Origen Against Plato

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ASHGATE

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hants GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
131 Main Street
Burlington, VT 05401-5600 USA

Ashgate website: http://www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Edwards, M. J. (Mark J.)
Origen against Plato. – (Ashgate studies in philosophy & theology in late antiquity)
1. Origen 2. Platonists 3. Christianity – Philosophy 4. Church history – Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600
I.Title
184

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Edwards, M. J. (Mark J.)
Origen against Plato / Mark Julian Edwards.
p. cm – (Ashgate studies in philosophy & theology in late antiquity)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-7546-1331-3 – ISBN 0-7546-0828-X (pbk.)
1. Origen. 2. Platonists. I. Title. II. Series.

BR65.068 E38 2002
230'.13'092–dc21

2002016332

ISBN 0 7546 1331 3 (Hbk)
ISBN 0 7546 0828 X (Pbk)

Typeset by Manton Typesetters, Louth, Lincolnshire, UK.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall.

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Introduction

I will not deny that the title of this book is calculated to surprise. Origen, who studied in Alexandria and preached in Caesarea in the first half of the third century, has a justified, if at times exaggerated, reputation as the founder of philosophical theology. Since almost all exponents of this discipline since the third century have commenced with an apprenticeship to Plato or to one of his apostles, why should we doubt that the same was true of this Greek theologian, particularly when it seems to be confirmed by all that we know of his life and work? First there is his birth in Alexandria, and among theologians Alexandria stands for Platonism, as London stands for smog. Secondly, the Neoplatonist Porphyry, a contemporary of Origen though his junior by fifty years, affirms that he was 'always in the company' of the most eminent Platonists and Pythagoreans.[1] Thirdly, the remains of his prolific labours, copious in themselves though much diminished and defaced, abound with thoughts that seem to be foreign to the scriptures as they are read in modern seminars, and he writes in a style more redolent of the philosophic schools than of the Greek Testaments, Old or New. Much of his vocabulary, no doubt, belongs to the common stock of educated writers in this period, but where if not among Platonists (it is urged) would he have learned to pen a treatise *On First Principles*, to meditate on the souls of astral bodies, or to combine a vivid faith in the unity of all creatures under God with a belief in the pre-existence of the soul?

Such crude positions have never perhaps been held by those who have made a special study of Origen's writings. It is only the title of C.H. Bigg's fine monograph, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, which perpetuates the assumption that we 'know' that Clement and Origen were Platonists, as we know that Aquinas was an Aristotelian. The assiduous researches of such scholars as Simonetti and Crouzel have made it clearer to the modern world that Origen was before all else a Churchman, who availed himself of philosophy in the service of exegesis and the defence of ecclesiastical tradition. In the work of Joseph Trigg indeed he becomes almost a Protestant, beholden to no authority but the Bible; in such interpretations as those of Alviar and Laporte he is, on the contrary, a catholic, devoted to the sacraments and contemplative prayer. Even when the reader becomes a critic, as in Hanson's stringent monographs on Origen's use of allegory, the exposure of his errors is considered more important than the detection of their causes.[2] At the turn of the twenty-first century therefore, Origen's detractors are both fewer and wiser than in late antiquity; nevertheless an essay like the present one may still be necessary to preserve him from the libels of his friends.

The present Pope, for example, is an eminent theologian who, when he publishes an encyclical, can rely on the advice of the ablest scholars. It is hard to believe, however, that anyone who was familiar with Origen's animadversions on philosophy

in his great retort to Celsus, or had deduced from his cross-references to his own books that *Against Celsus* must be one of his latest writings, could have praised him in these terms:[3] 'In countering the attacks launched by the philosopher Celsus, Origen adopts Platonic philosophy to shape his argument and mount his reply. Assuming many elements of Platonic thought, he begins to construct an early form of Christian theology.'

John Paul II's estimate of the facts is not at variance with that of the ancient jury who convicted Origen of an excessive fondness for Greek culture or *paideia*.[4] Despite his fame in his own day as exegete, dogmatician and corrector of the faithful, Origen's reputation after his death in 254 underwent a sea-change, and the custodians of orthodoxy kept an open file against his name for the next three centuries. In the course of time, this came to accommodate contradictory impeachments. Up to 320, no voice had been raised in eastern Christendom against the subordination of the Son to the Father in the triune Godhead, and the gravest charge against Origen was that he made the second person of this Trinity connascent with the first and thus denied that he was in any sense his offspring. Some drew the corollary that, since he could not have postulated two unbegotten deities, he must have regarded the Son as a mere emanation of the Father; if this were so, it would be a proof of Origen's philosophical allegiance for those modern theologians who cannot use the term 'emanation' without prefixing the epithet 'Platonic'. But after 325, when the Nicene Council had decreed that the Father and Son were of one nature (*homoousios*, 'consubstantial'), heresiologists convicted Origen of straying to the other extreme, and teaching that the Son was so inferior that he did not know the Father and was himself a member of the created order.[5] Those who embraced this obsolescent doctrine in the fourth century were branded as Judaizers by the party that overcome them, in spite of their appeals to Christian scriptures; in modern times, when students of the New Testament find it difficult to deny the inferiority of the Son in numerous passages, historians of doctrine still imply that it would never have entered any Christian mind to doubt the equality of the persons in the Trinity had they not overheard some Platonist speaking of a 'second god'.

As blasphemy after blasphemy was laid at Origen's door, each critic found new cause for scandal in his teaching on the origin and destiny of the soul. As early as 309, it was alleged that he denied the resurrection of the flesh and the eternity of punishment; it was said that he exchanged the biblical doctrine of hell for a theory of transmigration, which pretended that the misfortunes of our present lives are the guerdon of the sins that we committed in the last. Methodius of Olympia, the arbiter of sound doctrine in this period, alleged that Origen even went so far, with the most impious of the Platonists, as to sentence the souls of humans to imprisonment in the carcasses of beasts. Origen, he added, taught not only that the soul exists before it enters the body, but that it falls from a state of blessedness, in which it is so arrogant as to grow fatigued by the contemplation of God. These strictures were repeated in 375 in the compendious *Panarion* of Epiphanius, who, though his own epitome of Methodius shows that Origen postulated the survival of a spiritual body, goes on to vilify him as though he admitted no resurrection whatsoever. Epiphanius, born in Palestine, was perhaps the first native of that territory who took no pride in the fact that Origen had decamped to Caesarea from Alexandria.[6] Jerome, a western sojourner in Palestine, fell under the spell of

Epiphanius and revived an old charge that Origen made all punishment reformative and temporary, opining on the one hand that the devil can be saved, and on the other that even saints may fall again. Both Jerome and Epiphanius were prone to interpret scripture in a fashion that we should now deride as allegorical; none the less, both held that Origen had made excessive use of this device, and that the same principle which led him to oust the body from the economy of salvation also caused him to jettison the literal sense of important texts in scripture in pursuit of a chimerical exegesis which he deemed more spiritual than God's own truth.[7]

The chief persecutor of Origen's reputation in Byzantium was the Emperor Justinian. The Second Council of Constantinople, convened in 553, was required to judge a number of controversies, in most of which the royal theologian held that Origen had been of the devil's party. In 551 eleven counts against Origen were drawn up in his despotic communication to the bishops; in 553 a coda to the proceedings of the Council pronounced anathemas on fifteen. Origen's name, however, was not attached to any of the propositions, perhaps because the judges feared that this might make them accomplices in the calumniation of the blameless dead. The Council of 553 was the first at which any person not convicted of heresy in his lifetime, was declared to have been the author of false doctrines; Origen's judges had reason to be particularly scrupulous, as not only his later advocates but the man himself had protested against the hostile adulteration of his writings. For all that, and despite the somewhat tardy and irregular recognition of the Council in the west,[8] modern sketches of Origen's Platonism have almost always relied more heavily on these articles than on any surviving product of his pen. In Perceval's translation they run as follows:[9]

1 If anyone asserts the fabulous pre-existence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration (*apokatastasis*) that follows from it, let him be anathema.
2 If anyone shall say that the creation of all reasonable things includes only intelligences, without knowledge and altogether immaterial ... but that no longer desiring the sight of God they gave themselves over to worse things, each one following his own inclinations, and that they have taken bodies more or less subtile ... let him be anathema.
3 If anyone shall say that the sun, the moon and the stars are also reasonable beings, and have only become what they are because they have turned to evil, let him be anathema.
4 If anyone shall say that the reasonable creatures in whom the divine love has grown cold have been hidden in gross bodies such as ours and have been called men, while those who have attained the lowest degree of wickedness have shared cold and obscure bodies and are become and called demons and evil spirits: let him be anathema.
5 If anyone shall say that a psychic condition has come from an angelic state, and moreover that a demoniac and a human condition has come from a psychic condition, and that from a human state they may become again angels and demons ... let him be anathema.
6 If anyone shall say that there is a twofold race of demons, of which the one includes the souls of men and the other the superior spirits who fell to this ... and that the most holy and consubstantial Trinity did not create the world, but

that it was created by the working intelligence (*Nous demiourgos*) which is more ancient than the world ... let him be anathema.

7 If anyone shall say that Christ ... had ... pity upon the divers falls which had appeared in the spirits united in the same unity (of which he himself is part), and that to restore them he passed through divers classes, had different bodies and ... finally has taken flesh and blood like ours ... let him be anathema.

8 If anyone shall [presume to say] that God the Word ... is so only in an inaccurate manner, and because of the abasement, as they call it, of the intelligence ... let him be anathema.

9 If anyone shall say that it was not the Divine Logos ... [who] descended into hell and ascended into heaven, but shall pretend that it is the *Nous* which has done this, that *Nous* of which they say (in an impious fashion) he is Christ properly so called, and that he is become so by knowledge of the Monad: let him be anathema.

10 If anyone shall say that after the resurrection the body of the Lord was ethereal, having the form of a sphere, and that such shall be the bodies of all after the resurrection ... let him be anathema.

11 If anyone shall say that the future judgment signifies the destruction of the body and that the end of the story will be an immaterial nature ... let him be anathema.

12 If anyone shall say that the heavenly Powers and all men and the devil and evil spirits are united with the Word of God in all respects ... and that the Kingdom of Christ shall have an end: let him be anathema.

13 If anyone shall say that Christ is in no wise different from other reasonable beings ... but that all will be placed at the right hand of God ... as also they were in the feigned pre-existence of all things: let him be anathema.

14 If anyone shall say that all reasonable beings will one day be united in one, when the hypostases as well as the numbers and the bodies shall have disappeared ... moreover that in this pretended *apokatastasis*, spirits only will continue to exist, as it was in the feigned pre-existence: let him be anathema.

15 If anyone shall say that the life of spirits shall be like to the life which was in the beginning while as yet the spirits had not come down or fallen, so that the end and the beginning shall be alike, and that the end shall be the true measure of the beginning: let him be anathema.

Though few of these propositions would be held in the stated form by any pagan Platonist (since none of them acknowledged Christ, few were prepared to speak of evil spirits, and none habitually employed the word 'demon' in a pejorative sense) the majority of them presuppose some tenet, or at least employ a word, that is characteristic of this school. Plato taught that man is not so much a composite of body and soul as a soul in contact with a body; the soul is not at home in the present world, and enters the body only when it is banished, as the result of its own transgression, from the supercelestial heaven; the only permanent denizens of this heaven are the Forms, or eternal paradigms, and the gods who imitate them; as the paradigm is superior to both the imitation and the imitator, so the Forms excel not only their copy in the present world but the demiurgic mind who brought that copy into being. The *Timaeus* presupposes that the perfect shape is spherical, while the

worship of the sun and moon is enjoined in the *Epinomis*.[10] 'Monad' is a favourite appellation of the first principle among Pythagoreans, while on the other hand no Platonist would have used the word 'consubstantial' (*homoousios*) to signify the unity of incorporeal natures.[11] Scholars are well aware that Origen's extant writings seldom justify the attribution of any of these tenets to him. That does not mean, however, that the charges are apocryphal, for the bulk of his work has perished through destruction or neglect, and his boldest speculations are the ones that his enemies will have been most eager to suppress and his admirers least solicitous to preserve. Statements in the letters of Justinian and Jerome, which purport to be quotations, have more innocuous parallels in Rufinus' Latin rendering of the essay *On First Principles*, a work of Origen's Alexandrian youth. The Latin survives the Greek, and by his own admission Rufinus, who translated it to counteract the invectives of Epiphanius and Jerome, has lengthened, abridged, amended or omitted certain passages which, he believes, have suffered interpolation or are couched in terms that readers of the fourth century would be apt to misconstrue. Since Justinian writes in Greek, and Jerome, where we have the opportunity for comparison, is generally the more accurate translator, their citations of Origen are inserted into the notes (or even the text) of Koetschau's edition of *First Principles*, and are translated in Butterworth's standard English version of that treatise. The conviction that Origen was indeed the father of Origenism is thereby reinforced, at least in the minds of the unwary; those who have studied the question know, however, that while the translations of Rufinus may be free they have not been proved to be mendacious,[12] and that even if Justinian and Jerome quote verbatim, they may sometimes quote selectively, without asking whether Origen is expressing his own opinions, refuting those of others or advancing a hypothesis for inquiry. Personal and political enmities also deformed the vision of many churchmen in the fourth century, as in the sixth: once an embittered combatant had found reason for branding one of his opponents an Origenist, Origen might be tarred with every heresy that malice could lay at the opponent's door.[13]

It will be clear that in this study I have believed Rufinus more, and the accusers of Origen less than is customary even among those scholars who are most conscious that the delinquencies of Origen have been exaggerated and that his works have been well-served by his translators. It will also be apparent that, although it is not my intention to disguise or attenuate the similarities between some of Origen's teachings and the utterances of earlier or contemporary Platonists, I do not think such comparisons sufficient of themselves to tell us how the Alexandrian theologian (even in the days when he *was* an Alexandrian) came to hold so many heterodox or anomalous positions. In every age intelligent thinkers have worked their way to the same conclusions, not because they have 'stolen', 'borrowed' or 'succumbed to influence', but because as human creatures they enjoyed the same climate and used the same resources, as citizens they lived under common ordinances and aspired to common goods, and as philosophers they reasoned on the same principles, and were vexed by the same shortcomings in the patrimony of knowledge. On many points it is harder for contemporaries to differ than to say the same thing, and when two intellectual systems are built upon the same terrain, we are likely to learn more about the builders from the differences in masonry than from the quarry which supplied them both with stone.

One fallacy above all must be avoided, though it is licensed by the first heresiologists: we must not assume that the history of episcopal decisions is the history of faith, or that the declarations of ecumenical councils which are now the norm of orthodoxy represent an ancient rule to which Christians of goodwill have always hearkened since the days of the apostles. The custom which, until recent years, has left the historiography of the early Church in the hands of the clergy has tended to obscure the fact that the councils of the fourth century anathematized a number of positions which can be sustained from scripture and had been espoused in earlier times by eminent theologians; we have no reason to doubt that these theologians expressed the consensus of the faithful in their own congregations. The councils, for their part, never brought forth either speculative or apologetic documents; their purpose was to secure the condemnation or approval of certain phrases, some of which were attributed to named authors whose opinions were on trial. The same invidious methods necessarily find their way into any history of early Christian thought which is conceived as a vindication of synodical decisions. When such volumes feel obliged to demonstrate the falsity of a heretic's position, they are naturally inclined to look for the origin of it in sources that are most remote from scripture and the Christian tradition. In modern as in ancient times, the source most commonly cited is philosophy; and in modern as in ancient times it has often proved more convenient to trade on the notoriety of Plato or Chrysippus than to investigate the contents of their writings.

There was a time when cursory and tendentious accounts of late antique philosophy were only to be expected of theologians, as little more was offered by the few classicists who had dabbled in this field. For three quarters of a century this has not been true: the high standards set by A.H. Armstrong and E.R. Dodds have been sustained by subsequent generations, and historians of doctrine who ignore the results or tendencies of modern classical scholarship are therefore without excuse.[14] But after the theologian has learned everything that the classicist has to tell him, it is still his task to determine whether the antecedents of a Christian doctrine are its ancestors, and whether two opinions that look alike were deduced from identical premisses or adopted as answers to the same difficulty. If ancient theologians must be judged at all, they must be judged with reference to the motives, controversies and occasions that gave rise to their pronouncements, and we must consider not only their opinions but the arguments by which they were defended. Otherwise we can hardly fail to emulate the captiousness of a man who picks up a telephone in England, hears a voice from Australia say, 'good morning,' and replies, 'I think you mean good afternoon.'

We may take it as a truism, then, that propositions owe much of their meaning to their value in conversational exchange. When we speak we are in dialogue with the living; when we write we may parley with the dead, but only very presumptuous authors think it possible to address posterity. Yet all too often, theologians write about the ancient world as though everyone, for a period of six or seven centuries, talked at once. In keeping with the reprehensible usage of New Testament scholars, everything said or written in the interval from Alexander the Great to the fall of Rome is deemed to be 'Hellenistic'; against this background, Christianity moves like a shadow on an unmarked sundial. Wherever the reading is taken, it is always afternoon, as in Tennyson's country of the lotus-eaters, and Origen has ample

opportunity to help himself not only to the thought of his young contemporary Plotinus, but even now and then to that of Proclus, who in normal time would have lived a full two centuries after him.[15] All dates are annulled if we adhere to the simple axioms that everything pagan comes before everything Christian, and that no one creates but everybody steals.

The ancient world as classicists perceive it is not the still-life portrayed by theologians. The adjective 'Hellenistic' in their vocabulary is limited to the interval between 323 BC, the year of Alexander's death, and 31 BC, when victory at Actium left Rome the absolute mistress of the east. This was the age, as all theologians know, in which the culture of Greece invaded almost all the countries mentioned in the Bible; it was also – and some theologians forget this – the age in which barbarians frequented, led and even founded schools of Greek philosophy, while Plato's countrymen began to worship foreign gods at native shrines. It was in short, as C.H. Dodd has demonstrated, an age in which it was possible for the Bible to become not merely a Greek book but the tutor of the nations. Whether or not the Jews themselves set out to make new converts, we have ample proof that Jewish customs spread throughout the world.[16]

The compilation of parallel vocabularies – neatly characterized by Eric Osborn as the method of 'philological stamp-collecting'[17] – may allow us to trace a line between two authors, but does not tell us whether the younger was a pupil or a critic of the elder: is there more of Plotinus in Porphyry, for example than there is of Locke in Berkeley? Let us remember also that between appropriation and polemic there is dialogue, and that one of the fruits of dialogue, when carried on without rancour or duplicity, is that each of the interlocutors arrives at a better understanding of his own position. Indeed it sometimes happens that, although we think that we know our own opinion, we can offer only a tentative, approximate or Pickwickian account of it until we hear it paraphrased in the words of someone else. If we then adopt the same form of words, it is not because we have embraced a new position, but because we feel, as Newman wrote, that the other knows our meaning even better than we ourselves did.[18] We can hardly doubt that on occasions this would have been Origen's experience when he read the Greek philosophers, but it would obviously be an error of judgement to consider such flirtations as a proof of his betrothal to any philosophic sect. Even in the rare cases where philology has established the dependence of one author on another, that does not, as many scholars seem to think, complete the task of explanation. We must still ask why the borrower made this choice from his predecessors, and why he incurred the debt on this occasion when he contrived to be original or consented to be commonplace on others.

Too often we are given to understand that it was local accident, rather than reasoned choice, that determined Origen's philosophy: how, it is said, could anyone who was nurtured in the Plato-ridden atmosphere of Alexandria fail to become a Platonist himself? Once again we are in the country of the lotus-eaters, who appear to have acquired a new and dubious science, the epidemiology of knowledge. Such reasoning is fortified, but not justified, by the substitution of glib abstractions for names of individual philosophers. 'Middle Platonist', for example, is a useful catalogue heading for those authors who interpreted Plato's dialogues in the years between his death and the publication of Plotinus' seminars in the late third century.

We ought not to speak at any time, however, of 'Middle Platonism' as though it were a school. Two of the chief Middle Platonists, Speusippus and Xenocrates, were reputedly the heirs of Plato in his own academy; others, like Thrasyllus and Numenius, appointed themselves custodians of the same tradition, or even of an older one that originated with Pythagoras. On the other hand, it is difficult to be certain of the allegiance of such pedagogic writers as Apuleius and Alcinous, whose manuals of Platonic doctrine might be designed to facilitate a disinterested perusal of the dialogues, rather than to edify disciples or persuade the unconverted. Inevitably the most voluminous writers will be the ones most often cited, but suspicion must arise when the only witness to some allegedly generic trait is Philo the Jewish exegete, for whom the Torah was the womb of knowledge, or Plutarch the ambling polymath, who is justly more celebrated for his *Lives*.[19] It is useless and tendentious to label any thought of Origen's a 'Middle Platonic doctrine', unless we have also ascertained the provenance of the doctrine and decided whether it ought to be regarded as an index or as a mere concomitant of Platonic sympathies in the place where it first occurs. We should also take some pains to determine whether Origen needed any pagan antecedent to acquaint him with the doctrine, or might rather have derived it from the Scriptures, from a previous ecclesiastical writer, or simply from intelligent reflection on experience, common premisses and the necessary attributes of God.

It is a fancy of doxographers, the chroniclers of intellectual gossip in antiquity, that to be a true philosopher one must come of a certain bloodline.[20] It is not the position taken by the philosophers themselves, or in the tributes of their pupils, who are generally at pains to stress the number and variety of their mentors. In our own universities adhesion to a single master is not regarded as a sign of philosophical aptitude, but rather of sterility. A philosophic opinion is one that is supported by a philosophic argument; it does not acquire this status by coinciding, or by failing to coincide, with the opinions of a known philosopher. The question whether Origen was a philosopher is therefore independent of the question whether Origen was a Platonist, and may be susceptible of a different answer. Somewhere between the negative and the affirmative reply to the former question is Origen's depiction of himself as an exegete who was prepared to use any instrument that his education had put into his hands:[21]

> For this reason I would urge you also to appropriate from Greek philosophy such encyclical disciplines and preliminary studies as can be turned to a Christian purpose, and also those elements of astronomy and geometry that will be profitable for the exposition of the sacred writings ... Perhaps it is something of this kind that is hinted at obscurely when it is written in Exodus, in the person of God, that the children of Israel were told to beg vessels of silver and gold, together with garments, from their neighbours and fellow-sojourners, so that, having spoiled the Egyptians, they might have matter for the construction of the things that they were taking with them for the worship of God.

Origen can no more be discussed without a knowledge of philosophy than without a knowledge of Greek. Neither of these disciplines, however, can supply us with more than regulative principles, the conditions of thinking rather than the constituents of thought. A book such as the present one must certainly offer some account of the Alexandrian milieu into which Origen was born, but it should not try to proceed in

a single step from 'Alexandria' to 'philosophy', let alone to 'Platonism'. No one denies that Origen wrote of God, the human person and the world in terms that might have seemed profane to the apostles; but too many have forgotten that the use of a common language is as much the precondition of controversy as of intellectual friendship. Origen must be measured by, not merely assimilated to, the standards of his time: his hermeneutic methods, for example, should be estimated not in the light of modern Biblical scholarship but by reference to the needs of orthodoxy as he and the other Christians of his own epoch conceived them. If, after all comparisons with scripture and with previous commentators, he still seems profligate in his use of allegory, it is surely best to look for an explanation in his writings, and to avoid the hypothecation of 'long traditions' in the absence, and at times in the teeth of, demonstrable facts.

Notes

1 See Chapter 2 on this information, quoted in Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.19.
2 See bibliography for authors and titles.
3 John Paul II (1998), 58. I admit that the Pontiff also ascribes a 'critical' adoption of philosophy to Origen and the other Christian fathers, but I wonder what he considers Origen's *Commentary on John* to be if not 'an early form of Christian theology'.
4 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.72.9, p. 523.15 Holl.
5 I need not rehearse the particulars of a story already told by many authors, including Huet (1846), vol. 24 and Dechow (1977). Origen is not so much at odds with the declarations of the council as with the Athanasian interpretation of it that prevailed in the late fourth century: on the history of controversy after Nicaea see Hanson (1988) and Barnes (1997).
6 On the defence of Origen by his pupils Pamphilus and Eusebius of Caesarea see Barnes (1981), 81–105.
7 I make detailed reference to these authorities in the course of the book. The main primary sources are: Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* (completed by Eusebius, translated into Latin by Rufinus); Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* and *Panarion* 64; Methodius, *On the Resurrection*, included in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64; Rufinus, *On the Adulteration of the Works of Origen*; Jerome's three books *Against Rufinus*, with Letters 51 (translation of Epiphanius), 84 (to Pammachius), 87–96 (preserving the correspondence of eastern bishops and synods) 119 and 124 (to Avitus, a comprehensive inventory or errors).
8 See Perceval (1899), 121–3 on the hesitations of Pope Vigilius; Huet (1846), 24, 88–95 on the application of the charges to Origen, or perhaps uniquely to the infamous treatise *On First Principles*.
9 Perceval (1899), 318–19, with the letter of Justinian on p. 20. I have abridged the longer articles, and occasionally exchanged a Greek expression for an English one, or vice versa.
10 *First Alcibiades* passim; *Phaedrus* 245–52; *Timaeus* 28 ff.; *Timaeus* 33c; *Epinomis*, with *Laws* 887e.
11 See Dillon (1977), 351 on Moderatus of Gades. The word *homoousios* was never common outside the Church, and was reserved for corporeal entities by all philosphical schools, and Socrates, *Church History* 3.38 reports that this was one of the reasons for the reluctance of many otherwise orthodox Christians to adopt it in Trinitarian formulae.
12 See now Pace (1993), who is more severe than Chadwick (1959) or Crouzel (*Princ.* vol. 4) on the liberties of Rufinus, but still finds few important adulterations of the text.

13 See especially Clark on the motives of Epiphanius, Theophilus of Alexandria (translated in Jerome, Letter 96) and Jerome himself. Elm (1997) reminds us, on the other hand, that Origenists were condemned on other grounds in the course of the dispute between Theophilus and John Chrysostom. Vessey (1993) contends that, in his animadversions on Origen, Jerome is often etching an ideal portrait of himself. The teachings of the Alexandrian John Philoponus (whose surname, 'lover of labour', had also been accorded to Origen by earlier writers) may have been in the mind of the Council, as he was alleged to be a tritheist and to deny the resurrection of the flesh.

14 For a review of modern scholarship see Edwards (2000), lix–lx with accompanying bibliography.

15 Bendinelli (1999) has undertaken a meticulously accurate comparison of Origen's hermeneutic method with that of Proclus, but he fails to explain why this is supposed to throw any light on Origen's education.

16 See Dodd (1935) and Simon (1986).

17 Osborn (1993), 19n.

18 Newman ([1871] 1970), 324 (Sermon 15.1.5).

19 On these figures see Dillon (1977).

20 On the invention of successions in antiquity see, for example, Glucker (1978).

21 *Philokalia* 13.1–2, pp. 64.21–5 and 65.3–8 Robinson. The *Philokalia* is a collection of extracts from Origen's writings made by sympathetic editors in the fourth century; no. 13 is the text of a letter to Origen's pupil and panegyrist Gregory Thaumaturgus. Compare, in Chapter 1, Philo's opinions on encyclical learning and Clement's commendation of 'the eclectic' in philosophy.

Chapter 1

Origen among Christians, Jews and Gnostics

That Origen was born in Alexandria, the principal city of Egypt, and that most of his education was received there, may be all that is incontestably known about his infancy. His race, his date of birth and the religion of his parents are all matters on which the palpable bias of our ancient witnesses forbids any but the most tentative conclusions. Epiphanius, no friend and for the most part no authority, qualifies the statement that he was born in Alexandria with the words 'by race an Egyptian', *Aiguptios genei*. Although the adjective, when used alone, may betoken simply that one comes from the hinterland rather than the capital of Egypt, the noun *genei* in this context will be otiose unless it means that one at least of his parents was a Copt. We may choose to discount this as a wilful slur, the prototype for Theodoret's invidious hurling of the term *Aiguptios* at Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century; we shall certainly be too prudent to surmise with Norman Williams that Origen's theology inherited an irascible and saturnine tincture from his provincial forebears.[1] However many traces of the indigenous culture scholars may descry in the Christian heresies and the theosophical literature of Egypt in this period, they agree that the mother of Origen's Christianity was the Church catholic. It is, however, less easy to determine whether he was reared as a member of this church or whether, as Porphyry the Neoplatonist seems to allege, he was brought up as a Greek among Greeks and only later exchanged his ancestral culture for that of the new barbarians.[2]

It is Porphyry, more than anyone, who has taught us to regard Origen as a Platonist at heart, who did not so much convert to Christianity as annex parts of that religion to his own way of thinking. The present book, however, is a plea against the promiscuous application of the term 'Platonic' to elements of Origen's thought that he and his contemporaries would have considered part of the Christian heritage. With the passage of time the apostolic deposit had inevitably borne interest in the worshipping community, and, as this chapter will show, it was not always a simple matter to distinguish this spontaneous maturation from the trickle of foreign coin.

Christian and Jew

Circumstantial testimony that Origen was a Christian from birth comes from Eusebius, an apologist for both Origen and Christendom, and the literary adjutant of the Emperor Constantine. Porphyry's strictures on Origen have been preserved for us only because Eusebius feels obliged to contradict them in the sixth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*. To demonstrate that Origen was never a member of a

pagan household, he asserts that his father Leontius went to prison for his faith in the reign of Severus, whereupon his son at the age of seventeen became his tutor in fortitude, urging him in a letter not to put away the God of his salvation for any imagined benefit to himself or to his kin. The date of 185 for the birth of Origen is obtained by reckoning backward seventeen years from the Severan persecution of 202. He himself (Eusebius continues) thirsted only to join the martyrs, and his mother could prevent him only by hiding his clothes so that he would be ashamed to fare abroad. It is clear that the expedient was successful, yet no such fear of custom intervened when Origen read at Matthew 19.12 that 'some have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven'; the story of his castration has rendered him infamous in circles otherwise ignorant of theology, and we may note, as a striking instance of the vagaries of tradition, that Origen's friend Eusebius feels compelled to lend his authority to this anecdote, while his enemy Epiphanius concedes that it may be false.[3]

The credit of all our witnesses could possibly be saved by the conjecture that Eusebius has mistaken circumcision for castration. The tone of legislation against conversion to Judaism in the third century shows that this was a common error among the Gentiles,[4] though it was not one to be made by the Palestinian Epiphanius in the fourth century, a time of fierce contention between the synagogue and the Church. No city of the Mediterranean world played host to such a large population of Jews as Alexandria in the time of Origen, and in his earliest works we meet allusions to a 'Hebrew' who instructed him in Biblical criticism. Notwithstanding his ancestry, this man confessed both Christ and the Holy Spirit,[5] and he must clearly be credited with no mean part in the formation of a pupil who went on to become the first Christian to enjoy a reputation for Hebrew scholarship or to undertake a continuous exposition of the Old Testament. The influence of this teacher will be slighted only by scholars who continue to embrace a crude dichotomy between Hebraism and Hellenism – one that must now be entertained in the teeth of modern findings in philology, archaeology and comparative mythology, all of which conspire to prove that the Greek and the Jew have never been such strangers as we were once taught to imagine.[6] Even had they become antipodes elsewhere in the empire, it could hardly have been so in Alexandria: the two races had been neighbours in that city from its foundation, and the Jew at least could hardly have maintained a discrete identity in the place where the Hebrew scriptures had been translated into Greek at a king's behest.

Origen's master, then, was a Jewish Christian, but his religion had little in common with the 'Jewish Christianity' that is frequently contrasted with the Gentile varieties.[7] Its traits, as drawn by modern physiognomists, are scrupulous legalism in dietary and venereal conduct, often amounting to abstinence, a predilection for uncanonical gospels and apocalyptic writings, and hostility to any commutation of monotheism, with the consequence that Christ was honoured as a glorious man, the Messiah of prophecy, but not as God. There is reason to doubt, however, whether any group in the ancient world would have answered this description. The Palestinian Ebionites, who are commonly presented as exemplars of the type, are a skeletal phenomenon at best in heresiology until flesh tints are applied by Epiphanius, and he is no more disposed than his ecclesiastical forebears to admit that Ebion, the putative founder of the sect, is merely an eponym from the Hebrew word for

'poor'.[8] The doctrine that Christ was merely a man, if anyone ever held it, was more probably the symptom of a Euhemeristic tendency than a relic of Palestinian Christianity: it was rare to accord divine honours in the Roman world to one who had not enjoyed them during life.[9] As to legal observances, there was even a party of Jews in Alexandria who considered them to be superannuated, and the Judaizing Christians of the early second century (of whom for once we know something) neither practised nor demanded circumcision. Their conspicuous devotion to the Sabbath may have been a Gentile subterfuge to escape a persecution that was directed at Christians but not at Jews.[10] The majority of the extant texts which are known to have been produced by Jewish Christians now form part of our New Testament: while they lack the hallmarks of the 'Jewish Christianity' reconstructed by modern scholars, they bear witness to the prevalence of an error that was natural for Jews and barely possible for pagans – the worshipping of angels, with the concomitant belief that Christ was a being of that kind.[11] Here it might seem at first that we have the measure of Origen's 'Hebrew', who is known to have construed Isaiah's vision of the Lord flanked by two angels as an intimation of the Christian Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We must not infer, however, that he took Christ for an angel: many Christian exegetes opined that certain appearances of angels in the Old Testament were in fact discreet theophanies, and the argument that Christ was prophesied at Isaiah 9.6 as the 'angel of good counsel' was advanced by many whose writings leave no doubt that they acknowledged Christ as God.[12]

Christian, even catholic, as it may have been, the comment on Isaiah bespeaks a typically Jewish interest in the angelology of the Old Testament. In modern times a superficial antithesis between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity, coupled with the assumption that the Ebionite is a representative specimen of the former, has led some to suppose that only Greek thought can furnish a pedigree for the Trinity. But this is to seek an answer without considering the problem: had the Church not been fettered by the rigid monotheism that it inherited from Israel, the divinity of Christ would have been no scandal and the mystery of the three in one – so recondite to the faithful, so intractable to logic – would have given way to a pantheon of three unequal gods. The doctrine of the Trinity resolves the pious dilemma of any reader, Jew or Christian, who discovers that the same events are indifferently described in the oldest scriptures as angelic visitations or as epiphanies of 'the Lord'.[13] Should Yahweh be degraded to an angel? This, which might be called the Gnostic expedient,[14] was equally abhorrent to the Israelite who retained a hope for his people and to the Christian who knew Yahweh as the Father of Jesus Christ. Or should one follow the opposite course, not diminishing Yahweh but enlarging the class of deities? Such affronts to the unity of God were not inconceivable, for the rabbis of this epoch used strong words against the heretics, or *minim*, who paid blasphemous devotions to the angel Metatron.[15] Orthodox Jewry and primitive Christianity were at one in the belief that there was only a single God and that the angels were his creatures; but if this God addressed the world through cherubim and seraphim, while maintaining a categorical distinction between his glory and the ministers whom he glorified, some nomenclature must be devised to explain his mediated presence in the lower sphere, without prejudice to the freedom and inscrutability of his eternal nature.

The Old Testament already speaks of the 'name of the Lord' and the 'glory of the Lord' as though they were his intramundane surrogates; Wisdom is personified as

his helpmeet in creation, and his Word is almost an intermediary.[16] The New Testament preserves echoes of a time when the abstract terms had come to be used autonomously, as circumlocutions for a name that was now deemed to be too holy for human lips. Keeping pace with rabbinic orthodoxy, which imagined God as engaging in a permanent devolution of his sovereignty through his word and wisdom, apostolic documents bestow these titles on the incarnate Christ. In him, says Paul, 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Colossians 2.8), though the essence of God the Father remained unbounded. As the Word or Logos, Christ is stated in the Fourth Gospel to have been *theos* from the beginning – clearly in a less contingent, but not perhaps in a less symbolic sense than that in which Moses is declared in the Book of Exodus to have been 'made god' to Pharaoh.[17] No devout Jew, of course, could have allowed that the Almighty could have delegated his attributes so unreservedly to a single prophet; on the other hand, no heresy appears to have been detected in the assertion of Jesus Sirach that his wisdom is embodied in the law.[18] At some time – perhaps as early as the third century – it became a rabbinic commonplace that the glory of God, the Shekinah, had been scattered among the nations by the exile and dispersion of the Jews[19] Reading in the infallible word of scripture that the patriarchs had both seen and heard 'the Lord', a number of teachers postulated a 'form of God', an anthropomorphic vision of the invisible, which made his will intelligible to mortals but was not to be confounded with his essence.[20] This, it would appear, was a sufficiently ancient notion to find a place in one of the earliest meditations on the pre-existent Christ (Phil 2.5–12).

The first developments of Christian doctrine coincide with the age of the Tannaim, the rabbis who took charge of Jewish life under the Roman domination. Their aim was not to make converts but to teach Jews to be Jews, and until the compilation of the Mishnah around 200 their sayings were perpetuated by an oral, and therefore arcane tradition.[21] Their teachings must therefore have remained unknown to the majority of Gentiles, and once the Temple had been destroyed in 70 and the nation of Israel broken in 135, the synagogues of the Diaspora, the expatriate population, turned gradually into enclaves of the Law. The misanthropy of the Jews became proverbial, and to Christians at least they were never friendly; as a convert, Origen's teacher may have incurred the maledictions of the Egyptian synagogues.[22] Whether he himself had been a rabbi we cannot say, nor whether he kept faith with his ancestors by speaking Hebrew; we know that in the fourth century those Christians who mastered this tongue were Palestinians either by origin or by adoption, and it is possible that Origen, though his interest in the Old Testament was kindled in Alexandria, commenced the study of Hebrew only after his migration to Caesarea.[23] One thing is certain, whatever the course of his studies: although he was aware of the Hebrew canon[24] and restricted his own interpretative writings to its contents, he continued to regard the Alexandrian Bible, the Septuagint, as the norm of ecclesiastical theology.[25] Even where he contends that certain passages now extant only in Greek may have had a Hebrew archetype,[26] he does not seem to assume that the authority of the Greek would be contingent on the existence of the Hebrew, and Kamesar is no doubt right to argue that he consulted the original with the object of removing the obscurities and inconsistencies of the Septuagint.[27]

While subscribing to an expanded canon of the Old Testament,[28] Origen was too much a disciple of the New to countenance any unwritten increments to the ancient

legacy. For him there was no tradition of the elders, only the deposit of sacred writings, with the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation as a supplement, for the most part apostolical in provenance, which the Church agreed to deem authoritative. Books that professed to be the occult (and therefore uncanonical) ebullitions of a patriarch, a prophet or an apostle he was generally wont to handle with rabbinical austerity. In the preface to his Commentary on the Song of Songs he deprecates the reading of 'apocrypha',[29] employing this term not in the modern pejorative sense but with reference to the titles that were occasionally given to such works by those who forged them. His own term for these spurious productions, *deuteroseis*, can often stand in Greek for the tendentious paraphrases or rewritings of Old Testament literature that the Jews called Midrash.[30] Perhaps we should be less impressed by Origen's acquaintance with the vocabulary of Jewish exegesis than by his failure to discriminate, as a rabbi would, between orthodox and heterodox experiments in this vein. (An example of the former in Origen's day would be Genesis Rabbah, of the latter the Book of Jubilees. It is documents of the second class that Origen has in mind – though, with the precedent of Jude and the concurrence of Tertullian, he admits the claims of Enoch.[31]) Whatever the idiosyncrasy that he brings to its definition, scripture remains for Origen a fixed quantity, resisting oral or literary accretion and containing all things needful for our salvation. It has still to be interpreted of course, and since no individual can be trusted after the time of the apostles, the interpreter's task is either to defend the oecumenical consensus or, where none exists, to create one of his own.

Chapter 4 addresses the modern complaint that Origen falsifies the scriptures by his belated and capricious use of allegory to overrule the intentions of the author. For the present it will suffice to remember William Sanday's maxim that the frequency with which a text sustains such machinations is a measure of its sanctity in the eyes of those who read it.[32] The pioneer of Biblical theology was Philo of Alexandria, the only Jewish contemporary of the early Church who has left an ample body of his own writings, and the one whose Judaism was most purely the religion of a book. A figure of some eminence in his day, Philo wrote with animus against Flaccus, a Roman governor who connived at a persecution of the Jews in Alexandria, and, hoping to prevent the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem, he captained an embassy to the Emperor Gaius. In Roman fashion the autocrat wished to know nothing but why Jews did not eat pork, and it was only death that put an end to his sacrilegious project. It is difficult to estimate the success of Philo's courtship of the world in another medium: his object, in a vast library of treatises and homilies, was to demonstrate a harmony between the Jewish law and the moral precepts of philosophy, thus vindicating his own faith, deepening that of his co-religionists and securing the respect of impartial Greeks.[33] Nevertheless the label 'Middle Platonist' – so frequently applied to him by those who, like the great botanist Linnaeus, are unable to tolerate an unclassified specimen – is infelicitous in two respects. First, it often entails the generic attribution to 'Middle Platonism' of doctrines that are expounded for the first, or perhaps the only, time in Philo. Secondly, it obscures the fact that the matrix of his thought was not the Platonic corpus or any jewel of classical antiquity, but a family of documents that he read in Greek because he had no Hebrew – a Greek, as he must have known, that made no effort to appease the taste of educated pagans. To Philo the 'encyclopaedic learning'

of the nations was but the handmaid of a divinely-ordered wisdom;[34] in a city of philologists, the Torah was his palladium – though one that he may have been more eager to share than the Greeks to steal.

Thus he praises Plato because he takes him for a monotheist; he is not a monotheist because of Plato. His confession that the word *theos* may be applied to beings other than the Creator is not a capitulation to polytheism, but a candid assent to the inspiration of passages that speak of a plurality of gods, or (as in Moses' case) of one man being made God to another.[35] As an exegete he could not fail to be troubled by such anomalies; as a philosopher he was bound to wonder how the ubiquity, omnipotence and steadfastness of God could be reconciled with the anthropomorphic traits ascribed to him in the Old Testament. These are questions for any believer, not only for the Platonist; to treat them as by-products of a particular intellectual conditioning is not to explain but to explain away. It is true that Philo appropriates the idiom of the pagan schools, that problems which are indigenous to the Jewish faith are framed in a language redolent of 'encyclopaedic learning'; the verbal dress, however, does not tell us how his questions originated, let alone why he resolved them as he did. Students of Greek philosophy have profited from Philo's iteration of Pythagorean arguments in praise of the number seven, but no one would suggest that he thought these a better certificate of its holiness than the Jubilee Year, the Fourth Commandment and the inauguration of the Sabbath in the opening chapter of Genesis.[36] It is all the more remarkable, then, that spectral antecedents are so often proposed for his doctrine of the Logos, though if we judge by lexicography alone, it seems as fatherless and motherless as the number seven itself.

The Logos, as the factotum of divine creation and government, is sometimes represented in Philo's writings as the eternal pattern in the mind of God; this, as we see in Chapter 2, makes him comparable to the Forms in one legitimate variant of the Platonic theory. Nevertheless we must ask why it is in this form – by no means the most primitive, the most specious or the most favoured in this period – that the theory has imposed itself on Philo. The answer is, of course, that he adhered to a belief which, though occasionally serviceable to Platonists, was mandatory for Jews – the belief in a personal deity, at once benign and sovereign, who not only wills but loves the world, and, if he will suffer any name, elects to be known as Father and Creator. Philo would be conscious that he had met both terms in Plato, but also that he had read them first in scripture; and in any case the Demiurge, as 'father and creator' of the generated universe in the *Timaeus,* would appear to be not the author but an imitator of the unageing paradigm.[37] As for the title Logos, it has yet to be demonstrated that the Platonists ever used it to denote a peculiar organ of the Demiurge or a mediator between the transcendent Godhead and the theatre of the senses.[38] Once again Philo needed to look no further than the opening chapter of Genesis for the notion of creation through the Word, and it was certainly not from Plato that he learned to characterize it by appellatives such as 'high-priest', 'first-begotten' and 'son of God'.[39]

Elsewhere, as here, the most innovative thoughts of Philo are authorized by scripture and receive only the most perfunctory countersign from Greek philosophy. His famous definition of God as 'he who is' is derived from Exodus 3.14, a passage which is still a crux for Hebraists, but is rendered in the Septuagint as *eimi ho eimi*,

'What I am, I am.'[40] From these words, the Jewish philosopher argues, we deduce that the essence of God is in his own keeping, that it remains inscrutable to all his creatures, and that words are potent only to describe what he is not, not what he is. This is the germ of the negative or apophatic theology which, though later refined by Platonists with the instruments of a far more rigorous logic, is not securely attested in any of Philo's predecessors. Nor is pure being among the affirmative predicates that Plato reserves for hegemonic and creative principles: the Demiurge, as intellect, beholds the realm of essence, while the Good is raised to a higher altitude. Where Philo's thought seems most Greek in complexion, it is not because he has superimposed the pedantry of Athens on the poetry of Jerusalem, but because there is more homology than polarity between these neighbouring cultures. Thus when he equated the cherubs guarding Eden with the lordship and the goodness of God, he may have had an eye to the Aristotelian distinction between two species of entelechy or perfection – one the realized nature or actuality of a substance, the other an operation characteristic of that nature. Yet even a candid exegete who had never heard of Aristotle would notice that Elohim is the scriptural designation for the benevolent creator, Yahweh for the triumphant Lord of Israel, the Septuagint translating the first by *theos* and the second by *kurios*.[41] Philo holds that human speculations are endorsed in scripture, but only emblematically and only as preliminaries to wisdom. Abraham was schooled in the lore of heaven by the Chaldaeans who anticipated the interests of the Stoics, but it was when he quit that land that he became the friend of God.[42] Plato's theory of the tripartite soul, composed of reason, zeal and appetite, is accepted in the treatise *On the Giants*, but only as the template for a fable in which the giants of Hebrew legend represent the earthborn race who hunt the 'pleasures of the body', the sons of heaven are devotees of 'encyclical education', sharp of wit but still bemused by secular ambitions, and the 'sons of God' are the prophets and priests who abjure all worldly and sensual pursuits to live in perpetual contemplation of 'incorruptible, incorporeal ideas'.[43]

On the strength of the last phrase we might style this Platonism, yet philosophy is relegated with all encyclical learning to the second class, and the allegory purports to be derived from a threefold division of humanity in the Old Testament, which antedates all Greek writing, and might even be regarded as the archetype for two of Plato's myths.[44] The label 'Middle Platonist' undoubtedly conceals the originality of Philo, though most scholars would agree that this is greatly exaggerated in Wolfson's *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, which makes him the parent of almost all the philosophy that found its way into Christian dogmatics. Although, as David Runia has shown, the parallels between Philo and the Church Fathers are abundant enough to fill a substantial volume, Christian writers after Clement seldom avow his influence, which in many cases must have been oblique.[45] In printed texts of Origen the editorial apparatus suggests that he drew on Philo far more often than he named him, but the possibility of coincident reasoning or the use of an intermediate source cannot always be excluded. We can see – and Wolfson himself proved this[46] – that Philo's work is not an aberration in Judaism, that the Jew in his study was not a different man from the Jew in the synagogue, and that if the teacher of Origen was in any sense a disciple of Philo, his pupil may have received an education that would have flattered a philosopher and satisfied a rabbi. If Philo is representative,

the conjunction of the didactic with the speculative mentality in the ancient world gave rise to a strong conviction of God's hiddenness, and a proportionately high regard for scripture as the adumbration of his absent majesty. Study in Alexandria led Origen to the Bible as a book which, like the mind of the Creator, could embrace the thoughts of men without prejudice to its own authority, a book which therefore functioned at the same time as an incontestable document of history, an immutable guide to conduct and an inexhaustible reservoir of truth.

The Church in Alexandria

It may seem odd that Judaism should provide the overture to a survey of Origen's adolescent schooling, but if we follow the custom of treating facts before conjectures there could hardly be any other starting point: Origen's extant writings make no mention of any tutor in Christian doctrine except for his Hebrew master. Porphyry and Eusebius agree that he heard the lectures of Ammonius, a philosopher whose identity is a topic for the next chapter. Eusebius, who ascribes to him a *Harmony of Jesus and Moses*,[47] may have taken him for the same Ammonius who designed a rudimentary synopsis of the gospels:[48]

> Ammonius the Alexandrian, having employed much industry and effort (as was proper), has left us the fourfold Gospel, placing the corresponding passages of the other evangelists beside the Gospel of Matthew, so that the continuous thread of the other three is necessarily broken, preventing a consecutive reading ... I have taken my point of departure from the work of the man already mentioned, but have followed a different method.

