a scriptural basis upon which to pin the formulation of evil as non-being. Thus he puts forth the interpretation of John 1:3’s “without him nothing was made” as showing that evil is “nothing” and that therefore God did not create evil.

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<sup>29</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 66A-67E (Fowler, 228-235).

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil*, 29.

What this tells us is that, for Origen, the fallen souls in his cosmology really chose to deprive themselves of God for something inferior – that of material desires – which do not satisfy or complete the soul in the infinite way that only God can. This is why, in Origen’s theology, there is such a tension between the material and the godly, and why material desires can so easily give way to sin – precisely because material things are farther removed from spiritual things, the latter of which are more “real” in that they are closer to God who is truly real.

Origen seems to adopt a bit of Plato’s understanding of the cave motif. For Origen, however, we must always remember that the material is still not evil in and of itself, but that does not mean the material is not inferior to the spiritual in a very real sense. Yet in this way we see that, for Origen, by entering into and practicing the spiritual life, one is letting go of the material desires that give such easy access to “not being.” As one progresses spiritually, and becomes deified, therefore, one is in a sense becoming more “real” or at least establishing themselves in closer and closer communion with that which is really real.

Thus we can find in Origen’s theodicy resemblances to the Platonic hierarchy of being, in which souls can progressively attain to a higher spiritual and ethereal state. Meanwhile, Origen’s *telos* resembles Plotinus in that both anticipate a final state of beholding of God or the One, respectively. Yet Origen goes to great lengths to show how this final state is rooted in scripture, particularly in The Song of Songs through bridal imagery, in John’s Logos theology, and in Paul’s theological anthropology.

## V. Conclusion

As in Origen's thought, just as the end mirrors the beginning, so in this thesis we arrive back to where we started, albeit hopefully having gained something of value in the process. After having explored the concepts of image, likeness, and participation, in the context of Origen's theological anthropology and Christology (or perhaps better stated in Origen's case, *Logosology*) we are left to define what is, for this formative Church thinker, deification and, furthermore, how does it relate to the philosophical and scriptural sources of his time?

We have touched on these questions throughout, and in doing so have cited experts in the field whose analyses of Origen's thought have been instrumental in revealing the role and process of deification in his writings. To conclude, we shall attempt not merely a synthesis of these scholarly opinions, but will also contribute our own assessment to the mix. We shall additionally identify potential further areas of study, the research of which would bring fruit to the questions addressed in this thesis. Finally, we shall offer what we believe the understanding of Origen's theology of deification can offer contemporary Christian faithful.

If one thing can be said of Origen's thought, based on past scholarly analysis, it is that it defies easy categorization. For one thing, Origen covered so many topics and wrote so many works, not all of which are extant, that it can sometimes be difficult to get a handle on just what *really* this Church thinker had to say on any one in particular — particularly when we consider the more speculative theologizing side he was prone to display, especially in regards to metaphysical questions. Yet it is also because he committed so many of his ideas to papyrus,

and because of his inclusion of his more experimental thinking, that we have more than enough to work with to form a sufficient idea of Origen's concept of deification.

First, we can say with confidence that Origen never formulated a "doctrine of deification," in the same sense in which doctrine would be formulated later on in the Church's history. That is to say, for Origen, there is never a time where Origen exclusively presents deification as "such and such a thing," and explains why it is to be considered doctrine. So in discussing Origen's "doctrine of deification," we must remember that Origen never would have thought of things in such a manner. Here, using such a term merely helps to collect Origen's ideas on deification under one roof, and thus to help in seeing what he specifically did and didn't affirm about the process of becoming more like God, and how and to what extent this was a necessity in the life of the Christian believer.

Yet that Origen identifies deification as the *telos* of the Christian life is inescapable. If we could be so bold as to formulate a summarized doctrine of deification from Origen's writing, it could perhaps be construed as follows: For Origen, only the saint was to be considered truly rational among human beings. This was because only the saint, divinized by the Holy Spirit and free from all traces of sin, fully participated in, in so much as it is possible by a human being, the relationship of communion between God and man. In as much as man was and is to be again, *nous*, through the turning of his *psyche* back under its influence via the consideration of spiritual matters and by practicing virtue, and thus to God, he images and participates in that which is Reason itself, the Logos. The Logos in turn, is the archetype and true contemplator of *the* God, the Father, who is the source of all that is good, and from which nothing was not made. By imaging and participating in the *Logos*, the spiritual subject also attains to the likeness of God, inasmuch as he receives grace and the vivacity with which he pursues God. This likeness is the

actual deification of the spiritual participant, in that likeness consists of the divine qualities, although primarily that of reason, which God himself possesses. Thus a saint, after death, receives a spiritual body and is eventually restored to a position of uninterrupted and unadulterated communion with God as *nous*, which is another way of saying that the spiritual subject forever enjoys a pure and intimate relationship of love with Love itself, along with all other believers.

Can we “calculate” the influence of the theological and philosophical roots of the above “doctrine” in a way that assigns certain proportions to say, Paul’s theological anthropology or Plato’s hierarchy of being? One could certainly try, but despite a reliable outcome of such an endeavor almost certainly being unattainable, due to the intricacies of Origen’s work and the degrees to which he interweaves philosophical and theological concepts, we are still left with the reality that objectively putting forth how much Origen was a Christian, and how much he was a Platonist, is a debate which has not truly reached a consensus. Instead, this debate, one could argue, has been bypassed by modern scholarship to focus on the merits and weaknesses of Origen’s views, from a Christian theological perspective. Whether this is in regards to the question of evil, or how one should interpret the Letter to the Romans, for example, we will also take our cue from modern scholarship in assessing the contributions and merits of Origen’s “doctrine” for Christians today.