Once again we notice the supremacy of the philological method in Alexandria;[49] we also see that Ammonius subscribed to the fourfold canon of the gospels. Neither point should be overlooked in reviewing the work of Clement of Alexandria, whom Eusebius affirms to have been Origen's tutor and his precursor as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria.[50] Doubts as to the existence of this 'school'[51] are not ill-founded if we take that word to mean an institution like a modern university, with a precinct of fine buildings and a table of fixed emoluments for professors. A school in the ancient world more often consisted of a self-appointed pedagogue, a group of regular listeners, and a larger audience at occasional lectures. If the teacher had a successor, he gained that post informally, perhaps having been regarded as a colleague of his predecessor during the latter's lifetime, and any income that either received would result from a personal bargain with the clients. The Catechetical School, if it is not a legend fathered by the retrospective assumption that all teaching must take place within an authorized tradition, may have been a private venture, though one assumes, in the light of its purpose, that it was too benign to exact a private charge.

However they obtained their role, it is reasonable to imagine that the catechetes were sponsored, with the sanction of the Church, by affluent Christians or by popular subscription. An institution of some sort that would qualify adults for baptism was an obvious necessity in a city where the baptism of infants was a rarity as late as the year 300.[52] And, though there is no sure record of a bishop in the city

before 200, and though the clergy are often thought to have looked on the Catechetical School with fatherly consternation, the lessons of the school would have been of little use unless they were designed to fulfil conditions that were uniformly imposed, and hence imposed by the episcopate, on the administration of the baptismal water. The notion of the Catechetical School as a hotbed of licentious preaching is another modern chimera, and if it could be proved that some tradition had been handed on to Origen by Clement, it would be wiser to adduce this as a proof of the orthodoxy of the tradition than as a symptom of heterodoxy in the school. There is, as we have noted, no corroboration in Origen's works that he had been a pupil of Clement, but perhaps the strongest evidence is that both wrote treatises with the unusual titles *On First Principles*[53] and *Stromateis*.[54] Their only pagan namesakes, Longinus' *On First Principles* and the *Stromateis* of Plutarch, have perished, along with Clement's *On First Principles* and Origen's *Stromateis*; nevertheless the coincidence of names is striking enough to dispel all doubt that the younger Christian was conversant with the writings of the elder.

It is all too common for Clement's *Stromateis* to be regarded as his single work of substance, and interpreted as a morganatic union between Dame Philosophy and a beggarly handful of ecclesiastical platitudes. To many it seems that Clement is proposing the cultivation of the intellectual virtues as an avenue to Christian perfection, while reckoning the faith of the humble multitude, and the Bible on which it rests, as barely adequate for salvation. It is said that, while he occasionally professes to accept the ancient libel that the Gentiles stole their philosophy from Moses, his real view is that God worked by a double dispensation, communicating some truths to the Hebrew prophets and others to the Greeks. He is sometimes thought to have been, if not a Platonist, an adherent of that sect which he himself on one occasion styles 'eclectic', and whose teaching was an amalgam of serviceable doctrines from the leading pagan schools. And since, it is alleged, he failed to discover in these sources any plausible cognates of the Incarnation, the Passion, the Atonement, the resurrection of the body or the second coming of Christ, the president of the Catechetical School pays only superficial homage to these fundamental tenets of the Church.

Few of these charges will survive inspection. Clement, supremely occupied as he always is with the inner life, will not cease to incur the obloquy of clergymen-commentators whose sole concern in reading his chapters on the eucharist, is to find out how, by whom and on what day of the week the rite was celebrated in Alexandria.[55] Clement has no answer to such questions, and it is all to the good of Christendom that most readers do not ask them. If it is necessary to be a Platonist to hold that the real is the spiritual, then Paul was as much a Platonist as Clement. By knowledge or *gnosis*, Clement did not mean the pursuit of a liberal education in contempt of Biblical teaching and the inheritance of faith; rather he meant the study of Christian doctrine and the scriptures with all the tools that could be supplied by Gentile learning, in order that the doctrines might be better understood and the commandments more perceptively obeyed.[56] So he tells us plainly enough in the fifth book of the *Stromateis*, where, in an argument that proved seminal for Augustine and Cardinal Newman, he contends that knowledge itself must rest on faith. In the same book he satirizes the quarrels of philosophers, and while he sees a parallel in the Old Testament to the Pythagorean habit of secreting the most precious truths in

symbols, this is no proof of immediate inspiration; on the contrary, specimens of Greek plagiarism are legion, as he proceeds to argue in a verbose, and frequently inaccurate, dissertation.[57] The flaws in his scholarship illustrate the strength of his conviction, and only in the sixth book does he modify his thesis with the admission that a handful of the Gentiles have been visited by the Spirit. These were not the philosophers, but lonely vatic figures such as the Sibyl and Hystaspes – the same exceptions that had already been cited in the mid-second century by Justin Martyr when he urged that whatever is true in Greek philosophy is traceable to theft.[58]

The passage that is thought to betray the eclecticism of Clement does not suggest, when quoted at length, that he saw himself as the mouthpiece of a philosophic trend:

> There is one farmer who from the creation has sown the generative seeds in human soil, the one who has sent the sovereign Word as rain in every season; but the seasons and places that received it have engendered differences.[59] To put it differently, the farmer ... sows ... but preparation of the soil is also part of the same agriculture ... likewise not only shepherding but ox-herding too, with all the arts of horse-rearing, dog-rearing and beekeeping – in a word, all herding and rearing of livestock – differ in a greater or lesser degree from one another, but are all beneficial to life. Now what I mean by philosophy is not the Stoic, Platonic, Epicurean or Aristotelian, but whatever utterances of each of these sects inculcate righteousness with reverent understanding: the whole of this eclectic element I call philosophy. (*Stromateis* 1.37)

Clement has already explained that philosophy is a 'propaedeutic' study, which teaches us the mastery of the body and thus conduces to the apprehension of wisdom. At its best it purifies the intellect and directs the understanding in its search for the true philosophy (1.32). But encyclopaedic learning, with an undisguised allusion to Philo's treatment of the story of Hagar and Sarah, is the handmaid to the wisdom of those who have been set free by Christ (1.30–1); the philosophy of the world aspires to a goal that is realized only in the Teacher who declared, 'I am the truth.'[60] 'Eclectic' is not an adjective on all fours with 'Stoic' or 'Platonist'; it designates no intellectual system that purports to answer all the most abstruse or important questions.[61] It rather appears to signify that element in philosophy which is so much a consensus that it can reasonably be called technical, and treated, along with sciences such as agriculture or medicine, as an ancillary to more noble or more contentious speculations. The consensus among philosophers extended above all to the moral principle that life should be devoted to the rational pursuit of a wholesome end without regard to supernumerary goods or fugitive pleasures, and perhaps also to certain axioms of logic such as Aristotle's law of non-contradiction. It therefore included matters that were germane to our existence in the present world, but none with any bearing on theology, and none of Clement's compliments to philosophy suggest that he desired to create or fashion Christian dogma with its tools.

The eight meandering books of his *Stromateis* were written to demonstrate that the faith and practice of the finished Christian – the Gnostic, as Clement calls him[62] – are compatible with the best that has been achieved or commended by the philosophers. The result is simultaneously a petition on behalf of Christianity and an apology to Christians for the cultivation of secular pursuits. The audience need

not be defined more narrowly, unless it is impossible for the same work to secure the faith of intelligent believers and to disarm the ridicule of cultured pagans. Both objectives can be sought, however, in a less eirenic manner, and the *Protrepticus* of Clement is a lampoon on the religion of his times, inferior in wit and style but comparable in content to the exquisite harangues produced by such contemporary sophists (or showpiece orators) as Lucian and Philostratus.[63] The difference is that these men, being pagans, stopped before they had ceased to entertain their audience, whereas Clement writes with the tedious pertinacity of a convert. He chooses to see nothing in the pagan cults but a simple-minded practice of idolatry, assumes that the licentious acts of the gods in myth and poetry are approved by all their worshippers, and argues that the abominable trappings of the mysteries are sufficient proof that edification cannot be found within.[64] The work is generally counted as an apology, but if apologetic is the means whereby a minority 'comes to terms' with its hostile milieu, the author of the *Protrepticus* was patently no artist in the form.[65]

Was he a philosopher, as the Aristotelian title of the treatise seems to indicate?[66] The *Protrepticus* applauds this class of men for knowing better than the majority, only to convict them of pusillanimous complicity in the overthrow of reason and human nature. Clement befriends philosophy, not philosophers, in the *Protrepticus*, and not so much with the purpose of acculturation to the Roman world as to equip himself with the weapons to resist acculturation. Having entered this gymnasium of the intellect in youth, perhaps in Athens, he had found it to be capable of strengthening but not of imparting virtue; to make use of its lessons, one must first have set one's face against the sins and claudications of its unbaptized professors, and in the present world this was impossible for those who shut their ears to the word of God.

Each answering its purpose, the *Stromateis* proves the merits of philosophy and the *Protrepticus* its shortcomings. The *Paedagogus*, or *Schoolmaster*, the only other work of any length to have survived, is a treatise on Christian conduct which makes rather more constructive use of pagan antecedents. This was no breach of faith with the apostles, for the New Testament was frequently suspected, even in ancient times, of raiding the lexicon of civic values when it laid down rules for intercourse between Christians, or between Christians and the world. It would be rash to speak at this stage of anything more than verbal affinity, as Greek and Jewish teachings on morality were convergent, and in many cases might be said to express the collective wisdom of humanity. Erudite Christians of the next few centuries, however, found philosophy an arsenal of precepts on the ordering of communities and the fashioning of character in the light of a chosen end. The collection of apophthegms known as the *Sayings of Sextus* was already in Christian hands by the time of Clement,[67] and Justin was the prototype for many who praised the rectitude of the Stoics while remaining ignorant or disdainful of their teachings in other areas of philosophy. Clement did as almost every practical moralist does, whatever the grounds of his own integrity: he appealed to common sense.

None of these three treatises by Clement is an essay in philosophical theology; it is when they are least theological that they are most immersed in the philosophic currents of the day. It was in order to row against those currents, or avoid them altogether, that Clement equipped himself with the oars of logic in the eighth book

of the *Stromateis*, and when he invokes Pythagorean symbolism to justify his decipherment of anthropomorphic passages in the Old Testament, he is choosing a map but not a destination. When he concludes, in his discourse *On the Salvation of the Rich Man*, that we have a right to our goods so long as we put them at God's disposal, he is not diluting the vigour of the gospel, but encouraging a conspicuous philanthropy that was likely to win more converts in political society than an outright distribution of one's fortune to the poor. The Christian of late antiquity, being born into a world where civic loyalty was half of one's identity, fulfilled the command to preach unto the nations by becoming an ambassador to his own city. He did not forget that the city of Jerusalem was more sacred, and the city of God more lasting, than the one in which he spent his earthly pilgrimage; but the custom of munificence, like the language of philosophy, could be taken into counsel against the avarice, pride and carnal mediocrity that cemented the infidel in his unbelief. The strategy of such men as Clement prospered, for the public spirit of Christians in the third century excited the respect and emulation of beholders, whereas the courage of the second-century martyrs reaped no harvest but contempt.

A distinction, then, can be made in certain cases between the primitive content and the prosthetic form; but can it be sustained when we find that cardinal Christian tenets are alleged to be, not merely expressible in a Greek nomenclature, but equivalent in substance to the postulates of some current Greek philosophy? The most notorious case in Clement is probably his assertion that the world of ideas in Plato is the Logos of the scriptures, who is also Jesus Christ the Word of God.[68] Since the same position has been attributed to Origen, discussion of its veracity may be postponed to the following chapter; true or false, it does not prove Clement a Platonist where this term is an antonym to 'Christian'. As Eric Osborn reminds us, he would deserve the label only if he were to substitute the vocabulary of Plato for that of scripture in passages which profess to expound the ecclesiastical doctrine without the additional aim of juxtaposing it with the thought of pagan teachers.[69] It is one thing to say to Christians 'I find the term "idea" more significant than "Logos"', another to court the Platonists by suggesting that they will gain some understanding of the Logos if they reflect upon the functions of the idea. Instances of the former type do not come to hand for those who wish to brand Clement as a Platonist, for he never employs the term 'idea' except when quoting or paraphrasing the words of the Athenian philosopher. When we consider how far the works of Plato exceed the letters of Paul in volume, Osborn's calculation that the latter is cited 1200 times in Clement and the former only 600 becomes an eloquent statistic.[70]

Early speculation on the Logos is apt to be regarded as Platonic or Platonizing when it buries his humanity in his higher traits and contemplates him simply as the architectonic principle of the cosmos or the disembodied voice of revelation.[71] The notion of a God who was also man, brought forth in squalor and put to death in ignominy, was a perpetual stumbling block to the philosophers, and one of the errors most frequently condemned in the age of Clement was docetism, which admitted a real epiphany, but only in phantasmal flesh and blood. The heresy is sometimes laid at the door of Clement himself because he seems to quote Valentinus with approval when the latter denies that Christ endured the grosser operations of the body:

> Valentinus in his letter to Agathopous says that 'Jesus retained self-mastery in all that he endured, he exercised his divinity, he ate and drank in a peculiar manner, not evacuating what he consumed. Such was the power of his self-mastery that his food did not perish inside him, as it was not in his own nature to perish.' (*Stromateis* 3.7.59)

Here are the quaint beginnings of a line of thought that dominates Alexandrian Christology throughout the patristic era, and which manifests itself again, for example, in Origen's teaching that the body of Christ was free from sexual passions.[72] If, however, we use the term 'docetic' in this connection, we should be conscious that we are giving a much wider extension to it than the ancients, for whom it connoted only a strict denial of the flesh, but not of everything that happens to be a concomitant of the flesh in its present state. Even those early Christians who, like Clement, had no strong sense of a Fall held that the properties of the flesh had been depleted by our sins, and that only the resurrection could restore to it the glory that belongs to it as the final work of God. The most celebrated instances of Christ's eating in the gospels take place after the resurrection, when everyone would agree that he had attained at least the condition of being 'equal to the angels' which is promised to the elect in the kingdom of heaven. Even during his ministry in Palestine, his forty days of fasting in the wilderness reveal that food was not so necessary to his constitution as to ours.[73] As we shall observe, there was some contention in Clement's time as to whether Christ assumed the 'psychic' flesh that all men receive from Adam or the spiritual flesh of the resurrection; even those who held the first position, on the grounds that only such a psychic Christ would be truly human, would not have taught that the measure of humanity is the despotism of the alimentary canal.

The human Christ will surely have been more prominent in Clement's annotations to the gospels, which formed part of his lost *Hypotyposes* or *Outlines of the Faith*.[74] Once again the title has a forerunner in the work of a recent Platonist, Albinus, but the contents offered no shock to orthodoxy, then or now. In fact, if we may trust the Latin paraphrase of Cassiodorus, Clement was the earliest theologian to pronounce that the Second Person of the Trinity is strictly coeternal with the First:[75]

> *That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have heard* [1 John 1.1]. In accordance and in keeping with the Gospel according to John, this letter also contains a spiritual principle. Thus when it says from the beginning, the elder expounded[76] it in this way, that the origin of his generation is not separated from the origin that is [or maybe is in] the Creator. For when it says from the beginning, it alludes to the generation without beginning of the Son who exists coevally with the Father ... That the Word existed always is what it indicates by saying *The Word was in the beginning* [John 1.2].

This is the doctrine preached in Alexandria by the bishops of the fourth century, and which after a tortuous struggle overcame the rival teaching (also fostered in Alexandria) that the pre-existent Christ is not eternal, and is as properly styled a creature as the Son. Origen is generally held to have been the first exponent of the orthodox position, but the case against the priority of Clement rests on a single piece of late and hostile evidence. The patriarch Photius, writing in the ninth century, condemns him in his *Library* of excerpts and synopses for declaring that

the paternal mind (*patrikos nous*) is not identical with the emergent Word (*logos prophorikos*), and understanding the second of these locutions as a Christological title, accuses him of making Christ posterior to God.[77] He knew that certain apologists of the second century spoke of two successive phases in the pre-existence of the Saviour: first the immanent reason, the *logos endiathetos*, of the Father, then a discrete projection, the *logos prophorikos*, who gives utterance to the *logos endiathetos* as speech expresses thought. Finding the second of these expressions in Clement, he attached the same meaning to it, and inferred that the Alexandrian, unlike his predecessors, had affirmed two *logoi* rather than two phases in the history of one. But in fact this busy polymath appears to have been misled by a cursory reading of the following words in the *Stromateis*, where Clement, using ordinary Greek and not the idiom of the apologists, is tacitly rebuking those who rob Christ of his identity and reduce him to an adjunct of the Father by construing his title Logos as a synonym for the verbal utterance (*logos prophorikos*) of a human subject:[78]

> The one who gave us a share in being and life has also given us a share in *logos*, wishing us at the same time to live rationally and well. For the *logos* of the Father of all is not this *prophorikos logos*, but is the most manifest wisdom and goodness of God, an almighty power indeed and truly divine, nor is it incomprehensible even to unbelievers, being the will of the Almighty (*Stromateis* 5.6.3).

Redundant as this admonition may be for a modern reader, or for the well-groomed audience of the Byzantine patriarch, it did not seem so to Origen, who puts the case more forcibly in his *Commentary on John*. He and Clement faced a common enemy, known to heresiologists as monarchianism, which was so reluctant to compromise the unity of the Godhead that it left no ground for any but a functional distinction between the Father and the Son. In common with their contemporaries, Tertullian in Africa and Hippolytus in Italy, Origen and Clement upheld the paradox of coeval difference in coeval unity at a time when the most illustrious communities, those of Rome and Asia Minor, licensed teachings that were barely distinguishable from monarchianism. For all four authors the hammer of the monarchians was the gospel of John, a text which, though it was now canonical everywhere, had served as a talisman for every species of Egyptian Christianity at a time when it was unquoted, perhaps unknown, in the other cantons of the faith.

This brings us to the question of Clement's Bible. Although he is the first Christian known to have spoken of a canon and a New Testament, it is possible that neither of these expressions bears the same sense in his writings as in later Christian usage. *Ecclesiastical Canon* was the title of a lost work which was also called *Against the Jews*, and therefore may have been a Christian glossary to the Old Testament in the manner of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*.[79] As for his New Testament, he certainly endorsed the canonical gospels, but what are we to say of his appeals in the *Stromateis* to a *Preaching of Peter* and his espousal of a secret Gospel of Mark, which he believed to be a superior version of the canonical one, bequeathed by the evangelist to the Alexandrian Church?[80] The latter, to judge by the few surviving fragments, was either the archetype of our Johannine Gospel or a

contamination of this with the canonical Mark; in either case it falls into that category of apocrypha which Origen warned his readers to avoid. The *Preaching of Peter* was evidently related to the *Doctrine of Peter*, deprecated in Origen's *On First Principles* as a book that did not carry the authority of scripture in any catholic congregation; we have no reason to doubt that it was identical with a work that had already been proscribed in Antioch by Bishop Serapion, whose name seems to bespeak an Egyptian origin.[81] Here at least it seems that Clement set a liberal precedent that Origen did not elect to follow.

Origen was certainly less willing to consult arcane traditions, but the heterodoxy of his predecessor must not be exaggerated. It is harder than some historians imagine to construct an author's canon from his citations: Eusebius, for example, can transcribe what he believes to be a letter from Christ to King Abgar of Edessa without proposing to include it in his New Testament, and even in the fourth century, the *Assumption of Moses*, never part of the Septuagint, could be employed against a bewildered Arian. The adversaries of Clement were also the adversaries of the Gallic bishop Irenaeus, who around 180 proclaimed it as an obvious truth that the gospels cannot be more or less than four.[82] Even the heresiarch Tatian, working in Edessa a decade earlier, had omitted Peter's testimony from his harmony of the gospels, generally called the *Diatessaron*.[83] Serapion was asked only to adjudicate on the reading of the *Gospel of Peter* in Antioch, and as the Muratorian fragment indicates, the reading of a volume, whether in public or in private, might be encouraged even when it was not within the canon, just as a difficult book like Revelation might be 'received' yet not employed in public lessons.[84] Scrupulous writers after the closure of the New Testament canon were not afraid to quote certain *agrapha*, or 'unwritten sayings' of Jesus, and it was therefore not a breach of catholicity in Clement to make use of Peter's gospel – though it was an indiscretion when, as Origen reveals, the text had been a fishery for teachers of false religion in Alexandria. The line between the apocryphal and the canonical, between authority and speculation, was more permeable in Clement than in Origen, but it was not a different line.

Whether Clement was the teacher of Origen is a question that we could not determine even if we knew what we meant by asking it. We can, however, regard him as an eminent representative of the church that suckled Origen in his Alexandrian boyhood. This church inherited canons both of scripture and of doctrine, but it also bred theologians who desired to improve the legacy by crowning faith with knowledge. In the pursuit of system, a measure of linguistic innovation was unavoidable, while philosophy supplied not only a nursery of clarity and rigour, but a paradigm for the marriage of theology with life. No addition or alteration to the primitive deposit was envisaged by Clement, any more than by Origen: they set out to equip the faith with its own philosophy, not to borrow one from Aristotle, Plato or the Stoics. For Clement, as for Origen after him, apostolic teaching was the spring of all legitimate inquiry; if this was not coterminous with the writings of the New Testament, the residue was in the keeping of the entire community in Alexandria, and the pilot in these waters was not free to choose his own star.

Christian Heterodoxy in Alexandria

I remarked above on the absence of firm evidence for an episcopate in Alexandria up to the time of Clement. To be sure, Eusebius flatters the see with a list of supposed incumbents from the advent of St Mark, but as the names are only names, unattested elsewhere and unaccompanied here by dates or circumstantial details, it was not unfair of Walter Bauer to suggest that the list is a catholic invention to conceal a vacant archive. Yet relics of second-century Christianity in Egypt are not wanting, whether we seek them in the mountain of papyri brought to light by twentieth-century excavations or in the invectives of the heresiologists, who represent the province as the cradle of the most seductive errors. From that day to this Basilides, Valentinus, Isidorus, Ptolemaeus[85] and Heracleon have been quintessential heretics in all manuals of doctrine; sometimes it is urged that their views are proved to have been sectarian even in Egypt by the frequency with which extracts from the scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New, appear among the papyri. The truth, however, is that sects and heresies take their origin from scripture no less frequently than the orthodox and catholic systems do; what we know of these early theologians may not amount to a vindication of their teaching, but it proves (as might be expected) that the Alexandrian Bible was their instrument of persuasion, if not the foundation of their beliefs. Indeed a more prolonged and dextrous wrestling with the difficulties of the sacred text is evident in the fragments of their writings than in the documents which survive from any other part of Christendom at this date.

In the service of a body that had already, in other quarters, proclaimed itself the catholic Church, Clement hurled the most polemical chapters of the *Stromateis* at the elder generation of these teachers, while Origen took some pains in the refutation of their putative successors. Nevertheless it would be rash to deny that the opinions of Basilides, Heracleon and their like could have shaped the thinking of their critics, or to asseverate that they could have shaped them only by contradiction. Speculative experiments are not heresies until they are refuted, and the refutation is frequently the catalyst that precipitates orthodoxy. Docetism in Asia Minor forced Ignatius into a loud confession of the unity of God and man in Jesus; Justin Martyr's *Apology* to the pagan world is coloured by a desire to rebut the falsehoods propagated by his countryman Simon Magus; it was in response to the Valentinian teaching on the Fall (a hitherto neglected tenet) that Irenaeus undertook an essay in theodicy which has since become a jewel of catholic literature. Occasionally victorious Churchmen carried home the language of their adversaries, as when Tertullian countered the monarchians by adopting the Valentinian neologism *probole* to indicate the manner of Christ's procession from the Father. Tertullian's maxim was to take the word and eschew the doctrine, but the two were not so easily severed in territories where the reprimanded teachings had prevailed before an ecclesiastical norm came into force. The tumult of conjectures that is now called Gnosticism may be seen as an evil leaven in Egyptian Christianity, but a scholar who omits them from a study of Origen's Alexandrian background will be making bread without yeast.

The first great name is that of Basilides, who is also perhaps the earliest theologian to make use of the Gospel of John. The date that is generally given for his *floruit*, AD 120, coincides roughly with that assigned to the most ancient surviving relic of

this gospel, the Rylands Papyrus. Christians in other regions were familiar with the application of the title Logos to the Saviour, and with the Johannine representation of the Spirit as a wind that blows invisibly 'where it will'. But dogma remained indifferent to John's narrative, with its cardinal theme of Sonship – first as the 'only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father', then in descent from heaven to earth as Son of Man, and lastly in the paradoxical glory of the crucifixion, in order that by this consummation of filial obedience he might 'draw all men unto him' and make them sons of God.[86] This is the motif at the core of Basilides' allegory of the triple filiation, which, as reported in Hippolytus' *Refutation of all Heresies*, runs as follows. Above all worlds and beyond all ages sits the inscrutable God, of whom no predicate is truer than its opposite, so that even the negation of every predicate would be a false attempt to circumscribe the illimitable. While this God cannot be properly said to exist, he is none the less the father of all existent things, his first creation being the *panspermia* or collection of seeds from which the realms of matter and of spirit are both destined to evolve. The latter is the first to be populated, as the first and second of the three sonships (*huioteis*) which were latent in the *panspermia* detach themselves and join the ineffable father above the firmament. The firmament itself is brought into being in the course of this liberation, for the *pneuma* or spirit accompanies the ascent of the second sonship, but is detained at a lower altitude, where it spreads itself as a curtain between the upper and nether worlds. Beneath the spirit lies the eightfold sphere or Ogdoad, consisting of the earth with its seven planets; its overlord the Great Archon, who proclaims that he is a jealous god and thinks himself the only one, is evidently the Yahweh of the Jews. The sublunar domain belongs to the Second Archon, who as prince of the air would seem to be the devil of the New Testament. Each begets a son who is superior to himself, and beneath all four the third of the original sonships occupies the nadir of the universe, which astronomy in this period declared to be the earth.

Can anything be made of this that would satisfy a Christian? As a literal cosmogony, which subordinates the Biblical God to the Spirit and two supramundane powers, it is clearly insupportable; but as it has all the trappings of an allegory, it can be construed, in accordance with the literary conventions of this period, as a parabolic history of redemption. The Gospel of John suggests an interpretation for all three sonships: as Son of God, the Saviour dwells on the highest plane in the bosom of the Father; as Son of Man he is lifted up and foretells his own ascension; as the Son incarnate he performs the Father's bidding under the tyranny of Gentiles and the obloquy of Jews. On earth he is fortified by the descent of the Holy Spirit, while from heaven he sends the same Spirit as the Paraclete to comfort the elect: no wonder then that the Spirit is imagined in this myth as a divisor between his heavenly and his earthly apparitions. So far the Gospel of John alone will take us, and then another apostle must be our guide: the oppressors of the third sonship are symbolically depicted as the Law and the devil because it is implied in the letters of Paul that they conspired to crucify the Lord of glory. As the children of these traitors, Jews and Gentiles are doomed to linger in bondage to the elements unless, sustained by the Son in his humility and watered from above by the Holy Spirit, they can rise above their schooling and become members of the filial elect.

Of course this exegesis is conjectural, but the ubiquitous aroma of the scriptures in this narrative surely intimates that scripture is the key. Hippolytus' caricature of

Basilides as an Aristotelian rests upon a spurious equation of his non-existent deity with the god of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The latter, as a mind which has no content but its own thinking and is thus not circumscribed, as other minds are, by the objects of its thought, is incomprehensible to the finite intellect; but even if he can be defined only as the 'thought of thoughts', it remains true that he exists and is the subject of affirmative predications. Hippolytus' accusation therefore has no value except to expose the invidious consequences of the dogma that every heresy proceeds from sources foreign to the Christian tradition. There is little more substance in the modern theory that Basilides was a Platonist. Its principal exponent, Gilles Quispel, assumes that a brand of Platonism derided as the invention of 'new men' in the late third century was current at the beginning of the second, and that the Biblical locutions were injected into the myth by a supervenient 'Christian influence'.[87] Quispel admits, in a fine example of litotes, that 'the "ideas of filiality" in Basilides are not exactly Platonic ideas';[88] but the critical objection to all such truffle-hunting is that it contents itself with the exhumation of sources, real or imagined, and does nothing to interpret what it finds.

On one point, if our witnesses can be trusted, there is undeniable evidence of traffic between Basilides and the Platonists. Both he and his son Isidorus are alleged to have taught the transmigration of souls from body to body, and to have urged, as a palliation of God's dealings with the innocent, that the wrongs inflicted on Christians by the rulers of the present world are an expiation of sins committed in a previous life.[89] This theory involves two premisses – that the martyr is superior in integrity to his judges, and that God can be held accountable for all the incongruities in the physical creation – to which no pagan thinker of this period would have subscribed. The doctrine of transmigration, though it was known to have been held by great philosophers, is adopted here not on philosophical grounds, but as the solution to a difficulty which would not have troubled anyone but a Christian. We may add that the detractors of Basilides – Clement and Origen among them – are not above all suspicion. They make him contradict his own theodicy when they charge him with the belief that human souls were formerly resident in animals, for whom sin could have no meaning; they sink to calumny when they accuse him of maintaining that only the wicked suffer martyrdom and that others are entitled to escape by denying Christ. Equally discreditable to Clement are the circumstantial accounts of midnight debauchery, infanticide and sexual promiscuity which he publishes in the third book of the *Stromateis*.[90] In the ancient world defamation can be vigorous even when it is unfounded, and it appears that Clement, not content to tax the great heresiarch with pandering to apostasy, has diverted against his followers the lies that had been fomented in a previous generation to furnish pretexts for both popular and imperial assaults upon the Church.

It is possible that Basilides styled himself a Gnostic.[91] In classical Greek the term *gnostikos* is an adjective which means 'concerned with knowledge' and cannot function without a noun. In the early second century it learns to stand alone as an adjectival noun, but only in Christian usage; pagan use is almost always an echo of the Christian application, which is far more parsimonious than twentieth-century scholarship has been disposed to admit. Serving at first to qualify a small group of sects or movements, it was a name, not an incriminating sobriquet. The prosecutor never says, 'They call themselves Christians, but I call them Gnostics.' He sometimes

says, 'They call themselves Gnostics, but I prefer a more truthful appellation.'[92] Outside Alexandria it is always a party label, and among the orthodox it is used, like 'socialist' in a modern English parliament, to define, if not to condemn, beliefs that are only held elsewhere. Clement marks an exception, which was not imitated for centuries even in his native city: 'gnostic' for him, like 'liberal' in English politics, functions simultaneously as the title of a small party and as a commendatory epithet which almost any parliamentarian borrows at some time to characterize his own position. The content of the 'knowledge' that was claimed by the first pretenders to the term *gnostikos* is not defined by any ancient source, and there is little to support the modern theory that it implied the unmediated vision of things divine and supernatural. Perhaps the 'knowledge' consisted above all in the ability to discern the latent sense of ancient scriptures, with a complementary skill in the construction of new narratives that demanded an equally proficient reader. For Clement, as we have seen, the 'gnostic' Christian is not simply a believer with a liberal education, but one in whom this education quickens his understanding of revealed truth, thereby making him a better servant of God and of the Christian commonwealth.

In partisan usage, outside Alexandria at least, the word *gnostikos* connotes above all obscurity and a riotous miscegenation of images drawn from the Bible, pagan myth, Platonic allegory and the foul abysses of the imagination. Irenaeus summarizes an archetypal treatise of the Gnostics which, whatever its original form, is evidently the one that has come to light in the twentieth century under the title *Apocryphon of John*.[93] The three surviving versions, all in Coptic and all perhaps dating from the fourth century, differ widely, but are clearly redactions of the same rendering from a Greek original. This suffices to prove the elasticity of tradition and the popularity of the text in Egypt; its provenance and date of composition nonetheless remain impossible to determine, and the heresy of the Gnostics, strictly so called, is still a beast without a head. Modern histories tell us that the most zealous propagator of Gnostic tendencies in Egypt was a younger contemporary of Basilides, Valentinus;[94] ancient sources in fact do not portray him as a Gnostic, but as the heir of Gnostics, and as the sire of a brood of heretics who in their turn became heresiarchs.[95] We must speak with some reserve, because most of our information comes from sources who are preoccupied with epigonal characters – Ptolemaeus, Heracleon, Theodotus – and who pay at best scant regard to any differences between their thoughts and those of the more notorious offender. The nature and gravity of his offence remain uncertain: a new generation of scholars, spurning every testimony not underwritten by the name of Valentinus, acquits him of almost all the major heresies that have been imputed to him and denies him a leading role in the fabrication of the great myth which has hitherto been regarded as the diadem of 'Valentinian gnosis'. Doubts were first excited by the discovery of a cache of Coptic documents at Nag Hammadi in Egypt.[96] The codices, which papyrologists date to the mid-fourth century, are once again translations from Greek texts of uncertain date, and include two versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. Others bristle with Gnostic symbolism and bear titles known to be those of Gnostic works; the myths that they preserve do much to corroborate the polemics of ecclesiastical writers. Yet those most plausibly attributed to the school of Valentinus contain no blatant heresies, though they are florid in diction, hostile to the present age and somewhat chary of the name of

Christ. Since the Fathers must have had a reason for attaching the names of later men to that of Valentinus, it may be that these were followers who exaggerated the less conventional features of his doctrine, thus weaning it from heterodoxy to heresy; or it may be that he held both an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine, the latter of which survives at Nag Hammadi while the former was made public, with malign intent, by Irenaeus, Hippolytus and other apologists for the catholic order. However unreliable their accounts may be – and the variations prove that they cannot all have been derived from Valentinus at first hand – it is the heresiologists, not the Nag Hammadi Codices, who determine the meaning of the term 'Valentinian' for contemporaries of Origen. The Nag Hammadi Codices, which bear witness to the tenacity of deviant Christianity in Egypt, will continue to tax the industry of scholars, but for our purposes the man must be permitted to recede behind the myth.

This myth, as rehearsed by the ancient heresiologists Irenaeus and Hippolytus, runs as follows. From the Abyss, or Buthos, which veils the inscrutable Father, there emerged first *Sige* (Silence), then a pair or syzygy of linked immortals, Nous and Aletheia – Mind and Truth. From these proceeded a second pair, Logos and Zoe – Word and Life – and from them a third, Anthropos and Ecclesia – Man and Church. In this speculation we recognize at once the debt to John, whose gospel promised life to everyone who receives the incarnate Word; no less obvious is the debt to Paul, who longed to see his Church maturing into the form of a perfect man. The coupling of mind and truth is a Platonic commonplace, though perhaps it is only an accident that no instance of it occurs in our New Testament; we should note that the partner of Aletheia is also styled Monogenes, a Johannine title meaning either 'unique' or 'only-begotten', which would seem to intimate that the first emanation is the Logos who accompanies the Father in the first verse of John's Gospel, and therefore that the distinction in the myth between Nous, Logos and Anthropos is merely titular. However this may be, the seven emissions and the Father constitute the Ogdoad, and this in turn completes the Pleroma (fullness) of the Godhead by bringing forth as many as thirty aeons. Here we cannot fail to detect an echo of Paul's testimony that Christ appeared in the fullness of the ages, and no doubt this is the same fullness which, according to the Apostle, 'dwelt bodily' in Christ.[97]

The lowest of the aeons is Sophia or Wisdom, who belies her name by committing the first transgression and thus bringing about a schism in the Godhead. We find no unanimity in our sources as to the causes of her fall. Irenaeus makes her the last of thirty, Hippolytus the last of twenty-eight. The former says that she tried to create a child in emulation of the Father and without her masculine spouse Thelema or Will, but could only spawn a grotesque abortion; the latter makes the abortion a causal outcome of an immoderate desire to know the Father in his unfathomable solitude.[98] The first case may be compared with numerous instances of calamitous parthenogenesis in Greek myth, while the second, as many scholars have remarked, is the sin of Eve. While the offence may differ, the remedy is common to both accounts: the aeons are protected in their sublime impassibility by a boundary or Horos, which also bears the appellation Stauros, meaning 'Cross'. Here it seems that the Valentinian school concurred in adopting a motif that can only originate with Paul: the Cross which temporarily divided the flesh of the Saviour from his

spirit is the folly of God which overthrows the wisdom of the world and casts a stumbling-block before Jew and Greek alike.[99]

Sophia experiences the four Stoic passions – sorrow, fear, desire and rage – and penitence forces tears which form the deliquescent substrate known as matter.[100] The abortion or *ektroma* – the word is the one that Paul applies to himself before conversion[101] – begets the Demiurge, a being of psychic rather than spiritual substance, who although not strictly evil lacks the knowledge of his superiors, and sets about turning the material realm into an image of the *pleroma* which he himself knows only by a vestigial memory. Marrying the name of Plato's creator-god to the character of Yahweh, he proclaims 'There is no other God beside me' as he fashions the planets to oppress the body and fathers the psychic race which venerates nothing but the heavens and the Law. If 'Psychic' means to the Valentinians what it means to Paul, the adepts of the Demiurge are not pure souls but beings who possess a soul and body without the spirit. Nevertheless, where Paul appears to treat 'psychic' and 'sarkic', 'ensouled' and 'enfleshed', as synonyms, the Valentinian myth divides the mortal realm into three groups – the material or 'hylic' (also called the earthly or 'choic'), the animal or 'psychic' and the spiritual or 'pneumatic'. The last are the elect, begotten by Sophia through the secret impregnation of the Demiurge; in this event she is masculine and he feminine, since the lower is always feminine in relation to the higher. According to ecclesiastical witnesses, the assignment of humanity to the hylic, psychic or pneumatic category is predestined; the Nag Hammadi Codices do not bear out this charge, and even hostile sources add that the psychic man, the catholic Christian, is capable of becoming a pneumatic. As the adjective 'hylic' implies the possession of a body without a soul, we must assume that anyone who falls into this class is either a corpse or a person who evinces the signs of life but is dead within.

We may note two capital differences between the story told in the *Apocryphon* of John and the myth recited by the critics of Valentinus: there is not such a plethora of emanations, and matter is not brought into being, but coeternal with and antipathetic to the Godhead. As to the first, there is evidence of a superfetation of aeons in the half-century or so that seems to separate the *Apocryphon* from the time of Irenaeus. Even Valentinus is said to have envisaged a Tetrad rather than an Ogdoad, and modern scholars have argued that Sophia was originally the consort of the inexpressible Father.[102] If that is so, she was displaced in the *Apocryphon* by the aeon Barbelo, whose name is perhaps an echo of the Hebrew phrase that means 'in the beginning'. The verses that follow these words in Genesis can be construed to signify that matter antedated the creation, so that the spirit of God already found the earth 'without form and void'.[103] This is the presupposition of the Gnostics strictly so called, and in their version of the myth Sophia does not generate matter, but falls into it or at least inclines towards it. The tractate *Zostrianus* from Nag Hammadi asserts that she was embroiled by her own reflection, by the 'shadow of a shadow'.[104] The original of this text was familiar in the mid-third century to Plotinus, who not only supplies a corroborative epitome of the myth in one of his treatises but implies, when he says that the Gnostics are his former friends whom he cannot take to task without compunction, that he first made their acquaintance at the school of his master Ammonius in Alexandria.[105] It has often been suggested that Plotinus' thought matured through this exchange of hostilities with his erstwhile

colleagues,[106] and that in opposing them he was announcing his own defection from their circle. Whether this is true or not, it would clearly not be fanciful to suppose that Clement and Origen may have learnt as much from Alexandrian heterodoxy as candid thinkers are wont to learn from the conversation of intellectual neighbours who are also adversaries.

Notwithstanding the closeness of the Gnostics to Plotinus and some striking reverberations of Platonic myth in that of the Valentinians, there is less than half a truth in Harnack's dictum that the teachings are an 'acute Hellenization of Christianity'. Most scholars see that the cradle of Sophia is the canonical Book of Proverbs, which personifies the creative wisdom of God in Chapter 8 and in the next contrasts the wisdom which is imparted by the Torah with the follies of youth and passion. I have noted elsewhere the importance of the Septuagintal Wisdom of Solomon, and have likened the relation between Sophia and her abortion to that between the two images of Israel – as bride of Yahweh and harlot of the nations – which are constantly played off against one another in the prophets. The Demiurge is the symbol of the idolaters who are mocked by Jeremiah and Isaiah; but the Jews are now ensnared by their own polemics, for when Paul denounces the worship of the 'weak and beggarly elements' in his letter to the Galatians (4.9), he is pointing not only to the Godless heavens of the Gentiles but to the graven characters of the Mosaic Law.[107] The word 'Ogdoad' would connote, to a studious reader of the Bible, both the Sabbath on which the innocent will rest in God and the complement, or *pleroma*, of those who were saved in the ark of Noah.[108] If a further allusion to the Egyptian pantheon at Hermopolis is intended,[109] it will reinforce the lesson that the spirit cannot rest in the visible heavens or in any human concept of the Deity; the Godhead in its totality, as the Gnostics understand it, is the fulfilment of the ages, the consummation of wisdom and the *plenum* of the saints.[110]

If we could be certain that its contents are indigenous to Judaism, the medieval Cabbala could be quarried for examples of the teaching that the same principle can be masculine in relation to those beneath it and feminine in relation to those above. One Cabbalistic doctrine which undoubtedly has its roots in Jewish reflection on the Torah states that God, in his lower aspect, has the form of a man combining male and female; even during the Babylonian Exile he was revealed in the 'form of the similitude of a man' to the prophet and priest Ezekiel, and another priestly writer declares in Genesis 1 that man was created male and female in the image of God.[111] Philo and a number of orthodox rabbis had inferred that Adam himself was a masculo-feminine being before the discrimination of the sexes,[112] while a Cabbalistic source equates the bisexual embodiment of humanity with the likeness that was promised, but is not said to have been bestowed, in the original creation. There may be a reminiscence of these notions in Philippians 2.5–9, where Christ is said to have subsisted initially in the *morphe* or form of God; some rumour of them had certainly reached the author of the *Apocryphon of John*, who depicts the spiritual Adam as the mundane reflection of the sublime Anthropos. It is not the proper nature of this incorporeal being to be entangled in the elements, and his body is the work of jealous archons in alliance with the Demiurge; he owes his animation, on the other hand, to a stealthy insufflation from Sophia.[113]

Even in this dualistic accretion there is a trace of Biblical teaching. In the Wisdom of Solomon we are reminded that at birth we are helpless creatures, unable

to stand or speak without the discipline of wisdom; it is this same Wisdom, a mirror of the Creator, who intervenes to enable privileged men like Lot and Noah to evade the consequences of his general wrath.[114] Only Biblical sources can account for the conflation of the fall with the benevolent operation of divine wisdom and the creation of humanity in God's image. Certainly there is one text, the *Poimandres* ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus (the Egyptian Thoth), which relates that the present world came into being when the heavenly Anthropos, image of God and archetype of the human race, was enticed into the underlying waters by the beauty of his reflection;[115] but the *Poimandres* is a work of uncertain date, and, while its title seems to be of Egyptian provenance, Jewish traits have been discerned in it by reputable scholars,[116] and it is certainly in large part a rewriting of the Mosaic cosmogony. It would be difficult to deny that the fall of Adam has a pivotal role in Christian theodicy which was seldom allotted to it in rabbinic or other Jewish speculations, and this peculiarity of Christian thought is rightly traced to Paul. Nevertheless it was of little moment to ecclesiastical spokesmen in the century between Paul and Irenaeus, even those who, like Tatian or Theophilus, laid some stress upon the doctrine of creation. The return in Irenaeus to Paul's antithesis between Christ and Adam was prompted by the Valentinian doctrine that creation is itself a fall, the sequel to an irreversible rupture in the Godhead. The Christian retort is that the fall, whatever it was, occurred inside the material order, not in the transition from spirit to matter; a corollary is that salvation does not do away with matter, but reclaims it and restores it through the embodiment of Christ.

How much of this debate reached Origen's ears we cannot say. Neither he nor Clement takes any notice of the Valentinian myth which must by then have been notorious – perhaps because they regarded it as a meretricious veneer for propositions which the masters had divulged with greater clarity to their Alexandrian pupils. In the treatise *On First Principles*, which Origen composed in Alexandria as a handbook to the orthodox interpretation of scripture,[117] Origen attacks the Valentinians by name, and seems to deal a tacit blow against them when he distinguishes three categories of wisdom: the wisdom of the world, which makes an idol of the tangible and fleshly; the wisdom of the 'princes of this world', whom Origen takes to be the inventors of the useful arts and sciences; and the wisdom of Christ's people whose only study is the route to heaven.[118] The first class, like the Valentinian hylics, may be incorrigible; the second, like the psychics, have an inkling of the truth. Rejecting the determinism commonly imputed to Valentinus, Origen insists that we become members of one tribe or another by the exertion of our own free will.[119] I argue in Chapter 3 that his views on the pre-existence of the soul and on the fall of Adam are not so far from those of Irenaeus as is generally imagined; here I propose that the belief in the redemption of the body through the bodily manifestation of the Saviour is one in which he had been anticipated by the heretics of Alexandria.

Christological Considerations

Hippolytus, who took over from Irenaeus the role of grand inquisitor in the early third century, reports a bifurcation in Valentinian Christology. He adduces Pauline terms, and I have suggested that they bear a Pauline sense; Hippolytus, however,

insinuates that by a 'spiritual body' the heretics always mean a body composed of spirit, and by a 'psychic body' a naked soul. Even his Alexandrian co-religionists give the lie to this, for the *Excerpts from Theodotus* made by Clement credit this 'leader of the eastern school' with a number of Valentinian traits, but not with a denial of Christ incarnate. God incarnate, indeed, he could not affirm, for while, like other Valentinians, he speaks of a proliferation of aeons in the Godhead, he is enough of a monarchian to deny that any fragment of the Godhead could descend to earth and effect a union with human flesh. We cannot prove him identical with the person known as Theodotus the Monarchian, though an *a priori* case might be advanced on the grounds that Hippolytus denounces the last-named heretics in conjunction with the Gnostics.[120] We can, however, observe that the Valentinian system often acquires a monarchian colour in early heresiologists, who suspect that the aeons, if they are not fictitious, are merely phases or aspects of the Deity, rather than the 'hypostatic' entities whom Christians revere as God the Son and God the Spirit. The adjective *homoousios* ('consubstantial'), which at length became a catchword of the orthodox position that the three hypostases are a single God, was at first a technical term of the Valentinians,[121] and was consequently avoided by many Churchmen for one and a half centuries. On his Valentinian premisses, Theodotus reasons that the heavenly Logos and the human Christ are quite distinct, the lower being an image of the higher in a circumscription (*perigraphe*) of flesh.[122] But this is docetic only in denying that the flesh is God's flesh, not in denying that the flesh is real.

Theodotus does, in the first of Clement's *Excerpts*, style the body of Christ a 'spirit', but the reluctance of some editors to print the Greek as it stands shows that the apophthegm is not easily construed, and may mean something more abstruse than that the body was a phantom:

> The spiritual seed that was sown in fleshly form by wisdom through the Logos is the one in which the Saviour clad himself when he came down. Hence in the Passion he consigned his wisdom to the Father,[123] so that he might receive it back from the Father lest it fall into the grip of those[124] who have power to detain. (*Excerpt* 1).

The word 'spirit' (*pneuma*) stands in apposition to 'fleshly' (*sarkion*), as a predicative noun, not a qualifying adjective: it is not that the flesh is spiritual but that in the world it performs the work of spirit. In the Old Testament the word *ruach* can be rendered 'spirit', 'breath' or 'wind': to speak of the *ruach* of God is to say that he is exercising power within, among or upon his creatures. Hence it is the Spirit that stirs the waters on the first day, and the Spirit that will be poured upon the sons and daughters of Israel in the latter days; it is not in the strength of man but by his Spirit that the Almighty accomplishes his secret ends. 'The first man', says the Apostle, 'was of the earth, earthy; the second man was made a lifegiving spirit' (1 Corinthians 15.45); he does not mean that the flesh was annihilated, but that through the embodied presence of divinity what was dead in other men became a potent source of life. In the Gospel of John, the Spirit is the unseen wind that quickens new life, the spring of living water that flows from the belly of the regenerate; even the famous saying 'God is spirit' tells us not so much that the Deity is intangible as that he makes his temple in every heart that worships him 'in spirit and in truth'.[125]

When early Christians argued that the God who is pure spirit cannot be confined by a body or subject to any corporeal attribute, they arrived at a philosophical conclusion that may not have been in the mind of the evangelist, though it is not at variance with it. Even then the dynamic and vital character of spirit was not forgotten, and the Holy Spirit is seldom mentioned in the patristic era without some reference to his activity or presence in the universe. Since this is a universe in which matter is the vehicle of presence, it was only to be expected that the flesh would serve as an instrument of spirit, in the scripture and the sacraments no less than in the incarnation of Christ.

According to the Naassenes, a Gnostic group that Hippolytus and his modern annotators reckon to be at least as old as any other, the dichotomy between matter and spirit supervenes on a state in which there was one undifferentiated substance, a blessed formlessness or *askhemosune*.[126] Even when they are parted by the firmament the two worlds remain in constant intercourse, and the fiery Demiurge who rules the lower has his beatific counterpart in the higher. The mediator is Hermes, who in Egypt was not only the imaginary preceptor of the alchemists, but was in some sense identical with the substrate that they were labouring to transmute, as well as with the means of transmutation. The master Zosimus, writing around 300 in Panopolis, raises a question about the identity of the first man that had already been broached by the Naassenes, and concludes (as they also did) that Christ and Adam are both avatars of the everlasting rock, or adamant, which defines the nature of mankind.[127] Both alchemists and Naassenes aspired to a synthesis of all religions, but Zosimus the Egyptian is more evidently a Christian, and the goal of his lucubrations – a goal that he purports to have achieved in his own laboratory – is the contemplation of the Son of God.[128]

The primacy of spirit is implied in the Valentinian myth, where matter is a waste product of the strife between will and nature in the Godhead. At the same time the myth teaches that this barren world is fertilized by the penance of Sophia, and texts which are thought to inculcate a Valentinian theory of the sacraments hint that matter is an indispensable channel of the spirit even for the 'pneumatic' Christian.[129] The *Gospel of Philip* from Nag Hammadi enjoins both chrism and baptism, anointing with oil and immersion or tincture in water. An esoteric meaning is accorded to the rite, but it is nonetheless a rite, enacted with material tokens. The illusion that a Gnostic, being hostile to the creation, must be indifferent to the sacraments, is dispelled by the account of Mark the Mage in Irenaeus. The latter ranks him with the Valentinians, but he was also clearly indebted to the alchemists: pouring the wine and announcing to his gullible congregation that it would change into the blood of the goddess Charis (or Grace), he contrived, by the secret infusion of some haematic substance, to make it seem that the miracle had occurred.[130] It was not uncommon for catholics of this period to believe that the body and blood of Christ were present in the eucharist, but we do not hear of any who expected such a visible recrudescence of his sufferings in the transitory world.

Heracleon, by taking the Gospel of John as his text,[131] announced that Christ and his ministry were at the heart of his religion; a passing remark in Origen makes it clear that he saw the Church – whatever he meant by that – as the place where the risen Christ maintains his residence on earth. His choice of Johannine passages, if Origen's citations are representative, was desultory,[132] and perhaps the only episode

on which he commented line by line was the one in which Christ accosts the Samaritan woman at the well.[133] The colloquy that ensues, at least in the hands of a Valentinian translator, is addressed to every seeker of the kingdom. The Samaritan, as a female, stands for the undiscriminating soul which is nonetheless docile to instruction; the husband whom she lacks is the *pleroma* or fullness of her own perfection and that of Christ; the well from which she draws is the unfruitful realm of matter; the waterpot that she carries back to the city is an emblem of the new life that the soul imbibes in the wake of its conversion.[134] It is obvious that this allegory adds a great deal to the plain sense of the text, but we cannot be sure that in all respects it contradicts the intention of the evangelist, who always makes Christ speak through his interlocutors to humanity at large.[135] Nor should we presume, because the soul is said to be the recipient of the Gospel, that the body is excluded from salvation. If the soul is the seat of will and choice in the human agent, even an incarnate Saviour could hardly have chosen a different addressee, and the suggestion that the Fourth Gospel is a spiritual pendant to the others, first advanced in Alexandria by Clement, is endorsed by many readers who continue to regard the Incarnation, the resurrection and the efficacy of sacraments as fundamental tenets of the 'Johannine community'.[136] The injunction to flee the blandishments of the world and seek the everlasting truths beyond the senses is a commonplace in early Christian literature; and it is still the case, whatever may be said about the goodness of the material creation, that many good resolutions come to nothing, even in Christians, because passion, fear or appetite debilitate the will. Heracleon did not dissolve the flesh of Christ or banish him to a world beyond experience; he did maintain – and Origen agreed – that if his mission had been confined to a single lifetime or locality he would not be the Saviour of the present world.

Concluding Remarks on Origen

From Jewish, ecclesiastical and Gnostic circles in his native city, therefore, Origen could glean much that would assist him in the construction of a systematic Christian theology. As all inhabitants of the Roman Empire lived under one sky, felt the same wants and reasoned on like principles, there was sometimes no clear line to be drawn between one faith and another, or even between the precepts of religion and the theorems of philosophy; nevertheless there was at least one lesson to be derived from each of these associations that Origen could not have learned elsewhere. As a preparation for the study of his writings, it is helpful to note the things that he deemed it profitable to borrow and the things that he felt it incumbent on a Christian theologian to gainsay.

1 From the Jews he learned to read the scriptures with an indefeasible faith in the inspiration of every word, and hence to handle every word with a minute attention hitherto unmatched by Christian exegetes. Such microscopic commentary was equally foreign to the aims of Philo,[137] and while his example may have emboldened Origen in his application of figurative readings to the Old Testament, the desire to reclaim that ancient text from legalism, absurdity and obsolescence had never been the monopoly of one man. From Paul[138] to

Clement allegory had been an indispensable tool for Christian expositors, all of whom, including Origen, were bound to hold that Philo's canon was incomplete and that no interpretation of the prophets could be authoritative unless it yielded testimony to Christ.

2 Whether he was a pupil of Clement or merely his fellow Churchman, Origen was taught in Alexandria that the rudiments of the faith had been imparted by the apostles to the first generation of Christians and then bequeathed to posterity in the form of a new but authoritative scripture.[139] While the Church had officers to shepherd the transmission of the original deposit, it was the business of a scholar like himself to confirm their teachings from the canon. In the treatise *On First Principles*, composed in Alexandria and borrowing its name from a work by Clement, the written support of orthodoxy serves him as a scaffold for more adventurous, though disciplined, speculation. No doubt he looked to the *Stromateis* of Clement as his sanction for the occasional use of pagan learning in this enterprise; but he would also have been admonished by this work that knowledge of God is not a science like any other but the gift of revelation, whether at first or at second hand. Of Origen's own *Stromateis* we know enough to be sure that it was not so liberal as its predecessor in quotations from Greek literature, and indeed this parsimony is a constant feature of Origen's work, except in his response to the pagan Celsus, whom it was necessary to counter with his own weapons. Origen is also more economical and more diffident than Clement in his appeals to texts that lie outside the canon,[140] and he renounces any notion that one church, or a portion of it, had been trusted by the apostles with a mystery that they purposely withheld from the multitude. Every doctrine must be demonstrated from the inner sense of scripture if it was not contained already in the common rule of faith.

3 Where Irenaeus said plainly that the transgression of the first man was reversed by the obedience of the Saviour, the Valentinians unified cosmology with Christology through a myth in which the vicissitudes of Wisdom provide a frame to the first catastrophe and a backdrop to the second. Never since Paul had such a central and divisive function been accorded to the Cross; never again would a Christian cosmogony subsume so many Biblical accounts of the creation, or bring them into such intimate conjunction with the nature and work of Christ. The prologue to John's Gospel was the model for this juxtaposition of the beginning of history with its midpoint, and the irrigation of the world by spirit is a mystery that engages almost every Gnostic thinker, even where there is no profession of Christianity. Although we must speak with caution for lack of evidence, it might not be too much to say that his acquaintance with the Gnostics enabled Origen to improve on Clement's understanding of the Incarnation – to affirm that God not only unlocks his wisdom to the meditative intellect, but has come into the world in search of man.

He did not, for course, set out to be an apologist for any Gnostic group, and for the most part he perceived them through the eyes of his catholic contemporaries. No less than Irenaeus or Hippolytus, he believed that the Valentinians decried the resurrection, that their Saviour spent his season in the flesh not to redeem it but to liberate others from it, and that a lesser god was held accountable for the creation

of a lesser world. Much of his *First Principles* was conceived as an antidote to Gnostic poisons, and the themes of the present study – God, the soul and revelation – formed the threefold burden of the catholic case against the heretics in every part of Christendom. Later they formed the burden of the Church's case against Origen, who was cast as a Valentinian by a number of his detractors in the third century. To show that in fact he wielded an autonomous philosophy, based chiefly on the Bible and the premisses of the catholic tradition, is to acquit him incidentally of many things for which he has been both lauded and condemned. Such an exoneration neither entails nor presupposes that the Gnostics of Alexandria had the better of every catholic in dogmatic speculation; but if the main defendant can escape the taint of heresy, the charges that were thought to have been proved against his mentors will inevitably be subject to review.

Notes

1 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.1; Williams (1927), 209 ascribes to Origen a 'passionate African idiosyncrasy', in defiance of the standard ancient use of the term 'African' to denote only the inhabitants of modern Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. To Williams, however, Tertullian of Carthage and Cyril of Alexandria are compatriots. On Theodoret's pejorative use of the term 'Egyptian' see Newman (1876), 344.

2 Cited by Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.6–7. For discussion see next chapter.

3 Eusebius, *Church History*; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.1.

4 Simon (1986), 104–5 cites *Digest* 48.8.11 on the assimilation of circumcision to the self-castration of votaries in some orgiastic cults. *CommMatt* 15.1, pp. 348–60 Benz and Klostermann denounces any literal application of this verse, contending that the true eunuch is the one who is 'sterile in evil' (p. 359.25). This exegesis has a prototype in Philo's reflections on the number 7, and successor in the Neoplatonic interpretation of the castrated Attis as the mind withdrawn from matter (Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World* 4); it may thus be a case of 'spoiling the Egyptians' (*Philokalia* 13), but it does not read like the pronouncement of a man who has become notorious for his own misreading of the sense.

5 See next chapter on references in *Princ.* and elsewhere.

6 See Hengel (1991), 18–62 on the false antithesis between Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism in the New Testament era; West (1997) on the interpenetration of Near Eastern and Greek culture in the first millennium BC.

7 Taylor (1990) shows that there was no such thing.

8 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.17 alludes to the Hebrew etymology, but continues to believe in Ebion, the nominal founder. Origen too is aware of the connotation of the word in his scornful allusion to the earthbound exegesis of the Ebionites who are 'poor in intellect' (*First Principles*, 3.6.8 (24), p. 334.1–2 Koetschau), and no doubt believes, like Irenaeus before him (*Against Heresies* 1.22) that the Ebionites adhered to Jewish practices in defiance of Pauline doctrine; but neither he nor Irenaeus has yet heard that they slighted the divinity of *Christ*.

9 Euhemerus, much cited by the Christian apologists, purported to have written proof that the deities of Greek myth were only mortals who received outstanding honours for the benefits that they conferred upon their species.

10 See Ignatius, *Magnesians* 8.2 and 9.1, with Rev 2.9 and 3.9 on the 'synagogue of Satan' who dishonestly profess to be Jews in a time of persecution.

11 See Col 2.18, Heb 1.5, Rev 22.9; Ignatius, *Trallians* 5.2 and *Smyrnaeans* 3.2.

12 Trigg (1991) enumerates earlier Christian representations of Christ as an angel, but fails to convince me that Origen endorsed the same position.
13 Thus at Exodus 3.2 the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, but at 3.4 and thereafter his interlocutor is God. At Judges 13.9 an angel announces the birth of Samson to his father, but at 3.22 the latter exclaims that he has seen God.
14 See Pétrement (1991), 51–74.
15 See Urbach (1975), 139. On early Christian representations of Christ as an angel see Grillmeier (1975), 46–53.
16 Deut 12.5 (Name); Hab 2.14 (glory);Prov 8.22 ff. and Wisd 7. *passim* (Wisdom); Psalm 33.6 (Word).
17 John 1.1; Exodus 7.1 Septuagint. These texts will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.
18 Sirach (Ecclus) 24.23; see Davies (1955), 169 on the provenance of this notion and its relevance to Paul.
19 See Scholem (1954), 66 with n. 94 on Hekhalot mysticism and Rabbi Akiba (early second century AD).
20 See Bockmuehl (1997), and Scholem, as in previous note.
21 See Brooks (1988) on the compilation and content of the Mishnah, with which, however, he does not believe Origen to have been acquainted.
22 We need not here attempt to adjudicate on the antiquity or scope of the so-called 'blessing of the minim' which was certainly pronounced against certain Christians in certain synagogues by Origen's time: see Horbury (1982) for the evidence and a summary of competing interpretations.
23 See Blowers (1988); De Lange (1976), 8–9 cannot confidently identify any 'references in his early works to Jews in Alexandria'. Yet, as he goes on to note on p. 25, *Princ.* 1.3.4 and 4.3.14 reveal that Origen had consulted 'the Hebrew' during his Alexandrian youth.
24 At Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25.2, he shows how the present canon can be reduced to a figure of 22, which is equal to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.
25 For discussion and bibliography regarding the composition, purpose and influence of the Septuagint see now Gruen (1998), 207–13.
26 As he says of the Maccabean histories in the same passage of Eusebius, though at the same time he declares that these works lie outside the canon.
27 Kamesar (1993), 4–28 argues against Nautin (1977), 349–53 that Origen's exegesis is always centred on the Greek, not on the Hebrew, even if he occasionally lapses into the 'dualism' posited by Barthélemy (1972).
28 At *On Prayer* 14.4 he fiercely maintains the canonicity of Tobit and the Maccabean writings against opponents who would limit Christians to the Hebrew books.
29 *Commentary on the Song*, proem, p. 88.5–6 Baehrens.
30 On the principles of Midrash see Schürer (1973), 90–99 and (1979), 339–53.
31 See especially *Princ.* 4.4.35, pp. 358.32–359.4 Koetschau, though here the citation reinforces a reference to Ps 139.16. Enoch is quoted at Jude 1.14, and perhaps tacitly adduced at 1 Peter 3.19–20. Tertullian cites it expressly at *On the Attire of Women* 2.10.3, and without the name of an author at *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 32.1.
32 Sanday (1893), 39.
33 See Dawson (1992) for a perceptive account of Philo's method; Runia (1993), 47–58 for a survey of modern positions.
34 See *On Mating with the Preliminary Sciences* 5.23 on Hagar and Sarah; on the subordination of Gentile learning to scripture in Philo see Wolfson (1961), 2–4.
35 For Philo's exegesis of Exodus 7.1 ('I shall make thee god to Pharaoh') at *On Change of Names* 128–9 see Runia (1988).

36 See for example, Philo, *On the Making of the World* 89–129. For a Pythagorean encomium of the number seven, see Varro in Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 3.10; on Philo's reputation as a Pythagorean see Runia (1995). For all that, no other follower of this sect in Alexandria is attested during the Ptolemaic period, as Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 492 confesses, notwithstanding his own surmise that the Neopythagoreanism of Roman authors originates in Alexandria.

37 See Plato, *Timaeus* 28c and discussion in next chapter.

38 See next chapter. In view of Philo's interest in Pythagorean lore, it may be interesting to note that the Pythagorean Thrasyllus of Rhodes adopted the Stoic as an immanent and hegemonic principle in the universe: Tarrant (1993), 110–15. Tarrant and Runia (1986), 446–8 agree that Philo habitually substitutes the Logos for the World-Soul of the *Timaeus*.

39 See Wolfson (1947), 177–246.

40 See Starobinski-Safran (1978); Wolfson (1961).

41 Philo, *On the Cherubim* 27–9.

42 At *Migration of Abraham* 176–91, the description of the Chaldaeans as skilful readers of the heavens, who have thereby succumbed to astrology and a belief in the omnipotence of fate, is clearly a satire on the Stoics.

43 *On the Giants* 60–61. For the tripartite soul in Plato (reason, spirit, appetite), see *Republic* 439–40.

44 See *Republic* 415a-b for the division of humanity into three tribes, each derived from a different metal; *Symposium* 189d-193b on the three species of primeval human (male, female, androgynous) who threatened to storm Olympus like the giants of Homer, and after their defeat became the ancestors of male homosexuals, female homosexuals and heterosexuals respectively.

45 Wolfson (1956); Runia (1993).

46 See Wolfson (1948).

47 See *Church History* 6.19.6 for Porphyry's description of Ammonius, and 6.19.10 for the Christian rejoinder.

48 Eusebius, *Concordance to the Gospels*, trans. Barnes (1981), 121. On p. 122 Barnes notes that this Ammonius is 'otherwise unattested'.

49 Origen's occasional indifference to the structure of biblical narratives (which, as I argue in Chapter 4, should not be exaggerated) might have seemed to him to be sanctioned by the readiness of Ammonius to 'break threads' for the sake of his synopsis.

50 See *Church History* 5.11 on the Catechetical School; 6.13.2 on Pantaenus as Clement's tutor; 6.13.8 on Clement's correspondence with Origen.

51 See Bardy (1937). Van den Hoek (1997) contends that the evidence favours the existence of the school, but the ancient testimonies are subject to the doubts that have been cast on all intellectual genealogies in antiquity by scholars such as Glucker (1978).

52 Otherwise one could not make sense of the anecdote (Rufinus, *Church History* 1.14) that the child Athanasius horrified his elders by performing valid baptisms on infants of his own age.

53 For the *First Principles* of Longinus (*c.* AD 265) see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 14; for that of Clement see his *Stromateis* 3.13 and 3.21. An allusion to Greek theories about first principles at 5.14.140 does not convince that Kannengiesser (1988), 249 is right to assume that Origen was subscribing to a 'common use of the phrase' when he adopted it as a title. Logan (1999), 161 n.19 cites Marcellus of Ancyra's barbed comparison of the opening sentence with *Gorgias* 454d-e (Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4); had Marcellus known of a Platonic antecedent for the title, he would no doubt have published this also.

54 For Origen's *Stromateis* see Eusebius, *Church History* 6.24.3; Jerome, *Commentary on Ephesians*; and Moreschini (1987). For that of Plutarch see Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.8.1–12. Even if the work is wrongly attributed, it remains true, in the words of Méhat (1966), 104, that '*le fragment d'Eusèbe est un témoin de genre*'.

55 Tollinton (1914), vol. 2, 135–64 feels bound to apologize for Clement's reticence, and adds in mitigation that Alexandria was 'behind' the other sees in the formality of its rituals.

56 Méhat (1966), 421–88 shows that *gnosis* in Clement's *Stromateis* may signify knowledge of science, of philosophy, of the virtues, of worldly affairs, of Christian dogma, of supernal mysteries, of the last things or, of the inner sense of scripture. The discovery of such an array of meanings in a single work should deter us from assuming that the 'knowledge falsely so-called' which Irenaeus imputes to all his adversaries (*Against Heresies* 2, proem) is homogeneous in content.

57 See *Stromateis* 5.1.5 and 5.12.86 on the necessity of faith in the pursuit of things invisible; 5.1.3 on *gnosis* as a higher faith, the completion of obedience; 5.9.59 and 5.11.67 on Pythagoras; 5.14.89–145 on the plagiarisms of the Greeks.

58 Justin, *First Apology* 43; Clement, *Stromateis* 6.42–3.

59 Cf. Matt 5.45, 13.3–9 and parallels. There may also be a reminiscence of Numenius, Fr. 13 Des Places.

60 *Stromateis* 1.32, citing John 14.6.

61 It seems to me inaccurate to say with Domini (1988), 16 that *Stromateis* 1.37.6 conveys 'his own ideal of the philosophical method', but the evidence supplied by Domini does show that the word was a *termus technicus* in Clement's time. Domini rightly points out on p. 26 that the emergence of dogmatic schools of Platonism and peripatetic philosophy coincides with the heyday of eclecticism; but this does not seem to me to refute Zeller's notion that it was a 'moralizing ... *lingua franca*' (Domini, *loc. cit.*), since the dogmatism of these schools was generally confined to metaphysics, epistemology and some departments of logic and physics.

62 On the characteristics of the true Gnostic, whom Clement believes to be more faithful to the scriptures, to moral law and to the canons of rationality, see Méhat (1966), 489–522.

63 See Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods* etc.; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 6.11.2–18 etc.

64 At *Protrepticus* 70, Plato is upbraided for concealing his superior understanding of the divine.

65 See Grant (1988), 9.

66 Our knowledge of the *Protrepticus* of Aristotle is derived mainly from its namesake by Iamblichus, but affinities between Clement and earlier rhetoricians of the Roman era are noted by Emmett (2000) in a promissory note for a longer work. We should also observe that Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* bears the title *Protreptikos* in Greek.

67 See Chadwick (1959a), especially 109–11 on Origen's polemic in the *Commentary on Matthew* against excessive zeal in the pursuit of sexual purity.

68 See especially *Stromateis* 4.25.155.

69 Osborn (1994).

70 Osborn (1994). It will be seen that my estimate of Clement is in general closer to that of Osborn (1954) than to that of Lilla (1971).

71 See Grillmeier (1975), 108–13 on the Logos as a cosmological agent.

72 *HomLev* 9.2, p. 420.15–16 Baehrens.

73 See Luke 22.42–4 for his eating of fish, though in the near parallel at John 21.12–14 it is not said that Christ himself eats. On equality with the angels see Luke 20.36; for the fasting in the wilderness see Matt 4.2.

74 The title may bespeak familiarity with Alexandrian literature: see Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 492 on the *Hypotyposes* of the Sceptic Pyrrho.
75 Translation adapted from Edwards (2000), 172.
76 On Clement's appeal to certain unnamed elders as witnesses to the transmission of the apostolic writings, see Hill (1998). The 'elder' cannot be the author of the letter, since Clement clearly believes him to be the same person as the evangelist, whom he takes for John the Apostle.
77 Photius, *Library* 109. For bibliography see Edwards (2000), 168.
78 For commentary see Edwards (2000), 169, from whom this translation is taken with slight changes.
79 Eusebius, *Church History* 6.13.3. On his appeal to uncanonical, though not unorthdox witnesses, see ibid. 6.13.7. Metzger (1987), 291 observes that at *Stromateis* 4.15.98 and 6.15.124 the term appears to designate a norm of Christian belief and exegesis.
80 On the recent discovery of a letter which many scholars have agreed to attribute to Clement, see Koester (1990), 193–203.
81 Eusebius, *Church History* 6.12.2–4. Clement cites Peter at *Stromateis* 5.5.40, 5.5.43, 5.5.48 (here under the title *Preaching of Peter*).
82 *Against Heresies* 3.1.1 and 3.11.8.
83 For a survey of scholarship on this document see Petersen (1995).
84 See *Muratorian Fragment* 71–3 at Hahnemann (1992): 'We receive only the apocalypses of Peter and John, which some of our number do not wish to be read in church. As for the *Shepherd*, Hermas wrote it very recently in Rome, when Bishop Pius his brother occupied the see of Rome; therefore it ought to be read, but not publicly in church to the people, nor can it be reckoned in the number of the prophets, which is complete, nor among the apostles at the end of times.' I assume here, against Hahnemann, the late second-century dating which is evidently implied by the allusion to the late composition of the *Shepherd of Hermas*.
85 While the name indicates an Egyptian provenance, neither Origen nor Clement adds to our knowledge of this figure, though he appears to be the principal butt of Irenaeus' attack on the Valentinians in *Against Heresies*, and his *Letter to Flora* shows that he was willing to make discriminating use of the Jewish scriptures: see Markschies (2000).
86 See John 1.14, 1.18, 6.62, 12.28–33.
87 Quispel ([1948] 1968), citing Arnobius, *Against the Nations* 2.25 on p. 22 n.13. The 'novi viri' of Arnobius have been tentatively characterized by scholars as disciples of Cornelius Labeo or of Porphyry; in either case they were strict contemporaries of Arnobius, and distant epigoni of Basilides.
88 Quispel ([1948] 1968), 226. Bos (2000) argues cogently that if we take the 'exoteric works' of Aristotle as the touchstone, Basilides was indeed a disciple of the Stagirite, as Hippolytus avers.
89 See Clement, *Stromateis* 4.81–3, with the sceptical commentary of Lohr (1995), 122–51. See also *Stromateis* 2.112–4, with Lohr, 78–101 on the postulation of two souls by Isidorus in his analysis of freedom.
90 See Lohr (1995), 101–22 on *Stromateis* 3.1–3.
91 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.25.2 speaks of the 'remainder of the so-called Gnostics' after a paragraph on Basilides. On Christian and pagan usage see Edwards (1989). Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16 takes 'Gnostics' as the name of a Christian sect; Iamblichus, *On the Soul* p. 357 Wachsmuth perhaps recognizes them as a philosophical school.
92 See for example, Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 5.11. Modern scholarship often claims to be following the usage of Irenaeus and Hippolytus in attaching the label 'Gnostic' to almost all the heresies that they revile. Many infer that Gnostic

thought was a unitary system; others abuse the ecclesiastical tutors for imposing a false unanimity on heterogeneous foes. Against the first claim see Williams (1996), and against the second, Edwards (1989). The Fathers had no interest in pretending that all their enemies were of one mind, since they repeatedly exult in the proliferation of heresies from the 'Gnostic' prototype; while all their opponents make a pretence of *gnosis*, and thus aspire to be superior to the Church, the content of this *gnosis* is as variable as error.

93 For critical edition and history of the text see Giversen (1963). Robinson (1988) is cited here for reference to all the Nag Hammadi Codices.

94 Markschies (1992) is not the first to warn us that the tenets which are ascribed to Valentinus in ancient sources do not suffice to make him a Valentinian.

95 See Edwards (1989) on the application of the term 'Gnostic' in the first three centuries. In the *Panarion* of Epiphanius (*c.* 376) we meet Secundians, Theodotans, Ptolemaeans and Heracleonists; yet his chapters on these sects are wholly reliant on authorities who treated Secundus, Theodotus, Ptolemaeus and Heracleon as individual students in the school of Valentinus.

96 For a recent survey of theories as to the origin of the corpus, see Goehring (2000).

97 My account is a conflation of Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.1 with Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 6.29–30. These are still the fullest summaries of the myth, and so the analysis by Sagnard (1948), though written before the publication of the Nag Hammadi Codices, remains invaluable. John 1.14 and 1.18; Col 2.9.

98 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.2.2; Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.30.

99 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.2.4; Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.31. Cf. 1 Cor. 1.21–4, with Edwards (2001), 218–20. By contrast Philo, *On the Making of the World* 37, derives the word *ouranos* (heaven), arguing that the firmament lies between the seat of God and the home of man.

100 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.4.1–2; Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.32.

101 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.2.2; Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.30; 1 Cor 15.8.

102 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.11.1; Stead (1969).

103 Gen 1.2; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.29; *Apocryphon of John*; Scholem (1974).

104 *Zostrianus* (Nag Hammadi Codices 8.1), 10.4 at Robinson (1988), 406.; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.10.

105 See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16 on the Gnostic authorities; Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.6 on his compunction.

106 See especially Dodds (1960).

107 Edwards (2001), 214–6, citing the *Exegesis on the Soul* (which in turn cites Hosea 2.2 on the harlotry of Israel), Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.29.4.

108 See 1 Peter 3.20 and Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.12 on the ark; Clement, *Stromateis* 6.16 and *Excerpts from Theodotus* 63 on the Sabbath. For further commentary see Pétrement (1991), 68–70 and Edwards (2001), 218.

109 See Griffiths (1996), 17.

110 Edwards (2001), 218–19, citing Gal 4.4 on the fullness of time, Eph 3.19 on the plenitude of salvation; Rom 11.25 (with Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.7.1) on the Church as the entire quota of the redeemed.

111 See Scholem (1965), 104–5 on the feminine in God; Tishby (1989), 770–73 on the image of God in the embodied human being; Gen 1.26; Ezekiel 1.26.

112 Urbach (1975), 227–8 cites a number of authorities before the third century. Philo, *Making of the World* 46.134, surmises that the first Adam was incorporeal and not so much androgynous as neither male nor female.

113 See for example, *Apocryphon of John* (Nag Hammadi Codices 2.1), 14.21–31 at Robinson (1988), 113, and 19.24–31 at Robinson (1988), 116.

114 See especially Wisdom of Solomon 7 and 10, with Edwards (2001), 214.
115 See *Poimandres* 15–16 with the notes of Copenhaver (1992), 109–11. The treatise is often, though not invariably, regarded as the earliest writing in the Hermetic Corpus; a date around AD 100 is accepted, on different grounds, by Reitzenstein (1904), 31–6 and Dodd (1935), 201–9. For a summary of scholarly opinions see Copenhaver (1992), 95.
116 For a sober review of the evidence see Pearson (1981).
117 Together with his *Stromateis,* according to Eusebius, *Church History* 6.24.3.
118 *Princ.* 3.3, pp. 256.5–263.10 Koetschau. At *Princ.* 2.9.5, p. 168.15 Koetschau, Origen accuses the Valentinians of positing a 'diversity of souls' – that is, souls whose natures already destine them to perdition or damnation.
119 *Princ.* 3.4.2, p. 267.8–12 Koetschau.
120 Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.35–6; cf. Tertullian, *Proscription of Heresies* 9. Edwards (2000), 176–7 points out that Valentinians and Monarchians, often treated as antipodes in modern heresiology, were believed by ancient witnesses to be at one in holding (a) that there were no hypostatic distinctions in the Godhead, and (b) that the earthly Christ was not the same being as Christ in heaven.
121 Thus Theodotus, *Excerpt* 42 says that our spirits are consubstantial with that of God.
122 *Excerpts from Theodotus* 19; see Edwards (2000), 174.
123 Theodotus is commenting on Luke 23.46, but with a glance at John 10.17 and Eph 4.9–10.
124 That is, demons. Cf. 1 Cor 2.8, Col 2.14 and Procter (1998), 46. The latter seems to assume a complete abstraction of spirit from matter, which I do not find in the text.
125 John 3.8; 7.39; 4.24.
126 Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 5.7.18, tendentiously citing Rom 1.26–7.
127 *Treatise on the Omega* 10, at Scott (1936), 106, with commentary at 118–23. Zosimus shares a source, Nicotheus, with the Gnostics of Plotinus (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16): see further Jackson (1990). On affinities between Zosimus and the Naassenes (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 5.7.3–6) see Reitzenstein (1904).
128 *Treatise on the Omega* 6 and 14 at Scott (1936), 106 and 108 with commentary at 119–20. I do not wish to deny that there is also much of native Egyptian provenance in Zosimus, as Fowden (1986) demonstrates. There appear to be elements in the most primitive layer of Hebrew thought which are also indigenous to Egypt – not least, if Atwell (2000) is correct, the doctrine of creation by the word. The tenacity of this motif among the Jews of Egypt is attested by a paraphrase of Genesis 1, the *Apocryphon of Moses* (*Greek Magical Papyri* 13.11 Preisendanz), in which the world comes into being through a series of seven divine expectorations.
129 See Procter (1998), 45–51 on the cooperation of spiritual and material factors in the Valentinian sacraments.
130 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.13.2. Notwithstanding the justifiable scepticism of Förster (1999), 91–123, the parallels that he cites from pagan sources make it clear that this report is not a simple fabrication, and the corroborative material in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 9.6 may be of Egyptian provenance, though Mark was not.
131 One that differed from Origen's, according to Ehrmann (1993); since all his evidence comes from Origen's commentary, this article also demonstrates that the latter's animadversions were both truthful and precise. The remains of Heracleon's work, assembled by Brooke (1891), have received a sympathetic commentary in Pagels (1973).
132 See Bendinelli (1997), 9, who follows Simonetti (1966).
133 Seventeen citations of Heracleon appear between p. 234.7 Preuschen (John 4.12) and p. 257.9 (on John 4.31).

134 *CommJoh* 4.17.63, p. 235.1–3 Preuschen on the woman; 4.17.66, p. 235.12–14 on the well; 4.17.67, p. 235.20 on the *pleroma*; 4.17.187, p. 255.12–15 on the waterpot.

135 E.g. at John 3.11, where the plural abruptly supersedes the singular in both first and second person in the middle of Christ's discourse to Nicodemus; John 3.14 is overheard by the crowd at John 12.34.

136 Taking John 6.63 as an allusion to the eucharistic ritual, Barrett (1982), 42 opines that 'his attitude in general may be defined as neither rejection nor sacramentarianism, but one of critical acceptance'. This holds good of Origen, though he often construes the 'feeding on the flesh of the son of Man' as the acquisition of the knowledge of God through study of his word.

137 See Bendinelli (1997), 10–14 for a brief comparison of Origen with Jewish commentators.

138 Gal 4.24 etc.; see discussion in Chapter 4.

139 See *Princ.* 1, proem 1–3, pp. 7.5–9.11 Koetschau.

140 Cf. 1 Cor 1.23 on the Cross as a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. The centrality of the Cross (and of Christ's antecedent ministry on earth) for the Valentinians is illustrated, for example, by the so-called *Gospel of Truth* (Nag Hammadi Codices 1.3), 18.22–32 at Robinson (1988), 41; although the Cross is endowed here with a spiritual meaning, the nails are real enough.

Chapter 2

The God of Origen and the Gods of Plato

It is an axiom rather than an argued case with many scholars that Origen's conception of the Godhead is Platonic. This is a versatile epithet, which generally appears to have been prescribed by custom rather than conviction; and above all it is customarily pressed on those theologies which entertain a particularly lofty view of God or a particularly low view of our ability to comprehend his nature. Such theories hold that since we lack the means to say what God is we can say only what he is not: 'timeless', 'changeless', 'infinite', 'ingenerate', 'inscrutable', 'ineffable', 'incorporeal', 'impassible' are a handful of the negative or 'apophatic' terms by which we turn our ignorance into a sort of knowledge. No one doubts that Platonism rather than the Bible is the lexicon which supplies these words to the Christian tradition; and when the Christian happens to be, like Origen, an Alexandrian born in the late second century, these circumstances are often quoted in proof or in mitigation of his debt to the great philosopher. We are told that a man cannot escape the dominant thought of his epoch, and that in Alexandria 'Middle Platonism' was the oxygen of all cerebral processes, so that even an earnest Christian could not fail to imbibe it with his catechism. This argument wears the aspect of a truism, but none the less it involves two suppositions – that the Platonists were theists and that they exercised sovereign influence in this period – which are questionable enough to call for separate treatment before we come to examine Origen's teaching on the nature, work and purposes of God.

Platonism and the Name of God

For about half a century it has been the fashion for British theologians to assert that the notion of divine transcendence – of a God who has by nature nothing in common with his creatures – is as foreign to the Biblical tradition as to the spirit of modern science. Christian thought, they argue, has been all too prone to confuse the essential matter of the gospel with the verdigris that clings to it from a time when the Holy Spirit found it expedient to use his second language, Greek, as an instrument of preaching to the nations. God in the tongue of Plato is a distant figure, a he if not an it; by contrast the God of the Hebrew prophets is ever at hand, the inescapable though unseen Thou.[1] A return from Greek to Hebrew – from the ephemeral expression to the underlying category of speech – is a return to intimacy with the One who is always present, always immanent in the world of change and suffering, and Lord of another world or the 'world to come' in no other sense than that that world is destined to emerge from this.[2] Thus, on the prevailing theory, immanence is the Biblical, or at least the Hebrew postulate, while transcendence is the pagan

heresy. Yet strange to tell, in every other generation from ancient times to the early twentieth century, it was the converse view that held the field. Christians and Jews of imperial times held that the Greeks as a race were worshippers of the elements, while modern Europeans have seen the Platonists as pantheists who exaggerated the immanence of the Deity until he and the world became identical. On the other hand, the ineffable and unpicturable God of Judaism, who creates all things by fiat and is too sublime to be a companion to any of them, was proverbial throughout the Roman Empire;[3] later Jewish thinkers endorsed this view of their religion, spurning what is commonly called the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation as a blasphemous denial of the interval that separates the Creator from his world.[4]

This revolution in academic prejudice has perhaps a number of causes. First, the modern exegete feels no duty to harmonize texts which he believes to have been written by different men in different epochs, and with only partial knowledge. He admits that the anthropomorphisms of the Pentateuch are mythical, but declines to superimpose on them the more austere and explicit utterances of the prophets. Secondly, the modern theologian denies that speculation should be answerable to the laws of medieval metaphysics or of modern analytical philosophy. He feels that it is not his task to deduce the logical predicates of the deity from the testimony of experience, and he urges that experience bears witness to the immanence of God. Thirdly, it has not always been observed by the parties to the controversy that the meaning of the terms has become ambiguous. Some proponents of immanence mean only that God loves the world and intervenes through answered prayers and intermittent miracles; others mean that he dwells in it as the soul dwells in the body, and that he depends on the world for the fulfilment of his own being just as the world depends on him for its persistence and its orderly design. The first is the ancient teaching of the Church, but only the second takes account of the strict philosophical sense of 'immanence'. According to the first account, God's freedom to intervene is guaranteed by his transcendence, that is to say by his untrammelled superiority to his creatures; independence, on this view, does not imply indifference, and it does not follow that if God cannot suffer he cannot feel. If, on the other hand, he were enmeshed in the world as the modern doctrine of immanence proposes, he might feel as much as we do, but he would for that very reason be deprived of the power to act.

The doctrine of a God above creation who is none the less free and willing to intervene in it is Biblical; the strict doctrine of immanence, if anyone truly holds it, is the latter-day heresy. Antithetical to both positions is the notion of a God who, having brought the world into being, sits too high to notice what is going on in it. The gravamen of the modern charge against Plato is that he not only taught this but persuaded us, for almost two millennia, that the Bible taught it also. In fact, we are told, there is no common ground between the abstract theism of the philosophers and the living God of Isaiah and Hosea; Hellenized without knowing it, the Fathers misconstrued Christ's work as an unrepeatable miracle of reconciliation, rather than as a symbol of the permanent fellowship between humanity and God. This might not be good theology even if the history were sounder; as it is, the argument stumbles at the initial premise. It is dangerous to count Plato as a monotheist, or a theist of any kind, when he did not, in any sense that the Bible knows, believe in God.

Of course he believed in gods, in common with the whole body of Athenians whom Paul pronounced to be *deisidaimonesteroi*, somewhat prone to superstition.[5] Almost every dialogue takes for granted the existence of these superhuman and immortal agents; in the *Laws* an omniscient despotism inflicts harsh punishment on atheists and those who doubt that heaven keeps a watch upon the city.[6] It is not the mark of deity to be idle, and in the *Timaeus*, perhaps the most celebrated of his works in the second century, Plato traces the origin of the cosmos to a Demiurge, whom he frequently styles *ho theos*. This locution functions in the Greek Bible as a proper name or definite description, and could not be rendered otherwise than as 'God'; we have two reasons, however, to be wary of this usage when translating Plato's dialogue. First the Demiurge delegates many tasks to acolytes who, though inferior in rank, belong to the category of gods; secondly, while he is free to create he is not free to determine the character of his creation. That is determined rather by the everlasting paradigm, which is logically if not temporally prior to all material existence and contains the archetypes of natural kinds.[7]

The myth of the *Timaeus* – and we ought not to forget that it is a myth – may be regarded as a variant of the 'theory of Ideas', as this is presupposed or formulated in many of Plato's dialogues. Far from being, as common libel says, a substitution of metaphysics for experience, this theory came to birth as a vindication of experience. It assumes that words like 'beautiful', 'just' and 'holy' have a unitary meaning, and are not conferred at random on a host of fleeting, heterogeneous and debated objects.[8] Hence, it infers, the attributes denoted by these terms are neither figments nor illusions, but real entities, related in the same manner to every instance of the beautiful, the holy and the just. Since nothing in the present world is entirely equipollent with its attributes – nothing, for example, is of such unqualified beauty as to be beautiful at all times, in all aspects and to all observers[9] – the real entities that we posit here are not found in the world, and must be assigned to a superior plane of being, which is proof against the lapse of time and the vagaries of perception. In short the realm of Forms or Ideas lies beyond the senses, and its denizens, being logically defined and not empirically discovered, are changeless, timeless and apprehensible only to the mind.[10]

Whether there are Ideas of natural kinds as well as properties is a question seldom raised in Plato's dialogues and variously answered. According to Socrates in the *Parmenides*, there is no Idea of man, but this opinion seems to be countermanded by the same speaker in the *Philebus*.[11] Whereas the *Timaeus* implies that every plant and animal has its prototype in the paradigm no speaker in this dialogue or any other grants Ideas to such amorphous and ignoble phenomena as ugliness or mud.[12] Again the *Timaeus* intimates that any particular, any concrete entity, in the lower world is a copy of its idea in the higher one; Parmenides, in the dialogue that bears his name, objects that this entails a vicious regress, as the same logic that deduces the Idea from the resemblance between particulars will then be forced to infer another archetype – the 'third man', as it is styled in Aristotle – to account for the resemblance between the particular and the Idea.[13] If instead we surmise that the idea is immanent in the particular, we are pushed into a dilemma: either we must maintain, against all logic, that the whole of the Idea is present in each of the particulars, or else the Idea itself must be parcelled out among the particulars, as though it were not the prerogative of the incorporeal to be

indivisible.[14] The Idea is the formal precondition, not the negation, of material existence, since nothing can exist in the world unless it be a thing of a certain species; but, as we see from Socrates' failure to satisfy the cross-examination of Parmenides, the impression of form on substrate cannot be explained by the same considerations that disclose the logical properties of the form.

In the *Sophist* a disciple of Parmenides, on the plea that it would be absurd for Ideas to be less active than the minds that they inform, contends that they are pregnant with a superabounding energy that communicates itself to the present world in the form of life.[15] In the *Timaeus,* however, the conjunction of form and matter is effected by the Demiurge, whose creation is a spontaneous diffusion of his goodness,[16] though the content of that goodness in the realm of space and temporal becoming is dictated, as we saw, by the paradigm. Of this he is not the author but a privileged beholder, an executor rather than a beneficiary. Other beings are not so much seers as seekers of the Ideas, which stand to them as final causes, whether this expression be understood to signify abstract concepts such as beauty or the perfection of each creature in its kind. These alternatives are brought together in the great myth of the *Phaedrus*, which asserts that every soul before its fall into the lower domain inhabited a 'supercelestial place', where it pursued its allotted virtue in the retinue of its god. Here, as in the *Timaeus*, gods are clearly not the highest order of being, for they do not create but contemplate the Ideas, which remain external to them. In the tenth book of the *Republic* we read of an Idea that has its seat in the 'mind of god', but this is merely the form of a bed, a human artefact, and a pretext for artistic imitation. Only once elsewhere does Plato recognize the existence of such valueless Ideas, which are nothing to the philosopher in comparison with those that he aspires to see at the climax of the long regime of instruction that is described in the earlier portions of the work.

The *Republic* upholds the principle, first clearly enunciated in the *Phaedo*, that the only true causes in nature are final causes, since they explain not merely what is the case but why. The final cause of anything is its good, and since the philosophy of Plato assumes that all desirable purposes can be harmonized, it is much the same to ask what is good for a thing and what the thing itself is good for.[17] When we put this question to the Ideas we conclude that, as there are simple forms of Beauty, Justice and Holiness, so there must be a simple form of the Good which will vouchsafe to them both existence and a reason for existing. The souls in the *Phaedrus* struggle for a sight of it,[18] but in their rash endeavour they trample others and are trampled, lose control of the steeds that draw them, and so at last are pitched down wingless to the earth.[19] The mind that is purged by science and dialectic in the *Republic*, however, rises above the shadow-play of politics and the sensuous variety of the physical world, above mathematical certainties and even the contemplation of the ideas, until its years of seeking culminate in vision.[20] The spectacle cannot be described beforehand and requires no authentication: the Good is its own certificate, as in the lower world the sun is visible by the same light that it sheds on all below.

There is no mention of God here, and how far this mixture of ethics and ontology is from theism we can see from a brief comparison. Scholars who profess to detect an echo of this passage from the *Republic* in Christian authors have occasionally confused it with an analogue in the *Apomnemoneumata*, or *Memorabilia* of Socrates

by his sometime pupil Xenophon. In one of the conversations which this blunt but gifted soldier ascribes to Socrates, the sage exhorts us not to doubt the existence of the gods because we have no immediate knowledge of them. Just as our fleshly eyes lack strength to gaze upon the sun, so human reason cannot hope to comprehend, let alone discern, the gods themselves. Nevertheless, as surely as we are conscious of the sun throughout the day because we see all other things by it, so we *cannot* fail to be aware of the gods whenever we reflect upon the ubiquitous testimony of their works.[21] This is perhaps the first specimen of natural theology in Greek, from the pen of one who represents Socrates as the champion of the common man's religion.[22] Plato, on the other hand, though at pains in his *Apology* to rebut the charge that Socrates corrupted the youth of Athens, says little in response to the other half of the indictment, that he slighted the gods of his countrymen by worshipping his own.

The Socrates of Plato might be more justly charged with introducing, not new gods, but a novel brand of piety, in which *theos* ('god') is a term for a being of superhuman excellence, but is nowhere an appellation of the highest principle. The mere number of the deities in whom Socrates believes would seem to entail that they partake of a higher unity, and one might think that more honour should be accorded to the one than to the many. Yet Socrates, although he is as ready to venerate Thracian gods as to swear by those of Athens,[23] offers neither prayers nor sacrifices to the Good. The incorporeality of the gods raises a metaphysical problem that is not solved in the dialogues. If they are by nature just or holy, yet not identical with justice or with holiness, it must follow that they participate in the Ideas of these virtues; yet how can we speak of mere participation in the absence of the material principle that differentiates particulars in the world from one another and from their common properties? This question will apply with double force to the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, if we take it as an axiom that all good beings participate directly in the Good. In the myth he is also styled a *nous* or intellect,[24] if indeed he is not synonymous with Intellect; it was left to the later Platonists to determine whether the objects of the supernal mind are outside it or within it, and whether it is enough for the mind and its objects to be congruent or some external agent is required to make them one.[25]

Plato's pupil Aristotle annihilates the distinction between the intellect and its object in the deity. Matter in his system is potential, form is actual; that is to say that matter is susceptible of conversion into a body of any form, while the form itself, being what it is by nature and conceptual definition, is incapable of losing or acquiring properties. It is a general law for Aristotle that nothing exists in act alone but only as an actualized potential; an exception is made, however, for thought, which is actualized without a substrate as the intellect of God. Since this actuality is a state that all other beings, from the lowest to the highest, strive to realize, the god of Aristotle is a final cause of every change and motion in the cosmos. He himself, however, is so free from all tincture of potentiality that he does not even undergo the changes that would be entailed by passing from one object of cognition to another.[26] In fact he thinks of nothing but himself,[27] is wholly unconscious of his providential government, and moves the universe only as the beloved moves the lover, through the attraction of desire. This god then falls far short of personality, but he is at least a thinker and an agent, like the God of Christendom. The contrast

between the Platonic and the Aristotelian notions of the first principle was a commonplace even after the two philosophies had become fused in the minds of their adherents:[28] a logician of the sixth century asks why the Aristotelians call that principle Mind and Platonists the Good.[29]

The Good in Plato is a final cause, his Demiurge an efficient one; if either is the god of Aristotle it is the former, and it is generally agreed to have been the marriage of Platonic with Aristotelian metaphysics that begot the interpretation of the Ideas as 'thoughts of God'.[30] Aristotle's Prime Mover is of course the sole object of his own meditation, but we learn from other works of the same philosopher that it is possible for the intellect in thinking of itself to perpend the thoughts of things without. Indeed there is no perception of the outer world without such self-reflexive contemplation, for on every such occasion it is only the realization of the mind as 'active intellect' that makes it possible for the 'potential intellect' to unite itself with the form that it abstracts from the material particular.[31] A mind that is free from any residue of potentiality might still observe the ideas, provided that its awareness of them is timeless, inalienable and indifferent to external stimuli.