In what ways could Origen’s ideas surrounding deification contribute to current theological thought and thereby to Christian spirituality? What are the merits of his theological deductions regarding image, likeness and participation? A primary answer might be to say that Origen’s ideas can contribute to a renewed sense of *anastiform* living, as we discussed earlier in this thesis. There is a different sense of the economy of the second person in the Trinity, in ways

different than say, Calvin's or Anselm's accounts. The latter emphasize a satisfactory or penal substitutionary aspect of the Christ's incarnation and resurrection and their role in rendering us adopted children of God, thus allowing us to enjoy life as God's sons and daughters in spite of our lack of obedience to God. While Origen also endorses substitutionary elements in his writings in regard to the Son, he is also in ways more abstract, tending to place emphasis on the son's role as Logos. This causes him to emphasize the Logos as archetype, and thus the formulaic expression of the divine exchange, that God became man so that men may become gods.

Thus the focus shifts to a restoration of union with the Logos which brings about a renewing of the life of the believer day by day. There is an emphasis on spiritual progress in Origen's works which is accelerated through persistence, virtue, and grace. With this progress comes an increasingly deeper understanding into divine mysteries, along with "spiritual senses" which are mystical extensions of the ability of the believer to better understand, love and commune with God.

These foci turn the believer's attention and efforts towards an active, as opposed to passive, restoration of communion with God. In this respect, there is also an incentive of various levels of spiritual progress that the believer can make, each carrying with it a type of participation in God. Just as Origen describes various types of food and levels of maturity for the spiritual believer, so each believer is on a journey to God in which there is an interior ascent. It is this type of thinking which gives Origen's doctrine of deification a resemblance to mystical spiritualities such as that of St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross. They inspire the believer with the hope of continual progress with an end goal nothing short of complete sanctification. Thus Origen stresses a high ideal of sanctity to be achieved but with the

assurance that this sanctity is within the realm of reach of everyone through stepwise progress, even if one is a sinner.

The fact that Origen's theology of deification is one of progression which is suitable for incorporation into a lived spirituality is noted by Joseph Trigg, here commenting on the relationship between grace and free will in Origen's thinking, and how Origen's concept of lived spirituality influenced Christian monasticism and asceticism:

This way of relating human and divine activity in a continual process of human transformation provided the chief theoretical model for the Christian ascetic tradition. It is thus the source of Gregory of Nyssa's notion of *epektasis*, a continual straining toward God. Recent studies have shown how pervasive Origen's influence was on emerging Egyptian monasticism, including Antony of Egypt. Through John Cassian, who imbibed this Origenist approach from Evagrius Ponticus, Origen's approach to grace and free will became, even in the West, a standing alternative to Augustine's approach, which tended to present them as mutually exclusive. We see an echo of this in the controversy over free will between Erasmus and Luther, since the former depended heavily on Origen's *Peri Archon*.<sup>1</sup>

One may argue that Origen's spiritual methodology is therefore bent towards Pelagianism and thus not compatible with God's grace. Yet again we could draw parallels to mystical theologies such as the Carmelite theologies specified above. In these theologies, everything depends upon God's grace, but it is up to the believer whether one accepts such graces and uses them to "ascend" to God. Likewise, grace plays a similar role in Origen's theology, and it is only as the Logos draws closer to the believer, that the believer can draw closer to God.

In these respects, Origen's theology can provide reflections not only on the ideal of holiness and sanctification but also its accessibility to each Christian. In some measure, Origen impresses upon us the natural end of each human being — to become deified in Christ — and how that deification makes communion with God increasingly more possible. Just as in his Commentary on *The Song of Songs*, Origen identifies God's relationship with the soul as a

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<sup>1</sup>Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers*, 63-64. We note here that we are not, however, in complete agreement with the characterization of Augustine's approach as tending toward presenting grace and free will as "mutually exclusive."



meaning behind the symbolism of the intimacy shared between the Bride and the Bridegroom, so Origen's deification emphasizes the need for an actively maintained and communicative relationship with God.

In addition to the merits that reflection on Origen's doctrine of deification can provide to the Christian spirituality, there are also the merits that it can provide to ecumenical theology and comparative religion. Comparisons have been drawn, for example, between Hindu religion and Plato and Plotinus; given the Platonic influence in Origen's work, and the presence of themes such as deification and universal restoration, there is the potential for similar comparisons between Origen and Dharmic religious system. From an ecumenical perspective, Origen has been recognized by Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics as foundational to Church thinking and thus ecumenical discussions on his doctrine of deification could enlighten contemporary views on deification as it is understood from various Christian perspectives.

Finally, we may be able to garner from Origen's thinking renewed interpretations of scripture, especially those biblical texts frequently referred to in this thesis. This especially concerns our analysis of Pauline texts, and a reading of Paul that emphasizes the progressive character of the sanctifying influence of Christ on the life of the Christian. It also concerns the usage of image, likeness and participation, and rediscovered ways of understanding these themes as they appear in the Bible.

As we conclude this thesis, it is hoped that what has been conveyed above gives a better insight into both Origen's doctrine of deification and the ways in which his concept of the deified Christian life compared with the philosophical and scriptural sources available to him. In exploring this topic further, it would be helpful to additionally explore the reception of Origen's doctrine of deification by later ecclesiastics and theologians, as well as its influence on the

development of monastic and ascetic traditions. In this way, one might trace elements of Origen's theology as it continued to have an influence upon later Church thought and practice, particularly as this regards eastern and western Christianity. For now, we are content to end our present analysis with the following, that we may say with Origen: "Let us always, therefore, contemplate that image of God that we can be transformed to his likeness."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* I.13 (Heine, 66).

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