We need not endeavour here to trace the doctrine of the Ideas as thoughts of God to a single author; Origen would not have cared to know whether he was Philo the Jew, the Platonist Antiochus of Ascalon or Aristotle's first great commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias.[32] He may not have been acquainted with the theory in its simplest form, though as we shall see he entertained a similar view himself. He was certainly acquainted with the writings of Numenius of Apamea, a self-styled Pythagorean of the mid- to late second century, whose celebrated interpretation of Plato posits two transcendent intellects, the higher at rest and free of all distraction while the lower engages in ceaseless contemplation of the higher. So long as it directs its gaze above, this subaltern intellect generates only the Ideas; but when it lets its vision fall on the deliquescent restlessness of matter, it undergoes schism and becomes the reluctant Demiurge of the present world.[33] Inhabiting the second mind is a realm of sovereign Beauty, and the inferior world derives beauty from participation in it; yet even the contents of this second mind (which we may take to be all Ideas) are not good save insofar as they participate in the higher mind, which is the Good itself.[34]

It is often supposed that Origen, when he quotes Numenius on four occasions in his work *Against Celsus*,[35] was drawn to him by intellectual kinship; after all, who could be a better ally in his contest with his fellow-Platonist Celsus for the right to wear the spoils of the Academy? But Origen professes to take Celsus for an Epicurean, and when he cites Numenius it is not (say) as a precursor of his own Trinitarian doctrine, but as a witness in one instance to the origin of Serapis, and on another to the miracles of Jesus and the names of the Egyptian priests who strove with Moses and Aaron on the eve of the Exodus.[36] Origen knew the treatise of Numenius *On the Good*,[37] and it is frequently maintained that in his *Commentary on John* he took the technical vocabulary of this work as a model when he expressed the superiority of the Father to the Son by styling the former *autotheos*, 'God himself'.[38] There is rather more smoke than fire here, as Numenius' appellation for the First God is *autoagathon* (Good itself), not *autotheos* – a point of some importance to the Platonists, for whom not nouns but adjectives were always the Ideas *par excellence*. There were some among Plato's immediate successors who

spoke of such ideas as 'man himself' or 'horse itself', but there is little evidence that such terms survived the criticisms of Aristotle.[39] Yet neither the early masters nor the later Pythagoreans in Porphyry's catalogue of writers perused by Origen can be shown to have made use of the prefix *auto-* to assert that there is only one true God:

> This man, being a pupil of Ammonius, who in our time possessed the greatest attainments in philosophy, derived great profit from his instructor so far as concerns his acquaintance with literature, but followed the opposite path to him so far as concerns his choice of life. For Ammonius, raised as a Christian by Christian parents, as soon as he reached the age of judgment and philosophising, changed at once to a way of life more in accord with the laws. But Origen, a Greek reared in the study of Greek literature, defected to the wilful error[40] of the barbarians ... He spent all his time with Plato, and was conversant with the works of Numenius and Cronius, Apollophanes, Longinus,[41] Moderatus, Nicomachus and the men of renown among the Pythagoreans. And he also made use of the books of Chaeremon the Stoic, together with Cornutus, from whom he learned the tropological interpretation of the mysteries among the Greeks and applied it to Jewish writings. (cited in Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.6–8)

We need not doubt that Origen read the authors named by Porphyry, though in his extant writings he says not a word about most of them; on the other hand, the fact that some were also prescribed for study in the circle of Plotinus is proof of nothing but the uniformity of the Greek tradition.[42] Nowhere was this tradition more assiduously preserved than in Alexandria; nowhere were the writings of the ancients more accessible; nowhere was it less probable that a single author would become the tyrant of the syllabus, or that any strong-minded pupil, even a Christian, would be swayed by one opinion merely for want of hearing two.

Studying Philosophy in Alexandria

Alexandria was not an ancient city, for it owes its name to the conqueror of Greece and Egypt, Alexander the Great. Under the successors of Alexander's general Ptolemy, it throve until it exceeded even Athens in population and threatened to outshine it as a centre of Greek culture. Its cornucopian library, constructed at the behest of the second Ptolemy, fuelled the industry of scholars and refined the taste of poets. Two of its first custodians indeed were the poets Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius – one eschewing and one attempting epics in hexameter, but each in his way endeavouring to marry weight with elegance and escape the despotic precedent of Homer.[43] At the same time, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* acquired a new stability through the labours of the Alexandrian editors, who collated manuscripts skilfully, but were also prone to expurgate and emend the text according to their notions of propriety and good style.[44] For a time at least the sciences kept pace with the arts: Hero grasped the rudiments of steam propulsion, Eratosthenes measured the circumference of the globe with remarkable accuracy and the lighthouse on the island of Pharos took its place among the seven wonders of the world.[45]

Under the Romans verse and science declined in the eastern provinces, where it seemed that the one sure balm for present ills was a perpetual vacation in the past.

Throughout the Greek world, authors imitated what it was possible to imitate and extolled what it seemed expedient to remember from the chequered history of the classical period.[46] Alexandria had a peculiar role: it was not, so far as we know, a home to any of the great sophists, who made an occupation of being prolix in the manner of the ancients; but its fame as an argosy of the classical heritage survived even the partial burning of the library by the troops of Julius Caesar in the first century BC.[47] It was not by emulation but by annotation that Alexandria set its seal on the poetry and philosophy of the ancients: for example, the majority of surviving commentaries on Aristotle were composed by scholars resident in that city.[48] There is evidence – if evidence were needed – that the scholars also paid their devoirs to Plato, but nothing suggests that he enjoyed that prepotence which has been accorded to him in modern textbooks on the theology of the Church Fathers.[49] Wittingly or unwittingly, the theologians make their case by a retrospective inference from the honorific references to Plato in Clement and Origen, which – on the premiss that a Christian never thinks but only inhales the thoughts of others – are assumed to be psittacine echoes of their own schooling. The theory would be stronger if Pantaenus, the tutor of Clement, were not supposed to have been a Stoic; if Clement had not come from Athens nor Origen decamped to Caesarea;[50] if such great Alexandrians as Demetrius, Dionysius, Athanasius and Cyril were more commonly reputed to have been Platonists; or if Alexandrian scholarship had given rise to half as many commentaries on the dialogues of Plato as on the books of Aristotle. Here, as often, scrutiny reveals that an anemophilous receptivity to other men's conjectures is a feature of the modern, not the ancient Christian mind.

But at least, it will be said, we have learned from Porphyry that Origen studied under one Ammonius, and scholarship from ancient times has been all but unanimous in identifying this man as the Ammonius who taught the first Neoplatonist, Plotinus. The latter is the Ammonius to whom Theodoret gives the surname Saccas, and Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* contains a letter from the polymath Longinus in which the same man is extolled as one of the leading Platonists of his generation.[51] Porphyry in the same work also mentions a certain Origen as a colleague of Plotinus in the circle of Ammonius. Eusebius confirms that the Christian Origen had a tutor named Ammonius, and quotes a letter from Origen in which he pays tribute to an unnamed master who, for all we know, was his sole preceptor in Greek philosophy.[52] Nautin and Crouzel are only the most illustrious of the authorities who urge that, since an Ammonius taught Origen and Ammonius was the name of an eminent Platonist, we know beyond doubt that Origen was a Platonist in his youth.[53]

In my article, 'Ammonius, teacher of Origen', I have argued that a careful examination of the sources will reveal two Origens, two Ammonii and hence two reasons to be wary of founding judgements of identity on the coincidence of names:

1 Ammonius the Platonist had a contemporary namesake, known both by reputation and by acquaintance to Longinus, who reckons him a member of the Peripatos, or school of Aristotle. Longinus implies that the Peripatetic was the more erudite of the two Ammonii, and Philostratus corroborates this verdict in alluding to the same Ammonius in his *Lives of the Sophists*.[54] At the same time pagan

witnesses assert that both Ammonii wrote little and nothing equal to their merits. Either (or neither) therefore might have produced the *Harmony of Jesus and Moses* which Eusebius commends as the work of Ammonius the Christian Origen's tutor;[55] either, for that matter, could have put together that *Harmony of the Gospels* which, as we noted in the first chapter, is attributed by Eusebius to a bearer of the name.

2 'Origen' was not a rare appellation in Egypt, formed as it was from the name of the great god Horus; Ammonius is an even commoner name, and there is consequently no antecedent likelihood that two Origens, both taught by an Ammonius, are the same man. Origen the Christian was a voluminous expositor of the Greek scriptures; Origen the schoolmate of Plotinus is said to have published two works in the whole of his life, neither of which has a title that bespeaks any Christian interest, let alone the title of a known work by the Christian Origen. Ancient references to the earlier work, a treatise *On Daemons*, show that it was written in the spirit of Numenius, and distinguished evil daemons from benign ones;[56] Origen the Christian was a reader, but no disciple, of Numenius, and a daemon to him was always a fallen angel, created good but voluntarily inured to sin. The second book by Origen the Platonist, entitled *That the King is the Only Poet*, contained a dedication to the Emperor Gallienus; as it would have been impolitic to ignore his father Valerian during their period of co-regency from 253 to 263, this essay must be dated to the years between 263 and 268 when Gallienus ruled alone. But in that case it was not the work of Origen the Christian, who died in 254. Of course we are free to amend the name Gallienus to that of someone who lived earlier, like the consul Aelianus, provided that we are willing to suppress the unanimous reading of the manuscripts and ignore the obvious tenor of the sycophantic title. If such feats of conjuring became general, there would be no such thing as evidence and no such discipline as history.

It is no part of my purpose here to prove that the Christian Origen was a Peripatetic or that he did not frequent the school of Ammonius Saccas.[57] Once we grant two Ammonii and two Origens, it is as probable that one man taught both Origens as that each was the pupil of a different master. I do contend, however, that many of the chronologies that scholars frame for the life of the Christian Origen have involved a confusion with his pagan namesake – a confusion all the more culpable because Classicists have always known that Origen the Christian scholar was one man, and Origen the pagan demonologist another. No one is born a Platonist, and anyone who elected to study philosophy in Alexandria had a choice of schools.

God, Philosophy and Revelation

Two points should have been established by the foregoing considerations. First, if it is true at all that the god of 'classical theism' derives his peculiar attributes from Plato, he does not derive them from the 'God' of Plato, but from the 'Good' – that is, from a notion of the real that is largely independent of theology. Secondly, whatever terms in Origen's speculations may be said to have been derived from

Greek philosophy, they entered it by selection, not osmosis, and the environment alone could not provide him with a criterion of selection. Origen outdistanced his precursors both as scholar and as exegete: as scholar, by learning Hebrew for the purpose of restoring the deficient Greek of the Septuagint, and as exegete by completing for both Testaments a larger cycle of commentaries than Philo had attempted for the Torah. Since God is the principal subject of the Bible, a Christian's beliefs about God are more likely than any others to be fiduciary; and what Origen took to be a decree of faith he was obliged, like all other Christians, to cherish as an axiom in the course of all encounters with other systems. No talk of God, whether pagan, Jewish or Christian, could therefore be imported into his own system unless it appeared to him that he was refining inarticulate premisses rather than grafting in an alien creed.

It is true that scripture is almost wholly innocent of speculation on the nature of God, and that it seldom avails itself of the abstractions that have been a staple resource in apologetics and the philosophy of religion for two millennia. Nevertheless, a belief in the translatability of revelation is at the root of Christianity, whose very apostles cite the Hebrew scriptures in a Greek rendering; it is also an assumption of most philosophers that thoughts can be translated, and many curious palinodes would ensue if we were suddenly debarred from making use of our own technicalities when putting the Greek and Latin classics into an English dress. It is clear that the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus is omnipotent inasmuch as he can do as he will with earthquakes, lightnings, floods and the fates of nations; he may not be omnipotent in the medieval sense that he can do whatever does not entail a logical contradiction, but that sense is of little interest to the Fathers. That he is invisible is stated openly in the First Epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy 6.16), and implied in the Second Commandment which forbids us to represent him by an image. Psalm 138 attests his omnipresence: 'though I take the wings of the morning, thou art there'. His incorporeality surely follows from the universality of his operations: a body would be visible, act only in a specified locality and exert a force proportionate to its bulk. Were God not incorporeal, his ubiquity would be explicable only on the pantheistic doctrine that the whole world is his body – and that, of course, is a species of divine immanence that even the most radical revisers of theology are still loth to espouse.

Does the Bible assert the immutability of God? It is common now to argue that if God can change, he lacks the qualities that would make him human, and that if he is exempt from time, he does not possess the grammar of experience, and is thus inferior to his mortal creatures with their capacity for mutual knowledge, suffering and love. Furthermore the doctrine of divine immutability might be thought to strike a reef on the well-known passages in the Pentateuch which report that God repented, waived a threat or received an increment to his knowledge.[58] These objections are not quite convergent, as the philosophers who maintain that God must be capable of change are seldom willing to impute to him the fluctuation of purpose and the myopic irascibility that characterize him in the Mosaic narratives. Nevertheless, if the Holy Writ can tolerate such vagaries, it is fair to urge that the changelessness of God is not an indispensable tenet of Christianity, but only of that strand in it which assimilates God to the logical archetypes of Platonism. Such sayings in later prophets as 'I am the Lord, I change not', or the more forcible

declaration in the New Testament that 'in him there is no change or shadow of turning' are rightly taken not as metaphysical propositions, but as pledges of God's rectitude in judgement and above all of his fidelity to the covenants recorded in the scriptures.[59] The Christian philosopher may seek sureties for his faith in the assumption of divine impassibility, which entails that God is always the master, never (as humans are) the mere adjutant of circumstances; we can, however, make this stipulation without denying God a capacity for spontaneous motility and for self-determined change.

As champion of the Christian doctrine of God against the attacks of Celsus, Origen denies him any affections that would compromise his status as an agent. Divine wrath, he opines, is a constant law of retribution, not a transient excitation of the feelings; erroneously, he questions Celsus' reading of the prologue to the story of the Flood, where the Almighty is said to repent of his creation.[60] He is conscious that these anthropomorphic verses stand in need of interpretation; the incorporeality of God, on the other hand, he regards as a clear deduction from the plain sense of the commandment against idolatry and from John the Baptist's statement that 'no man hath seen God at any time' (John 1.18).[61] This one premiss burgeons into a cluster of further predicates:

> Affirming as we do that the God of all is mind, or superior to mind and being – simple, invisible and incorporeal – we say that God is not to be comprehended by any except the one who has come to be in the image of that mind. (*Against Celsus* 7.38, p. 188.11–14 Koetschau)

Origen does not buttress these positions by an appeal to any secular philosopher. None the less it was his view that the Christian faith should be held as a philosophy, and he argues for the incorporeality of God against two prevalent schools of error. In Epicurean thought a god is an accidental congeries of atoms, hence corporeal, destructible and not equipped for the exercise of providential government; in this age of widespread religiosity, the Christian apologist had only to state this theory to rebut it, and Origen has little cause to mention it, except perhaps to incriminate Celsus by association. The Stoics, on the other hand, were to be found on every pagan roll of honour, and Origen repeatedly takes issue with their notion of God as a cybernetic element, either fire or something rarer, which pervades the material universe. No true doctrine of providence, he urges, could accommodate such a deity, who shares not only the mutability but the passibility of all bodies, since (according to the Stoics) he is embroiled in the birth and perishing of each successive world.[62] Origen regards himself as the mouthpiece of a doctrine that every Christian holds when he argues in *First Principles* that God is not a material fire and that spirit cannot be ranked among the elements; he is countering a literal misreading of two metaphors in scripture, not a position that he knows to be held by another Christian philosopher.[63] In this he sees correctly, for even his great contemporary Tertullian, who praised the Stoics and held that God is a body, insisted also that the spirit which constitutes this body is not a variety of matter.[64] Tertullian's God, who is able to transcend even the law of contradiction,[65] would hardly have consented to be bound by the laws of nature; we have in fact no evidence that this Hellenistic doctrine of divine immanence was held within the Church, and therefore it was

unnecessary for Origen to become a Christian Platonist in order to refute a Christian Stoic.

Origen in *First Principles* concludes that God is mind[66] – a proposal reminiscent of Numenius, except of course that the latter posited two intellectual deities, if not three. For Plato, as we have noted above, the Demiurge is a mind or mind itself, but it is not clear that the Demiurge is the highest principle. Since the Stoic God is Logos or reason and Aristotle's Prime Mover is the 'thought of thoughts', the equation of God with mind is by no means a distinctive tenet of Platonism. One salient respect in which the theology of Origen parts company with Plato's is that it presupposes no particular definition of substance. He chides the Stoics indeed because, on the premiss that all substance is material, they make God himself a body; but his quarrel is with their concept of divinity rather than with their philosophical nomenclature. He agrees with the Platonists that there may be noetic substance, but does not commit himself to the position that all substance is noetic; that is to say, he does not maintain that whatever truly exists must be either cognitive or perfectly cognoscible. In fact he holds that only God can comprehend his own being, and for him it is a legitimate hypothesis that the deity is superior to substance, and perhaps superior to mind itself.[67]

The word that we render as 'substance' is *ousia*, and is nowhere represented in the New Testament, except, as Origen thinks, by the word *epiousios* in the Lord's Prayer. It is generally agreed now that this means 'bread for the coming day', hence 'daily bread'; but in Origen's time it was commonly maintained that this petition lent itself to a more spiritual construction.[68] He himself understands it in a novel sense, 'higher than *ousia*, supersubstantial'. But as 'substance' is a term that the Greeks employ in many senses, he continues, its significance here must be gathered not from any philosopher's lexicon, but from the infallible context. One party of philosophers maintains that all *ousia* in its proper sense is incorporeal, while another identifies it with formless matter; if the bread that we pray for is the 'wisdom of the Lord, the common food of saints and angels', then the former interpretation (that of the Platonists, although he does not say so) is the one to be preferred.[69]

This practice of glossing one revealed text from another is habitual with Origen, and flows from his conviction that we cannot speak or know the truth about God the Father without his own assistance. He admits – indeed in his *Commentary on Romans* he asserts[70] – that even Gentiles are endowed by God with a ratiocinative faculty that leads them to a partial understanding of his nature; at the same time he scoffs at those philosophers who endeavour to perfect this understanding by the methods of analogy, abstraction or synthetic reasoning. Festugière[71] observes that the same three processes had already been commended by Alcinous, an expositor of Plato if not a Platonist, who was not afraid to equate the good with God and God with mind. The analogy between the human mind and that of God, Alcinous urges, makes it possible to deduce him from his works (the way of synthesis or *via eminentiae*), to represent his properties through symbols (the way of analogy, or *via analogiae*), or to make the mind an image of divinity by stripping it of extraneous perceptions (the way of abstraction, or *via negativa*).[72] Plato in the *Timaeus* had been more reticent, saying only that 'it is difficult to find out the father and maker of all, and if one could discover him, impossible to declare him to mankind'.[73]

Although this aphorism had delighted the second-century apologists, it was not enough for Origen, who retorts that it is not difficult but impossible to reach God by our own devices:

> Consider whether the divine word does not show more benevolence in introducing the one who was *with God in the beginning*, God the Word *become flesh* ... Let Plato say that it is a labour to apprehend the Maker and Father of this world, implying that it is not impossible for human nature to arrive at a worthy apprehension of God or if not a worthy one, at least superior to that of the multitude. Had this been true, had God in truth been apprehended by Plato or one of the Greeks, they would not have worshipped another and called him God ... We for our part declare that human nature is not sufficient to seek out God in any way and to arrive at a pure apprehension of him, unless it is assisted by the one whom it is seeking. (*Against Celsus* 7.42)

We must understand that no forfeiture of reason is entailed when we acquiesce in revelation. If he is not a philosopher, the Christian is a fool, and he can escape the imputation of fanaticism only by giving evidence of moral amelioration and a rational account of his beliefs. For this reason Origen prefaced his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* with a eulogy of Plato's cardinal virtues – wisdom, temperance, fortitude and justice;[74] for this reason again, he was not content to browbeat philosophical objectors with quotations from the scriptures, but answered Celsus on his own ground. Paganism, he urges, is refuted by its logical and moral inconsistencies; on the other hand, the unity of creation, the antiquity of the Old Testament, the miracles of the church and fulfilment of a host of prophecies all conspire to justify submission to the authority of the written, and hence of the incarnate Word.[75]

One might protest that Origen is giving an exaggerated sense of the disparity between his own opinions and those of the living Platonists whom he must have met in the schools of Alexandria. Such men could have informed him, if he had not informed himself, that a philosophy akin to that of Numenius had recently been cast into laboured and pregnant verses by the gods themselves. Although it was agreed that they owed their currency to two magicians of the second century, both named Julian, the *Chaldaean Oracles* came to be regarded by most Platonists as a dateless and infallible revelation.[76] They taught that, above the heights that reason scales, there sits the ineffable source of all, the paternal Monad, who through the power or *dunamis* that accompanies him begets a filial intellect, the Dyad or number two.[77] Numenius too had employed numerical and familial titles in distinguishing his gods, and had from time to time affected a vatic manner reminiscent of the *Oracles*; while Porphyry, who was as much a disciple of Numenius as of Plotinus, did not deny that the verses were both Chaldaean and divine.[78]

Nevertheless it would not be true to say that the theology of the Platonists was now a revealed religion. For one thing the *Chaldaean Oracles* cannot be regarded as an indefeasible part of a philosophy which subsisted for five hundred years without them. Secondly the dialogues of the master were always the soul of Platonism and furnished the most frequent matter for commentaries; even Proclus, who typifies the most superstitious epoch in the history of the school, maintained that the *Timaeus* was of equal value to the Chaldaean teachings.[79] Finally it is seldom that an oracle is the sole premiss in an argument: more commonly the quotation is the omen or epilogue to a conclusion that is reached by exegesis or by some more

regular mode of cerebration. Platonic thought is rarely mystical, if that means that one despairs of the mind's ability to furnish rational grounds for its beliefs.

It was certainly not the Platonists who put it into Origen's mind that God might be superior to intellect. To be sure, this is a paradox that is trumpeted in Valentinus, Basilides and the Hermetica at a time when it was absent from the works of catholic Christians;[80] but any Platonic matter that these authors borrow sits cheek by jowl with elements of the Old Testament, the New Testament and native Egyptian lore. Among the Pythagoreans read by Origen, Moderatus of Gades was perhaps disposed to negative theology,[81] but Pythagoreans of his epoch seldom reckoned themselves as Platonists. The principal expositors of Plato in the second century – Plutarch, Numenius, Maximus of Tyre – imagined nothing higher than the pure intellect; Alcinous alone suggests in one place that the highest god might be of a higher nature.[82] This conjecture appears to be at odds with the general tenor of his *Didascalicus*, or *Platonic Handbook*; the handbook itself, in any case, notwithstanding an early rendering into Latin,[83] was ignored by subsequent Platonists and might as well be anonymous for all that we can say about the identity or interests of its author. The first Greek-speaking author to maintain that God is absolutely ineffable is Philo of Alexandria,[84] and Philo (as we have noted above) may pass as a Platonist in modern scholarship, but was styled a Pythagorean by his Christian posterity and saw himself as a believing Jew.[85] That is to say, he worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the God who had made a mystery of his essence while revealing his existence under a name that signified nothing but 'I AM'.[86]

For Origen as for Philo, the incognoscibility of God implies the necessity of a positive revelation; conversely revelation makes a cul-de-sac of every other avenue to God. Neither of these authors would have accompanied Plotinus, the first Neoplatonist and a junior contemporary of Origen, through the series of logical turnpikes that was to terminate in his doctrine of the One. The One is ineffable, infinite, opaque to reason, inimical to all affirmative predicates; but while it shares these properties with the Biblical God it lacks his personal attributes – omniscience, sempiternal creativity, zeal for righteousness and providential love. No special revelation acquaints Plotinus with the One; he works his way beyond mind, beyond the Platonic world of Ideas, by meditation on the unity of the Demiurgic intellect. On Aristotelian premisses, perception is the actualizing of a potential union between the mind and the immaterial form of the thing perceived. The mind of Plato's Demiurge and the Ideas that it contemplates are equally free of matter, and his thinking therefore does not entail a movement from the potential to the actual; it follows that on the plane of being, the knower, if once united, is inseparably united with the known. Since, however, the mind is one but the realm of ideas manifold, the Demiurgic mind does not contain the rationale of its own integrity. It derives its unity from a higher principle, which we call the One by virtue of its effects and not because it is denumerable as other objects are; it is not in fact an object of any kind, though it may justly be equated with the Good, or final cause of all existence, which had already been pronounced in the *Republic* to be 'superior to being'. Having no cause, the One begets itself, and this 'aseity' (as the medievals called it) is expressed in one of the *Enneads* by making him the product of his own will. This will, Plotinus says, is its characteristic *energeia* or activity;[87] but in the realm of

predicates activity, actuality and being coincide in the sphere of intellect. Nothing below itself can be an object of volition to the One or even an object of cognition; to be conscious of anything, even of itself, would be to fall into that duality from which it redeems the intellect. Since there is nothing higher than the One, the One is God; yet the cares and obligations of divine governance do not fall upon the One. For all that it is not free – or more precisely, in the absence of all matter, change and potency, necessity and freedom coincide. Unlike the God of Origen, the One can make no choices: it causes without creating, presides without governing, superabounds without love.

The Divine Creator

The autonomy of God was most in evidence, to Christian eyes, in his making of the world. Believing readers of scripture thought it possible to look back from the present to the first year of creation, and the premiss that the world began in time was sometimes thought to gain support from Plato's most familiar dialogue, the *Timaeus*, which discriminates between the *agennêton* – the ingenerate and hence self-sufficient world of the Ideas – and its opposite, the *genêton*. The meaning of this latter term, however, was debated, and by the end of the second century most Platonists agreed with Aristotle that there could have been no reason for the world to come into being at one date rather than another.[88] It followed that the discrete act of creation which appears to be described in the *Timaeus* was a myth, and that the world, although *genêton* or *gennêton* in the sense that it depended on an archetype, was not of any determinable age. Atticus and Plutarch, who maintained that Plato meant to assign a temporal origin to the visible cosmos, were remembered only as dissidents after the triumph of Neoplatonism; and in the second century it was already the task of Christian apologists to demonstrate that the world is not eternal, any more than it is one stage in an interminable series. Both Platonist and Stoic were put to flight in Christian writing, as in Philo, by the authority of Moses; and though Philo may have thought it profitable to canvass arguments for the contrary position, both Jews and Christians knew that an eternal world would be one that God had either not created or had created by necessity with no deliberate exercise of will.

The doctrine of God's transcendence in both Jewish and Christian thought has conventionally entailed that he is omnipotent, at least in the sense that he wields power over everything that exists if not over everything conceivable. If by Plato's god we mean the Demiurge, the Christians of the Roman world who upheld divine omnipotence were more hostile to Platonism than the modern theologians who deny it. In the *Timaeus* of Plato the 'nurse' or matrix which receives the simulacrum of the Ideas is in a state of perpetual *genesis* or becoming – fitful, bellicose, discordant – which could never, but for the Demiurge, obtain a share in the permanence of being. And yet, of course, to be spoken of at all – even if it be only, as Plato says, by a 'bastard reasoning' – it must exist in some way, even if not as a denumerable entity: it may not be a being, but it cannot be pure non-being. Though *chora* (space) is one of Plato's names for the receptacle of the ideas, we should not expect to encounter such tourbillions in a vacuum, and most Platonists agreed that

the receptacle was a forerunner of Aristotelian matter – that is to say, a substrate of corporeal existence which is not itself corporeal or intrinsically endowed with any qualities of body, though for that reason it is hospitable to all qualities. Since everything extensible has magnitude and parts, it was commonly held that Plato equated matter with the dyad, or number two, which in Pythagorean arithmetic is the root of all division. Its perpetual mobility was thought to bespeak the presence of a soul, which, since all movement in the soul comes from within, must be eternal; but movements so aleatory and futile, Plutarch reasons, must proceed from an evil soul such as the master himself had posited at one point in the *Laws*.

What becomes of this troublesome agent? Either it abides as a permanent rival to the World-Soul which is fashioned by the Demiurge as the envelope and regulatory organ of the cosmos, or else it is itself the raw material of the World-Soul, and traces of its primitive anarchy survive the transformation. Alcinous holds a similar view, alleging that the soul of the world was dormant until the Demiurge aroused it, though in this case the temporal sequence would appear to be metaphorical, and we are not told that the dregs of evil linger once the soul has been reformed. Be that as it may, the uniform teaching of the Platonists was that, whether it sprang from within or from the soul in matter, nature displayed a contumacious tendency that frequently resisted and occasionally belied the wisdom of its benign artificer. Neoplatonism put the blame on matter, which according to Plotinus is the prime evil, the impatient host but never the bearer of determinate properties, and the cause of Plato's saying in the *Theaetetus* that evils cannot be entirely banished from the world.

The Demiurge of the Platonist lacks the power, if not the goodness, of the Biblical Creator. Still more odious to the Christian reader was the Gnostic myth, in which an inferior portion of the Godhead, or its image, becomes a prisoner of matter. Alexandrian Christians were acquainted with the aggravated blasphemy of Valentinus, who carried 'bastard reasoning' to an extreme when he represented matter and the Demiurge as surreptitious offspring of Sophia, or fallen wisdom. Here the divine plays only an inadvertent role in the fabrication and governance of the present world, the higher ranks of spirit being ignorant of us, while the lower, or psychic agency which creates the world is caught in the toils of matter in the same way as the personal soul succumbs to the pains and errors of the flesh. Catholic Christianity, by making the highest deity the Creator, reconciles the world to the will of God; at the same time it preserves the prepotent freedom of that will, and thus upholds the doctrine of providence, by insisting on an absolute distinction between the nature of God and that of his workmanship.

The case was pressed beyond the Biblical evidence, for the opening verses of Genesis suggested to ancient readers, as to many modern critics, that the stuff of creation lay to hand, 'without form and void', before God framed the heavens and the earth. Although creation *ex ouk onton* (from what is not) was an article of faith in both Maccabean literature and the letter to the Hebrews, this phrase may mean 'from a state of being nothing in particular' rather than 'from absolutely nothing'.[89] Philo and Justin Martyr were both content to take it in the former sense; Theophilus of Antioch is ambiguous; Tertullian, who could not have formed the equivalent phrase in Latin, is the first to state decisively that God created all things, including matter, *ex nihilo*.[90]

Origen, as a Christian of his generation, held it as an axiom that matter was made by God or else there is no such thing as matter.[91] To him both possibilities were open, for, while he did not disown the Peripatetic fiction of a common substrate, void of actual predicates but potentially receptive to all predicates and a precondition of individuation in things corporeal, he would evidently have preferred to cast his lot with those who recognized no difference between inchoate being and absolute non-being, and who therefore banished matter altogether from their cosmology:

> For if hardness and softness, warmth and coldness, humidity and aridity are qualities, and yet when these or their like are taken away nothing else is perceived to act as a substrate, all things will appear to be qualities. ... Since all who assert that matter is uncreated confess that qualities were created by God, their position also would be found to entail that matter is not uncreated, should all things really be qualities, the latter being declared by all without dissent to have been created by God. (*Princ.* 4.7 (34), p. 358.1–8 Koetschau)

This passage gives the lie to those who pronounce the Greeks incapable of a pure idealism in metaphysics.[92] At the same time, it shows that modern classicists have left an earlier name out of the reckoning when they point to the Cappadocians of the fourth century as precursors of Bishop Berkeley.[93] More than one name, we ought to say, for Origen is only one of four candidates for the authorship of a treatise in the Philokalia (a compilation of 'beauties' from his writings) which denounces the philosophical hypothesis of matter. Even if he is the author of this piece, he is not the inventor of the main thesis, as his own words in the excerpt from *First Principles* make clear. Whoever they were, the proponents of the claim that there is no such thing as matter were not Platonists, for all members of that party now endorsed the Aristotelian assumption that whatever comes to be in the temporal order is the actuation of some antecedent potentiality. Whether it be matter, space, the dyad or a mere *dunamis*, there must always be more than nothing before there can be anything. Since all Platonic theology is natural theology, spontaneous generation from the void would not be a miracle but a breach of providence.

For Christians, on the other hand, creation was an exercise of God's untrammelled will – an exercise that, whether or not we can guess the reason for it, had occurred at a point in time. Origen held that Moses, when he commemorates the foundation of the world a few thousand years before the present, is to be trusted notwithstanding the pagan satirists who asked what God was doing before he hit upon this profitable employment. Augustine's *City of God* confirms that Platonists were the sect most given to urging this objection, which had already been forced on Origen by Celsus. He answered, to the satisfaction of later Christian readers, that there has never been a time when God was idle, since time itself has meaning only when there is a world:

> Now this very assertion of ours, that 'there never was when he was not,' must be heard with indulgence. For these very terms – I mean 'when' and 'never' – derive their sense from the temporal vocabulary; but those things which are predicated of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are to be understood in a sense that transcends all time, all ages, and all eternity. (*Princ.* 4.4.1 (29), p. 350.18–23 Koetschau)

Plato had defined time as the moving image of eternity; for Origen, the *arche* or beginning of the universe, coeval with time itself, is none other than Christ the Second Person of the Trinity.[94] For all that he insists on the contingency of the world and the disparity between creature and Creator, Origen is aware that scripture seldom speaks of God except as Lord and architect of the present order, and he is loth to attribute powers to the designer that have not been manifested in the design. Thus he reasons that the world is finite because infinity is beyond the grasp of a rational intellect, even a divine one:[95]

> The power of God himself must be said to be bounded, and its circumscription is not to be denied on any pretext of pious speech. For if the power of God were infinite, he would necessarily not even know himself, for the infinite is by nature incomprehensible. (*First Principles* 2.9.1, p. 164.2–6 Koetschau, citing Justinian's *Letter to Mennas*)

By the time of Origen's death in 254 the most eminent school of Platonists taught that the highest principle was infinite (*apeiron*),[96] not because (like matter) it lacked real properties but because it was prior to intellect and being, and so could not participate in the finitude that is always a concomitant of being in both the sensible and the intellectual realms. Sensible phenomena acquire attributes by participating in the Ideas of them; the Ideas derive their unity, both severally and collectively, from the One, which, being superior to everything, can participate in nothing. For Origen, on the other hand, it is only the inner man who can partake of God, or rather can be 'divinized' by partaking of his gifts; whatever exists apart from him is a product of his will, and a simple fiat grants or withholds the properties that he himself possesses in the most eminent degree. The incorporeality of God is a measure of his superiority to his creation. Nothing else subsists without a body, and there is no eternity of noetic objects to be contrasted with the generated world:

> For he says, *I am not from this world*; and it is as though he spoke these words, *I am not from this world*, as one who was from another world. We have already said that it is hard for us to give an account of this world, lest we should give occasion to anyone to form the notion that we are affirming certain images that the Greeks call *ideas*. Now this is absolutely foreign to our intention, to speak of an incorporeal world, which subsists only in the fantasy[97] of the mind and the vagaries of cogitation; and how they could affirm that the saviour came thence or that the saints will go thither, I cannot tell. (*First Principles* 2.3.6, pp. 121.19–122.6 Koetschau)

These remarks should teach us what to make of a notorious conjecture in the *First Principles*, which is often misconstrued as a confession of Platonism:

> If indeed particulars, which are *under the sun*, existed already *in those ages that were before us*,[98] all genera and species existed for ever, and another one will say even all numerable unities;[99] but in any case it has been shown that God did not commence work having at some time been idle.[100] (*First Principles* 1.4.5, p. 68.8–12 Koetschau)

We might confuse this at first sight with the doctrine of Alcinous and others that the Ideas are thoughts of God. But Origen reserves the term *idea* for the thesis that he

rejects, and here the coupling of the words 'genus' and 'species' (*gene kai eide*), though attested in the *Cratylus* of Plato, would be more likely to remind the ancient reader of Aristotle's *Categories*. In this work the noun *eidos* denotes a natural kind or species such as man, *genos* a more extensive category, such as animal. Both are specimens of 'secondary essence' (*deutera ousia*), which never subsists as a separable entity, but only as the form or quiddity of the concrete particular which Aristotle styles the 'primary essence' (*prôtê ousia*). It is the primary essence that is actual, though the secondary essence seems to be the final and formal cause of its actuality; by contrast the Platonic Ideas, even as thoughts in the mind of God, are more actual, and hence more real, than anything in what we call the world. Aristotelian usage would of course have come all the more naturally to Origen if he had been, as I suggest above, a student with the Peripatetic Ammonius. Had he instead adopted the nomenclature of the Platonists, we should have to assume that he and Plotinus had a common master after all, since no one else before the latter is known to have surmised that there may be Ideas even of particulars. Even then, however, we should need to explain why Origen, having Christianized and as it were Alexandrianized the Ideas in Book 1 of his *First Principles*, should have cast them out of the temple in Book 2. Rather than force him into self-contradiction or idiosyncrasy, it is best to take the allusion to particulars in the mind of God as a rejoinder to the question, what God did before creating, and as a philosophic gloss on the doctrine of predestination, according to which the future is as visible to God's fatherly solicitude as the present, so that even the fall of a sparrow is foreseen.

Christ as Logos

No one would deny that Christ the Logos, the eternal Word and Wisdom of God, is at the centre of Origen's theology; we are told on all sides, however, that his Logos is not the Christ of Christian worship and the creeds, nor yet the New Testament Son of Man. He is not the first, because in all his actions as creator and redeemer he is subject to God the Father, who employs him to avoid the defiling contact of the world; he is not the second, despite his natural kinship with the mind and his intermittent condescension to the senses, because his ministry on earth is a carnal interlude in the otherwise intangible and timeless history of revelation. Whereas the Christ of faith is God and man, the Christ of Origen (on this account) is neither. One is the mediator of a covenant, the other an intermediary in the cosmos, and where one breaks down the wall between sin and righteousness, the other spans an imaginary gulf between earth and heaven. As ever, it is assumed that he hatched this plot against the prejudices of modern criticism in conjunction with a philosopher; and as usual the philosopher is Plato, who in modern caricatures is deemed to have posited an impossibly transcendent god and then rigged up a ladder of intermediaries to fill the void created by his own temerity.

The suspicion that he conspired with the philosophers is not allayed by the trite and uncontested observation that he derived the title Logos from the Fourth Gospel, and that he makes the most liberal use of it in his *Commentary* on that text. Because it is the most speculative – and consequently, some would say, the most Greek – of

the four, John's gospel has customarily been treated as a hybrid of philosophy with an authentic, Palestinian tradition; scholars have not always been made to answer to the usual laws of evidence when they ascribe to alien influence whatever they find incongruous or abstruse. Fissiparous criticism tends to seize upon the prologue as the most detachable feature, not only because of its lyrical obscurity, but because the designation of Christ as Logos is not found again in any other portion of this gospel, let alone in the other three.[101] Since no other passage of the New Testament dwells at such length on his role as the creator of all things visible, a prototype is sought in the immanent Logos – otherwise known as spirit, fire or Zeus – which regulates and sustains the play of elements in Stoic cosmology.[102] Others, more attentive to the fact that there are two divine subjects in the opening verses of the prologue, have surmised that John anticipates the Church Fathers in purloining the title Logos from the Platonists – the latter, it would seem, being so notoriously addicted to this sobriquet for the Second Mind or intermediate principle that illustrative quotation would be redundant. Scholarly decorum can be satisfied by mentioning Philo, even if one is uncertain of his date.

Yet no one would deny that the opening sentence of the prologue – 'in the beginning was the Word' – contains an allusion to the first verse of the Septuagint, where God 'in the beginning' creates 'the heaven and the earth'.[103] This fact alone should suffice to dispel the notion of a borrowing from the Stoics, whose Logos, spirit, fire or Zeus is not the creator but the coefficient of the natural order between the birth and perishing of each new world.[104] As for the theory that the 'Platonic Logos' is the parent of the Johannine one, the sum of what is known about the former could be distilled into a chapter like the one on snakes in a celebrated history of Iceland: there is no such intermediary as the Logos to be met with in the writings of the Gentile Platonists. The acolyte of the Good, who superimposes form on matter, is the Demiurge or Nous; every manifestation of the higher in the lower may indeed be styled a *logos*, but in such instances the term functions as a common noun, and not as a proper name. If a handful of commentators speak of an immanent Logos, in the Stoic manner, as the hegemonic principle of the universe,[105] it is clear that, like the World-Soul in the *Timaeus*, this is an instrument of deity, not a deity in its own right.

Even in the works of the Greek apologists, where some conflation of Biblical and philosophical usage is inevitable, the Logos owes his title to his revelatory and creative character as Word. He effects the first creation of the elements by command, and the new creation of humanity by his teaching; the Word that caused the light to shine from darkness is the Word that in the latter days has raised up life from death.[106] The Christ of Justin Martyr is primarily the author and archetype of the written law, and it is through this medium, rather by direct insufflation, that he has planted seeds of truth in the mind of Plato and other Greeks. In his honorific references to a seminal or spermatic *logos*, Justin asserts the ubiquity of revelation, not, like the Stoics from whom he culled the phrase, the universality of reason.[107] Theophilus of Antioch also turned to Stoic linguistics for a distinction that the Stoics themselves had never thought of applying to theology, and thus explained how the Logos and the Father could be two divine agents in a single Godhead: Christ, he taught, was initially the immanent reason (*endiathetos logos*) of the Father, but was then projected as his uttered speech (*prophorikos logos*) for the creation of the world.[108]

It is not impossible that the early Christians, John included, were indebted to Philo's doctrine of the Logos. The learned Jew[109] perceived that the divine will to communicate, evinced both in creation and in scripture as the record of creation, was better represented by this term than by its Platonic rivals, *nous* and *paradeigma*; on the other hand, both commonsense and piety forbade him to imagine that the speech of God consists of sounds like those emitted by the human larynx. The instrument of creation in Philo's thought is therefore not so much a 'word' as a changeless pattern which abode in the mind of God as a coherent scheme of being when it had not yet taken shape in space and time. This Logos would appear to be a close relative of the Wisdom who accompanies the Creator in the Wisdom of Solomon and the eighth chapter of Proverbs; at the same time, such personal appellatives as 'high priest', 'Son of God' and 'only begotten' (*monogenes*) bespeak not only his majesty and closeness to God, but his interest in the destiny of Israel, which is the bearer of these epithets in the Old Testament. It is never said, however, that he proceeded from the Father as a distinct hypostasis, let alone that he became incarnate. In this respect, of course, he is not the Logos of the Fourth Gospel, nor the Logos of the Alexandrian catholics Clement and Origen; both men, however, inherited from Philo the conviction that the attributes and functions of divinity are immutable, and the consequence for Christology is that any notion of an emergent Logos is proscribed. If he had ever been the immanent reason of the Father, he would be immanent still; conversely, he could not have performed the offices which distinguish him from the Father had the two not been eternally distinct.

Whereas a number of the second-century apologists had implied that the Trinity supervenes upon an undifferentiated unity,[110] Origen insists in his *First Principles* that the distinction of *hypostases* is strictly coeternal with the Godhead. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians styles Christ the wisdom of God, and though his meaning in this passage may be only that the logic of the world is overthrown by the crucifixion, the palpable allusions in Colossians and Hebrews to the Biblical personification of Wisdom seemed to justify the equation of that figure with the Logos, and hence the application to him of the Septuagintal verse, 'the Lord created me in the beginning of his ways'.[111] Unless we are prepared to say that there was a time when God was without his wisdom, Origen reasons, we cannot put a beginning to the existence of the Logos. So far even the sublunary usage of the term will carry the argument, but Origen warns us not to press analogy so far as to imagine that the Father is the whole substance of the Trinity, and that the Second Person stands in an accidental or adjectival relation to him:

> It is incumbent on us to resist those who ... make continual use of the verse, *My heart has given forth a goodly word* [Ps. 45.2], imagining the Son of God to be a sort of projection from the Father, as though he consisted of syllables, and in this way, if we understand them accurately, they deny him a hypostasis, and fail to speak clearly of his *ousia* – I do not mean an *ousia* of this or that kind, but any *ousia* whatever. (*CommJoh* 1.24.151, p. 29.17–26 Preuschen)

In the final sentence the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* appear to be nearly coterminous in meaning, but since they occur in the company of different verbs it may be surmised that here they are not quite synonyms. In later Christian formularies, the

ousia is the nature that the three persons of the Godhead hold in common, while the hypostasis of each is a peculiar determination of that nature. Origen, however, cannot be following this rule, as in his treatise *On Prayer* he affirms that the Son and Father are distinct in both *hypokeimenon* (substrate) and in nature or essence (*ousia*).[112] Nor would he have endorsed the declaration of the Nicene Synod in 325 that the Son, as the Only-begotten (*monogenes*) is from the *ousia* of the Father, and is therefore *homoousios* or consubstantial with him. For Origen, as for the Platonists, this adjective in its proper application is restricted to things corporeal, though the consubstantiality between an ointment and the exuded vapour serves as a feeble analogue for the community of nature between the Father and the Son.[113] A combination of Wisdom 7.25–6, where Wisdom is styled an emanation (*aporroia*) of the Father, with Hebrews 1.3, which represents Christ as a 'ray' of the Father's glory and a character or impression of his *hypostasis*, provides the theologian with his text:

> For [scripture], adopting the term 'vapour', took this simile from corporeal phenomena to the end that we might in part understand how Christ, who is Wisdom, in like manner to the procession of that vapour from some corporeal substance, himself issues from the power of God himself like a sort of vapour. And thus Wisdom, proceeding from him, is generated from the very substance of the Father. (Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 5, p. 358 Lommatzsch)

We may doubt whether 'from the hypostasis of the Father' is a fair paraphrase, but the words had already taken root in the Church, for Tertullian lays it down as an axiom that the Son is 'from the substance of the Father' in his tract against the Monarchians who refused to differentiate the three persons.[114] How, he demands, can he who is from the substance of the Father be without substance?[115] While Origen does not espouse this reasoning, he states, as the confession of the Church, that there are three hypostases, Father, Son and Spirit. The term *hypostasis* does not appear in such a context in the writings of a Platonist before Porphyry's edition of Plotinus, which attaches the rubric *On the Three Hypostases* to *Enneads* 5.1.[116] Porphyry was writing fifty years after Origen's death and perhaps in conscious imitation of him; in any case his use of the term belies that of the treatise itself, in which a hypostasis is almost always the product or concretion of a generative principle in a lower plane of being. Thus Nous may be the hypostasis of the One and Soul of Nous, but the One itself is only once, perhaps for want of a better word, described as a *hypostasis* by Plotinus,[117] and nowhere does he state that there are three. For Origen *hypostasis* is not a term denoting a relation,[118] and the assertion of three hypostases in the Trinity entails that the Father and Son are distinct (as Justin Martyr had said already) in number. The same point is conveyed by the notorious expression *heteros theos* ('another god'), which is used of Christ in Origen's *Dialogue with Heracleides*. *Heteros*, it is argued, implies *deuteros*, and since it is apparent from other passages in Origen that his Logos is inferior to the Father in power and dignity, his Christ is all too plainly the 'second god'[119] or 'second intellect' of the Platonist Numenius. Yet even those who insinuate that Origen himself endorsed the locution *deuteros theos* do not pretend that he ever spoke of a First God[120] or a third in the Christian Trinity, and in the argument of the

Dialogue, the meaning of the term *heteros* is not that Christ is inferior in nature to the Father, but that he comes second in the train of reasoning. In controversy with heretics, the divinity of the Father is a postulate, while that of the Son remains to be demonstrated:

> Origen said, 'Christ Jesus, *subsisting in the form of God*, and being another beside the Father in whose form he subsisted – was he God prior to his entry into the body or not?'
> Heracleides said, 'He was God before.'
> Origen said, 'Was he God before he entered the body or not?'
> Heracleides said, 'He was.'
> Origen said, 'Another god beside the God in whose *form* he himself *subsisted*?'
> (*Dialogue with Heracleides* 1.25–33; p. 54 Scherer)

The language of the last sentence is audacious,[121] for while it presupposes an orthodox reading of Philippians 2.6, it appears to contravene at least the letter of the First Commandment. Origen may deprecate, but he hardly forestalls, a charge of ditheism when he goes on to state that 'we speak without superstition of two gods in one respect, but in another only of one'.[122] An exegete who remained as close to his text as Origen did would find little warrant for the assertion of an ontological unity between the Son and the Father, though he would of course find hints of the divinity of Christ which might be thought to be at odds with the inherited monotheism of the apostolic writers.[123] Later in the dialogue, Heracleides ventures that the 'power is one' (perhaps with an echo of the apologist Athenagoras), while Origen contends that the communion of hypostases in the Godhead resembles that of Adam and Eve, who were distinct as personal beings, yet 'one flesh' in matrimony; by a higher law, the believer who is joined to Christ becomes 'one spirit' with him.[124] In other writings Origen cannot advance any further than a communion of nature or a harmony of wills[125] and it is easy to see why the first generation of critics blamed him, not for subordinating Christ to the Father but for according the same predicates to both. For Christians before Origen subordinationism, the refusal of full divinity to Christ, was a prophylactic against division in the Godhead and the notion of 'two Unbegotten Ones'.[126]

Nonetheless, even in Origen some disparity in rank between the Father and the Son is an inevitable corollary of the difference between their *ousiai*. Where *hypostasis* is not synonymous with *ousia* in common Greek, the second tends to be the more abstract, so that the entity itself is the *hypostasis*, while the *ousia* is the sum of its characteristics.[127] In the Godhead, as Origen conceives it, each of the three is a concrete being individuated by his salient properties – in theological parlance, a *hypostasis* circumscribed by his own *ousia*.[128] Does the Trinity, then, consists of three independent subjects? No, for the derivation of the subaltern hypostases from the Father guarantees a certain community of nature,[129] and with this a stock of attributes that are not possessed by any other being. There are no gradations in incorporeality, in eternity or even in omniscience, for the imputation that Origen denied knowledge of the Father to the Son is a late misreading of his humdrum observation in *First Principles* that the members of the Trinity do not see one another as they have no bodily eyes.[130] In the *Commentary on John* we are told that

since the Son is Truth there is no truth that is concealed from him, not even as the prerogative of the Father.[131] Here we have a measure of the distance between the Christian dogmatician and Plotinus, who contended that the First Principle is not cognoscible even to the Second, since the intellectual properties that are fully instantiated in the latter are, for that very reason, not to be predicated of its cause.

The Father is superior to the other two hypostases in so far as they are logically, if not temporally, posterior to his act of generation. The Son derives both his *ousia* and his *hypostasis* from the Father, but he lacks the self-sufficiency which for Origen is expressed with equal clarity by the private terms 'ingenerate' (*agennêtos*) and 'unbegotten' (*agenêtos*). Later heresiologists blamed Origen for his indifference to the niceties that enabled them to urge, against the Arians of the fourth century, that the Son, although begotten, was ingenerate;[132] once orthodox Christology had concluded that the Septuagintal rendering of Proverbs 8.22 ('The Lord created me') had no reference to the pre-existent Son of God, Origen's description of the Son as a 'creature' (*ktisma*)[133] could be reckoned among his blasphemies. Apologists and detractors alike, in the decades after the Nicene Council of 325,[134] lost sight of his distinction between the work of the Creator, who can summon a perfect cosmos out of nothing, and its human antitype, making or *poiêsis,* which can manage only a transient permutation of fallen elements.[135] For Origen whatever resides in matter is doomed to change, if not to perish, and among sentient beings only the Son of God preserves the image undefiled, because he has no substrate but the Father's will.

Origen is commonly labelled a 'subordinationist', and there is no doubt that in his Trinity the Second and Third hypostases are the servitors of the First. It is still the general custom in patristic studies to deprecate this position as an error, which can only be explained as the result of traffic with alien philosophies, and can only be excused on the plea that orthodoxy and heresy had not yet been defined by a magisterium. Origen would have been surprised by the second proposition, as the Church of his day was armed with both a New Testament, as the test of apostolicity, and a rule of faith, as the watermark of orthodox exegesis. And in its generation, no doctrine of the Trinity was more catholic or more apostolic than that of Origen. As to the first, it is generally admitted that the majority of Christian writers in the first three centuries taught a subordinationism more extreme than that of Origen, denying the eternity of the Son as a discrete hypostasis;[136] as to the second, candid modern readers of the New Testament seldom fail to be struck by two pervasive features which appear to have been obscured, if not forgotten, in the deliberations following the Council of Nicaea:

1 Jesus is consistently represented in the New Testament as the image, the anointed or the mouthpiece of the Father, but is never expressly said to be his equal. Paul hails him often as *kurios* (Lord), but never as *theos* (God), except perhaps in one or two sayings whose interpretation is not beyond controversy.[137] John's Gospel states that the Logos was not only 'with God' but *theos* in the beginning, and attributes to the Word made flesh the claim that he participated in the Father's glory before the creation of the world; nevertheless, the word *theos* when applied to the Logos may be more an epithet than a title,[138] as it lacks the definite article and it is the embodied Logos who, a few lines after proclaiming

himself the all-sufficient minister of salvation, announces that he is going to the Father because 'the Father is greater than I' (John 14.28). Such contrapuntal utterances as 'I and the Father are one' (John 10.30), or 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14.9), no more indicate that Christ is God by nature than Paul implies that we are God by nature when he writes that the believer is 'one spirit with the Lord' (1 Corinthians 6.17). The appellation 'Son of God' is conferred on Christ by the Father at his baptism, by himself and his disciples during the ministry, by a soldier at the Cross and by the Holy Spirit at his Resurrection;[139] but nowhere is it used of his relation to the Father before embodiment, let alone of a timeless coessentiality in the Godhead. As to worship, even where the doxology at the end of 2 Corinthians enumerates all three persons of the Trinity, only one is God.

2 Everything that primitive Christianity has to say about the pre-existent saviour is compounded with some reference to his humanity, or else to the glorification of his humanity and ours. The object of John's prologue is to show that the incarnation of the Word is no new tale but the peroration of a speech that commenced in the morning when God said 'Let there be light'.[140] The Son of God through whom God made the world in the Epistle to the Hebrews is the same one who is now enthroned on high after having been made 'a little lower than the angels'.[141] The image of God through whom all things were made, the firstborn of creation, in the Epistle to the Colossians is declared three verses later to have been the firstborn from the dead.[142] In certain contexts one is not sure that any discrimination between the manhood and the divinity is intended: even if Christ's being 'in the form of God' at Philippians 2.6 signifies more than that he was made, like all men and women, in God's image, he is evidently a paradigm of humanity in the main body of the hymn, which celebrates his refusal of theft (*harpagmos*), his humility and his willing death in contrast to the fatal disobedience of Adam. The manhood of the Saviour was an indefeasible element of devotion for a Church in which the cult of Christ as God had supervened upon the acknowledgement of the crucified Jesus as its risen Lord.[143]

Orthodoxy has commonly adduced the second point in mitigation of the first, alleging that wherever the historic Christ confesses himself inferior to the Father, his words are a corollary of his being in the body and have no bearing on his status in the Godhead. The most prominent theologians of the modern age, however, have imposed a wise embargo on attempts to add by a priori reasoning to the knowledge of God as Trinity that is imparted through the Incarnation, the Bible and the experience of the Church. 'The immanent Trinity', writes the distinguished Jesuit Karl Rahner, 'is the economic Trinity'[144] – that is to say, we cannot speak of any nature in God except the one he reveals to us. This dictum, or the substance of it, is widely endorsed by Protestant theologians, though the same conclusions are not always drawn. The modern view can boast that it is Biblical, but not that it is original, as can be seen if we draw out the same two threads from the work of Origen.

Firstly, we have already noted Origen's invention (if such it is) of the compound *autotheos* to express the superiority of the Father to the Son.[145] We have seen that, though the prefix has Platonic antecedents, the word itself does not; the motive for

coining it is to explain the function of the definite article in the first verse of John's prologue, where although the Logos receives the predicate *theos*, it is the Father alone who claims *ho theos* ('God') as his proper name. Had *autotheos* been the neologism of a Platonist, it would no doubt have implied that God the Father is the paradigm in which an indefinite host of gods participates; Origen, however, does not teach that the Son 'participates' in the Father who created him, and believes, like any Christian, that the monad[146] who is 'God himself' is apprehended through the unique theophany of Christ. In short, a word that might have given countenance to the polytheism of a Greek philosopher is used by this theologian to forestall the polytheism that would follow from our imagining that all three persons of the Trinity are in the same sense 'gods'.

Of the Platonists it is almost true to say that the higher their notion of the First Principle the less inclined they were to worship it. Plotinus shunned all festivals; Iamblichus treats sacrifice as a propaedeutic to higher disciplines; Proclus, who exhorts us 'as it were' to hymn the One, chooses lesser gods as the addressees of his own poetic orisons.[147] For Origen, on the other hand, all species of prayer are due to God the Father. He does not, as is often thought, forbid the worship of Christ in his treatise *On Prayer*, but he argues that, because Christ differs in *ousia* and substrate (*hypokeimenon*)[148] from the Father, he is not entitled to prayer in the 'strictest sense', which (as the rest of the treatise indicates) means the prayer of adoration.[149] To say that Christ could not receive our petitions, and our thanks for his granting of them, would be not only to contradict the practice of the Pauline churches, but to make him weaker than the departed saints whom we approach with our intercessions. Origen's theology, unlike that of the Platonists, requires that a deity should have a cult.

Secondly, as Origen maintains the coeternity of the Logos and the Father, it is clear that he must distinguish between the incarnate and the premundane existence of the former.[150] It is all the more remarkable that he fails to leave the flesh out of account when he explains, in the second chapter of *First Principles*, what it means to characterize the Second Hypostasis as the image of the First. Imagine, he says,[151] a statue of such magnitude that the eye cannot take it in, and next to that another statue, like in contour and proportion but of measurable dimensions: in the same way, he continues, the Logos tempers the sublimity of the Father to our weak faculties. Although designed initially to distinguish grades of dignity in the Godhead, the simile terminates in a quotation of Philippians 2.7, which suggests that Christ becomes the visible image of the Father not so much by falling short of true divinity, as by stooping to human form:

> In like manner the Son, 'emptying himself' of equality with the Father [Phil 2.6–7], and showing to us the way of knowledge of him, becomes the 'express figure of his substance' [Heb 1.3], so that while we were not able to bear the glory of the pure light that was housed in the greatness of his divinity, now that he has been made a 'radiance'[152] to us, we can find a path to the contemplation of his glory through the exhibition of this radiance.
>
> (*First Principles* 1.2.8, pp. 38.25–39.4 Koetschau)

It is as ruler of the *logikoi* and the *logika* – of things and sentient agents that belong to the rational order – that the Second Hypostasis is styled the Logos. *Ta logika* we

may take to be the genera and species that inhabit the mind of God before the ages, but in so far as human beings belong to the class of *logikoi*, they do not so much inherit as achieve this state, by various paths and each in his own degree. To govern a heterogeneous world the Logos must be all things to all his subjects, but this does not entail that there is any multiplicity in his own nature. When, in Origen's *Commentary on Joshua*, we read that the Father is simple and the Son manifold, we should hesitate to deduce a contrast between their essential characters from this demarcation of economic roles:

> Let us never consider Christ as purely human, but let us confess him equally God and man, because the Wisdom of God likewise is called multiple, so that through this we may be deemed worthy to participate in the Wisdom of God, who is Christ Jesus our Lord. (*Homilies on Joshua* 7.7, p. 335)

Wisdom is personified in scripture with the purpose of exhorting us to be wise; even as God's helpmeet she remains the personified wisdom of humanity, and whatever is predicated of her is held to be true by virtue of her actions in this world.[153] One can only be perplexed by Grillmeier's deduction from this passage that the epithets of Christ pertain to him 'not only from a soteriological point of view, but in respect of his very constitution'.[154] We frequently hear that in Origen's thought the Logos fills the role of a 'cosmological intermediary', who protects the frail creation from the otherwise intolerable majesty of the uncreated God. Once again this grand conclusion rests on a jejune interpretation of the evidence most often cited to verify it. The Christ who in *First Principles* 2.6.1 is said to 'stand between God and all his creatures' is described in the very same sentence by the Pauline locutions 'mediator' and 'firstborn of creation'.[155] Such allusions must be given their full weight when they occur at the beginning of a chapter which is expressly titled 'On the Incarnation': the Christ of whom Origen speaks here is the result, not the means, of union, between the immortal and the perishable. The necessary adhesive, as he goes on to explain, is the 'soul of Christ', because the nature of soul, at once created and incorporeal, lends itself as no other nature will to simultaneous conjunction with the body and communion with the Logos. Here indeed he does affirm that it would be contrary to nature for a body to be the vessel of the Godhead, but the Godhead is plainly that of the Second Person.[156] Although there are gradations in divinity, and the soul of Christ is an image of the Logos as the Logos is an image of the Father,[157] we should not press the analogy so far as to say that Christ within the Trinity was a hybrid even before his Incarnation: is it not the essential premiss of the argument for a human soul in Jesus that the pre-existent Word is truly God?

Origen knows nothing of the fourth-century orthodoxy, which denied that the subservience of Christ to the Father while on earth was mirrored in the relation between the persons of the Godhead. Nor, on the other hand, can we assume that he would have modelled his own account of these relations on the incarnate life of Christ, as though the saying of Rahner, that the 'immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity', were already a platitude to him. Of one thing we may be certain: he held with Paul, Augustine and the theologians of the twentieth century, that had God not become incarnate, we should never have known him as a Trinity. This is sufficient

proof that he differed in his way of reasoning from the Platonists, whose theology was never derived from special revelations but by logical abstraction from the inalienable properties of being. Origen's Son of God – created, palpable, unique – may have some epithets in common with the cosmos of the Timaeus, but he is not the god of any Platonist.

The Trinity, *Ousia* and *Hypostasis*

Recent scholarship has made it impossible to sustain the hackneyed notion that the Christian Trinity is a Platonic triad. The inexorable constraint on Christian thought is monotheism: we may say that there are three within the Trinity, we may deify each one severally, but we may not affirm three gods.[158] Platonists, for whom *theos* was an honorific label and not a rigid designator, had no objection to polytheism and, even when they opined that the One is god,[159] did not assert that God is one. Nor are the roles and characters that Christian thought apportions to the persons of the Godhead fully commensurable with the functions of the three transcendent principles in any Platonic system. We might say indeed that before the incarnation the Christian Logos was primarily a demiurgic intellect like the Second Mind of Numenius; the unapproachable Father is a fair match for the First Mind of Numenius and the One of the Neoplatonists, so long as we ignore his personal qualities; but in no Platonic system is the third principle a compeer of the Christian Holy Spirit.[160] If there is a third god in Numenius, it is either the world or the worldly portion of the Second Mind; in Plotinus the third hypostasis is Soul, the elder sister of the World-Soul and our own.[161] The Holy Spirit, however, is at the same time more restricted and more powerful in his workings. Omitted from the account of the creation in John's Gospel, and expressly stated not to have been given before the glorification of Jesus, he is pledged to the disciples as the spokesman of the absent Christ on earth and as the steward of faith and hope till his return.[162] In Paul's epistles the Spirit is the bond of the Church and the earnest of salvation, the one who, having raised Christ from the dead, teaches his followers to call God 'Abba, Father';[163] he is at odds with the rulers of this world who crucified Christ, with the principalities and powers who reign in heaven, and above all with the 'god of this world' who blinds the unilluminated heart.[164] Christianity cannot hold, with the Platonists, that the world is permeated by divinity, for the world as we know it is to be overcome and the new creation is reserved for the elect.

If Origen, as his enemies alleged, maintained that all will be redeemed, he held this view as the obverse of his belief that all is fallen. The material realm does not contain the germ of its own salvation: rather this is progressively effected through the leavening of the individual human by the Spirit, and of humankind by the spiritual Church. We enter this world as rational, not as spiritual creatures, and the domain of the Son at present is therefore wider than that of the Spirit, while the dominion of the Father, which extends to the irrational creation, encompasses both:[165]

> God the Father, holding all things together, extends to everything in existence, granting to each in its kind to be the thing that it is, but the Son, doing less in comparison with the

> Father since he is second to the Father, extends only to the rational (*ta logika*); while the Holy Spirit does still less, as he goes only so far as the saints. (*First Principles* 1.3.5, following the Greek text at pp. 55.4–56.5 Koetschau)

Those who adduced this passage in antiquity as a characteristic affront to the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit had forgotten not only the scriptures but the precedent of Irenaeus, the great heresiologist, who maintained in the late second century that, while the reprobate possess a soul and hence the image of God, only the elect have been refashioned in his likeness by the Spirit.[166] There is no analogous ordering of powers among the three *hypostases* of the Neoplatonists; John Dillon, however, argues that the Trinity in Origen is homologous with the threefold structure of the Second Hypostasis, as expounded by the successors of Plotinus.[167] Being, life and mind are the three constituents of the 'intelligible triad', but whereas all three collaborate in every mental process, Proclus notes in his *Elements of Theology* that the scope of life is greater than that of being, as it extends to plants and beasts who lack intelligence, while that of being is greater still, as even objects destitute of life have a share in it. If the triad of Proclus is juxtaposed with the Christian Trinity, the Father will correspond to being, the Son to life and the Spirit to mind – the very nomenclature that was adopted in the fourth century by the Christian neophyte Marius Victorinus in his defence of the catholic Trinity against the Arians. But whereas Victorinus could draw on Porphyry, who is generally regarded as the father of the intelligible triad,[168] Origen died while Porphyry had not yet commenced his studies at Plotinus' school in Rome. Our Platonic parallel, as we noted, comes from Proclus, the restorer of Athenian Platonism in the fifth century, and if we were forced to regard one passage as the source of the other we should therefore have no choice but to award the primacy to the Christian author. Closer inspection shows that the comparison in any case was specious: Origen's Trinity contains no member whose domain is strictly coterminous with the realm of living beings, and his second principle does the work of Proclus' third by allowing all rational beings to partake of him. Origen's Holy Spirit was unlikely to meet his double in fifth-century Platonism, which was still without the concept of the spiritual, as distinguished from the intellectual man.[169]

Perhaps a stronger case for a Platonic antecedent to Origen's doctrine of the Trinity could be built upon his statement that the Son does not proceed directly from the Father but from his *dunamis* or power;

> He [Christ] is the image of his goodness, and a ray, not of God, but of his glory, and of his eternal light, and a breath, not of the Father but of his power, an unsullied emanation of his almighty glory, and an untarnished mirror of his activity (*energeia*), the mirror through which Paul and Peter and their like see God. (*Commentary on John* 13.25.153; pp. 249.29–250.1 Preuschen)

The sequence Father–*dunamis*–Son is congruent, word for word, with that of the highest triad in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where *dunamis* is also the middle term in a precursor of the intelligible triad.[170] Such harmony, one might urge, is seldom fortuitous. But, although the *Chaldaean Oracles* antedate Porphyry,[171] we cannot be certain that they were already current at a time when the Christian scholar might have culled his own vocabulary from them; nor can we be sure that their only

reservoir was the literature of Platonism, with no admixture of the Hebrew doctrines that the name 'Chaldaean' would have suggested to an ancient reader. Even if they were Platonic and available to Origen, it is clear that he appropriated nothing that was not also to be found in hallowed sources, for he is quoting scripture even as he writes.[172]

No Platonic triad, and no use of the term *hypostasis*, anticipates the passage in which Origen, foreshadowing Augustine and his medieval imitators, argues that the blessings of the Father become substantial – that is, present and accessible – through the Spirit:[173]

> I believe that the Holy Spirit, if I may say so, imparts the matter of the blessings of God to the saints whom he[174] also causes to enjoy a share in him; the aforesaid matter of blessings is activated *(energoumenês)* from God, distributed *(diakonoumenês)* by the Son and made substantial *(huphestôsês)* according to the Holy Spirit. (*Commentary on John* 2.10.77; p. 65.27–31 Preuschen)

Aristotle's god, as the unobstructed thought of thought, is a pure activity or *energeia*; Plotinus used the same noun to denote what would be later styled the aseity, or self-origination of the One,[175] which, though it transcends all actuality, is realized on the plane of Nous as being. But Greek philosophers, even when they attributed superabundance or a second entelechy to the First Principle, did not say that its characteristic energy is the communication of grace. The *energeia* of the Plotinian One produces nothing but the One, and when we hear that intellect gives a *hypostasis* to being, we are not told that this being is a gift to those below.[176] Pagans like Numenius, who depict the Second Principle as the acolyte of the first, avoid the invidious term *diakonos* ('servant'), which the New Testament applies freely to the incarnate Christ and to those who imitate him. Here again the Christ of Origen's Trinity is the Christ of the evangelists, in whose flesh the unseen Father is made visible. No Platonist could have toyed with the conceit that the Holy Spirit conveys the 'matter' of divine benevolence; such a trope was possible only where matter was believed to be an appointed, not an adventitious factor in the great design, created by the same God who informs it, and not merely as a receptacle for his overflowing goodness but as an instrument of his special love for man.

The presence of spirit in matter is a cardinal motif of the next two chapters. Chapter 3 argues that the body, which in Platonism remains at best the luggage of the itinerant soul, is for Origen the condition of our historical integrity as persons. In Chapter 4 we see that he enhanced the dignity of the written scripture by adopting this Biblical concept of the body as his key to the discovery of the spirit within the letter of the text.

Notes

1 The putative source of this antithesis is the Jewish thinker Martin Buber, but his name is often taken in vain by lesser scholars and weaker theologians. For a deft account of his thought on God as the unknown interlocutor see Vermes (1980), 156–235, and for a survey of Buber's influence on his Christian contemporaries in Germany see Ward (1995), 53–102. Of course the presupposition of Buber and his early followers is that

only a God who surpasses familiar categories of being – a God who is always person, never object – can be present to us in this elusive manner; the conversion of this theology into a manifesto for the exorcism of transcendence from the Christian vocabulary is the innovation of writers beguiled by the false connotations of the epithet 'personal'.

2 See for example, Robinson (1968).

3 See for example, Numenius, Fr. 56 Des Places (cited by the Byzantine author Lydus, *On Months* 4.53) on the 'imparticipability' of the Jewish deity.

4 See Scholem (1954), 109 for Judah the Hasid's strictures on Jewish Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages.

5 Acts 17.22; the speech that follows is the starting point of Norden's *Agnostos Theos* (1913), which surmises that the mystical and transcendental monotheism of late antique philosophy is an Oriental graft on the Greek tradition.

6 See *Laws* 907b–909c.

7 See *Timaeus* 41b–d for the allocution to the lesser gods; 29d–31a for the Creator's imitation of the eternal paradigm. In *Hermetica* 23.50, the speech of the supreme God to his subalterns combines an echo of Plato with the conciliar setting of Psalm 62.

8 See especially *Euthyphro* 6d–e on the necessity of a standard by which to measure the holiness of our actions; *Symposium* 209–11 on the superior fecundity of minds that have apprehended the form of Beauty; *Republic* 433a–b on the definition of justice, with 534c–e on the political utility of acquaintance with the Forms.

9 *Symposium* 211a–c; on the superior reality of the Forms see Vlastos (1965).

10 As Crombie (1963), 319–25 observes, it does not follow from this that the Ideas or Forms are separable in the sense that they subsist even when they are not instantiated in the world.

11 *Parmenides* 130b–c; *Philebus* 15a.

12 *Parmenides* 130c.

13 *Parmenides* 132d–133a. For Aristotle's critique see *Metaphysics* 990b, and for a rejoinder to it Meinwold (1992).

14 See *Parmenides* 131d, and for a defence of the rejected position Fine (1986).

15 *Sophist* 248c–249c. See Hadot (1960) and (1967) on the evolution of the 'intelligible triad' (being, life and mind) in Neoplatonism.

16 *Timaeus* 29d–e.

17 See Nettleship (1897), 218–34 for a history of the term *agathos* in Greek and in Plato's writings.

18 Though Plato at *Phaedrus* 247c–248b prefers the designations Being and Truth, Hackforth (1972) rightly compares the imagery and vocabulary of the passage to that of Republic 508c, where the good is the highest object of aspiration.

19 *Phaedrus* 248c–e, contrasting these souls with the gods who achieve their goal at 247e–248a. Here the fall is said to arise from an ordinance of Necessity (alluding to Empedocles, Fr. 115 DK), and Platonists who wished to make the soul responsible for its own predicament found the statements of the master on the causes of its embodiment inconsistent and confusing: see Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1.

20 See the parable of the philosopher's emergence from the Cave at *Republic* 517b–518b, anticipated by the analogy between the Good and the sun at 508a–509b. On the awarding of political honours by the prisoners in the Cave see 516c; they know nothing of the world except the shadows which a fire at their backs projects on to a screen. On the inadequacy of mathematical hypotheses see 511a–e.

21 *Memorabilia* 4.11–14, adapted to a Christian purpose by Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 32.

22 See *Mem.* 1.1 on the conventional piety of Socrates; Chroust (1973), 173–93 on the later attempts of Aristotle in his lost works to demonstrate the existence of a deity

from the evidence of design. Christians of the first two centuries will have been more familiar with these 'exoteric' writings than with the 'esoteric' works on which my own discussion of Aristotle is based.

23 See *Republic* 327a, with 354a, for his attendance at the festival of Bendis.

24 See Mueller (1998), 88 on the contrast between the activity of *Nous* in the *Timaeus* and its subordination to Forms in the *Republic*.

25 See Festugière (1954), 275–93, for annotated translation of the summary of previous views in Proclus, *Commentary on Timaeus* I, 303–317 Diehl.

26 On the collusion of active and passive intellect in the acquisition of knowledge by other agents, see Aristotle, *De Anima* 429–31, with the analysis of the 'maker mind''s activity in Kosman (1992) and survey of interpretations by Brentano ([1867] 1992). As Blumenthal (1991) reminds us, Aristotle speaks at 429b 24–5 of 'passive intellect', but the expression 'active intellect' is derived from 430a11–12.

27 Commenting on the argument from *Metaphysics* 1072b15–1072b27, Norman (1969), 69, writes that 'what is meant is not "self-contemplation", but simply that identity of intellect and object of thought that characterizes all abstract thought'.

28 On the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle in Neoplatonism see Hadot (1990); the solution advanced by Dexippus and Porphyry was that Aristotle's logic contains the rules of predication for the common world, whereas Plato's dialectic seeks the discernment of sublime realities.

29 See Hadot (1991), citing David (Elias), *On Categories* 120.

30 See Rich (1954) on the evolution of this tenet; Armstrong (1960) on the antecedents of the Plotinian doctrine that 'the intelligibles are not outside the intellect'. Ammonius, a sixth-century commentator on Aristotle, maintained against the Neoplatonists Proclus and Simplicius that Aristotle's God is a cause of being as well as motion: Sorabji (1990b), 184–5.

31 See *On the Soul* 429–31, with Blumenthal (1991) and Kosman (1992).

32 Witt (1937), 70–5 is a spokesman for Antiochus; Barnes (1989), however, sifts away almost every particle of the evidence. Armstrong (1960) on the *Mantissa* of Alexander, the second-century founder of the tradition of commentary on Aristotle. On Philo see Wolfson (1948), 1,322 and (1961), 33–8. He argues that Philo follows Aristotle, *On the Soul* 429 in seeking a location for the Ideas, and that this cannot lie outside the divine intellect in a theology which posits God as the sole eternal being.

33 Fr. 11.11–20 Des Places, from Eusebius, *Preparation* 11.17.

34 See Fr. 20.12 (Eusebius, *ibid.* 11.22) for the term *autoagathon*; Fr. 18.10 (*ibid.* 11.18) for the Ideas as the 'rudder' of the gubernatorial second mind; Fr.16.14–17 (*ibid.* 11.22) for the participation of the second mind in the *autoagathon* and of the beautiful cosmos in *to kalon*.

35 See *Against Celsus* 1.15 (Fr. 1b Des Places), 4.51 (Fr. 1c), 5.38 (Fr. 53), 5.57 (Fr. 29).

36 Fr. 10a (*Against Celsus* 4.51) and 53 (5.38).

37 Fr. 1b (*Against Celsus* 1.14), although the references to Moses and Jesus are taken from the otherwise unknown *Epops*. The allegorical tenor of the latter suggests that its title, which would usually mean 'hoopoe', alludes also to the 'epoptic' climax of initiation.

38 *CommJoh* 2.2. See above for *autoagathon* in Numenius.

39 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1040b 33–4; *Categories* 1b, where the same examples recur, is probably his rejoinder, and it is notable that Numenius, while he asserts in Fr. 20.8–9 that there are ideas of man and horse, eschews the prefix auto, which he goes on to attach to *agathon*.

40 *Tolmema*, the nearest equivalent in pagan Greek to 'heresy'.

41 If this is the most celebrated Longinus of the epoch, we see that Origen kept abreast

of his contemporaries, for Longinus survived until 271. See Heath (1999) on his life and works.

42 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 14 relates that the works of **N**umenius and Cronius were prescribed reading in the school, while Plotinus perused and criticized the writings of his contemporary Longinus. Moderatus and **N**icomachus (Pythagoreans of the second century) are cited elsewhere by Porphyry, who was a pupil of both Longinus and Plotinus. Apollophanes is more obscure, but Porphyry, *loc.cit.* admits that Stoics were not neglected in Plotinus' seminars. As Porphyry implies, the only precedents for the application of allegory to pagan texts in Origen's time were Stoic essays from the early Roman period; see further Chapter 4.

43 See Cantora (1987), 40–4 for a brief and lively review of the labours of these two poets; Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 448–79 on scholarship in the Hellenistic city.

44 See Pfeiffer (1968), for a survey of Homeric scholarship in Alexandria; Cantora (1987), 102–3 for a concise collection of references.

45 See Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 17–20 on Pharos; vol. 2, 186–7 on Eratosthenes.

46 See Swain (1996) on the artificial world of the Greek elite under Roman dominion.

47 See Lucan, *Civil War* 10. 486–505, with Apthonius, *Progymnasmata* 12. Cantora (1987), 77–100 assembles records which suggest the survival or restoration of the Library after Caesar's time, though much rests on the assumption that the Library was identical with the Museum which appears as an extant monument in Strabo's *Geography* 17.1.8

48 See the essays by various hands in Sorabji (1990a), 173–303.

49 In fact, to judge by Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 480–94, the sceptics and eclectics flourished more than the Pythagorean and Aristotelian Platonists. On p. 493, Fraser remarks that we do not know the name of a single Neo-Pythagorean in Alexandria during the first century BC when the school began to flourish elsewhere.

50 See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.10.1 on the Stoicism of Pantaenus; 5.11.1 on his role as tutor of Clement.

51 Theodoret, *Cure for Greek Ills* 6.61 (though the text as it stands implies that the Christian Origen, a pupil of Ammonius, taught Plotinus); Longinus, in Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 20.36–7.

52 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19.13 (on Ammonius); 6.9.14 (Origen's letter).

53 **N**autin (1977), 200–201.

54 Longinus in Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 20.49; Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* p. 618 Boissonade. Edwards (1993), 178 observes that the name Ammonius bespeaks an Egyptian origin (the more so when Longinus associates with another Peripatetic called Ptolemaeus); Plotinus' comment, 'Longinus is a philologist, but no philosopher' (Porphyry, *Life* 14.19–20) reveals at least that the Platonists regarded Longinus as an able critic.

55 See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3 (on the reticence of Ammonius Saccas); *ibid.* 20.50–7 (citing Longinus on the exiguous compositions of the Peripatetic Ammonius); Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19.13 on the harmony. Edwards (1993), 177 upholds the view of Dörrie (1955), 445–59 that Porphyry is the source of the allusion to the teaching of Ammonius Saccas on the 'unconfused commingling' of corporeals and incorporeals in **N**emesius of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 3.20; if that is so, the teaching may have been transmitted orally through Plotinus.

56 See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 2.20–38 and 2.41–5. In the latter passage, quoted from Longinus, this Origen is treated as an estimable colleague of Ammonius Saccas – hardly the view that any pagan was likely to take of the Christian Origen, as we see from Porphyry's comments in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19.5–7.

57 It might be said, for example, that if Origen had been taught by a Peripatetic, his

works would have evinced a greater esteem for Aristotle, whereas in fact he figures little in the collections of citations and quotations from Aristotle in the Greek fathers made by Festugière (1932), 221–63 and Runia (1989). Against this one might argue (a) that, since the Peripatetics cultivated encyclopaedic learning, Ammonius may have taught Origen other things than the philosophy of Aristotle; and (b) that in any case a pupil is not obliged to adopt the tenets of his master. The studies of Clark (1977) and Bos (2000) have shown that Aristotle was not neglected by the Christians of Alexandria, and if it is true that Origen ignores him, it will not be for lack of acquaintance with his thought.

58 See for example Gen 2.17 for an unfulfilled threat ('in that day ye shall die'); Gen 6.6 where the Lord repents of creating man; Gen 11.5 where he descends to ascertain the purposes of the builders of Babel.

59 Micah 3.6; James 1.17.

60 See *Against Celsus* 4.72 on wrath; 6.58 on God's repentance at Gen 6.6. Philo, in *On the Immutability of God*, admits that many construe the text to mean that God repented, though he cites it in the Septuagintal Greek, where the verb *enethumethe* may imply no more than that God 'considered' his work. Celsus would appear to have been better acquainted with the Hebrew original than either Philo or Origen.

61 *Princ.* 1.1.7, p. 25.8 Koetschau; 2.4.3, p. 130.7.

62 *Against Celsus* 4.14.

63 Deut 4.24 and John 4.24, cited at *Princ.* 1.1.1, p.17 Koetschau. As Dillon (1988) observes, Origen tests both passages against the affirmation that God is light at 1 John 1.5, and assumes without question that light is incorporeal. He may have derived this assumption from the physics of the Platonists, but this does not imply that he was indebted to their theology, let alone that, as Dillon suggests, that his concept of divine illumination is derived from *Republic* 507a–509c and the late antique conflation of this with Aristotle's words on the active reason. The Christian comparison of God to the solar orb was already a commonplace: not only was Christ himself the sun of righteousness (Malachi 4.2), but Tertullian (*Apology*) records that Christians face the sun in prayer as a symbol of resurrection.

64 See *On the Flesh of Christ* 14. On his use of Stoic psychology and physics, especially in the philosophic treatise *On the Soul*, see Daniélou (1977), 209–32.

65 Thus in *On the Flesh of Christ* 3.5 he maintains that the divine nature can change into flesh without any forfeiture of its original qualities, merely because it is the nature of God.

66 *Princ.* 1.1.6, p. 21.14–17 Koetschau, with the argument that mind, like God, requires no medium for its operations.

67 See Markschies (1995), 73 on the diverse senses of the word *ousia* in *Origen*.

68 See Tertullian, *On Prayer* 6.3, followed by Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*.

69 *On Prayer* 8, 367.13–368.19 Koetschau; 11, p. 370.10–11. Markschies (1995), 71–3 calls attention to the sequel, unintelligible to a Platonist, in which it is said that the saint ingests this supersubstantial bread when he partakes of the eucharist.

70 *CommRom* 2.6 at 1, p. 131.15 Bammel, commenting on Rom 2.12ff.

71 Festugière (1954), 95–102; on pp. 115–23 he discovers the same three ways in Celsus (Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.42 and 45).

72 See *Didascalicus* 10.5–6, p. 165.17–35 Hermann. For the primary God as the good see 10.3 (164.36); for God as intellect or the cause of intellect see 9.3 (163.32). Dillon (1993), 106 remarks that the Good of *Republic* 509 has been conflated with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.

73 *Timaeus* 28c; see Daniélou (1973), 107–14 on the frequency with which this text is cited in Christian literature of the second century.

74 *Exhortation* 5, p. 6.16–21 Koetschau; for the Platonic tetrad see *Republic* 428a–433c.
75 See Fédou (1988) for Origen's strictures on paganism; Reemts (1998) for the defence of Christianity.
76 See Saffrey (1981) on the ancient evidence and modern conjectures.
77 See Frs 3,4,7,8 Des Places.
78 See Lewy (1958), 1–61 on Porphyry's use of the *Oracles*; Numenius Fr.21 for 'grandfather, offspring, scion'; Fr. 17 (with Dodd (1960)) for a possible allusion to the *Oracles;* Fr. 37 on Porphyry's allegiance to Numenius.
79 Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 37; Proclus died in AD 480.
80 See Dillon (1999).
81 See Dillon (1977), 347–8 on the supranoetic One in Moderatus. Whittaker (1969) amasses a number of citations from Platonic and Pythagorean sources (including Maximus, *Discourses* 11.11 Hobein; Plutarch, *Platonic Questions* 1001e–1002a; Alcinous/Albinus, *Didascalicus* 10, p. 164 Hobein; and Clement, *Stromateis* 5.11); but, while these liberate the highest principle from the finitude of sensible phenomena, none of them amounts to a declaration that God is inaccessible to the purified human intellect.
82 *Didascalicus* 10, p. 164.6–8 Hermann, though Dillon (1993) enters a caveat against the inference that the god of Alcinous is 'literally ineffable'.
83 The putative author of the *De Platone* is Apuleius of Madaura, an African sophist of the mid-second century AD. On his philosophy see Dillon (1977), 306–38.
84 Wolfson (1952), citing for example *On Dreams* 1.67. Dillon (1993), 101 appears to me to make too little of this observation.
85 See Runia (1995).
86 See Starobinski-Safran (1978).
87 *Enneads* 6.8.
88 See Dillon (1977), 242–4 on the classic discussion of *Timaeus* 28b in Calvenus Taurus.
89 See Gen 1.2, Heb 11.2; 2Macc 7.28.
90 See Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.4 and 2.10; Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 19–27.
91 At *Philokalia* 24 Origen is credited with a treatise against the existence of matter which is also attributed to Methodius, as well as to 'Maximus' and 'Adamantius' (the latter name being a frequent sobriquet for Origen). For discussion of its authorship see the introduction to Robinsons's edition (1896), xl–xlviii.
92 Burnyeat (1982); cf. 2.1.4, pp. 110.7–111.12 on the omnipotence of God.
93 Sorabji (1983), 290–4, after quoting a number of passages from Gregory which in his view express a Berkelian idealism, looks for precedents in Greek philosophy, but finds nothing worthy of consideration before Plotinus.
94 See *Timaeus* 37c, with Edwards (1997a).
95 I quote Justinian's Greek here because it agrees in substance with Rufinus' Latin; this is one of the passages in which he simplifies (without falsifying) a philosophical argument for the sake of Latin readers who find rigorous logic indigestible. See Rist (1975) and Pace (1990), 46–57.
96 *Enneads* 5.5.11, 6.9.6 etc. Guyot (1906), 35–101, contends that Philo, the first philosopher whose supreme principle is both infinite and personal, is indebted to his native Judaism as well as Plato. The passage quoted is possibly Origen's retort to such Philonic texts as *On the Sacrifice of Abel and Cain* 15.
97 Platonists understood *phantasia* as an inferior mode of perception, based entirely on sense-perceptions or on recollections of them. See further Chapter 3 on the adhesion of such impressions to the soul after death to constitute a vehicle for transmigration in Porphyry.

98 Eccl 1.9–10, repeated at 23.5.3 (p. 273 Koetschau). This argument for the existence of previous worlds is the only one that seems to have weight to Origen, and it would of course seem trifling to a Platonist or Stoic. Gasparri (1987), 57 remarks that only Methodius, as quoted by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 236, accuses Origen of having argued for the eternity of the present universe.

99 That seems to mean all individuals in the world; but so far as we know Plotinus was the first Platonist to raise the possibility that there are forms of individuals, and it is far from clear that scholars have succeeded in reconciling his affirmative answer in *Enneads* 5.7 with his more conventional utterances elsewhere. See the important discussions by Blumenthal (1966) and O'Meara (1999).

100 This objection to Christian cosmogony is raised at *Princ.* 1.4.3. p. 66.4 Koetschau.

101 See Ashton (1994), 5–33 on the metamorphosis of the Jewish personification of Wisdom in John's prologue; Ridderbos (1966) against the claim that the prologue is detachable from the main body of the gospel.

102 See Aetius, *Opinions of Philosophers* 1.7.33 on God as fire, spirit and Logos; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.135–6 on God as Logos and fate.

103 John 1.1; Gen 1.1.

104 Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.14 condemns the Stoic conception of God as a body (*soma*) and their doctrine of recurrent conflagrations (*ekpuroseis*).

105 Thus two second-century interpreters of the *Timaeus*, Plutarch (*Convivial Questions* 720b etc.) and Atticus, speak of a *logos* or reason-principle which is implanted by the Demiurge as a germ of order in the chaotic matter of creation. Both men were literal exegetes, who maintained against the encroachments of the Peripatetic doctrine, that the Demiurge created the world in time. More Aristotelian Platonists, like Alcinous, use *logos* as a common noun to signify any determination of matter by an idea (*Didascalicus* 9.1, p. 163.15 Hermann). Neither conservatives nor Aristotelians imagined that the *logos* was a god, or a supernal intermediary, who enables the divine intellect to contemplate the Forms before imposing them on matter. By the end of the second century, when Christians had come to the conclusion that even matter was created out of nothing, the cosmogonies of Atticus and Plutarch were as obsolete to them as to the Platonists, who now maintained the eternity of the world.

106 See Col 1.15–18; 1 Cor 6.4.

107 See Edwards (1995a), against Holte (1958) on the origin and function of the Logos; for the dissemination of truth through scripture, see 1 Apol 44, where it is clear that the seeds implanted in the minds of the philosophers come not directly from the Holy Spirit but from the clandestine perusal of Jewish texts.

108 See Edwards (2000), 161 on the rarity of this 'two-stage' theory, enunciated by Theophilus at *To Autolycus* 2.10 and 2.22.

109 On the personification of God's word as an intermediary in rabbinic thought see Moore (1922), though, as the author observes, it is not easy to date such evidence or to ascertain what influence it might have had on Christians (or on Philo).

110 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 10; Tatian, *Oration* 5.

111 See 1 Cor 1.21–3, Col 1.15, and Proverbs 8.22, though the Hebrew is now more frequently translated 'the Lord possessed me', and was so understood in other ancient renderings of this verse into Greek (see for example Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.299). Heb 1.3 appears to allude more strongly to Wisdom of Solomon 7.25–6, where Wisdom is both the helpmeet and the effluence of the Almighty.

112 *On Prayer* 15.1, pp. 353.27–354.6 Koetschau – a preface to the ruling that we cannot accord the prayer of adoration to the Son. Origen taxes his monarchian opponents with holding that the Father and Son are not only one in *hypostasis* but *hen hupokeimenon* at *CommMatt* 17.14, p. 624.13–17 Benz and Klostermann. I do not

take this to mean, with Lommatzsch in his note to Huet (846), 131 that the terms are synonymous, but that very concrete being or *hypostasis* has a single substrate the *hupokeimenon*. If this is so *hypostasis* is almost an equivalent for *ousia* in one sense defined by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*.

113 See further Edwards (1998), defending the authenticity of the passage ascribed to Pamphilus in Rufinus' Latin version, but arguing that the word *homoousios* is not being cited here in vindication of Origen's orthodoxy.

114 On Origen's controversy with those who rejected the distinction of hypostases, see Orbe (1991). On the prevalence of monarchianism in the second century see Hubner (1999), esp. 1–38. At *Against Celsus* 6.52, the pagan rhetorician seems to be already familiar with the theory that the Father's spirit, rather than a distinct hypostasis of the triune Godhead, furnished the divine element in Christ; see further Heine (1998) on this 'monarchian' Christology in the time of Origen.

115 *Against Praxeas* 14. No doubt Origen used the term hypostases at *CommRom* 4.10, where Rufinus adopts the Tertullianic phrase *ex substantia patris*. All good translators borrow established formulae where a new one would be difficult to reconcile with the idiom of their own contemporaries, and Hanson (1987) is therefore wrong to impugn the honesty of the Latin rendering.

116 Cf. also *Enneads* 5.3, *On the Knowing Hypostases*. Smith (1994), notes that this is widely regarded as the primary use of the term *hypostasis* in Neoplatonism, but he goes on to discover a technical sense of the substantive as 'the production of a *dunamis*' in the *Sententiae* (p. 35), though elsewhere Porphyry's usage is protean.

117 *Enneads* 6.8.7.47, which as Rutten (1994) remarks, says circumspectly that the One is 'a sort of *hypostasis*'. The One could not satisfy her own definition of *hypostasis* in Plotinus as '*la nature propre [d'une] chose, ce qui, dans cette chose, forme une contenu noetique, distinct de toute autre, qu'exprime, plus ou moins parfaitement, le discours*' (p. 30).

118 As it sometimes can in Plotinus when the relation is considered as the referent of a noun: Rutten (1994), 29.

119 It is sometimes alleged that this was a common term among the apologists, or at least that it was endorsed by Justin Martyr; Osborn (1993), 4 dispels both myths.

120 Origen's use of the title 'second [god]' at *Against Celsus* 6.61, p. 132.2 Koetschau is a mocking rejoinder to his adversary's denial that the 'first god' can submit to anthropomorphic predications. At 5.39, p. 43.22–3, he admits that the expression *deuteros theos* may be employed by Christians, but does not claim it as his own.

121 'Two gods' are more tolerable to Origen than the 'differentiation of divine natures' that he ascribes to Marcion and Valentinus at *Princ.* 2.7.1, p. 148.19 Koetschau; Father and Son may differ, but not in the sense that one of them is good and the other evil.

122 *Dialogue* 2.56 (p. 56 Scherer), alluding to the 'superstition' (*deisidamonia*) of the Athenians in Paul's harangue at Acts 17.22.

123 Rom 9.5; Titus 2.13; 1 John 5.20; John 20.28; John 1.1. In all but the last it is possible to argue that the term *theos* should be referred to God the Father. For assertions of monotheism see Mark 12.29 and parallels, with the more ambiguous 1 Cor 8.4.

124 *Dialogue* 2.27 (p. 58 Scherer); cf. Athenagoras, *Embassy* 10 (*c.* AD 170). See same page in Scherer for *Dialogue* 3.8, citing Gen 2.24; 3.14 citing 1 Cor 6.17 (a favourite verse with Origen).

125 *CommJoh* 2.10, confirms that Origen did speak of a communion of nature, as the Latin of Rufinus implies at *Princ.* 1.2.6 (p. 35.1 Koetschau); *Against Celsus* 8.12.

126 See Edwards (1998), 663 on the denunciation of this tenet at the Council of Sirmium in 351. Proponents of the Nicene *homoousion* regarded this as an Arianizing council,

but its object was to maintain the distinctness of properties among the three hypostases. At *Princ.* 1, proem 4, Origen, according to Rufinus, states that it is not determined whether the Son is 'begotten or unbegotten' (*natus an innatus*), implying that the Greek was *genêtos, ê, agennêtos*. Jerome's translation, *factus an infectus*, suggesting the Greek *genêtos ê agenêtos*, would have seemed less heterodox to a catholic of the mid-fourth century, though to Jerome's ears it has an Arian ring. See further Bigg (1886), 172n.

127 Perhaps the term most often employed to indicate mere 'existence' is *huparxis*, a substantive which, according to Glucker (1994), 19 is attested first in Philo, and was perhaps coined by him to signal a contrast between the fact of God's existence, which is known to us, and his *ousia* or essence, which remains inscrutable. The surveys by Smith (1994) and Rutten (1994) suggest that the words *hypostasis* and *hyparxis* can function synonymously in the Neoplatonists, though *hypostasis* has the wider range of senses.

128 As in *CommJoh* 1.24, cited above. For the term *perigraphe* see *CommJoh* 1.39.212, p. 51.23 Preuschen, with *hypostasis* at 51.25. Origen's usage may be anticipated by Clement, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 19–20. Van den Hoek (1999), 43n.23 suggests that Origen draws on a distinction already observed by Clement at *Stromateis* 4.136.4, an allusion to which can be detected at *CommJoh* 1.34.244, p. 43.20–25 Preuschen.

129 *CommJoh* 2.10.76, p. 65.22 Preuschen speaks of the Son as deriving his origin 'by nature' from the Father.

130 *Princ.* 1.1.8, pp. 25.13–26.6 Koetschau. Koetschau's apparatus cites Jerome, *Against John of Jerusalem* 7 and Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.4. The distinction between corporeal and incorporeal vision, pursued in *Princ.* 1.1.9 with a reference to the spiritual senses, recurs, for example at *Contra Celsum* 7.33 (Koetschau, *Princ.* p. 26).

131 *CommJoh* 29.186, p. 34.19–21 Preuschen. On the perfect congruence between the truth of the Father and the knowledge of the Son, who himself is truth (John 14.6), see Rius-Camps (1987), 157–64 and Williams (1987); cf. *CommJoh* 2.4.38–41, p. 58.20–32 on the unity of truth.

132 See Stead (1999) for reflections on the justice of this charge.

133 Not attested in Rufinus' text of *First Principles*, but as Origen plainly identified Christ with wisdom, and Eusebius had no scruple in applying the noun *ktisma* to Christ even within the Trinity, we need not doubt the substantial truth of Justinian's testimony, though it is possible, as Rius-Camps (1987), 169–71 suggests that Origen's own expression was not *ktisma* but a cognate. See further Lowry (1938); on the other side Gorgemanns (1973), concludes that *ktisma* is an interpolation.

134 For the text of the creed with commentary see Bindley (1899), 13–54. As he notes on p. 53, the word *ktisma* does not appear in every version of the anathemas.

135 See Harl (1987), 244 for the contrast between fallen *kosmos* and unblemished *ktisis;* Widdicombe (1994), 89n.100 cites *CommJoh* 20.182, which implies that the inner man is created according to God's image, while the outer man is fashioned from the earth. A contrast between 'creating' and 'making' is also implied here.

136 Tatian, *Oration* 5; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 10; Theophilus, *To Autolycus* 2.10 and 2.22; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 5.6. Many would add Clement to this list, but see Edwards (2000).

137 At Rom 9.5, it is not clear whether the phrase 'God over all' looks back to Christ, or is the beginning an exclamatory prayer to God the Father. Titus 2.13 may not be written by Paul himself, and here too it is not clear whether Christ or his Father is the intended referent of the term *theos*. In 1 John 5.20, where yet again the syntax is ambiguous, comparison with John 17.3 suggests that the Father is being styled 'the one true God'.

138 The interpretation of John 1.1 is a question beyond the bounds of the present book, but I suspect that light could be thrown upon the meaning of the anarthrous word *theos* here by a comparison with a similar usage in the Septuagint at Exodus 7.1, where God says to Moses (undoubtedly a man of earthly origin), 'I shall make thee god to Pharaoh'. On the subordination of Christ to the Father in John's gospel see Barrett (1982), 19–36.

139 Mark 1.11 and parallels; Matt 16.16 and John 10.36; Matt 27.54; Rom 1.3.

140 Ashton (1994), 22 contends that the Logos in the Johannine prologue is the 'plan of God', and that the Gospel is a history of divine revelation rather than of a person.

141 Heb 1.3 and 2.9, applying to Christ the quotation of Psalm 8.5 at 2.7.

142 Col 1.15 and 1.18; cf. 1 Cor 15.20 on Christ as 'first fruits of them that sleep'.

143 Cf. Phil 2.9–12, and the satirical observations of the pagan Lucian, *Peregrinus* 13 in the late second century.

144 See for example Rahner (1978), 136–7.

145 *CommJoh* 2.2, p. 54.30 Preuschen.

146 *Princ.* 1.1.6, p. 21.13 Koetschau. Although Justinian condemned the term as a Pythagorean one (Letter to Mennas, quoted by Koetschau *ad loc.*), it is anticipated by Athenagoras, *Embassy* 6.3 and by Clement, *Stromateis* 5.11, so that whatever its provenance may have been, it was already traditional for Origen.

147 See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 10.35 on the philosopher's disdain for cultic practice; Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.11 on hymning the One (cf. Plato, *Symposium* 212b–c).

148 The meaning of this term, when applied to the immaterial God, is hard to determine, and perhaps we should assume that here, as elsewhere, the flesh of the Incarnation is inseparable from Origen's conception of the incorporeal Logos.

149 See *On Prayer* 15.1 on not praying to Christ; 14.6 on thanksgiving to Christ and saints; 14.2–3 on prayer in the proper sense as adoration of the Father.

150 E.g. at *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9.1, as Widdicombe (1994), 52 observes. Widdicombe goes on to note that the antithesis between a manifold Christ and a simple Father at *CommJoh* 1.20.119 (pp. 24, 23–6 Preuschen) refers to the work of the Saviour in his incarnation.

151 *First Principles* 1.8, p. 38.12ff. Koetschau. Cf. Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 5.4.10, where the inference from the simile is that the First and Second Persons differ numerically but not in dignity.

152 The Greek word will have been *apaugasma* from Heb 1.3. Splendour is also a mediated property of the hidden God in Cabbalistic literature, though here without the notion of an Incarnation.

153 See Proverbs 8–9, Wisdom of Solomon *passim* and Von Rad (1972), 157–9 on the call of Wisdom in Proverbs.

154 Grillmeier (1975), 141.

155 *First Principles* 2.6.1, p. 139.14–17 Koetschau: *superest ut harum omnium creaturarum et dei medium, id est 'mediatorem' quaeramus, quem Paulus apostolus 'primogenitum omnis creaturae' pronuntiat,* citing 1 Tim 2.5 and Col 1.15.

156 *ibid.* 2.6.3, p. 142. 12–15*: nascitur, ut diximus, deus-homo, illa substantia media existente, cui contra naturam non erat corpus assumere; sed neque rursum anima illa, utpote substantia rationalis, contra naturam habuit capere deum.* At *Against Celsus* 1.66 and 2.9 Origen boldly asserts that the god-man is a 'composite' (*suntheton*), with no mitigating allusion to the soul.

157 See Crouzel's edition of *First Principles*, vol. 3, 176 for the assumption that the *logos* in creation and the soul in the incarnation play the same mediating role.

158 A point overlooked in Frede (1999). Even if we say that this is a controversy about

the use of words, that does not make it trivial; what else but words is at stake in any religious disputation?

159 See Rist (1962) and discussion above.

160 See further Ziebritski (1994), esp. 262–4.

161 See *Enneads* 4.3.1–8 on the Soul and particular souls; 5.1.11 on soul and *nous*.

162 John 1.1–14; John 7.39; John 16.7–11 etc.

163 2 Cor 1.22; Rom 8.11 and 8.14.

164 1 Cor 2.8 and Col 2.13–14; Eph 6.12–17; 2 Cor 4.4.

165 I translate the Greek text as the more incriminating, and also, as I suspect, the more accurate. Rufinus has omitted the parenthetic clause which asserts that the Son is inferior to the Father, at least in his operations. Origen, on the other hand, asserts at *CommJoh* 1.35, p. 45.13 Preuschen that the Son is less than the Father even as Creator. This is also the implication of Heb 1.2, where the Son creates as the Father's instrument.

166 See next chapter on Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

167 Dillon (1982), citing Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 110.

168 See Hadot (1966) on Porphyry and the triad; Hadot (1968) on Porphyry and Victorinus; Edwards (1990b) for criticism, especially of the hypothesis that the middle term for Porphyry was 'life' rather than 'power'.

169 See 1 Cor 2.10–16 on the spiritual man; Origen sees a more gradual progression from natural morality to spiritual illumination, as Williams (1987), 9 observes.

170 See Edwards (1997) for the juxtaposition of the *Oracles* with Christian writings; *Oracles* 3–4 Des Places are cited on p.193.

171 His *On the Return of the Soul* (if that was the genuine title) is still the first source known to Saffrey (1981), 215.

172 Not merely Hebrews 1.3, but Wisdom of Solomon 7.25–6, which includes all the clauses in Origen's roll of titles. At the end he is thinking of 1 Cor 13.12 and 2 Cor 4.18.

173 Immediately above, at p. 65.23–4 Preuschen, the Son (who is so 'by nature') is said to minister to the *hypostasis* of the Spirit. Cf. *Princ.* 1.4.3, p. 65.11 Koetschau on the beneficent power (*euergetikê dunamis)* of the Father operating through the Trinity. Cf. also *On Prayer* 27.12, p. 371.8 Koetschau, where the assertion that the Son subsists implies that he is accessible to our prayers.

174 Or perhaps 'it' would better suit the neuter noun *pneuma* and its congruent pronouns.

175 See Leroux (1990), 39–61 on the use of positive predicates to describe the one in *Enneads* 6.8; as Beierwaltes (1999) observes, the teaching of this work is superficially at odds with that of the *Enneads* in general, where the one appears as *dunamis* in contradistinction to *nous* as *energeia*, and its predicates are uniformly negative.

176 See *Enneads* 5.1.4 on the hypostatization of being by *nous*; *Enneads* 6.8.12 on the sovereignty of the One over itself through *energeia*, as distinct from *ousia*. Atkinson (1983), 93 remarks that Plotinus holds positions elsewhere which appear to conflict with the former passage; it is therefore a passing conjecture, not a dogma that Origen might have borrowed from the young Plotinus or from a common master.

Chapter 3

The Doctrine of the Soul in Origen

One can seldom speak of the soul in modern English without being taken for either a Christian or a poet. It now seems trite and precious to say that someone 'has no soul' when we mean that he lacks the capacity for wonder and the appreciation of beauty. If we assert, on the other hand, that we ourselves possess a soul, we are likely to mean not merely that we are animated beings, but that an incorporeal fraction of this being outlives the extinction of the body. In fiction and hostile parody, this is regularly imagined as a tenuous simulacrum of the body at the time of death; if we assume that this is also the entity that haunts, informs and animates the body during life, the result is rightly characterized by its philosophical critics as the theory of the 'ghost in the machine'.[1] Intimidated by such jibes – which are frequently intended by their authors as attacks upon religion – a large number of theologians have abandoned the belief in a discrete and immortal soul. Although it seemed to be the indispensable leaven of Christian thought and practice from antiquity to the present, this belief is now pronounced to be contrary to the spirit of the Bible – which means that it is not found in the Old Testament and those portions of the New that are most Hebraic and thus most truly Biblical.[2] On this view the Church Fathers, handicapped by a knowledge of Greek that our education spares us, hardly knew what they were doing when they superimposed the metaphysics of Plato on the parables of Jesus; consequently they can be at once forgiven and ignored. The truth behind this contention is that Biblical writers seldom speculate on the nature of man except to say that he is nothing compared with God; even such rigorous dogmaticians as Gregory of Nyssa and Tertullian are forced to turn from scripture to the pagans in their writings on the soul. Since they would not set out to elicit truths about God himself from any other source than scripture, we see here an incipient distinction between theology and philosophy, comparable to the one now often drawn between theology and science. No one now attempts to refute the Copernican theory from the book of Joshua, and in the same way we should treat the patristic concept of the soul on its merits, not as revealed truth, but as one of those 'preservative additions' (to borrow Newman's phrase) which the Church employed as dragomans to its articles of faith.

Scripture gives some warrant for the belief in the existence of a soul, if not for a sharp dichotomy between this and the body or a promise of its autonomous survival after death. Often the noun is a synonym for 'person': commands are addressed to the human agent under the name of 'soul' in the Levitical code, and where a man is urged to save or refresh his soul, we feel that the exhortation would lose nothing if the word 'life' were used instead. Similarly, translations of the Gospel of John make Jesus say, 'I lay down my soul and take it again' or 'I lay down my life and take it again' without detriment to the sense in either case.[3] Paul speaks of a

conflict between the inner man and the outer man, between flesh and spirit, even between the mind and flesh,[4] but never between the soul and body or spirit, its two neighbours in the human composite. Indeed, outside the one verse that convenes this triad in a blessing on the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5.23), the apostle is content with a simple contrast between the psychic and the spiritual or pneumatic, treating these as two kinds of agent rather than two categories of substance. When our earthly tabernacle dissolves at 1 Corinthians 5.1, it is not our souls but simply 'we' who are to enter the immortal mansion, the 'house not made with hands'. It is Adam in his entirety, as 'living soul', who is juxtaposed with Christ in his entirety, 'as lifegiving spirit', at 1 Corinthians 15.45. Only on the lips of Christ himself do we hear of soul as one constituent of humanity, to be distinguished from the body: he exclaims that his soul is troubled, speaks of death in a parable as the calling of the soul to God, and bids us fear not those who destroy the body, but him who has the power to cast soul and body into hell. As it is attested in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, this saying is assigned to the Q-tradition, which is frequently extolled as the source of the earliest and most authentic testimonies to the ministry of Jesus. If that is so, we cannot hope by winnowing Greek from Hebrew in the New Testament, to justify an antithesis between 'Biblical' anthropology and the 'Hellenic' or 'Platonic' accretions of the infant Church.[5]

If the soul can accompany the body to hell, can it also enter heaven without the body? Solomon hints that part of us will outlive the mortal composite when he writes that in death 'the spirit shall return unto God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12.7). The New Testament, proclaiming the resurrection of body and soul – or at least of the animated body – does not add that the soul enjoys a life of its own in the interim. But if he did not hold this, one might argue, how could Paul imagine – so many years, as it proved, before the Second Coming – that sudden death would enable him to 'depart and be with Christ' (Philippians 1.23)? How could the penitent thief have been assured that he would be with Christ in Paradise within a few hours of dying on his cross? 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell', pleads the Psalmist, 'nor wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption' (Psalm 16.8); what can he mean if not that the soul of Christ went down to the underworld while his body lay unblemished in the tomb? A topography of the afterlife is suggested by Luke's parable of the beggar and the rich man, which assigns a posthumous abode to each of them while kinsmen of the latter are still on earth. Perhaps then the souls of the rich man and his like are sent to Hades, a place of temporary chastisement, to await the sentence of the last tribunal; perhaps the bosom of Abraham, where Lazarus resides, is a sort of atrium where the souls of the elect are gathered in preparation for entry to the kingdom.[6] Such inferences entail the separability of the soul, but not its incorporeality: Tertullian cites the dreams of his fellow-sectarians to vindicate the Stoic doctrine that the soul is a simple body, while even Irenaeus seems to state that the body serves it as a mould.[7] Both these great precursors of Origen argued that salvation will discriminate between psychics and pneumatics, though only among the heretics were different destinations in eternity assigned to spirit and soul.

Thus by Origen's time it was a commonplace – according to all known rules of exegesis, a scriptural commonplace – that body, soul and spirit were discrete components of humanity. For Origen himself it was both a dogma and a thesis to be

verified from scripture – above all, in default of other evidence, from what was revealed in scripture about the state of the departed as they await the final judgement. Quoting the texts adduced above from Luke and the Psalms, the *Dialogue with Heracleides* neatly decants the spirit of the crucified Christ to God, his soul to Hades and his body to the sepulchre.[8] The task of his soul in Hades was to rescue those of the patriarchs, who had willingly endured this long confinement, not as a penalty, but as preparation for eternal life. In Origen's notorious treatise on the witch of Endor, it is from this antechamber that the sorceress summons the ghost of Samuel. This conjecture gave offence to many, and Eustathius of Antioch, interpreting the scene as a diabolical illusion, expressed surprise that Origen, so addicted elsewhere to allegory, had in this case failed to get beneath the surface of the narrative.[9] As will become apparent in the next chapter, this is not so deep a riddle: Origen never allegorized what scripture appeared to say about the soul, because a literal division of the person into body, soul and spirit was the charter for his own ascription of a threefold meaning to the text.

It was not perverse in Henri Crouzel to tax Origen with 'excessive literalism';[10] Bishop Gore did not fall into paradox when he wrote that Origen's heterodoxies 'were mainly due to an overscrupulous literalism in the interpretation of Holy Scripture'.[11] There is no better illustration of this remark than Origen's reasoning that, since there are two accounts of the creation of humanity in the first two chapters of Genesis, humanity must have been created twice. Since the second chapter records the fashioning of the outer man and his consort, the subject of the earlier creation must be the inner man who is common to the whole species. And since we have no reason to posit more than a single body, it follows that the inner man will be strictly incorporeal, and hence that the soul is not a body as the Stoics opined.[12] Thus Origen substantiates his notorious assertion in *On First Principles* that rational beings are by nature incorporeal. As stated there the conclusion is superficially philosophical; in the *Homilies on Genesis* it is the product of a reading which a modern critical scholar would pronounce to be only superficially faithful to the text. Sound or not, his exegesis leads him to a concept of the soul that was often taken, then as now, for a confession of Platonism. Literature on Origen, from antiquity to the present day, has strengthened the imputation by attributing to him the notion of a pre-existent fall which he could not have derived from scripture or the catholic traditions of the Church.

Did Origen Believe in the Pre-existence of the Soul?[13]

Even Henri Crouzel, on other occasions an immovable defender of Origen's orthodoxy, admits that he succumbed to Plato's teaching on the pre-existent soul.[14] Jean Laporte assures us that he introduced it only as a subject of inquiry,[15] but in saying that it has often been misconstrued he does not deny that it is there. Marguerite Harl, while bringing to light some errors in the received account of Origen's teaching, states none the less that the doctrine of the pre-existent soul is '*tout a fait central*' to his theology.[16] Here, however, I wish to advance a more banal position: in my view, the evidence indicates that, except in a vestigial form that is not heretical, Origen never embraced this doctrine, either as an hypothesis or as an edifying myth.

Though Origen was arraigned on a variety of charges – not all of which, as his advocates pointed out, were consonant with one another – he is never censured simply for maintaining the pre-existence of the soul. The one accusation of this kind that required the notice of Pamphilus in his *Apology for Origen* is that he taught the transmigration of the soul from one receptacle to another. This Platonic tenet, as we shall see below, was a regular mark for Christian polemicists and was frequently adduced in the second century for the incrimination of heretics. In the fourth century Origen was taxed not with this error, but with a Gnosticizing slander on the body, which he allegedly described as a penitentiary for sins committed in a higher sphere. This indictment proved to be more enduring, and was compounded in the sixth century by allusions to the theory of *apokatastasis*, according to which the end and the beginning of our existence are identical. Scholars have occasionally wondered why the charge is so elastically defined.

One reason is perhaps that the bare hypothesis of a pre-existent soul, without the corollary of transmigration or a fall from heaven, was not a heresy. Most Christians who had any view on the origin of the soul believed that it came directly from the hand of God; even after Origen it was safe for a catholic Christian to infer that it had enjoyed an instantaneous existence before its junction with the body that had been cast for it on the wheel of generation. Modern scholars generally acquit the young Augustine of the Platonism that Robert O'Connell claimed to detect in his theory of the soul;[17] nevertheless in an early work he spoke of the return of the soul to its birthplace in the heavens. While he deprecates the word 'return' in his *Retractations*, he assures the reader that even in his infancy as a Christian he had not meant to embrace the Platonic doctrine, and that Christians of authority before him had asserted that the soul issues from heaven.[18] If such thoughts were palatable even in the fourth century, we cannot suppose that the third would have had anything to say against Origen's double interpretation of the word *katabolê* at Ephesians 1.4. Though generally and properly translated as 'foundation', the noun consists of a root which signifies 'casting' and a prefix meaning 'down'. Origen would appear to have surmised that the resultant compound might denote not only the creation of the universe but a descent of human souls from heaven to earth. The Greek does not survive, but the conjecture finds its way into Jerome's commentary on Ephesians, which confessedly owes much to that of Origen.[19] If Jerome fails to pursue the second option in his subsequent remarks, it is no doubt because he senses that the mind of the Church has hardened against the bolder speculations of his mentor; but an opinion does not become heretical merely because some readers treat it circumspectly. This one was not such a blatant heresy to Jerome that he felt obliged to expunge it altogether, and we have no reason to think that he found anything in Origen's commentary about a sin committed by the soul before its entry into the body, or a history of transitions from one body to another. Jerome himself was not disposed to meditate on the provenance of souls, and when Augustine asked him for his opinion on the matter, he said nothing to the purpose in reply.[20]

As arguments should always proceed from uncontested premisses, it seemed better to quote the comment on Ephesians from these sources than to adduce a similar passage from Rufinus' Latin rendering of the treatise *On First Principles*.[21] Rufinus has incurred the justifiable suspicion of modern readers, though one aim of this chapter is to show that we can rely upon his work with less misgiving than on

the infamous testimonies from other quarters which are sprinkled through the modern editions of *On First Principles*. Culled as they are from a host of later sources, these insertions do not always have an exact equivalent in the Latin of Rufinus, which is our only extant version of this great work. They are, however, generally deemed to be transcripts or translations of Greek passages that Rufinus, in accordance with his own principles, was too scrupulous to render word for word. And thus they often function in modern scholarship as a test for the veracity of the translator – as though one were to commence a search for strangers in the cabins of legal passengers when the stowaways had already been given the freedom of the deck.

One of the most notorious, Koetschau's fragment 15 which he compiles and substantiates from a variety of later sources, is a prooftext for the claim that Origen traced the soul's alliance with the body to a primordial transgression:

> Before the ages all were pure minds (*noes katharoi*), demons, souls and angels, doing service to God and performing his will. But one of them being the devil, he exercised his freedom of will by withstanding God, and God drove him forth. Yet all the other powers seceded along with him, and those who had sinned most became demons, and those who sinned less angels, and those who sinned still less archangels ... And the souls were left behind, who had not sinned so much as to become demons, or so venially as to become angels. God therefore made the present world and bound the soul to the body for chastisement. (*First Principles*, p. 96 Koetschau)

Koetschau does not offer any equivalent from the Latin of Rufinus at the point where he places this fragment in the text (1.8.1). Rufinus is a discreet translator rather than a dishonest one, and generally his version shows some traces of the errors laid to Origen's account by his traducers. He does indeed allow Origen to say in a previous chapter that different lots are meted out to the angels in proportion to the distance that they have wilfully put between themselves and God; Justinian thought this opinion heterodox enough to be worthy of preservation in Greek, and thus confirms the accuracy of the Latin version, in which there is no mention of human souls.[22] There is a patent inconsistency with the rest of Origen's teaching if we take the souls to be those of human beings. If our souls were naturally of the middle rank, our bodies would be lighter than those of demons, as they are denser than those of angels; in fact, the Apostle intimates and Origen confirms that these invisible fiends who walk the air have bodies far more tenuous than ours.[23] We do not in any case need such anomalies to tell us that Epiphanius is fallible, and, as he is quite capable of imputing to an author the opinions of another who was a total stranger to him, we could fairly refuse him credence altogether. A glance at some contemporary trends in Greek philosophy, however, shows that we need not go so far.

We have noted in the last chapter that, about the time of Origen's birth, an obscure concatenation of verses acted as a midwife to the birth of an intellectual tradition. The father of this tradition, now called Neoplatonism, was Plotinus, whose student Porphyry knew Origen both from personal encounter and through his works. The verses themselves were known to their readers as the *Chaldaean Oracles*, or simply as 'the oracles', and contained elaborate precepts for the invocation, petitioning and coercion of the deities who populate the space between

the world and its ineffable First Cause.[24] These as they are enumerated by the late Neoplatonists, after Iamblichus, are gods, archangels, angels, daemons, archons, heroes and souls.[25] On the common account, a hero was a man whose deeds entitled him to posthumous veneration, and a demigod was the offspring of a god by a mortal woman. Proclus insists for his part that such famous men as Heracles were homonymous, not identical, with the superhuman beings whose names they borrowed;[26] if the demigods and heroes of the *Oracles* had never been confounded with their namesakes, he would have felt no need for such a caveat.

It is possible that what Epiphanius found, wherever he found it, was a reference to this middle class of beings, whom he, with his merely Christian and demotic education, all too readily mistook for human souls. Whether he was paraphrasing Origen or a different source we cannot be sure, but Origen was certainly familiar with some practices of sorcery and did not deny that they could be efficacious.[27] We do not need to assume that he had read the *Chaldaean Oracles*, for similar rites and formulae had already been used to consummate a marriage between theology and magic in the school of his Alexandrian predecessor Valentinus. Heretical as this was, it had contributed its own share to the 'treasure of the Egyptians', which Origen thought it the duty of an expositor to raid.[28]

We are later informed that the sun, the moon and all the heavenly bodies have been 'subjected to vanity' by embodiment, that hitherto they had been mere souls and afterwards they were no longer clean in the sight of God.[29] It is clear enough, however, that they have not been pressed into this painful service on account of previous sins but for the good of their fellow-creatures, and that although they perform it sadly they do so willingly, just as Paul elected not to depart and be with Christ but to remain in prison and minister to his flock.[30] For such fine beings at least, uncleanness is a concomitant of life in the body rather than a cause of it;[31] the purpose of God in laying virtue under this obstruction is considered later in the present chapter with reference to the image and likeness of God in the human creature. Our next task is to consider whether the choice to enter a body, which is always a free one, is ever a sinful one in beings less exalted than the heavenly bodies.[32] The following passage, not preserved in Greek or suppressed in Latin, is often said to adumbrate a fall from the incorporeal to the bodily condition:

> So then, once the untiring work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit commences to lead us through each grade of proficiency one by one, we can with difficulty, if at any time, set our eyes upon the holy and blessed life. In this, when it has been possible to reach it after numerous ordeals, we ought to remain so steadfast that no satiety of this good overtakes us ... if, however, satiety at some time overtakes one of those who have attained the highest and perfect grade, I do not believe that one suffers a sudden emptiness and fall, but he will necessarily fall gradually and by stages. (*First Principles* 1.3.8; pp. 82–3 Koetschau)

There is no doubt that the cause of the soul's defection here is boredom or satiety, and it is probable enough that the Greek was *koros*. But is there any evidence that this aberration occurred in a higher sphere?[33] Everything that is said in the opening sentence appears to concern the trials of the soul on earth as it tries to persevere in the life of faith. Origen continues:

> But so that we can elucidate this degradation or lapse of those who have been more negligent in action, it seems not absurd to make use of a certain example as a simile. Thus suppose that someone has been gradually imbued with skill or art in, for example, geometry or medicine, and has advanced by stages to perfection ... if, however, his operations lose their integrity and effort is neglected, then things will slip away from him gradually through his negligence – a few at first and then even more. (*First Principles* 1.4.1; p. 63 Koetschau)

The final sentence indicates that the soul can be restored to its true condition by repentance in the present life, which would scarcely be conceivable if its blessedness were peculiar to the disembodied state.[34] The parable of the nodding artist seems to have been founded on a passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, who, as I hope to have shown elsewhere,[35] is likely to have been at least as prominent as Plato in the young Origen's curriculum of study. Aristotle's simile has no bearing on the follies of the pre-existent soul, but rather illustrates the failure of rational agents in the present to make use of the moral precepts with which nature and education have imbued them. The Stagirite nowhere speaks of the existence of the mind before its union with the body, though he shared with many Christians the suspicion that we owe its presence in us less to the cycle of reproduction than to a special act of God.[36]

It is probable then that Origen was alluding only to the decay of virtue in the embodied life; at the same time, the adversaries who imputed the Platonic heresy to him can be acquitted of any intention to deceive. In their time it was no straw man but a powerful philosophy that postulated *koros* or repletion as the cause of the mind's mutation to a lower plane of being. Plotinus, echoing Plato's derivation of the divine name Kronos from the noun *koros*,[37] contends that the highest principles can submit themselves to the order of this world and yet remain impeccable:

> On this principle we have, here, Soul (successively) dwelling in it and yet again being filled to satiety with reason-principles ... The splendours contained in Soul are thought of as the Garden of Zeus [at *Symposium* 203b5–6]; and Poros sleeps in this garden in the sense of being pleased and happy with its produce. (*Enneads* 3.5.9. trans. Mackenna)

Plotinus is describing the procession of transcendent Soul from Nous, and the word *koros* denotes a superbounding affluence of goods. In Philo, on the other hand, the descending soul is that of the individual when already in the body; it experiences *koros* because it is glutted not by the intellectual but by the sensual appetites; and the consequence is that the higher is debauched by the lower element, not (as in Plotinus) that the lower imbibes the virtue of the higher.[38] In a careful survey, Harl has found that Origen preserved Philo's sense of *koros* throughout his works, in which it always means either negligence or satiety of evil;[39] thus it appears – and not on this occasion only, as we shall see below – that the Council of 553 condemned him, not for a heresy, but for a word.

Interlude: the Pre-existence of the Soul of Christ

Whatever views of the soul were entertained by orthodox Christians after Origen, authorities were at one in countermanding any notion that the Logos had united

himself with human nature before his birth from Mary, whom liturgy, dogma and homiletics now agreed to style the 'Mother of God'. Athanasius in his *Letter to Epictetus* felt obliged to refute the heresy that the Word took flesh in heaven, and a similar position was attributed to Apollinarius by his indignant critics. None of Origen's numerous detractors in antiquity appears to have suspected him of holding the error of Apollinarius,[40] but modern translators make him affirm at least the pre-existence of the inner man when they take the following words to mean that the soul of Christ was enamoured of the Logos from the creation of the world:

> Given that, on account of the faculty of freewill, each of the souls was subject to variety and diversity, so that one burned with a fiercer love, another with a weaker and more unstable love towards its maker, that soul, of which Christ said that 'no one takes away my soul from me' (John 10.18), inseparably and indissolubly adhering to him from the beginning of creation (*ab initio creaturae*) and thereafter ... was made with him at the outset 'one spirit'. (*First Principles* 2.6.4; p. 142 Koetschau, citing 1 Cor 6.17)

Butterworth takes *ab initio creaturae* to mean 'from the beginning of the creation'. Thus construed, the passage endows the soul with a life of centuries before its first embodiment, and hints that this is a period of trial. Neither of these doctrines, it should be noted, is Platonic, for the *Meno* states that the soul has passed innumerable lives before the present one, and the *Phaedrus* offers mythological rather than moral causes for the original descent.[41] Such questions are of little weight unless we can prove that Origen himself held either doctrine; those who assume without argument that he did have failed to observe the ambiguity of the Latin *ab initio creaturae*, which may mean 'from the beginning of the creation' or 'from the beginning of *his* creation'. The Greek, if it was *ap' arkhês tês katabolês*, was equally equivocal, and the rendering 'from the beginning of *his* creation' is obviously compatible with an orthodox belief about the origin of the soul.

The Pre-existent Soul: does *On First Principles* Contradict Itself?

The evidence surveyed so far corroborates a passage in our text of *On First Principles*, where Origen, as translated by Rufinus, doubts that souls or other creatures would be able to maintain themselves without a circumscribing shell of matter:

> If anyone supposes that in this 'end' material, that is to say corporeal, nature will perish absolutely, to my mind it is utterly impossible to imagine how so many entities of such magnitude can act and subsist without bodies. When only God – that is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – is of such a particular nature that its existence can be conceived without any material substance and in the total absence of any corporeal adjunct. (*First Principles* 1.6.4; p. 85 Koetschau)

Origen's reasoning is not impaired by his reluctance to accept the Aristotelian notion of matter. According to this, prime matter is the substrate of the properties which unite with it to constitute the sensible particular; Origen, on the other hand, is prepared to entertain (and was perhaps the first to defend) the 'idealist' theory

that there is nothing more to matter than the properties themselves (*First Principles* 4.4.7; pp. 357–8 Koetschau). As a Christian he was bound to deny the eternity of matter, and even the priority of matter to the material, both of which were attributed to Plato by interpreters of the *Timaeus*. But whether he thought of matter as a substrate or as a congeries of properties, it is clear that Origen drew a sharp distinction between the attributes of God in his threefold unity and those that individuate the products of his will.

The longevity of demons and of angels presents no difficulty, for Origen, in the preface to his *First Principles*, asserts that the description of such beings as incorporeal is a popular abuse of the adjective (p. 15 Koetschau). Angels have ethereal bodies, demons bodies of air, both lighter and less visible than our own, but bodies still. It seems harder to deny the inconsistency when he states, at the beginning of his account of the fallen angels, that at one time all had lived as *noes katharoi*, pure intellects, in the unbroken contemplation of their Author. We might try to save appearances by denying the veracity of this report, but what are we to do with a similar passage, occurring within a chapter of the paragraph just quoted, where Origen characterizes human nature in a phrase that seems to exclude the possession not only of a body, but of all phenomenal qualities? Whatever we have become, he says, we are essentially incorporeal beings, and that, we may infer, is what we were when we issued from the hand of God: 'All souls and all rational natures are made or created, whether they be holy or good-for-nothing; all of them in their proper nature are incorporeal, yet even in this respect, that they are incorporeal, they are none the less made' (*First Principles* 1.7.1; p. 86 Koetschau).

We cannot escape contradiction by proposing a distinction between the incorporeal and the immaterial. While certain bodies – geometrical figures, for example –may lack matter, it is no more possible in Origen's world than in that of Aristotle for matter to exist without being formed into a body.[42] If we were ever incorporeal, therefore, we were also immaterial; this inference reinforces the testimony from other sources that Origen commended a primordial state in which we were all *noes katharoi*, 'pure intellects'. This, however, is one case where an appeal to Greek philosophy is more likely to absolve than to incriminate the defendant at the bar of orthodoxy; if we are allowed to furnish Origen with the premisses of contemporary Platonists, his statements can be harmonized, not only with one another, but with the teaching of the Church.

It was hardly even a paradox by Origen's time to maintain that the inner man, the mind or the soul is the proper self without ascribing to it a capacity to exist apart from body. Aristotle for instance, urged the pursuit of contemplation on the grounds that the mind is what we truly are,[43] and yet his premiss that every nature is a composite of form and matter forbade him to endorse the Platonic notion of a separable soul. Origen lived at a time when even Platonists were beginning to doubt the possibility of a long divorce. Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, the most distinguished Platonists who were born in Origen's lifetime, all declare that the human being is strictly speaking not the composite (*sunamphoteron*) but the soul, and Plotinus clearly holds that after its severance from the body it subsists alone for an interval; yet he also holds that in the course of nature every soul is bound to return and occupy another body.[44] Even this brief and interstitial freedom is denied to the soul by Porphyry, who maintains that it carries with it a vestigial body

engendered by its sensory experience.[45] It may be that he reserves this apparatus for the lower soul, but Iamblichus, his pupil and occasional critic, posits different substrates for the higher and the lower soul, and argues that the latter at least is never separated.[46] Proclus, writing 150 years later, refines the teaching of Iamblichus, still arguing that the lower soul cannot discard its attenuated body, and all the while protesting that the *sunamphoteron* is not the man.

The period during which the rational being abode with God as a *nous katharos* or pure intellect is thus not one in which it was entirely without a body, since no one (according to Origen) can sustain this state apart from the persons of the Holy Trinity. It is, however, a time in which the incorporeal nature suffers no adulteration from the presence of this companion, and in which it is not misleading to use the term 'mind' as a designation of the whole agent. If, then, strict incorporeality is so deciduous, it follows that there can be no timeless realm – at least no peopled realm – of pure intelligences such as is commonly alleged to have been posited by Origen for the entertainment of the eternal Logos. Many books inform us that this *kosmos noêtos*, the immaterial archetype of our own world, is inhabited by bodiless minds, the *logikoi*, coeval with the Logos who created them and remaining in his company except when sin precipitates them into the present world or into one of its innumerable precursors. Yet such accounts are fatally marred by demonstrable errors and contradictions of the author's known beliefs. For one thing, Origen nowhere speaks of an infinite series of worlds before the present one, though he does deduce that some must have existed since not enough has yet transpired in ours to justify Solomon's maxim that 'there is nothing new under the sun'.[47] Secondly, his term for the rational entities that come straight from the hand of God is the neuter *logika*, not the masculine *logikoi*; the latter occurs most frequently, in his *Commentary on John*, as the appellation of the earthbound saints who already live in close fellowship with the Logos.[48] Thirdly, Origen formally denies in his *First Principles* the existence of a world distinct from our own and constituted by the Ideas, or intellectual Forms, of Greek philosophy.[49] Finally, Origen sometimes imitates the apostolic use of *kosmos* to denote the human, rather than the whole of the natural, order: he adopts the locution *kosmos noêtos* sparingly, and only in one instance does it clearly denote a world of incorporeals superior to the human intellect. In another passage, thick with echoes of a Platonic text adduced by Celsus, the *kosmos noêtos* seems to be the regenerate mind, illuminated (in John's phrase rather than Plato's) by 'the light that lighteneth every man'.[50]

It is possible that he anticipates his fellow-Alexandrian Plotinus in the view that the *kosmos noêtos* is the untrammelled mind, no longer forced to contemplate an external world, but embracing in its own perfected finitude every object of perception but the all-transcendent Father. He hints at such a theory when he argues that the sudden change, the 'twinkling of an eye' which marks the terminus of salvation, will take place through the simultaneous renewal in the soul of all past experience, enabling it to gather up the whole of its past life in one synoptic recollection.[51] Origen differs strongly from Plotinus in two respects. First, as he sees self-judgment as the gate to heaven, he postulates a recrudescence of memory, while the philosopher maintained that it would perish, giving way to a timeless consciousness.[52] Secondly, he argues that there is only a single life to be remembered, while Plotinus assumes

a series of embodiments, ascribing continuity and perhaps a formal identity, but not what we should call a personality to the soul.

A Pilgrimage of Souls

Of all the dissonant charges brought against Origen, by far the most tenacious (and in the eyes of his prosecutors much the most heinous) was that he taught the transmigration of the soul. This theory that the soul employs its endless life by passing from one body to another was an easy mark for Christian polemicists, yet remained a common and distinctive tenet of Platonism in the later Roman world. If one wished to impugn the orthodoxy of other Christians, it would always suffice to brand them with this doctrine, for which no argument could be advanced from scripture. The frequency with which heresiologists resort to this allegation is matched only by the paucity of evidence to confirm it in the works of the accused.

The ancient world knew three varieties of transmigration, which polemicists were not careful to distinguish. We for our part must discriminate, for while Origen may be reasonably suspected of holding one, it is certain he did not hold them all.

From Human to Animal Bodies, and Conversely

Description This notion gives a Pythagorean colour to Plato's myths in the *Republic* (620a) and *Timaeus* (91d–92b). Few scholars are so hardy as to deny that Plotinus understood it literally,[53] but the trend among his followers, beginning perhaps with Porphyry,[54] was to treat it as an allegory, in which the loss of human form was a symbol of decay within the soul.

Can this be ascribed to Origen Origen's foes were eager to convict him of making human souls pass into animal bodies, for there was no other tenet so degrading to the image of God, so palpable to the thrusts of Christian logic. If God had ordained migration into animals, he would have sentenced souls to punishment without leaving them the intelligence to understand the cause of it; nor would there be any opportunity of release in a further life, unless we grant to brutes the capacity to perform acts meriting penalty or reward. Origen himself was one of the first to deploy these arguments, if we can trust Rufinus' version of his *Commentary on Romans*. Paul declares that when the Law was taught to him as an infant, sin 'revived' in him, and thus implies that he had sinned already. Origen, whose theology did not countenance the inheritance of guilt from one's progenitors, is prepared to accept the view of Basilides that the earlier sins were committed in a previous embodiment.[55] Against his heretical predecessor, he urges that the same reasoning will not allow the Apostle to have inhabited the body of a beast:

> If then sin is said to have revived in the soul, how do these men apply the doctrine of *metensomatosis* to this discourse of the Apostle in which he says *I was once alive without the Law* [Rom 7.9], attributing to him the teaching that the souls of human beings were once in brutes, in birds or in fish, and making the Apostle say I was once alive without the Law, as if before entering this human body he had lived in the category

> of (for example) birds or animals, among whom there is no law? ... It is certain that one who revives has lived already; and therefore it appears that the soul can never have been or lived in that category, in which, as there was no law, there could be no sin.
>
> (*Commentary on Romans* 7.8, vol. 2, pp. 502–3 Bammel)

Of course one might suspect that the intervention of Rufinus has removed the most dangerous statements from this passage.[56] Nor can we exclude the possibility of his tampering with a remarkable discussion in the *First Principles*, where Origen offers Biblical support for the hypothesis that beasts have human souls. Since, he urges, only rational conduct can be punished or rewarded, how can it be just to put a beast to death for sodomy, as Leviticus 20.16 commands, unless its soul is of the same kind as ours? Nevertheless, without answering his argument, he concludes (in the Latin version) that we ought not to hold a doctrine that receives so little countenance in the Church:

> For our part, however, let these statements not be doctrines but let them be said for the sake of discussion, then discarded. The sole reason for saying them is that it may not seem that a question has been mooted without discussion. When, however, this perverse doctrine has been confuted and banished in its own place and time, we shall explain in what manner the texts that they produce from the holy scriptures are to be interpreted.
>
> (*First Principles* 1.8.4; p. 105.11–16 Koetschau)

The retreat is not untypical of Origen, but neither is the reasoning that precedes it, and we can easily perceive which is more likely to be the invention of Rufinus. Pamphilus and Eusebius would be independent witnesses if their joint defence of Origen had survived in the original; as it is, we are once again dependent on Rufinus' Latin for the rejoinder of Pamphilus to those who allege that Origen taught the transmigration of souls from human into animal bodies. It begins with a citation, for which no Greek original survives, from the eleventh book of the *Commentary on Matthew*:

> There are indeed some who opine on the strength of the saying this is Elijah who is to come [Matt 11.14] that the soul of Elijah is the same as that of John. For they think that the clause *this is Elijah* has no other possible referent than the soul, and from this one discourse they have introduced the doctrine of *metensomatosis*, that is the translation of souls as though Jesus himself had taught this. For they ought to have considered that, if this were the case, something of the kind would have been found in many passages of the prophets and evangelists. (Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 10.1, pp. 405–6 Lommatzsch)

The majority of scholars have elected to trust Rufinus, and they appear to have probability on their side. In the first place, the views attributed to Origen in these excerpts are consistent, and there is no countervailing evidence in any of his known works. Next, whatever Pamphilus wrote, he must have thought that he had a text to hand – in Greek – that was clear enough to refute the allegation. Finally, after Pamphilus we do not find the same indictment pressed against Origen by his critics: they aver that he maintained the pre-existence of the soul and transmigration, but not that he made the souls of human beings pass into brutes.

This conclusion is not endangered by a passage in *First Principles*, where Origen concedes that a habitual sinner, sinking to the depths of moral hebetude, may lose all that distinguished him from his natural inferiors and become, in a metaphorical sense, a beast. There is no anachronism in this allegory, and little originality. Both Pythagoreans and Epicureans had suggested that the horrors of the afterlife are symbols of the torments that we suffer when we give unbridled licence to the passions; and in the mid-second century the Pythagorean Platonist Numenius already felt obliged to uphold a doctrine of transmigration in which wolf and ass mean nothing but wolf and ass. Origen (as Porphyry informs us) had a wide acquaintance with Platonic literature, and was ready, by his own account, to avail himself of any speculation that he deemed compatible with Christian truth.

From One Human Body to Another

Description This is the kind affirmed in Plato's *Phaedrus* (248d–e) and presupposed in his *Meno* (82b–d) and *Phaedo* (72e–73b). So far as we know all Platonists believed in it without metaphor or reserve. Plotinus takes few pains to reconcile it with his thesis that each person has his own unchanging archetype, and therefore a fixed identity as Socrates or Pythagoras, in the universe of Forms; his student Porphyry urges that the soul acquires self-knowledge when it becomes aware of the intellect which abides as its changeless paradigm through all its temporal pilgrimages.[57] He adds that in the disembodied state the soul is free to choose the paradigm of its next life, but after its descent it becomes enslaved to the trials and accidents of this life with their attendant miseries.[58]

Can this be ascribed to Origen? As to the second heresy, which entails that souls assume a different person with each embodiment, Origen's position is known for certain, as it survives in Greek. Commenting on the question 'Art thou Elijah?' which the Jews put to the Baptist at John 1.21, he asks whether such a return to life is possible through *metensomatosis*, the re-embodiment of the soul. He urges that the narrative of John's birth in Luke predicts only that John will preach 'in the power and spirit of Elijah', not that either the spirit or the soul will be translated in discarnate form from one man to another.[59] He has heard that certain Jews regard Elijah himself as a second incarnation of Phineas, son of Eleazar,[60] but has already warned the reader that such tenets are forbidden to a Christian:

> The man of the Church, for his part, repudiating the notion of re-embodiment as a falsehood, and not accepting that the soul of John was ever Elijah, will appeal to the aforesaid statement of the angel, who did not refer to Elijah's soul in connexion with John's birth, but to spirit and power, when he said, *he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.* (*CommJoh* 1.11, citing Luke 1.16)

Herod's fear that Christ was John the Baptist come to life again is allayed with similar arguments in the *Commentary on Matthew*. We may take it as a rule, then, that a single soul can experience only a single human life. On such a view, migration into animals could never be remedial, as a soul that had once fallen would be unable to redeem itself by recovering its humanity. Since Origen held that reform, not mere

retribution, was the object of all punishment, we now have another reason for denying that he embraced the teaching of the Platonic dialogues. It may be that Plotinus found a way to combine a literal belief in transmigration with his thesis of the immutable identity of persons; but we have no reason to think that this strange tenet was already known to Origen, his older contemporary, nor that the latter would have been more disposed than Plotinus' followers to make it part of his own philosophy.

From the Divine, Daemonic or Angelic to the Human, and Conversely

Description The archaic poet Empedocles, lamenting that his sin had cast him out from the company of the 'long-lived daemons',[61] could nevertheless proclaim that, after successive incarnations which had driven him from element to element, he had now regained his primal state, 'no mortal, but a god'. Allusions to this verse abound in Neoplatonic literature,[62] and the progress of the sage from man to daemon, then to god and father of gods, is plotted in Porphyry's *Sententiae*, a textbook for later moralists of the school.[63]

Can this be ascribed to Origen? The premiss that every demon is a fallen angel is, of course, traditional, and invites no further scrutiny. Origen was also accused of teaching that the demon could return to its first condition, and the scandal of his universalism was aggravated by his alleged belief that Satan would be saved.[64] In fact the earliest rumour of this charge is a testimony to his innocence, occurring as it does in a letter of Origen's, in which he denies that this was his opinion.[65] Be that as it may, it was an axiom with him that reform is the proper end of punishment, and that justice will always presuppose the freedom of the agent; he must therefore have concluded that, whatever God foreknows about the choices of the demons, he has left them at least the natural possibility of conversion. Eccentric and even heterodox as this opinion may be in its indiscriminate charity, it is not expressly drawn in Origen's writings and since Christians and Jews were the only subjects of the Roman Empire who believed in Satan, the belief in his salvation cannot be branded as a Platonizing error.[66]

The transmutation of humans into angels, on the other hand, would appear to be excluded by the Biblical texts that speak of our judging angels and distinguish angelic mediators from the human Christ.[67] Luke indeed makes Christ say that the redeemed will be *isaggelloi*, but Hippolytus, the arch-heresiologist of Origen's day, construes this to mean only that their flesh will not see injury or corruption.[68] Origen seems to go further in Jerome's rendering of the first of his homilies on the Song of Songs:

> Those who, while being faithful, are not such as the word has previously described, but seem somehow or other to have acquired salvation, you must understand to be the souls of the faithful and the young girls with the bride. The ones with the groom you must understand to be angels and those who *have arrived at the perfect man*. (Homily 20.8 Baehrens, citing Eph 2.15)

As a translator of Origen, Jerome is habitually more faithful to the letter than Rufinus, and as he produced a continuous translation of this homily, he cannot have

distorted the tenor of the present passage (as he may have done elsewhere) by the omission of the context. Jerome himself accused Origen of saying that men in the last days will be angels, and therefore he must have taken the conjunction *kai* ('and') in Origen's Greek to be epexegetic – that is to say, it introduces not a different subject but the same subject in a clearer form of words. His reading is confirmed by Origen's statement in the *First Principles* that men are a third class of beings, distinct from angels as from daemons, but capable of rising to the condition of the former by the practice of rectitude in the present life:

> Now the third order of the rational creation is that of those spirits who are reckoned fit for the replenishing of the human race, that is the souls of men, of whom we see some taken up progressively into the order of the angels – those, namely, who have been made 'sons of God' or 'sons of the resurrection', [69]or those who, forsaking the shadows have loved the light and been made 'sons of light'.[70] (*First Principles* 1.8.4, Latin text, pp. 101–2 Koetschau)

As this paragraph survives only in Latin, we owe it to the candour of Rufinus, and we should therefore be slow to accuse him of having suppressed some other passage in which Origen imagines a descent from the angelic to the human. It is possible to believe that men can rise to a state from which they have not fallen, and to say that we shall be members of the angelic order in heaven is not to say that we were already angels in the past.[71] The notion that all mortals are all expatriates from above is not confirmed but contradicted by a tentative proposal in the *Commentary on John* that the patriarch Jacob and John the Baptist were angelic beings who temporarily took on a human form at God's command.[72] The topical and speculative character of this passage is revealed both by its inconclusive tone and by its appeal to certain 'apocrypha of the Hebrews', against which Origen warns the reader in other works. In any case it is evident that a sojourn of this kind is the exception, that the descent entails no change within the agent, and that these ministers are entrusted with the work of God on a lower plane because they can be trusted not to sin. Both Jacob and John are bearers of extraordinary communications, one foretelling the destiny of Israel and the other announcing Jesus as Messiah; what would their angelic status have added to the solemnity of the message if their hearers were themselves degraded members of that race?

A quotation from Origen, held up to indignation by Justinian and included as a parallel to the Latin in Koetschau's edition of *First Principles*, again implies that, while it is occasionally possible for an angel to assume a human guise, the greater part of the human race is not composed of thrones, dominations and principalities, but of creatures who are subject to their authority.[73] Origen's position is still heterodox, but so was that of Christ when he maintained that those who are visited by the Logos have become 'gods.'[74] In his *Commentary on John* he can expound the divinization of human beings in a manner that does not compromise the uniqueness or sublimity of the Father,[75] and perhaps he would have found a way to distinguish the angelical souls from the spirits who were angels when they came from the hand of God. The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is that Origen's heterodoxy is not yet a full-blown heresy, and that here at least he evades the charge that is often laid against him, of making the final state of man no more than a repetition of the first.

Image, Likeness and the Fashioning of Saints

Theologians of the eastern Church are accustomed to distinguish between the image and the likeness of God in man.[76] The former, which is held to be indefeasible, is the power of rational choice that makes us persons and enables calloused sinners to cooperate with God in their salvation. The likeness, on the other hand, though promised at the outset, was not vouchsafed to Adam at the moment of creation, or at least not in such measure as to barricade his soul against temptation. Once sin had entered the citadel of reason, the assimilation of man to God through virtue was impossible without a manifestation of the likeness through the infallible humanity of Christ. The argument is almost always traced to Irenaeus of Lyons (*fl.* 180), and not without reason. Although the terms 'image' and 'likeness' are often coupled indissolubly in his statements on the origin and destiny of the human race, he distinguishes sufficiently to say that it was the likeness, not the image, that was forfeited by Adam, that everyone with a soul retains the image, and that in these latter days it is the image that the Holy Spirit restores to the elect.[77] The likeness at least is a property of body as well as soul; image and likeness were manifested together in perfection by the corporeal epiphany of the Word. Authority for these theses can be found in Paul, who declares both man and Christ to be the image of the Father, but represents the incarnate Christ, the likeness or *homoioma* of our sinful flesh, as the antidote to false and blasphemous likenesses that have caused the world to turn away from God.[78]

For all that, it remains true that the Apostle never formally distinguishes the image from the likeness, and that Irenaeus' thought is always simpler, if not more cogent, in the hands of his expositors. Origen[79] was the first of these, unless (as he himself believed) he was merely citing scripture in support of an ecclesiastical commonplace:

> The supreme good, after which the whole of rational nature strains, and which is also called the end of all, is defined in the following manner by a great many of the philosophers: that the supreme good is to become God [cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b]. Yet this I deem to be not so much their discovery as a borrowing from the divine books. For this is what Moses, before all others, intimates when he says in his account: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image and likeness.' Then indeed after this he adds, 'And God made man, in the image of god he made him' ... In so far therefore as he said, 'He made him in the image of god' and was silent about the likeness, he means to say nothing else than that, whereas man has obtained the image in the dignity of our first condition, the perfection of the likeness is laid up for him only at the consummation. (*First Principles* 3.6.1; p. 280 Koetschau)

Could a Platonist have said this? In the *Phaedrus*, each soul before embodiment has a clear view of its own god and the associated virtue as it pursues them in a supercelestial hippodrome; the Form of the Good is a more elusive quarry, and desire for it engenders reckless strife among the drivers, causing their chariots to slip into the world without their wings or any hope of restoration but the recollection of supernal beauty. The pilgrimage from ignorance to knowledge is completed in the *Republic* by philosophy, a discipline that is cultivated only in the body; the Good, though now attainable as an object of intelligence, remains so unfamiliar to

the soul that its discovery is likened to the impact of the dazzling sun on eyes unused to anything but shadow. Mathematics is commended in this dialogue as a prelude to dialectic, the most rigorous division of philosophy; the *Meno* implies that this is not the soul's birthright, but must be obtained empirically in a previous life to be retrieved by memory in the present one. The end is therefore higher than the origin, and although there is only passing or tentative reference in Plato's work to a Form of which the soul might be an image, the *Theaetetus* tells us that the goal of the philosopher in the present world is *homoiôsis theô* – likeness to deity, if not to God.[80]

Yet no philosophical rhapsode of the ancient world would have stitched from Plato's dialogues a tale like this, in which the sage accomplishes more through his mundane embodiment than his soul achieved in heaven. Alcinous and Sallustius may have been thinking of the chariot in the *Phaedrus* when they credited soul with a natural affinity for body; Plotinus holds that even the fallen soul fulfils a purpose by bestowing form and beauty on its material domicile.[81] Nevertheless it was generally agreed that if we consider only what is best for the soul itself, descent is a calamity, which at best encumbers it with a blemished organ and at worst confines it to a walking tomb. In Origen's time most Platonists believed both soul and world to be eternal, and therefore it was hard to imagine either a beginning or a terminus to the cycle of transmigration. Even of Numenius and Plotinus we cannot say for certain that they expected an eternity of bliss when they quit the body to be 'alone with the alone'. Porphyry and those after him interpreted the chariot of the *Phaedrus*, not as a vehicle assigned to the soul at some fictitious moment of creation, but as a cyst formed by the errors, misdemeanours and delinquencies that accrued to it in the course of an earthly life.[82] It is this pneumatic or astral body, some maintained, which bears the scars of its previous sins in the *Gorgias* of Plato; and how, unless it were carrying such a cargo, could the soul be thought susceptible of translation, as in the *Phaedo*, to the upper rim and thence to the fabulous canyons of the earth?[83] How, unless he too ascribed some kind of vehicle to it, could Numenius hold that the soul descends to earth through Cancer and leaves it again through Capricorn; how could a more popular exposition of the same notion in the Hermetica assert that in the course of ascent it sheds one vice at each of the seven planets?[84] The body is necessary in all these parables to facilitate the detection and expiation of wrongdoing, but none of them implies that the material world is in itself a good thing, let alone that it is a nursery of virtue, except in so far as virtue may be the offspring of remorse.

From Empedocles, a precursor of Plato by about a century, the Neoplatonists fondly quote the tag, 'I am a god, no longer a mortal',[85] but they fail to note that he claims to have commenced his peregrinations not as a god, but as a daemon, and only when he had been whirled through all four elements in turn and made his way through every species of existence, whether animate or inanimate, was he able to make this boast. In Origen's time a theory of this sort was held by the Carpocratians of his native Egypt, who maintained that their salvation required them to pass through a succession of lives until they had tasted every kind of sin. (Those who sneer at this as an orthodox calumny should be admonished by the history of Sabbatai Z'vi, the false Messiah of Judaism in the seventeenth century, who proclaimed the violation of the law as a pious duty. If it be objected that he may

have been inspired by Christ, the Carpocratians too were a Christian heresy.[86]) Some Jews held that God, although the earth could not contain him, could become present to the senses by the nutation of his visible form, which Greeks would style his *morphê;* if Philo alludes to this belief, as Bockmuehl has surmised, he proves himself more Jew that Platonist. Bockmuehl also suggests that this motif gave Paul the pattern for his Philippian hymn, in which Christ Jesus, 'being in the form of God', resigns it and assumes the servile likeness (*homoioma*) of humanity, submitting to the pain and ignominy of the Cross and being rewarded for his obedience with the worship and the name that pious lips reserve for God.[87] When Paul says in Colossians that 'in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily', he may not mean that God fulfils his nature through incarnation; but the Valentinian myth speaks of a Father who emerges into his fulness or *pleroma* by the projection of life, light, wisdom, man – in short by the multiplication of the epithets of Christ.[88] Tertullian asserts that even before the incarnation, the divine Word gained a knowledge of the ways and thoughts of mortals by his intercourse with the Hebrew patriarchs. In later Jewish meditations the exile of God's glory (the *Shekinah*), the fall of man and the tribulation of Israel are inseparable; in antiquity, so far as we know, it was Christians such as Origen and Irenaeus who first transferred the theme from God to his creatures, and embraced as a corollary the principle of rising by a fall.

We have seen already that Origen posits two creations, one of the inner and one of the outer man. If he were a Platonist the latter would no doubt have been an afterthought, the concretion of past sins or at best a portable infirmary for a soul which had been banished by a fault or lapse of vision from the intellectual sphere. Three facts show, however, that the outer man is neither of these for Origen: first, he rejects the Platonic world of Forms as he conceives it;[89] next, he allots no history, and hence no opportunity for sin, to the soul before embodiment; finally, while he says in the first of his *Homilies on Genesis* that the creation of the inner man preceded that of the outer man, this thesis is advanced as a resolution of the conflict between two passages in Genesis, one of which implies the simultaneous 'creation' of male and female in the image of God, the other a successive 'fashioning' of man from the soil of Eden and then of woman from his rib.[90] Although the second creation entails the embodiment of the soul, and hence (we may surmise) a descent to earth from heaven, it is not said to be sinful, nor a consequence or concomitant of sin:[91]

> This man indeed, whom he states to have been made in the image of God (Gen 1.26–8), we do not understand to be corporeal. For the bodily mould does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man said to have been made but fashioned, as is written in what follows: for it says, *God fashioned a man* (Gen 2.7), that is he moulded him from the mud of the earth. As for the one who was made in the image and likeness of God, he is our inner man, invisible and incorporeal, incorrupt and immortal.

Whatever Irenaeus held, Origen clearly teaches that the image of God in man has been degraded by the fall. We ourselves, he insists, are not that image, for we are only made according to the image, who is Christ.[92] Since it is an image of God, it resides in the incorporeal element that we share with Christ, that is the soul.

Nevertheless it is God's will that the soul should be embodied, and in a Paradise that, as Origen reveals in *On First Principles* (2.11.6), is a definite locality on earth.[93] If we ask, with the Platonists, why God should make an incorporeal being only to plunge it into the mêlée of generation and corruption, with the body as its labile mask or temporizing ally, Origen would not answer, with the Platonists, that we suffer in the lower world as a consequence of our failure in a higher one. On the contrary, the perils, sores and hardships of the present life, with its changes and calamities, its errors and illusions, are our own creation, even as they are part of God's design:

> The cause of diversity among rational creatures arises not from the will or judgment of the Creator but from the choice of their own will ... It is from these causes that the world derives its causes of its diversity, seeing that divine providence allots each to his place according to the variety of their movements or to that of their minds and purposes. (*First Principles* 2.9.6, p. 170.3–5 and 10–12 Koetschau)

The variety of the world arises here from the foreseen variety of human choices, not from any antecedent fall. It is true that in other statements of the same position, Origen affirms that the beneficiaries of this mundane diversity were initially created in a perfect state, to which providence will ultimately restore them.[94] Such pronouncements, when we meet them in orthodox Greek writers of the fourth century, are rightly understood of the human race collectively, as it was fashioned in Adam and Eve, and do not entail that any of their descendants was born into the felicity that they lost.[95] To make Origen consistent with himself, we must believe that he too held that no individual human being has been perfect since the protoplasts were driven out of Eden, so that each of us, by virtue of the freedom that God vouchsafes to us, is brought into the world with the capacity for attaining a beatitude that we have not yet enjoyed.

We must not misunderstand Origen when he goes on to surmise that God loved Jacob and hated Esau on account of the merits that each of them acquired in 'the foregoing life' (*praecedentis vitae*).[96] The phrase is glossed a little later as an allusion to existence before corporeal nativity,[97] but such a life cannot be that of the disembodied soul, since it is proved at length in more than one previous chapter of the second book that life cannot be maintained without a body by any creature.[98] In the first book Origen has already adduced the quarrels of Esau and Jacob in the womb as a proof that the soul comes into being before the body,[99] and it is therefore clear that he means by body only the infant frame as it emerges in parturition. When he adds, as a confirmation of this argument, that Jeremiah was known to God before he was conceived and was sanctified by the Holy Spirit before he issued from the womb,[100] it is not so much the 'knowing' before conception as the sanctification within the mother's uterus that demonstrates the priority of the soul to body: the soul, he argues, must earn merit in order to be sanctified, and we may guess that if it is *born* in a state of innocence, that is only for want of sinning. If it can be sanctified, then (on Origen's view of freedom) it must also be able to wane in merit and even to commit sin.[101]

The world is thus a gymnasium as in Irenaeus, not a penitentiary as in Plato.[102] Both Christian authors make an axiom of human freedom, which they believe, and

not without reason, to be incompatible with any doctrine of transmigration. Plato is often seen as a proponent of human liberty, but he found it hard to account for the misuse of it, and at times he can assign no better reason for the waning of perfection in the world than that the gods themselves have appointed certain periods for the fall of souls or the overthrow of cities.[103] When we read in the last book of the *Republic* that the apparent injustices of our lives on earth can be traced to choices that were made by the soul in a heavenly interlude between incarnations, it may seem fair to Plato to asseverate that 'the blame lies with the one who chooses; God himself is blameless';[104] but the edict of oblivion that accompanies the soul's entrance into the body means that in our present bodies we are not aware of having made such choices, and we feel ourselves to be thrown upon our fate.[105]

The inequalities of birth and fortune are, in Origen's scheme, the consequence of lesions which the soul sustains in the course of its embodiment, an event which always entails a loss of godliness and wisdom, but in varying degrees. Rather than trace this blinding of the soul to a previous life of which the author has said nothing, we should reflect on the ancient commonplace that pain and want are irritants to activity, and that if we were incapable of sin we should be ignorant of virtue. Irenaeus had already argued that we could not have known the good until the tree of knowledge acquainted us with its opposite; Plotinus, finding Plato's statements hard to reconcile, was to propose as his own opinion that the fall of souls arises from their failure to master the bodies into which they have descended for a good purpose.[106] Origen, in contrast to Plotinus, posits only one transition from the incorporeal to the embodied state, though as we have seen he appears to have believed that it was possible for angels to acquire a lighter or a grosser body by desert. Turpitude and virtue are both corollaries of the freedom that is thrust upon the soul by association with the body, and that freedom is diminished or enhanced by further choices. When it makes an evil choice – as every soul but that of Christ is bound to do – the crime comes from within, from a propensity that Origen considers too familiar to require more than illustration. Just as a hard-won skill is sure to wither if the artist fails to cherish it with the same zeal that he brought to its acquisition, so it is all too easy for the soul to slip away from innocence simply by doing nothing, when it fails to maintain that ardent, arduous and unbroken elevation of the intellect which its creaturely task of contemplating God enjoins upon it.[107] This thesis, if it deserves a philosophical name at all, is Aristotelian[108] and, unlike the Valentinian position which it may have been intended to rebut, takes little notice of the motives attributed to Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. For Origen they do not sin because 'the woman saw that the food was good to eat', or even because, at the prompting of the serpent, they desired to 'be as gods'; the fall is simply a fall, from the spiritual to the carnal mode of vision – or, as Origen prefers to write when sparring with a Platonist, it seals the eyes of intellect to open those of sense: '*They ate, and the eyes of the pair were opened* [Gen 3.7]. It was, then, the eyes of sense-perception that *were opened*, which they had good cause to keep shut, so that they might not be distracted and prevented from seeing with the eye of the soul' (*Against Celsus* 7.39).

This is the true fall – not, as some have argued, a second fall,[109] because the first descent of the soul from the hand of God to an earthly body was a part of the divine economy. The fall itself, in Origen's view, was a true catastrophe, not the mere

aberration that it might appear to have been for Irenaeus. As a result, Adam lost not only the promise of the likeness but his property in the image; indeed it was replaced by that of the devil, who – as Origen protested to the accusers of his own time – has no place in the economy of salvation. He has rights notwithstanding, and the souls whom he holds captive can be ransomed only by the precious blood of Christ incarnate. That is one reason for the Word's assumption of a body: another is to reveal the ways and purposes of God through a medium fitted to the senses. The higher truths, to which the body of Christ is but a stepping-stone, will not be attained by those who, like the uninstructed readers of the Gospel, fix their faith upon on his manhood to the exclusion of the Godhead. Yet even in this instance, where the flesh is still less able to contain the god within than it is to circumscribe the soul of a common mortal, the human frame survives the tomb, participates in the rising and, for all its novel properties, does not cease to be visible to an eye that is schooled by faith:

> Therefore what is said regarding place, as I apprehend, is something great and wonderful, exceeding the desert not only of many among the faithful, but even of those who are far advanced ... [summary of transfiguration scene in Matt 17.1ff. and Mark 9.1ff.] ... As one could not reasonably reproach Jesus for not having taken all the disciples up to the high mountain, but only the aforesaid three ... so one could not reasonably blame the apostolic accounts for informing us that Jesus after the resurrection was not seen by all, but to those whom he knew to have acquired eyes that could bear the spectacle of his resurrection. (*Against Celsus* 2.63, p. 185.18–20 Koetschau; 2.65, p. 187.11–14 and 16–19)

This is not, of course, the corporeality to which our carnal senses are accustomed. Origen contended, to the indignation of Jerome and Epiphanius, that the body in the afterlife cannot be similar, either in its substance or in its functions, to the one that chains us to our present sorrows.[110] We have it on the authority of the Lord that the redeemed will neither marry nor be given in marriage: therefore it appears that they will not have any need of sexual organs. It would be an affront to attribute defecatory functions to those who, as we read, will have become 'equal to the angels'; hence we may presume that they do not eat. Paul's aphorism that 'flesh and blood will not enter the kingdom of God'[111] should be taken as literally as any other verse in scripture that defines the new creation: the spiritual body is thus a body constituted by the spirit, not just one that is perfectly responsive to its bidding. But a body it is: as Jerome notes with malice, Origen leaves no doubt of his own conviction when disputing with those heretics whom he supposes to deny a resurrection of any kind. How could it be just, he asks, that the partner of the soul in its earthly tasks, its fellow-sufferer in adversity and its broken helpmeet under persecution, should not participate in the blessings of eternal life?[112]

Temperance was no virtue in theological polemic of the fourth century. If two men differed in anything, each made it his business to prove the other not only wrong but false in everything: all heterodoxy was heresy, and every error mortal. Those who were called Origenists in this period were opposed by those to whom they gave the label 'Anthropomorphites':[113] the latter may have held, with Irenaeus, that the human body participates in the likeness of its Maker, but controversy tarred them with the absurd belief that God is himself a body.[114] In retaliation, the

champion of the Egyptian Anthropomorphites, Bishop Theophilus, charged Origen with denying that the body was even part of true humanity. This is the age in which Epiphanius sneers at the Valentinians for asserting that we rise from the dead in a spiritual, not in a carnal, body: as a Churchman who had learned from Athanasius that the devil can cite scripture to his purpose, he reasoned that the heretics were convicted from their own mouths when they poached the words of Paul.[115] Origen's reliance on the scriptures now appeared to bespeak a low esteem for the doctrines of the Church, and he was further incriminated by proximity to Arius, who early in the fourth century had proposed that the second person of the Trinity is more properly the creature than the offspring of the Father. Origen too had styled the Son a creature on the strength of a text in Proverbs that continued to perplex the orthodox.[116] Corroborative proofs of his Arianism were not far to seek,[117] but those who adduced the following words as evidence of a vicious subordination of the Son to the Father deserve our gratitude, because the same passage, when it is read in combination with his other teachings, serves as an affidavit to his faith in the resurrection of the body:

> The Father, holding all things together extends to each of the things in existence, apportioning to each from his own power the gift of being what it is; the Son does less in comparison with the Father, extending only to the rational natures (for he is second to the Father[118]); and the Holy Spirit still less, reaching only the saints. (*First Principles* pp. 55–6 Koetschau, citing Justinian)

A comparison – but only a comparison in the absence of any demonstrable or even probable borrowing – can be drawn between this concept of the Trinity and the hierarchical ordering of three intellectual principles in the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus. Being, writes the Platonist, is superior to Life, and yet its power extends to things of a lower order than the living. Similarly, Life is a higher principle than Intellect, but intellectual beings are only the highest tier of those endowed with life. There is, however, no strict correspondence between the Christian's Trinity and the philosopher's triad, for Origen did not set out to adumbrate any kind of Platonism but to make sense of the evidence in the Bible and apply it to salvation. That the Spirit is the prize of the elect is the uniform teaching of the New Testament, and though all things are said to have been created through him, Christ in scripture is represented chiefly as the Saviour of humankind. A doctrine of the Trinity which neglected this relation would be guilty of the 'Logocentric' bias which is often imputed to Origen in contrast to the 'Christocentric' teaching of the Gospel and the creeds.

Origen's innovation is to correlate the persons of the Trinity with the corporeal, the rational and the spiritual elements in nature. Only the vocabulary is reminiscent of Plato, for this triad is a refinement of the Pauline anthropology in which man consists of body, soul and spirit. If there is an order of precedence in the Godhead, it inverts the order of dignity in the human composite:

> Since, therefore, they receive from God the Father the bare fact of existence, and next their rationality from the Word, and finally their sanctity from the Holy Spirit: conversely those who have already been sanctified by the Holy Spirit are capable of receiving Christ in view of his being 'the righteousness of God' [1 Cor 1.30]; and those who have become

> worthy to reach this stage through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit nonetheless pursue the gift of wisdom by virtue of the power that is exercised by the Spirit of God ... That of the father, which furnishes existence to all, is found to be more brilliant and majestic, when each person ... arrives at the higher grades of proficiency. (*First Principles* 1.3.8; p. 61 Koetschau)

Thus the Spirit bestows the moral purity that prepares the soul for wisdom; and this quality, as imparted by the Logos who is Wisdom itself, implies not only the acquisition of knowledge but the germination of the implanted virtue in the soul. These are internal goods, and their collaboration may be more or less perfect in the present life; the Father's gift, on the other hand, can be experienced only after death by whatever part of us survives it. That this includes the body can be deduced from *On First Principles* 1.6.4, where those who hold that the consummation will put an end to bodily existence are challenged to say 'how substances so great in number and quality can sustain their lives and subsist without bodies, when it is proper to the nature of God alone – that is, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – that it is understood to exist without material substance and without association with any corporeal admixture'.[119] While corporeality may not be a condition of bare existence, it will be all the more necessary as a principle of individuation once the Trinity has purged the imbecilities and vices of the soul.

Origen gives the name *skhêma* to the shape that made the souls of the prophet Samuel and the beggar Lazarus visible in Hades.[120] He was probably alluding to this tenuous simulacrum when he wrote in his dialogue *On the Resurrection* that after death the form or *eidos* of the body is translated to the soul. Methodius and Epiphanius have been accused of misconstruing the term when they regard it as the equivalent to *morphê*, 'outward figure'.[121] Yet that equation had already been made by Aristotle, who is often thought to have peculiar rights over the philosophical usage of the noun *eidos*, and the properties attributed by Origen to the *skhêmata* of Samuel and Lazarus suggest that the mistake of his detractors was not to construe the *eidos* or the *morphê* as an appearance, but to assume that this appearance could be predicated in the absence of a material substrate. *Morphê* has at least the recommendation of being a Biblical word,[122] and if Origen employed it, it would no doubt, like its ancestor at Philippians 2.7, connote resemblance – and veridical resemblance – to the man of flesh and blood. Comparisons, often drawn in recent decades, with the vehicle of the soul in Platonism are not unilluminating,[123] but the body is not, for Origen as for the Platonists, a raft that bears the storm-tossed soul from one reef of delusion to another. For him, as for any Christian, it is the guarantee of personal identity, the premiss of immortality in the only life that God vouchsafes to us. Origen may deserve to be called a dualist in so far as he affirms that the soul is real and none the less strictly incorporeal; Catholics have preserved his orthodoxy by proposing that it outlives the body only until the last judgement, when its yokefellow will be restored to it in the general resurrection. It seems to me, however, that the evidence points to a still less divisive theory, in which the soul and its body coalesce in a joint ascent, until each has surrendered its impurities to the chastisement of fire. The Protestant might still brand this as a species of dualism, born as it is of the ascetic spirit which is commonly supposed to be engendered by hostility to the material creation. The true ascetic, however, loves

his body and desires its glorification; his resolute belief in the integrity of the human frame forbids him to imagine that the cleansing of the soul could be effected without a corresponding change in the outer man.

Eusebius states that Origen embraced the ascetic life during the time of his embodiment.[124] In his writings Origen says little of his own practice, but he does prescribe peculiar abstinences in his tract *On Prayer*, and he tacitly enjoins a more general practice when he argues that the scriptural injunctions to taste and touch are best interpreted of the spiritual, not the carnal, senses. Physical death, which separates the soul from its gross integument, unites it both in nature and in experience to a body of finer texture. So much is obvious even from *On First Principles* 2.11.6 (p. 190.3 Koetschau), where after death the elect soul is conveyed to the earthly paradise: this is evidently a place on earth and if the incorporeal soul is to dwell in it, it must be part of an entity which is capable of occupying space. Once its education in this school has been completed, the soul is free to rise through the celestial spheres until it reaches a height that affords a prospect of the whole handiwork of God:

> When we were on earth, we saw animals and trees and perceived the differences between them, and above all the diversity among persons; but when we saw this, we did not understand the principles behind them, but all that was suggested by this diversity which we perceived among them was that we ought to examine and investigate the reasons why all these things were so differently created and so variously disposed. The zeal or passion to know this having been conceived on earth, we shall also receive after death the knowledge and understanding of it, if indeed the matter proceeds as is desired. (*First Principles* 2.11.6; p. 189 Koetschau)

And later in the same chapter:

> If anyone is 'clean in heart' and purer in mind and more acute in sensibility, he will progress with greater speed and thus arrive quickly at the heavenly kingdoms also, by way of, if I may so speak, the 'mansions' [which consist] of the particular localities that the Greeks for their part called 'spheres' although the scripture calls them 'heavens'. (p. 190 Koetschau)

Sidereal navigations were recounted often enough in ancient literature, but not as adventures subsequent to death. When those who profess to have experienced them are not satirists like Lucian, they are poets like Lucretius or men of 'shamanic' character whose souls glide through the windows of the body at the same time as they use it as a lodging. Hermotimus and Aristeas plunged themselves into cataleptic trances while their souls explored the heavens and the realms that lie beneath; Pythagoras, to judge from his detractors, must have essayed a similar mode of travel; it is the living Socrates, now comically portrayed as a disciple of Pythagoras, who intones in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 'I tread the air and gaze upon the sun.'[125] Such is the fascination of mundane phenomena for the embodied intellect, but a Platonist would comment that the true flight is reserved for those who turn away from the cosmos altogether, and aspire to the contemplation of a sphere that is inaccessible to the senses.[126] Origen denies that such a sphere exists, and here as elsewhere makes more use of the Pythagorean than the Platonic legacy; taking the

opportunity to extol the works of providence, he reveals (as might be expected) that he has learned more from the Bible than from either.

Eschatology and Mysticism

What will be the state of the redeemed when every blemish has been purged? Above we have seen reason to doubt whether Origen held that human saints were destined to assume the form of angels; such a translation, in any case, would not imply the destruction of the body, for, as we have already noted, Origen maintains that created spirits have a body of tenuous substance and that only the Holy Trinity is strictly incorporeal. Nor does it seem probable that Origen has been accurately reported by those who accuse him of saying that angelic beings descend to the condition of human souls; even if this did take place, it would obviously be fallacious to assume that this was the angel's first acquaintance with a body. It would be equally fallacious to assume that any loss of corporeality is entailed by the conversion of soul to spirit, which for Origen marks the apogee of sanctity. 'Soul' as he justly argues, is a term used in the Old Testament to characterize humanity, and particularly humanity in its weakness and estrangement; 'spirit', by contrast, is applied, most often in the New Testament, to those who exercise virtue in communion with God. Thus it is not merely the erudite but the true proficients, not merely those who know but those who act, who can be said to have attained the sublime condition in which the saint beholds the countenance of his Maker:

> And thus the rational nature, growing by several increments – and not as it grew in flesh or body or soul in the present life but through the increase of wit and sensibility – is led, being already a perfect mind, to perfect knowledge; in no wise is it now impeded by those carnal senses but is increased in the intellectual ones, always tending to purity, and if I may put it so, looking 'face to face' on the causes of things. Now it takes hold of perfection, first that by which it ascended to this height, then that by which it remains, having as food for its sustenance intellectual notions, the understanding of things and causal principles. (*First Principles* 2.11.7; pp. 191–2 Koetschau)

At this point theology must be content to quote what it is impotent to explain. But even if we admit that we know as little of this glory as the larva knows what it is to be a butterfly, we can at least say that, since it marks the consummation of fellowship between creature and Creator, it is granted under the usual conditions of creaturehood. These include, as we have already seen, the perseverance of the body; as Paul had intimated, even flesh and blood are no impediment to one who is 'caught up into the third heaven and hears things that it is not lawful for man to utter'. Origen might have added that it is not so much unlawful as impossible, for even while we remain on earth the Christian life is grounded in a faithful and assiduous perusal of the scriptures, the depths of which cannot be mined unless we make use of spiritual as well as carnal senses. Although the light that these confer will often take the form of a natural insight, the awakening of a dormant truth in the concentrated intellect, there are also flashes of a different order, when the mystery breaks upon the commentator with a sudden, if fitful, clarity that beggars sense and speech:[127]

> Then she sees the Bridegroom, who on being seen disappears. And this he does frequently throughout the Song, but unless one has experience of it, one cannot understand. Often, as God is my witness, I have seen the Bridegroom approach me and be with me most intimately; then suddenly he retired, and I could not find what I sought. (*Homilies on the Song* 1.7, p. 39 Baehrens)

Similarly sparse and anecdotal reminiscences spring up *currente calamo* in the works of the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus;[128] they, like Origen, leave to their biographers the recitation of times and circumstances, and Augustine is the first mystic (after Paul) who puts a date upon his memories. Yet Origen and Augustine are at one against the philosophers in presenting the experience, not as the soul's self-willed and laudable ascent to a higher plane of understanding, but as an audience, unlooked-for and unmerited, with the God who speaks from the freedom of his love. One man being primarily an exegete and the other a philosopher, each takes leave in his own way of the secular tradition: the Word approaches Origen first as text and then as Bridegroom, while Augustine – partly echoing Plotinus, partly anticipating Proclus – recounts his passage from dialogue with his mother through the purgatory of silence to a heaven in which Pauline hearing rather than Platonic seeing is the medium of revelation.[129] Both held a theology of grace that was lacking in the Neoplatonists; each combines an utterance with an internal preparation, though in Origen the word is already written, the timeless overture to a transient rapture, and contains in itself the imagery that identifies its author and interpreter as Christ.

We do not know whether the soul enjoyed this knowledge of the Bridegroom before its union with the body. Origen's fastidious distinction between the image and the likeness, and his insistence on the retention of the body, do not suggest that he conceived the beginning as in all respects identical with the end. Nevertheless, among the numerous heresies that have encumbered his reputation since the Second Council of Constantinople is the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, which implies that we receive nothing new from God in our salvation, and that the final state is simply the return of the soul to squandered innocence. Justinian offered the following account of Origen's teaching to the Council:[130] 'As the body is punished, the soul is purified little by little, and is thus restored (*apokathistatai*) to its primitive order ... The punishment of all human beings, and even that of daemons, has a limit, and the impious and the daemons will be restored to their erstwhile order.'

The term *apokatastasis* was most often used in antiquity to characterize the Stoic theory of an innumerable succession of universes, each minutely reproducing the history of the others from the inception to the end of its fatal cycle.[131] According to this doctrine every world contains its Socrates, its Christ and its Antichrist; each is to be swallowed up in a conflagration; no one will be lost for ever, and no one will be saved. Whether anyone but the poets held this opinion we need not inquire; it is certain enough that Origen denied it in his treatise against the pagan critic Celsus, one of his few works to have been handed down to us in a complete and undistorted Greek edition.[132] If this is the position that the fathers at Constantinople meant to exclude, their target, whether they knew it or not, was someone other than Origen. More probably their intention was to denounce the claim that the best that the soul can hope for is a return to a pre-existent state of blessedness. As we have seen, even

Plato may have taught that the present life is capable of adding something to the soul's felicity, while Origen not only held this opinion but denied that the soul enjoys a prolonged existence of any kind without the body. Once again, whatever the Council had in mind, the tenets of the real Origen seem to fall outside the scope of its condemnation.

This is not to deny that he used the term *apokatastasis*; but why should he avoid any word that the Holy Spirit had found serviceable?[133] In scripture (Acts 3.21) it signifies the restoration, not of anything that had previously existed in actuality, but of God's plan for the happiness of his creatures, which for so long had been overwritten by human sin and folly. In the *Commentary on John* the noun is once used with allusion to this passage, once to denote the return of the Jews from exile in the last days.[134] Some reason should be offered for construing the word in a culpable sense when Origen employs it in *First Principles*. Twice we have the Greek context: once the noun denotes only a toiling vessel's hope of landfall (p. 233.1), and thus again implies the realization of an end, not a return to origins. In the other case we read of the *apokatastasis* of sight to the blind by Jesus (p. 233.6); the Gospels do not state that the beneficiaries of such miracles had been able to see before, and it thus appears that the health has been 'restored' to the species rather than to the individual. Rufinus adopts the ambiguous *redditur* in his translation of this sentence; elsewhere the Latin equivalent of *apokatastasis* is *restitutio*. At 120.19 and 290.14 it is nothing but a reminiscence of Acts 3.21. At 278.22 the restitution of the 'entire creation' is preceded by the inclusion of the redeemed in Christ, and then at 288.5 the individual's restitution presupposes the acquisition of a spiritual body, and thus cannot be a return to Plato's heaven as this was popularly conceived. When the Latin text alludes to the restitution of warmth within the soul, this does indeed connote the recovery of a lost condition; but is this one that is prior to all embodiment, or a primitive state of innocence in the body?

> Therefore one must consider whether perhaps – as we have said to be revealed by the very name – the *psukhe* (soul) is so called because it has grown cool from the heat of righteousness and the participation in the divine fire, though none the less it has not lost the power of restoring itself to that heat in which it existed at the beginning. (*First Principles* 2.83; p. 158 Koetschau)

Origen derives the Greek noun *psukhe* (soul) from the verb *psukhein*, 'to cool', explaining that the mind sinks to the level of soul when it suffers a loss of ardour.[135] The etymology was known to Platonists, in whom it is juxtaposed with a belief in the soul's descent from freedom into the bonds of matter. But in these words of Origen's, there is no express allusion to pre-existence,[136] any more than in the analogues from Book 1 of his *First Principles*, which have been discussed above. Nor is there a Platonic antecedent for Origen's consistent use of *pneuma* to define the quality of the human agent at the end. Thus commenting on the Saviour's curious saying that 'he who would save his soul shall lose it',[137] he explains: 'If then he is *joined to the Lord*, when he is an animal man, he is converted by this into a spiritual one, and *is one spirit* [1 Cor 6.17], let us also lose our souls that cleaving to God we may be transformed into one spirit' (*Homilies on Luke* 36, p. 207.15–18 Bauer).

Only seldom – only, perhaps, in the Latin of Rufinus – is 'spirit' used as a synonym for the mind or rational nature that all free beings possessed before the fall (*First Principles* 2.9.7; p. 171.13 Koetschau). The restoration of this mind is a necessary prelude to the ennoblement that was promised, but not yet conferred, in the opening chapter of Genesis, where God proposes to make man in his image and his likeness. This promise is fulfilled by the conversion of soul to spirit, which is expressly said to be that higher portion of the soul which has been fashioned in the 'image and likeness of God' (*First Principles* 2.10.7; p. 181.13–19 Koetschau). The victory of spirit makes it possible for us to become 'one spirit' with the Lord and so through him to come face to face with God the Father (pp. 181.13, 191.24 etc.). Far from being dissolved, corporeal nature will now come into its own, evolving into a 'spiritual body' from the merely animal or psychic costume which accompanied the soul on its upward journey; flesh and blood will perish indeed, but what remains will vindicate the promise of the Apostle and reveal how far the glory of heaven outshines that of the earth.[138]

It should by now be apparent that the Bible, rather than Plato, is Origen's manual, and the Bible, rather than Plato, must be our guide to the interpretation of his vocabulary. The concepts of satiety, refrigeration and restoration are all to be found in Origen, but even if all are borrowed from the schools it should be obvious that they do not carry with them the philosophy of the Platonists or the Stoics. A philosophical writer has no choice but to avail himself of the language coined by earlier philosophers; he is not, however, obliged – and, if he aims at originality, will refuse – to redeem the wares for which that currency was exchanged on the ancient markets. Both ancient heresiology and the study of patristics in more recent times have laboured under the fallacy that a word can never mean anything but what it was devised to mean – that it must remain for ever Stoic, Platonic or Aristotelian in tendency because it was Stoic, Platonic or Aristotelian in origin. In making this assumption the historian belies his own vocation and that of the authors whom he professes to interpret: a scholar must learn to think the thoughts of others, as a philosopher must learn to think his own.

Notes

1 For a riposte to modern satire on Descartes see Lewis (1969), 21–36.
2 Thus Robinson (1968), 95, contrasting the 'Hebraic division of man into soul and flesh' with the 'threefold Greek division into body, soul and spirit'. As it later proves the Hebraic division is really no division; commentators on 1 Thess 5.23 who do not share Robinson's distaste for footnotes have also failed to uncover any trace of the 'Greek' trichotomy in writers who used that language: Milligan (1908), 77–8 suspects the Pharisees.
3 John 10.17.
4 2 Cor 4.16; Gal 5.17; Rom 7.25.
5 For criticism of the dichotomy between the 'Greek' belief in the immortality of the soul and the 'Biblical' faith in resurrection, see Barr (1992), 29–45. As Barr points out, Hebrew thought is both diverse and progressive; the new elements in the thought of Hellenistic Jewry are thus not mere excrescences but necessary supplements to the primitive deposit in the light of new discoveries and needs.

6 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.34.1; Tertullian, *On the Soul* 55, *Against Marcion* 4.34.11 etc. On the vacillations of Tertullian see Hill (1992), 24–8.
7 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 9.4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.33.4.
8 *Dialogue with Heracleides* 7.1–8.17, pp. 70–73 Scherer.
9 See Eustathius, *On the Sorceress* 12 and 21 for criticism of the allegorical method.
10 Crouzel (1988), 258–9.
11 Gore (1907), 114.
12 *HomGen* 1.13, p. 15.8–12 Baehrens.
13 By pre-existence I mean existence prior to the conception of the embryo. All second-century Christians, to judge by their attacks on pagan tolerance of abortion, believed that the human foetus is ensouled between conception and parturition; Origen may be fencing with his own shadow when he elicits a demonstration of this from the dancing of the Baptist in his mother's womb at Luke 1.44 (*Princ.* 1.7.4), and it is certainly tendentious to cite this passage as Chadwick (1966), 115 does – as a specimen of Origen's desire to prove a heterodox position from the scriptures.
14 Crouzel (1988), 160.
15 Laporte (1995), 159–61.
16 Harl (1993), 374.
17 See O'Daly (1983).
18 *Against the Academics* 2.9.22; *Retractations* 1.1.3, citing Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 16.
19 Jerome, *On Ephesians*, pp. 555–6 Migne. On the reconstruction of Origen's commentary from Jerome, see Heine (2000).
20 Certainly we hear no such thing at *Princ.* 3.5.4, p. 275.15 Koetschau, where the term *katabolê*, glossed as 'the descent from the superior to the inferior', is applied to the sun's reluctant sojourn in the visible firmament. Augustine records his perplexities at Jerome, Letter 131.7.
21 *Princ.* 3.5.4, pp. 273–5 Koetschau.
22 *Princ.* 1.6.2, p. 81 Koetschau.
23 Eph 6.12; *Princ.* 1, preface 9, p. 15.17 Koetschau. While a similar rarefaction of spirit (*pneuma*) is attributed to daemons by Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 2.39–41, this author's daemonology is not typically Platonic, if only because he concedes that some are evil. The notion that the souls of ancient heroes walk the earth 'in mist apparelled' can be traced to the archaic poet Hesiod, and these departed spirits already constitute a class of demons for the eclectic Plutarch: see Brenk (1977).
24 See previous chapter on the theology of the *Chaldaean Oracles*; Dillon (1992) for their influence on the Neoplatonists.
25 See Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 2.3–5 (pp. 70–79 Parthey), with the annotations of Cremer (1969), 38.
26 Proclus, *On the Cratylus* 81, p. 38.15–21 Romano.
27 See for example *Against Celsus* 6.39, pp. 107.30–109.5 Koetschau.
28 See the letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus at *Philokalia* 13.
29 *Princ.* 1.7.2, p. 87.14–15 Koetschau; cf. 1.7.5, p. 91.13 and 2.9.7, p. 171.15–20. I do not see that Scott (1991), 147 proves that Origen ever entertains the view that the heavenly bodies were 'sinners doing penance for pre-existent vices'. The passages that he adduces on p. 139, even if they both come from Origen, appear to me to be interpretations of certain references to the stars in scripture as oblique allusions to fallen angels, and therefore have no bearing on the status of the true sidereal bodies.
30 *Princ.* 1.7.5, p. 93 Koetschau, citing Phil 1.23–4.
31 See especially *HomLev* 8.3; p. 396 Baehrens on the filth or *sordes* contracted at birth and purged by infant baptism. On the benign purpose of embodiment see below.

32 It is only of these bodies that Origen says that they are spherical: *On Prayer* 31.3, p. 397.5–6 Koetschau. He regards this as a mark of their perfection, and perhaps it is a misunderstanding of this common (and accurate) belief that gave rise to the accusation at the Council of 553 that he assigned a spherical body to all the saints. That the sun and moon have souls was a common view in the ancient world, and is deduced by Origen, with characteristic literalism, from exhortations addressed to them in scripture: *On Prayer* 7.1, pp. 315.27–316.3 Koetschau.

33 Gasparri (1987), 67 notes that only Epiphanius (*Panarion* 64.4) and Theophilus of Alexandria (Jerome, Letter 96.17) attest the doctrine that a soul is a mind or *nous* that has descended after a cooling of the love that it had felt for God in its disembodied state. The doctrine was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 553, but not under the name of Origen.

34 It may be worthy of note that *koros* or satiety of 'material filth' would appear to be the cause of the soul's conversion to the desire of heaven and spiritual things at *Princ.* 3.4.3, p. 268.4–5 Koetschau (Latin only). Similarly, at *On Prayer* 29.13, p. 388.9 Koetschau, *koros* is the occasion of repentance and renewal, not of sin.

35 See Aristotle, *Ethics* 1147a10–1147b18 on the drunkenness or forgetfulness of the man who has knowledge of right and wrong yet knowingly does evil; 1150b29 on the possibility of repentance. Conversely Aristotle opines that we become virtuous by the practice of virtuous actions rather than by ratiocination, as Origen also does at *Princ.* 3.1. See previous chapter and Edwards (1993) on the possibility that Origen was a pupil of the Peripatetic Ammonius praised by Longinus in Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 20–21.

36 On the divinity and extraneous origin of *nous* see *On the Soul* 408b28–29, with Kahn (1992), esp. 362–7.

37 *Cratylus* 296b; cf. *Politicus* 271–2.

38 Harl (1963), 387–93. Chadwick (1966), 84 assumes that Origen imbibed his belief in the fall of souls from Philo; to illustrate the frequency of this motif in Philo, he cites *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?* 240 and six other passages on p. 151 n.34.

39 Harl (1963), 393–4, citing *On Prayer* 29.13 (where it is clear that Origen refers to earthly delinquencies), *Philokalia* 27.4 (on Exodus) and *Against Celsus* 5.29 and 5.32.

40 Jerome, Letter 124.6, writes to Avitus that 'no other soul, which descended to a human body, displayed a pure and kindred likeness of the impression that was in it at first except that of which the Saviour says' etc. Even this does not entail that the differences between souls were evident before they descended; nor, when one compares the length of this sentence with its counterpart in Rufinus, is it easy to see what Koetschau means by his comment that '*Rufin hat gekurzt*' (p. 142, note).

41 *Meno* 81b–d cites Pindar; *Phaedrus* 248c alludes to Empedocles, Fr. 115 DK. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1 and Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 28 on the diverse causes assigned by Plato and his followers to the descent of souls.

42 See *First Principles* 4.4.7–8 (pp. 357–9 Koetschau), where Origen, having urged that matter cannot exist without qualities, goes on to suggest that it may be nothing but quality, asserts that whatever it is, it is of God's making, and concludes with the speculation that in the book of Enoch matter devoid of qualities is the kind that is styled 'imperfect'.

43 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1178a; cf. Augustine, *On the Ways of the Manichees* 2.52; Gregory of Nyssa, *Making of Man* 16 on universal humanity (that is, intellect) as the true image of God.

44 See Alt (1993), 222–34.

45 See Porphyry, *On the Styx* and *To Gaurus*; Deuse (1983), 213–30. Cf. Alcinous,

Didascalicus 16, p. 172.11–19 Hermann, echoing Plato, *Timaeus* 42c, on accretions to the soul.

46 Finamore (1985), 17–27.

47 *First Principles* 3.5.3; p. 273 Koetschau. But at 1.3.5 (p. 68) this is glossed as a reference to the 'prefigurement and preformation' of the present world in the mind of God – clearly a Philonic *logos* rather than a Platonic realm of ideas. The argument that God the Father must always have had an object on which to exercise his benevolence is tentatively advanced at 1.4.3 and at once disarmed by the reflection that he was eternally the Father of the Son.

48 Thus at *CommJoh* 2.16.114, p. 73.13–14 Preuschen, the saint who partakes of the Logos is styled the one true *logikos*. At 2.10.76, p. 65.25 the Spirit is said to be *logikos* by partaking of the hypostasis of the Logos.

49 *Princ.* 2.3.6, p. 122. Koetschau.

50 *CommJoh* 19.146, p. 323.34 Preuschen, explaining Christ's ascent above the heavens in Eph 4.10 as a 'mystical' rather than 'topical' translation; *Cels.* 6.5, p. 74.27–75.1 Koetschau, superimposing John 1.9 on Plato, Epistle 7 341c–d. see further Runia (1999).

51 See Numenius Fr. 42; Origen, *Fragment on Luke* 228 Bauer, citing 1 Cor 4.14.

52 See *Enneads* 4.4.1 on the evanescence of earthly memories; 5.8.11–13 on self-knowledge as the fusion of the soul with eternal Beauty, and hence with the Divine.

53 Rich (1957) is generally regarded as definitive.

54 If we can trust Augustine at *City of God* 12.27.9–10 (Fr. 300a Smith). Fr. 268 is ambiguous, but I take lines 49–63 to mean that souls endure, not the life of brutes, but a brutal life within a human domicile.

55 Bianchi (1987) defends the attribution of this tenet to Basilides, who is not named here in the *Commentary on Romans*.

56 It is clear at least that Origen scorns the doctrine of transmigration at *Against Celsus* 7.32, where he denies that the Christian hope of the resurrection is founded on it.

57 See Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7, with Blumenthal (1966) and O'Meara (1999); the assertion of Porphyry, Fr. 275.20 Smith, that it is by mind that one is 'established as a being' (*ousiomenon*) suggests that he holds a similar position to O'Meara's.

58 Fr. 271.33 and 64–5 Smith. Iamblichus, *Mysteries* 9.6 says that our personal daemon serves as a paradigm; he seems to contrast it with the ruling planet (*oikodespotes*), as Porphyry would no doubt have contrasted the paradigm with the natal daemon who forces him to appease his sexual appetite at *Letter to Marcella*, p. 274.6 Nauck.

59 *CommJoh* 6.11, glossing 'power and spirit' as the 'power of the spirit'. For a perceptive discussion of the passage, and its importance in the history of Christian thought, see Kruger (1996), 117–26.

60 *CommJoh* 6.14, with reference to John 1.21, Judges 20.28, Num 25.11. Proponents of the view that John was Elijah only by virtue of transmigration seem to have argued that his human birth forbids us to believe that he was simply the same Elijah who was bodily carried up into the heavens: see *CommJoh* 6.11–12.

61 See Fr. 115DK on the ordinance of Necessity, cited by Porphyry at Fr. 271.23–4 Smith.

62 Empedocles, Fr. 112.3 DK; *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* 71; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10; Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 22 with Edwards (2000b), 41n.233.

63 Porphyry, *Sententiae* 32; cf. Marinus, *Proclus* 3.

64 De Faye (1925), 121 upholds this accusation, which Farrar (1892), 291–2 and 338–9 believes to have been the principal cause for the condemnation of universalism in antiquity. On p. 257 he also understands Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* 26 to be predicting the salvation of the devil. Origen is prepared to assert that 'even the

worst of sinners may be saved, we know not how'; but if, as I argue here, he did not believe that men and demons are a single race, we need not extend this promise to the devil.

65 The relevant materials, from Rufinus, *On the Adulteration of Origen's Works*, and Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus*, book 2, are collated by Crouzel (1973). In fact both ancient witnesses make it clear that, while refusing to curse the devil, Origen had not expressly predicted his salvation. He had, however, maintained against the Valentinian Candidus that no creature is by nature irredeemable, and that the devil is the victim of his own choice.

66 Plato, *Protagoras* 324a–c is generally regarded as the first European writer to enunciate the view that all punishment has a remedial purpose, but it was unnecessary for Origen to go to him for a lesson that he could have imbibed from Job 5.17, Heb 12.5–6 etc. Although the attribution of universalism to Origen rests on strong grounds – see Edwards (1995b) among many others – there is some countervailing evidence, as at *HomLev* 9.5, pp.427.23–428.2 Baehrens, where Christ is said not to pray for all.

67 1 Cor 6.3, Heb 1.5–6.

68 Luke 20.36. Hippolytus (vol. 1, p. 254 Bonwetsch and Achelis) interprets this to mean 'incorruptible, immortal and indissoluble'.

69 For both these Biblical phrases see Luke 20.36, though cognates of the former occur also at John 1.13 and Rom 8.21.

70 Cf. Eph 5.8, 1 Thess 5.5.

71 It is possible, in any case, that to be of the angelic order is not in the strictest sense to be an angel, and that Origen merely paraphrases Luke 20.36 here.

72 *CommJoh* 2.31 (25), citing the Prayer of Joseph as at *CommJoh* 1.31 (34).

73 Justinian, *Letter to Mennas* at *Princ.*, p. 81.6–10 Koetschau. Note that Rufinus here betrays his author by implying, at *Princ.* 1.6.2, p. 82.3–5 that all human beings originate from angels.

74 John 10.35, interpreting Psalm 82.6.

75 *CommJoh* 2.2, speaking of 'all' (including Christ the Word) 'that is *theopoioumenon* (made god) by participation in the essential Godhead (*autotheos*).

76 See for example Lossky (1957), 114–27, with little recognition of the complexity of the tradition, and the customary falsification of Augustine's teaching. No credit is given to Origen, who for Lossky is simply 'heterodox' (p. 32), and the author of a 'religious philosophy' masquerading as theology (p. 42).

77 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1; the beginning of the chapter implies that likeness and image were both manifested in the body of Adam. At 4.38.4, however, both image and likeness seem to lie in the future, while both 5.16.2 and 4.38.1 could be taken to mean that the likeness was not vouchsafed even to Adam. See also 3.18.1 with the comments of Lawson (1948), 200–202. Lawson notes that Irenaeus (1.5.5) attests a Valentinian distinction between the corporeal image and the psychic likeness, and that the terms are also contrasted in Clement of Rome, 1 Clem 33.4.

78 See Rom 1.23, 5.14, 6.5, 8.3 on true and false likeness; Phil 2.6–8 for form and likeness; Col 1.15, 1 Cor 11.7 on images of God. On Jewish antecedents see Bockmuehl (1997). While there is little evidence in Rabbinic tradition of a sharp distinction between the image and the likeness, a Cabbalistic tradition of uncertain date maintains that after the image is imparted by the entry of the soul into the embryo at conception, a second image supervenes as the agent grows from a foetus to an adult. By marrying the faculties of soul and body, this second image bestows upon the creature the awesome likeness of his Creator. See Tishby (1989), 770–72; at 753–4 Tishby notes that the soul in the *Zohar* descends for the purpose of realizing virtue in the body.

79 The relevant passages are collected by Alviar (1993), 17–39.

80 *Phaedrus* 248a; *Republic* 508c–e; *Meno* 81c; *Theaetetus* 176c.
81 Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World* 20; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 26, p. 178.38 Hermann, on which see Alt (1993), 151–3. On the fall of the soul as supervening on embodiment in Plotinus see *Enneads* 4.8 and Rist (1967), 112–29.
82 See *On the Styx*, *Sententiae* 29 (p. 18 Lamberz), Fr. 185 Smith and other materials considered by Pépin (1999).
83 Plato, *Gorgias* 524c–d; *Phaedo* 110b–114c. Plato states at 114c that souls of philosophers pass 'without bodies' (*aneu somatôn*) to the more pleasant localities. Burnet (1911), 142 notes that Eusebius transcribed this phrase *aneu kamatôn* ('without toils') and suggests a 'deliberate falsification'; maybe so, but it might be the falsification of a pagan editor, striving to make the philosopher consistent with himself and later doctrine. Christians were wont to assume that Plato and his followers denied any resurrection or survival of the body.
84 Numenius, Fr. 31 Des Places (Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs*, p. 70 Nauck); Hermetica 1.25. For parallels to the latter see Copenhaver (1992), 114–6.
85 Empedocles, Fr. 112.3 DK; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10; *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* 71.
86 See Scholem (1954), 287–324 on Sabbatai Z'vi; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.25 on Carpocrates.
87 See Bockmuehl (1997) on Phil 2.6–10.
88 Col 2.9; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.1.1–2.
89 *Princ.* 2.3.6 (p. 122.1–2 Koetschau). See discussion in Chapter 2 above.
90 On the difference between creation and fashioning see *HomGen* 1.13, p. 15.8–13 Baehrens; on the conjunction of male and female in the inner man see *HomGen* 1.15, p. 19.8–22.
91 Simonetti (1962) suggests that Origen does not mean that the two creations were literally consecutive, and Origen does indeed maintain (*HomGen* 1.1) that time came into being with the material creation. It seems to me, however, that if Origen had not read this narrative as a sequential history, he would have said so with his wonted clarity.
92 See continuation of cited passage; Theodoret, *Questions on Genesis* 20, citing Origen's lost *Commentary*; *CommJoh* 6.49 (3) etc. On Christ as image of God see *Princ.* 1.2.6 (p. 35 Koetschau).
93 *Princ.* 2.11.6, charting the passage of the saints. Origen interprets allegorically, but does not himself write allegories, and therefore this clear passage seems to me to refute the conclusion of Burke (1950), 27 that Origen understands Paradise symbolically. If he boasts in *Against Celsus* 4.40 that the story is superior to Plato's notion of the soul's fall from a 'supercelestial place', it does not follow (unless of course we are Platonists) that the Biblical Paradise must be incorporeal. If he denies (Theodoret, *Questions on Genesis* 39) that Paradise is a divine place, we are free, with Rauer (1961), to regard it as an earthly one. In fact it may be Origen's intention to distinguish between this Paradise and that of God from which the devil fell (*Princ.* 1.5.4, p. 75.3–4 Koetschau, citing Ezekiel 28.12–13).
94 See for example *Princ.* 1.6.2, pp. 79.22–80.1 Koetschau; 2.1.1, p. 107.10–18.
95 Both Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* and Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* persistently assume that we are accomplices in the errors of the first humans.
96 See *Princ.* 2.9.7, p. 171.7–8 Koetschau, citing Rom 9.13, which is in turn a citation of Malachi 1.6. If this passage stood alone, we might understand 'foregoing life' to mean 'the life that they were going to live before the point where God requited their deserts'; this 'Arminian' view, that God predestines with regard to merits foreseen, is upheld in the *Commentary on Romans* (Greek extract, *Philokalia* 25).

97 *Princ.* 2.9.7, p. 171.27–8 Koetschau; but there appears to be some infelicity in translation, since the Latin implies that heavenly and infernal entities also undergo corporeal birth.
98 *Princ.* 2.2.2 (p. 112 Koetschau) and 2.3.3 (p. 117).
99 Princ. 1.7.4 (p. 90.7–9 Koetschau).
100 *Princ.* 1.7.4, (p. 90.14–20 Koetschau).
101 Both Pace (1993), 165–9 and Rist (1975), 110 hold that Jerome gives a more literal translation of the passage in *Princ.* 2.9 at Letter 124.8. This text, so far as I can judge, considers but does not endorse the theory that they expiate the offences of our past lives in the present one; it certainly does not imply that embodiment is itself the price of sin.
102 Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 25 advances four different reasons for the descent of souls, the second of which, at p. 178.38 Hermann, is the 'decision of the gods'. Dillon (1993), 157 perceives here an allusion to the judgements passed by the gods on souls that have already been embodied at *Phaedrus* 113a; as a general explanation for the presence of souls on earth, Dillon suggests that the gods will this for their 'honour and glory' (*Didascalicus* 16, p. 172.3 implies that it is more properly the Demiurge who decrees that human bodies should be inhabited by souls akin to the gods). By contrast, Origen holds that it is God's benign solicitude for his creatures which causes him to immure the sun and moon in the firmament against their will.
103 *Phaedrus* 247d; *Republic* 546a–547a; *Statesman* 269c–270e.
104 *Republic* 617e, reinterpreting the ordinance of Necessity to entail that each of us will live his next life under the tutelage of the daemon whom he chooses. This text is juxtaposed with *Timaeus* 90a by Plotinus in *Enneads* 3.4.
105 See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.25 etc. Porphyry, *On what is in our Power* (Fr. 271.15–20 Smith) may have such complaints in mind when he distinguishes between what is in the power of the soul (the fruit of its previous existence) and what is in the power of the human being after a certain life has been allotted to him.
106 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.39.1; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.
107 *Princ.* 1.4.1, p. 63.12–29 Koetschau. It is clear by the end of the passage that he is speaking of the lapse and restoration of the soul in the present life, and the Latin supplement from Jerome, inserted by Koetschau on p. 64.9–16, does not belong to this train of reasoning.
108 See above, though scholars have in general found little evidence of Aristotelian influence in Origen: see Crouzel (1962), 29–34 and Koch (1932), 205. None the less, as Chadwick (1966), 162 n.50 observes (citing Cicero, *Academics* 1.4.17), it was widely held that Plato and Aristotle shared the same philosophy.
109 For example Burke (1950); for similar interpretations, beginning with Procopius in the sixth century, see Bammel (1989), 66–8.
110 Jerome, Letter 38 to Pammachius; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.
111 1 Cor 15.50.
112 Jerome, Letter 38.
113 See Clark (1992) on the real and putative teachings of this group, and on the notoriety which accrued to Origen from the dangerous speculations of his follower Evagrius.
114 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.
115 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.7; Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* 1.8.
116 See previous chapter on the noun *ktisma*.
117 See Clark (1992), 95, 112, 115 etc., citing Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64; Jerome, Letter 51; Richard's fragments from Theophilus, etc.
118 I am citing the Greek text here because the Latin appears corrupt. However, it seems to me probable that the words in parentheses are a gloss by Justinian rather than the *ipsissima verba* of Origen, who used such terms less often than his accusers.

119 *Princ.*, p. 85.16–20 Koetschau. It is possible that Rufinus has smuggled the appellations of the three Persons into the text, to forestall the inference that Origen reserved incorporeality for the Father; but the equivocal use of 'substance', to denote first a concrete entity then the nature of an entity, bespeaks an almost infelicitous loyalty to the Greek of his original, in which the term *ousia* will have retained its perennial ambiguity.

120 Photius, *Bibliotheca* 224, citing Methodius, *On the Resurrection*. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.17, p. 428.1 Holl/Dummer; 64.27.3, p. 443.19 Holl/Dummer; 64.40.3, pp. 462.20 and 463.1–2; also *Princ.* 2.10.2, p. 174.12 Koetschau. Origen might be thought to deny the retention of the body by the departed soul at *Against Celsus* 2.43, where he speaks of Christ as a soul without bodily covering who dwelt in Hades among other souls who were 'naked of the body'; at 2.62 he distinguishes the 'intermediate body' of the resurrected Saviour from the grosser envelope of his incarnation, and both from the condition of the soul 'without such a body'. These last words need not, however, connote the total absence of a body, and in the light of Origen's doctrine in *First Principles*, we may surmise that in his 'exoteric' reply to the philosophers he accommodates his language to that of Plato, *Phaedo* 114c etc.

121 Crouzel (1972), 693–7, with the endorsement of Clark (1992), 92; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1043a29–32. The term *morphê* is in fact frequent in the treatise of Methodius: see Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.41, p. 464.16 Holl/Dummer. Cf. 463.1 on the conversion of the *skhêma* to a more comely *morphê* (*eumorphôteron tropê*). Both Phil 2.6. and 3.21 will have been in Origen's mind when he used the term; at p. 462.11 and 17 the noun *idea* (related etymologically, as all Greeks knew, to words connoting vision) seems to be taken as an equivalent.

122 See Bockmuehl (1997), 8–19.

123 Above all with Hierocles of Alexandria, who not only allots a luminous body to the soul in the afterlife, but calls it an *eidos* as well as *sumphues soma* ('connatural body') at *On the Golden Verses* 110–111; see Schibli (1993), 111–113. On the vehicle of the soul in Origen's disciples see Schibli (1992).

124 *Church History* 6.3.11. See Cox (1983) for a sceptical estimate, as asceticism was not yet a common practice.

125 See Lucian, *Icaromennipus*; Lucretius, *The Nature of Things* 1.62–79; Aristophanes, *Clouds* 225; Maximus of Tyre, *Discourses* 10.2 on Aristeas. In most of these passages talk of looking down implies contempt for things below.

126 Porphyry, Fr. 271.69–70 Smith speaks of an ascent through the spheres in language reminiscent of the *Poimandres* (*Hermetica* 1.25); but the true ascent consists in the soul's discovery of itself as mind (Fr. 275.24), and though he foresees a stage when we shall contemplate 'the whole' in Fr. 274, he does not allow it to detain his imagination for more than one allusive sentence. For Origen, a candid and panoptic recollection of past sins is incidental to the soul's encounter with God at the consummation; in Porphyry self-knowledge is the goal, and one corollary is that it frees us from contingent memories (cf. Fr. 255.21–3 for the antithesis between memory, a property of all animals, and the human prerogative of *anamnêsis*).

127 See Chapter 4 for discussion. Notwithstanding the reminiscence of Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 34–5, where the Jewish exegete seems to be speaking only of the exhilaration felt by the illuminated intellect, the description suggests to me, as to Crouzel, a supersensual experience. Contrast Louth (1981), 71.

128 Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1; Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.11.

129 *Confessions* 9.10.

130 Letter to Mennas, cited by Koetschau at *Princ.* 182.15–183.7.

131 Jerome, Letter 124.5 (to Avitus) asserts that Origen posited an infinite series of

worlds after the present one, each entailing a new creation of matter, and each forced into existence for the punishment of souls that had sinned again and thereby forfeited the bliss of incorporeality. In Letter 96, translating the Paschal Letter of Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, he says that Origen followed the Stoics in teaching that a human being 'dies again and again'. Though Koetschau, pp. 113–15 prints these charges in parallel to Rufinus' text of *Princ.* 2.3, the argument for the perpetual recreation of matter is treated in the Latin of Rufinus as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctrine that the saints can survive in heaven without a body. The text of Rufinus is consonant with the rest of Origen's writings; that of Jerome is not, and his accusation does not appear among the fifteen indictments at Constantinople, or indeed in any Greek witness whose words survive in the original. Discussion of this question need not detain us, as even if Origen held the tenet imputed to him by Jerome, he did not borrow it from the Platonists.

132 See Ludlow (2000), 38–44 for a general review of pagan and Christian usage. For Origen's denial of the eternal recurrence see *Against Celsus* 4.14 and 6.71, p. 141.25–28 Koetschau. Crouzel (1985), 288 notes that in the latter Origen contrasts the periodic and all-consuming conflagrations of the Stoics with the unquenchable fires of punishment in Christian eschatology, though whether these are everlasting or merely of incalculable duration is never obvious from the word *aioniôs*.

133 Bibliography on this question is collected by Alviar (1993), 31 n. 74. It will be clear that I side with Rius-Camps (1956) against Méhat (1964).

134 *CommJoh* 1.10.91, p. 20.12 Preuschen; 10.42.291, p. 219.29. In the exoteric *Against Celsus* 7.3, p. 155.11–12 Koetschau, it seems to denote an ascent of the soul to the truth in defiance of demons who attempt to pull it down; notwithstanding the echo of *Phaedrus* 247c–248d, nothing is said to imply that the soul has previously fallen from the blessedness to which it now aspires.

135 *Princ.* 2.8.3, p. 157.12–15 Koetschau, and p. 158.17–20 (citing Jerome, Letter 124.6). Koetschau cites Aristotle, *On the Soul* 405b26 for the etymology.

136 Although Crouzel, otherwise so circumspect, assumes one: Crouzel (1988), citing 2.8.3. My interpretation will, I hope, suffice also at *First Principles* 3.6.3 (p. 284.5 Koetschau), where the rational returns to the state that it knew before the fall. Even if this signifies the nature of Adam and Eve in Eden, this is in my view subsequent to the union of soul and body, and the return to mental purity is not itself identical with the final state, but a necessary condition of the spiritual union with God.

137 Luke 17.33; to avoid the implication that the soul may be lost and the man saved, English versions have agreed to render *psukhe* here as 'life'.

138 *First Principles* 2.10.2, citing 1 Cor 15.39–42 at 174.21 Koetschau.

Chapter 4

The Interpretation of Scripture

The strongest condemnations of Origen in the twentieth century have been prompted by his handling of the scriptures. Theologians may applaud his universalism and smile at his innocuous speculations on the origin of the soul; but many are unable to stomach his commentaries and homilies, in which (they allege) the plain sense of the words is driven hither and thither by the gadfly of allegory, and the Church is left with a sad misnomer, a 'spiritual' reading whose rigidity belies the versatility and novelty of the primitive inspiration. As a result the reading of the scriptures becomes an essay in cryptology when it ought to be an audience with Christ. Since it is unthinkable that Holy Writ should offer any ground or warrant for such unfavoured practices, they are traced to Origen's Platonism, and thus he becomes a cautionary example of a pious mind seduced by the transient wisdom of the world. Yet here as elsewhere, he declares his independence of the philosophers in his use and exposition of the principles that he holds in common with them. The modern scholars who disown these principles share with Origen the task of making the text speak for itself; if they are free from prejudice, they can scarcely fail to admire the assiduity and tact with which he engages the clearer passages as midwives to bring forth a meaning from the more obscure.

Notes Toward a Definition of Allegory

The word 'allegory' denotes both a form of writing and a discipline of reading. In the latter sense it was for centuries the helpmeet of exegesis, and after an abrupt divorce it still enjoys an occasional flirtation in the pulpit and the circumspect attentions of the literary theorist. Yet scholars, preachers and critics are at one in their inability to frame a definition of the term that is broad enough to cover everything of relevance, yet excludes the more conventional – or as some would say, more natural – modes of reading. The premiss of the allegorist, said the Latin rhetoricians,[1] is that 'one thing is said, another is intended'; though this formulation is capacious enough to accommodate irony, lying, codes and sundry forms of humour, it is narrow by comparison with the scope accorded to allegory in Angus Fletcher's celebrated essay on the subject.[2] A popular definition, taking allegory as the name for a species of literature, asserts that it is a tale with a hidden meaning; but this is far too catholic until we have explained what kind of meaning might be hidden, and to what end. When Shaw proposed that *Hamlet* was a play about the conflict of religions, he said something that is not stated in the text and is still not palpable to the majority of readers; the writer of an economic history of Rome or Greece is forced to look beneath the skin of every narrative that survives in written

records; yet neither the historian nor Shaw is thought to be guilty of an allegorical reading. Allegory is generally contrasted, not with the surface of the text, but with its 'literal sense'; for this reason it is frequently regarded, both in ancient and modern treatments, as a branch of metaphor.[3]

This definition, however, is incomplete in every case and inaccurate in many. It is incomplete because it fails to observe that metaphors tend to be embedded in a sentence which is otherwise free of tropes, and in which there is consequently no real occultation of the subject. It is fashionable, with a nod to Roman Jakobson, to say that metaphor works by substitution, in contrast to another rhetorical figure called metonym, which works by contiguity.[4] Yet if we examine a sentence such as 'Egypt is a broken reed', we do not see a replacement of the subject by the metaphor, but only an augmentation in the form of a grammatical complement; a sentence such as 'the mantle of Elijah descended to Elisha' might seem to be a case of substitution, yet we might be hard pressed to say what 'literal' subject has been ousted by the word 'mantle'. Allegory, on the other hand, is genuinely a figure of substitution,[5] in which new linguistic coinages displace the common currency. If, for example, death is represented (as in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*) by the crossing of a river, we do not expect to meet more perspicuous references to dying in the narrative; if we do (as in Bunyan) we may rate this as a fault. Allegory, if well sustained, possesses an autonomy denied to metaphor and will impart some meaning even when it is not perceived as allegory; Hazlitt recommended that we read the *Faerie Queene* for the story alone,[6] but no one would suggest that we could derive more pleasure from metaphor by attending only to its outward sense.

It may be said that, even if metaphors work by juxtaposition and allegory by substitution, the two have this in common, that they illuminate the subject by comparison, and whether the relation be implied or stated, both must therefore posit some resemblance, correlation or community of attributes between the things compared. But once again Bunyan's masterpiece, which he himself described as an allegory, casts doubts on this position. The actors in *The Pilgrim's Progress* – Christian, Pliable, Faithful – do not *resemble* the qualities after which they are named, but *exhibit* them; they do not *imitate* Christians, pliable worldlings, faithful martyrs, but *exemplify* the type. The landmarks of the journey – the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death – are more often genuine metaphors, but even here some differ. Thus, although the world is not a fair, the buying and selling that goes on in it is, in Bunyan's view, all vanity: Vanity Fair might consequently be classified as an instance of synecdoche,[7] where the part stands for the whole. The pilgrim's way and the narrow gate at which he aims are strictly metaphorical, but even this cannot be said with confidence of the route described by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*: for all we know, he truly believed that hell is an infernal colosseum, that purgatory is a mountain in the antipodes, and that the saints dwell in the orbits of the stars. His characters, drawn from history, once again do not *resemble*, but more properly *epitomize*, the virtues and the failings that distinguished them in life. The term invented by an eminent critic for this device is 'figuration'.[8] Dante's poem is by common consent the crowning work of the allegorical tradition, and may for that very reason be exceptional; perhaps a more typical specimen is the first part of *Piers Plowman*, where the virgin Meed, who represents the wages due to virtue, is clearly metaphorical. Yet even here the Seven Deadly Sins are portrayed

through actions which are not likenesses of sin, but active sinners, simply human malefactors as they would be if they were freed from legal and physical restraint.

Similar reservations would apply to the *Romance of the Rose* (where even the garden might be real, and the lady, though called after a flower, is not portrayed as one), or to Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, the fountainhead of Christian allegory, where the combatants are armed and clad in metaphors,[9] but only to facilitate the literal exercise of the qualities which their names denote. Adding these to Dante, Langland, Spenser and Bunyan,[10] we have glanced at half a dozen witnesses: what have they in common? Not, it seems, a predilection for any one figure of rhetoric, yet all of them make use of human stereotypes, whether drawn from imagination or from history, as plenary yet concrete illustrations of a general law that governs nature, conduct or the polity of God. Another salient feature, in keeping with the principle laid down above, is that the universal is not merely expressed but encrypted in the particular – that is to say, some labour or some acumen is required for interpretation. Finally we must add – or every moralist who hits upon a latter-day application of the scripture would be treating it as an allegory – that the deeper sense is felt as the discovery not the creation of the exegete, that it seems to be part of the fabric of the work, and hence – as Steiner said in the language of theology – a 'real presence' that is waiting to be deciphered, not an arbitrary function that the reader has found it useful to impose.

Judging by these canons, we can see that, unlike many recent critics of the art, the early Christians who took offence at allegory knew what they were opposing. They did not deny – indeed Epiphanius strongly affirms – the presence of metaphors even in the New Testament; but a statement such as 'I am the vine' (John 15.1) does not conceal its subject, and is not unlocked with the same keys that we bring to an allegory. While the ancients lacked a clear distinction between typology and allegory, they evidently do not treat these terms as synonyms, and the doctrine that some passages of the Old Testament prefigure the work of Christ did not entail that every episode and prophecy can be applied to the human race *in toto*, as the allegorist assumed. Once we exclude mere metaphors, the typological passages and the many that do not appear to call for elucidation, the difficult residue includes the works ascribed to Solomon and the Book of Revelation;[11] but rather than hand these over to the allegorist, the casuistry of commonsense pronounced them 'enigmatic'.[12] In authors like Marcellus[13] and Epiphanius, this term implies that, where it was impossible to secure a pious agreement in the interpretation of them, parts of scripture were better left alone lest they obscure the transparency of other texts.

These strictures were passed on Origen in person after his death, but, as I hope to show in the following inquiry, they were not only anticipated but accepted in his own principles of study. A thoroughgoing exponent of typology, he did not confuse this with allegory, and his readiness to discern the face of Christ in every chapter of the Old Testament was as gratifying to his ancient critics as it is painful to his modern advocates. While he could not believe that there was any sacred text whose sense was wholly beyond recovery, he confessed that there were some which it was dangerous to peruse without instruction. Having gone so far with the conservatives, he drew the contrary inference that these were the texts that scholars had a duty to expound. For him, as for his critics, allegory is not so much a property in texts as a hermeneutic lens through which one seeks the universal in the particular; unlike

them, he holds that the very sanctity of the scriptures authorizes and indeed entails the use of allegory, as surely as the organic unity of the human self bespeaks the presence of a soul. As the conative centre of the agent, soul is the mate of spirit on the higher plane and of body on the lower; in the same way, allegory as Origen conceives it is the instrument that mediates between the corporeal parsing of the text, which some would term the literal reading, and the spiritual divination of its mysteries, which is otherwise called typology. And just as souls and bodies do not dwell in parallel worlds, but one is immanent in the other as the source and pilot of its vital functions, so the allegorical sense is not at war with the literal, but on the contrary endows it with the coherence and vitality of truth. Such an account of allegory, in the hands of a modern formalist, would represent the triumph of metonymy over metaphor;[14] but formalistic categories are too jejune to render Origen's doctrine of the interanimation of theology and life.

Allegory and the Philosophers

The term *allêgoria* does not occur in Greek of the classical period, though Cicero was aware of it[15] and the adverb *allêgorikos* was employed by the Stoic Cleanthes in the third century BC.[16] We hear of measures taken from an early date to palliate the absurdities of myth and to redeem the embarrassing legacy of the poets. Even in the sixth century one Theagenes of Rhegium is said to have interpreted the battles of the gods in Homer's *Iliad* as a metaphor for conflicts between the elements. Authors known to Origen showed more interest in Theagenes' contemporary Pherecydes of Syros, reputedly the teacher of Pythagoras and the author of strange myths which could be understood as glosses on those of Homer.[17] His name is also associated, both in modern and in ancient scholarship, with the battle between the Titans and the gods which was depicted on the ceremonial robe of the goddess Athena.[18] This picture and its lurid subject haunted the works of Plato and his followers, but Plato himself maintained that myths are better forgotten than explained away. However salutary the *hyponoia*, or subliminal intent, may be, he says in the *Republic*, it will generally be neglected while the sweet veneer continues to spread its poison in the adolescent soul. While that soul remains inscrutable to us, muses Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, what point is there in wondering whether Orithyia the local nymph was in fact a human maiden, and the Boreas who raped her merely a fatal gust of wind (*Phaedrus* 229d–e)? Here, as in Theagenes, the interpretative method of the allegorist is the 'physiological' one which seeks the meaning of the fable in some natural phenomenon or event. From classical times we have one extended specimen of such pleading, the papyrus of Derveni, which argues that the obscenities of myth and Orphic song will cease to trouble us if we let the natural world and the human faculties supply more decorous substitutes for the gods.[19]

In these early times, it seems, any tool that lay to hand could be suborned to the purpose of the commentator; it was left to Stoics of the Hellenistic era to put a rein on allegory, as well as giving it a name. The word 'Greek' now defined a tradition rather than a territory, and the aim of Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus was not so much to exculpate the classics as to make them witnesses to their own philosophy. In this the gods of epic and mythology were equated with the elements, Zeus

himself being taken for the spirit, fire or aether which pervades the world invisibly and is also a hegemonic flame, the leaven of divinity, within the human soul. Stoic physics, with its concomitant psychology, provided Heraclitus with his clue to the mind of Homer in the first century AD. In his *Homeric Allegories* the changeful seagod Proteus is matter, the meeting of Odysseus with Hermes is the soul's approach to wisdom, Athena drawing back the head of Achilles by the hair is reason chastening the passions of the heart. The first interpretation is metaphorical, the third metonymic (as reason does in fact subdue the passion of Achilles in the *Iliad*), while the second is perhaps a combination of the two. Fanciful etymologies were the stock-in-trade of early Stoic theology, but the most studious exemplar of this practice was Cornutus, also in the first century AD. Taking the entire pantheon as his model, he is seldom content with a single permutation of syllables. Apollo, for example, is the sun and thus the destroyer (*apollus*), but also, by a similar conjunction of etymology and metonymy, the healer (*apoluôn*) and the expeller (*apelaunôn*) of disease.[20] The Platonists continued to demur, and his contemporary Plutarch warns the young not to ape the Stoics in their violent handling of the text.[21] And yet he too derives both physiological and psychological doctrines from the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, and from the letter E which crowned the lintel of the Oracle at Delphi. Desultory experiments in this vein adorn the treatises of Maximus of Tyre,[22] although he still assumes an antithesis between poetry and philosophy. Even this was overcome a generation later, with the involuntary complicity of Plato, by Numenius of Apamea.[23]

By the late second century AD it was already a hackneyed charge that Plato decried the myths of others, yet beguiled the reader with fabulous narratives of his own construction. The strongest censures fell on the tenth book of his *Republic,* in which Socrates, shortly after driving Homer from the gates of his ideal city, draws a prospect of the afterlife, with its punishments, rewards and transmigrations. The trident, Er the Pamphylian (614b), being patently fictitious, this epilogue seems to countermand the criticisms of poetry and myth that Plato scatters throughout his dialogues;[24] and no defence of the myth would be complete unless it accounted for the similar flights of fancy in the *Symposium, Phaedo, Gorgias* and *Timaeus.* Worse still, Socrates seems to be a Stoic before the Stoics in the *Cratylus*, where, after all allowance is made for irony and wilful inconsistency, the greater part of the dialogue presumes that nature can be interrogated through the analysis of names. Taking the etymologies of the *Cratylus* in earnest, and perceiving that the vindication of Plato entailed the reconciliation of philosophy and poetry, Numenius married the myth of Er to Homer's representation of the underworld in the *Odyssey*;[25] the wily and storm-tossed hero of the poem was interpreted as a symbol of the soul in its precarious quest for heaven (Fr. 33 Des Places).

The method of exegesis is for the most part metonymic: Hades stands for that contiguous region which we call our world, its denizens are called dreams because our present life is a dream of the Ideas (Fr. 32.6–7), and the portals of the Sun may be equated with the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, through which souls come and go in Plato's vision (Frs 31, 34, 35). Like the descent through Capricorn to Hades, the ascent to heaven through Cancer is neither metaphor nor absolute reality: it is a foretaste of the true apotheosis in which the soul is liberated from the blandishments and errors of the flesh. The war between Atlantis and the Athenians,

a prologue to the cosmological myth of the *Timaeus*, is construed as an account of the unending war that the gods wage with the daemons both in the soul and in the natural elements.[26] The west being the location of Atlantis, the seat of daemons and the tenement of departed souls, this is once again a metonymic reading; and these examples ought to make it clear that allegory (though not yet so called) was a far more potent weapon in the hands of Platonists than in those of Stoics. For the Stoic physiology and psychology were cribs to be consulted when they were puzzled by the symbols of theology; for the Platonist theology was the mother tongue, of which the natural sciences were but dialects, and it was possible for all three to conspire in a single process of translation. Platonic exegesis involves a hierarchy of disciplines, made possible by an ordering of reality that subordinates the material realm to soul and soul to God. The legend of Atlantis would have been nothing but a story to a Stoic, but for a Platonist even history is redeemable, since soul coexists with time, the moving image of eternity, generating a mobile world and sowing it with tangible simulacra of the Forms.

Numenius, quoted four times in the *Contra Celsum*,[27] was perhaps the most recent Platonist with whom Origen was acquainted. But in Origen's younger contemporary Plotinus we meet hints towards a philosophical reading of the *Odyssey*, especially in his earliest work, *On Beauty*, which is manifestly indebted to Numenius. Elsewhere Plotinus presses the Orphic poems into service, and he regularly complements his logical meditations with a parable, evolving new and more transparent myths from those of Plato, when the subject is beyond the reach of words. Although his student Porphyry was too young to have left any mark on Origen, he was a literary disciple of Numenius and his allegorical treatise *On the Cave of the Nymphs in Homer* is the blossom of which Origen saw the bud. Its subject is the tenebrous but pleasant cave of living rock, frequented by the nymphs and equipped with separate gates for mortals and immortals, where Odysseus makes landfall on his return to Ithaca. No labour is required to equate this subterranean chamber with the underworld, and therefore by analogy with ours; the two openings are of course the mouths of Hades in the one case and the tropics in the other. The ascent from the lower to the higher plane is adumbrated in the journey of Odysseus: as he fled the enchantress, braved the tempests, dressed in rags, regained his kingdom from the satellites of pleasure and went on to seek his death among men who had never heard the ocean, so we too, having pierced the alluring texture of the world, must strive with pain of soul and hardship in the body for a home not yet revealed to us, for the peace that awaits the mind in solitude (80.8–21 Nauck). In this toil we are not left to ourselves, nor wholly passive to the gods: the collusion of divine and human energies is symbolized in Homer by the olive tree, Athena's sacred emblem, which stands as a mark or *skopos* over the lintel of the cave.[28] Porphyry here anticipates the use of *skopos* as a *termus technicus* in the later Neoplatonists to denote the principal object or intention of the text, to which the interpretation of any given passage in the text must be referred. To designate the olive as a *skopos* is to indicate that the goal of the text is wisdom, the prerogative of Athena: by this admonition we are freed from bondage to the literal meaning, just as in the narrative the tree itself facilitates the emergence of Odysseus from the rocks. Just as the cave delights the eye in spite of its obscurity, so the text gives pleasure even when it is but dimly comprehended; and, just as Odysseus

thought himself marooned until the mists were dissipated by Athene, so the wise mind will know that it is not at home in the deliquescent beauty of Homer's verse.

Perhaps it was during his studies with Longinus, the great philosopher and critic,[29] that Porphyry came to regard the semantic parsing of the text, its *hermêneia*, as its body and the more profound intent, or *dianoia*, as its soul.[30] Longinus indeed went further: building on the dictum of Aristotle that the words of a treatise function as its matter,[31] he discovered a correspondence between the Aristotelian categories and the senses, then applied this in rhetorical analysis to the 'body' of the text.[32] In Porphyry's exegesis of the *Odyssey*, the relation between the cave and the present world, between escape from one and progress in the other, is more truly metaphorical than anything that we have hitherto considered, and it might seem that his thought could be condensed in the neat disjunction that the body of the poem concerns the adventures of the body, and its soul the education of the soul. To this it can be objected, fairly enough, that matter is in fact a party to both sides of the metaphor, as perfection in the soul is unattainable without the prolonged and voluntary attrition of its envelope, the body. Nevertheless it remains true that the exploits of Odysseus in the cave are only symbols, not a species of the acts that a philosopher must perform for his salvation. Porphyry reads the epic as an allegory in which the human characters stand not for their human types (as in Dante and Bunyan), and not for the abstract properties of those types (as in Spenser and Langland), but for characters of an altogether different type, who exemplify a different kind of virtue. It is not without significance that, of the five authors mentioned in the last sentence, Porphyry is the one who is not a Christian. A Christian holds that soul and body are destined for the same heaven or the same hell when all accounts are done; for the Platonist any narrative that takes the good of the body as its final cause can only be metaphorically related to one in which the centre of interest is the soul.

Porphyry's antithesis between *dianoia* and *hermênia* is superseded in later Platonism by a contrast between the aim or *skopos* and the exposition according to the *lexis*. The latter expression signifies to Proclus not so much what we would call the literal meaning as the examination of particulars once the general import of the text has been established.[33] When it recurs in Origen's *First Principles*, the formula *kata lexin* and its cognates denotes the paltry literalism which fails to penetrate the membrane of the sacred narrative;[34] at the same time, his exegesis is more, not less, attentive to the surface of the archetype than that of his philosophical forebears and contemporaries, and his spiritual readings are often forced on him by his reverence for anomalies, ambiguities and obscurities that would be passed over in modern attempts to grasp the 'spirit' of an ancient author. As the reader's soul cannot be saved without his body, so he cannot be edified by the soul without the body of the scriptures.[35] We shall have occasion below to speak of Origen's Hebrew master; and it may be that the Jewish theologians Paul and Philo were the only authors known to him who combined the same disdain for superficial exegesis with the same fidelity to the graven syllables of the text.

The Alexandrian Tradition

In the writings of philosophers the emancipation of reason from the senses was habitually compared to initiation into the mysteries, whose rites, though superficially obscene and antiquated, were hallowed by the everlasting truths that they embalmed. The classic pattern of initiation was a threefold one: the ceremony, or *dromenon*, was succeeded by a speech of explanation, the *legomenon*, and this (in time) by the spectacle or *epopteia*, vouchsafed to few and not to be divulged. Heraclitus had argued that the premisses of allegory are established in the mysteries, and Plato freely appropriates the language of the adept, though he mocks those who imagine that the rites alone will secure them a better portion in the afterlife (*Republic* 364e–365a). Porphyry thus said nothing new in principle when he noted that the Mithraists met in caves and found his clue to both the presence and the tenor of the allegory in Homer in their fanciful cartography of the heavens. We do not know, however, of any Greek who appealed so often and so ardently to the mysteries as Philo of Alexandria: Jew though he was, he could hardly have been ignorant of the festivals that were celebrated with such pomp and colour in that city, and he may have learned by hearsay what was practised or experienced in the more esoteric stages. To him the mere perusal of the Torah is a mystery, its climax the immediate contemplation of divine truth in a 'corybantic ecstasy' of the kind that seized the worshipper in the orgiastic cults of Dionysus.[36] Before construing this as a sign of Philo's capitulation to Greek models, we should remember, first, that chronology will not allow him to be a 'Middle Platonist' in his use of allegory, and secondly that even the native mysteries of Greece were often thought by the Greeks themselves to have had their origin elsewhere. The idiom of the mysteries was therefore a cosmopolitan one, and eminently suited to Philo's project, which – as David Dawson has shown[37] – was not to Hellenize the scriptures, but to demonstrate, on the contrary, that a universal science of human nature had been thoroughly conned by Moses long before it came to the knowledge of the Greeks.

Philo's religion bound him to a host of daily and annual observances that had no obvious tendency to make him a better man. It was thus a pious duty, and not merely an apologetic measure, to affirm that the prohibitions and injunctions of the Law, however captious they appeared to be, were calculated to foster by analogy the pursuit of virtue and the restraint of vice. The beasts that the legislator called unclean exhibit traits that make them natural emblems of the unwholesome passions; cleanness is ascribed to those in which the parted hoof commends the analytical function of the intellect. The division of animal carcases in sacrifice is a symbol of the dichotomy between the corporeal and the incorporeal, the eternal and the temporal, the mind and the flesh;[38] it is thus another sign that the enthronement of the intellect in the inner life is the true end of the alimentary code. Nevertheless the Law differs from the mysteries in that mere obedience to it is supposed to be meritorious and the neglect of it always culpable: inward and outward purity remain, at every stage in life, contiguous elements of piety.[39] Literal observance may be complemented but never superseded by the secular philosophies, for what is the wisdom of the Stoics and Platonists but the fruit of that same Logos, the creative word and reason of the Godhead, who informs the Torah and every level of meaning in its precepts? Not only in the legal texts but in the historical passages,

the literal sense cohabits with the allegory, both readings being indelible, though the former is metonymically subordinate to the latter. The barrenness of Sarah is a riddle whose solution will unlock the whole mystery of exegesis. Hagar, Abraham's temporary concubine, is the vulgar or encyclopaedic learning of the Greeks; Sarah's fruitfulness after long sterility betokens the intercourse of the soul with wisdom, and Isaac the rational piety which is the lawful heir of such a bond.[40]

Philo often avails himself of the term *allêgoria,* which betokens in his work a shift in reference, not only from the outer to the inner life, but from a restricted and arbitrary virtue to a more natural, and consequently more universal, type. With this optic he scours the whole of Genesis, the life of Moses and much of the legislation in the Pentateuch, outstripping not only the Platonists of his own day but the Stoics of any period. For the Stoics some texts were difficult but none was sacred; Plato had no intention of leaving a bible to his followers, and it was only in the fourth century that they learned to read his dialogues continuously and to weave with the same vermicular tenacity from one obscure construction to the next. Even in the commentaries of Iamblichus and Proclus there is not that devout attention to the syllables and letters of the oracle that becomes a mark of Jewish and Christian study of the Bible after Philo. The claim that his light was borrowed from the gentiles has been answered with a battery of comparable practices and methods from rabbinic literature[41] – enough to prove, if nothing else, that the philosophic Jew of the Diaspora was not wholly estranged in spirit from the synagogue. If Philo's etymologies are unbiblical, that is only because he knew so little Hebrew; his loyalty to the dietary conventions that he interpreted so boldly made him in his own generation (or at least in his own estimation) a conservative. We have no cause to doubt that the 'Hebrew' master from whom Origen imbibed his critical principles while still in Alexandria was one of the intellectual posterity of Philo.[42] The word 'Hebrew' ought to signify an acquaintance with the language of the Torah; the custom of the ancients, pagan or Christian, was to refer to his Greek-speaking predecessor as 'Philo the Jew'.

But to Clement of Alexandria he was 'Philo the Pythagorean'.[43] This epithet need not imply a personal adherence to the sect, for Greek doxographers had noted a community of ethos, and suspected a community of origin, between Jewish and Pythagorean teachings long before the time of Clement. Each was a religion of perpetual observances, each credited its founder with a body of cryptic maxims which demanded interpretation because, unlike the sayings of ordinary philosophers, they contained not only wisdom but a law and a way of life. Clement held that the Greeks were always plagiarists when scripture and philosophy agreed (*Stromateis* 5.14), but perhaps his sobriquet for Philo means no more than that the Pythagoreans would have recognized him as an exponent of their own hermeneutic methods. The Neo-Pythagoreans embraced the 'mathematical' view that the founder's *Golden Verses* were not apodictic utterances but *symbola,* intelligible only when some virtuous disposition of the soul was substituted for the arbitrary conduct which appeared to be prescribed. The 'acousmatic' principle of adherence to the letter was already moribund by the time of Aristotle;[44] none the less the Neo-Pythagoreans did not so much adopt a metaphorical reading of the verses as reverse the order of metonymy. Vegetarianism remained compulsory, and the commentator Hierocles dispensed the body from practical obedience only during its novitiate: once the soul

is perfect it will compensate for the weakness of the body, rendering possible the literal fulfilment of the most difficult commands.[45]

This symbolic translation of the ancient precepts furnished Clement also with a precedent for his expurgation of anthropomorphic passages relating to God in scripture. Whether it is allegory to deprive God of his limbs, his tool, his human ignorance and his human passions is a question that we may leave to Biblical scholars; immutability, impassibility, omnipotence and omnipresence were axioms of the philosophy of religion in that period as in ours. Nor is it clear why even a theologian should take fright at Clement's praise of the 'Gnostic' Christian, since the knowledge that he extols is a discerning meditation on the scriptures – not an alternative to faith and service but an avenue to proficiency in those virtues. More distinctly reminiscent of Plato is his division between two senses of the scripture, not the fleshly and the spiritual as in Paul, but the fleshly and the noetic,[46] as though the spiritual perception were the exercise of a mental faculty. In his treatise *On the Salvation of the Rich Man*, the noetic understanding of the injunction 'Sell thy goods to feed the poor' is one that allows the Christian to retain his goods so long as he contemplates them with detachment and employs them for the purposes of God. Perhaps this is a sophistry, but very few Christian moralists since Clement have insisted on a literal application of this text, and even his 'noetic' sense is a counsel of frugality that few of his modern critics would be willing to espouse.

Here as elsewhere in Clement the opinion of a heterodox authority is quoted without disparagement. In his principal works he seldom speaks of his own decipherment of a biblical passage as an allegory, except where the trope is signalled and interpreted by the context and is thus (as I have argued above) not truly allegorical. In his *Gleanings from the Prophets*, where he tries to strain the hyssop from the vinegar in the thought of his Alexandrian precursors, he reserves the verb *allêgorein*, more properly, for passages that would also admit of a literal construction. Thus it is an allegory when the formless void of Genesis 1.2 is said to denote the primitive matter of the universe (Chapter 8); a Stoic might have said this, but only a Churchman, or one who counted himself as such, would have proposed as his second allegory an interpretation of baptism as a passage from the 'waters below the firmament' (Genesis 1.7), in which we immerse the body, to the spiritual 'waters above the firmament', which effect the cleansing of the inner man. The sacrament anticipates the escape of mind itself from merely 'hylic' or material perception; allegory in the Christian use of scripture is therefore not an exotic plant but the corollary of faith. According to the typological principle, which is widespread in the New Testament and signified already by the occurrence of the word *tupos,* the repeated and imperfect sacrifices of the Mosaic code were finally subsumed and surpassed by the offering of a single, perfect victim; the sacramental principle, as this author understands it, works to the opposite effect, as it presumes that God's first act of grace can be recapitulated at constant dates in the ecclesiastical calendar, functioning as a portent and an instrument of recreation in the Christian life.

We see then that the antithesis between flesh and spirit, even in exegesis, did not lead to a divorce between Gnostic wisdom and the catholic tradition. Still less fissiparous is any scheme that introduces a third or fourth term to imply that there is more than one alternative to the literal sense, or at least that it is possible to transcend it by degrees. From Clement himself we learn that the Valentinian

Theodotus had divided the sayings of Jesus into three categories: The Saviour, he declares, spoke some things mystically and typically, some parabolically and enigmatically, some openly and plainly, but in private (*Excerpts from Theodotus* 66). This hint that the most perspicuous sense was purposely withheld from the multitude may seem invidious, but it also seems to be a plain construction of at least one Gospel passage: I speak to the crowd in parables, says Jesus in Mark's Gospel, so that 'seeing they may see not and hearing hear not, lest at any time they should understand and amend their ways'.[47] This verse has taxed both ancient and modern critics, but, as we shall see, one cardinal aim of Origen's exegesis is to show that all obscurity in the scriptures is contingent, that nothing was designed to remain concealed from those who persevere in seeking. Hence it is that his own triadic reading of the text looks for support to the catholic doctrine of the Trinity, a familiar taxonomy of intellectual disciplines and the threefold constitution of the self, which is a doctrine of experience underwritten by an apostolic prayer.

Origen and the Word of God

Though fragments survive of Clement's *Hypotyposes,* together with long extracts from the commentaries and Biblical dissertations of Hippolytus, we possess no earlier specimens of Christian exegesis that are so long and comprehensive – so Philonic, we might say – as those of Origen.[48] To him the Old Testament and the New are 'scripture' without distinction, and no more than the Jews or his fellow-Christians does he trace the authority of 'what is written' to the personality of its human author. His Christology leans heavily on the so-called Wisdom of Solomon, though the title of that treatise, as he knows, belies its origin; and he speaks with some acerbity of those who deny a hearing to the Book of Tobit merely because it is not an item in the Hebrew canon. As for the Epistle to the Hebrews, he opines that God alone can say who wrote it, but affirms its canonicity by quoting from it repeatedly as from Paul. On the other hand, he warns us against the putative works of prophets and apostles, which style themselves *apocrypha* or secret texts because the Church has made no use of them in its public ministry.[49] It is therefore not its provenance, but the sanction of the worshipping community, that defines a work as scripture: to be 'written' is to be suitable for reading, whether in private meditation or at a gathering of the saints. Platonists could make nothing of this notion of a sovereign text in which the author's name may have no function but to advertise the presence of inspiration; Plato indeed had argued in his *Phaedrus* (275) that the inspiration dies with the act of writing, and the text is the mute simulacrum of a thought that it is powerless to uphold or revise in the face of controversy. Few of his followers took him at his word, but they continued to pay more honour to the ancients than to the literary or lapidary artefacts that survived them. Porphyry, for instance, reasons that if the cave in Ithaca was Homer's own invention, that is proof that it was not an idle fiction; if instead the poet was merely describing the handiwork of older masons, we can be sure that they would not have built in vain. The author being the reservoir of wisdom, such accolades as 'divine' or 'great' belong to him exclusively, while the text itself is so far from deserving them that the critic has a duty to excise what he can show to have been put in by a different hand.

The Jewish Pseudepigrapha, composed in the names of distant patriarchs when the succession of the prophets was believed to be at an end, combines this high regard for the author's person with a superstitious reverence for the book. In the works ascribed to Enoch and Ezra, writing is not a means of preservation but an instrument of secrecy, which seals the plan of God from mortal eyes, and thus of course from the scrutiny of Israel's teachers, until providence lays it open to a worthier or more needy generation. The infant Church, while claiming to be the custodian of a 'mystery that was hidden from the ages' (Colossians 1.26; cf. Romans 16.25), professed to have learned it not from a buried book, but from the words of Christ himself and his disciples. To this deposit Alexandrian Christians had subjoined a more arcane one, handed down through a chain of privileged apostles whether as oral testimony or as text. Clement himself subscribes to a tradition of this kind, yet he is also the first eccelesiastical writer who bears witness to the currency of a written 'canon',[50] whether this means an inventory of documents or the hermeneutic rule by which he reads them. These postulates – a private gospel on one hand, a fixed and public canon on the other – would appear to be in conflict and not easily reconcilable with the axiom that Christ himself is the revelation of the mystery. Origen, by adopting the Church itself as his apostle, catholicity as his test of authenticity, secures the common faith against subversion by a clandestine tradition. At the same time, he argues that a simple reader is likely to be deceived by truth itself until he understands that the word of God in scripture is identical with the Word of God incarnate, whose divinity was hidden from the senses by the same fleshly apparatus that disclosed it to the spiritual eye.

As one might expect, he finds this principle particularly apposite to a commentary on John:

> The whole word of God, the 'Word that was in the beginning' [John 1.3], is not manywordedness (*polulogia*), for it is not words. For it is one consisting of many notions, each of these notions being a portion of the whole word ... So that our meaning is this, that the one who utters anything at all that is foreign to godliness is a man of many words, while the one who says what pertains to truth, even if he says everything without omissions, is always saying one word and the saints are not men of many words as they hold to the purport of the one word. (*Philokalia* 5.4; p. 45 Robinson, citing *CommJoh* 5)

This paragraph implies, but is not reducible to, the proposition that all scripture is a revelation of the mind of God. We have noted above that Origen does not distinguish clearly – perhaps we should say, has evidently chosen not to distinguish – between the cosmological Christ and the Christ of Nazareth, the eternal word of God and the one who preached that word in history. It is therefore not surprising that in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, where his goal is to discern the Spirit behind the veil of sacrifice, it is not the celestial Logos, but the tangible and audible one, the God-man of the evangelists, who furnishes the hermeneutic key:

> The Scripture is constituted, as it were, of the visible body, the soul within which lends itself to conception and comprehension, and the spirit which as it were involves 'the types and shadows of things celestial'. So then, having called upon the one who has framed the body, soul and spirit in the Scripture, the body for those before us, the soul

> for us and the spirit for those who 'shall inherit eternal life in the age to come' ... we shall discover not the letter but the soul in the present instance.
>
> (*HomLev* 5.2; p. 334 Baehrens)

There can be no doubt that the one who is invoked here is the Word who became incarnate and thereby caused his own handiwork, the visible text of scripture, to disclose the latent truth that was concealed from 'those before us'. As he is the fulfilment of the sacrificial law, the one oblation for our sins, the eternal prototype and now the sole inheritor of the sacerdotal office, his threefold revelation is prefigured in the three categories of vegetable sacrifice and in the three phases of initiation which are respectively allotted to the laity, the Levites and the priesthood (3.3; 3.6; pp. 340, 344 Baehrens). Origen seldom misses an opportunity to repeat Christ's admonition that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood to enter into the Kingdom, and he always adds that these words cannot be literally obeyed, but are fulfilled in the continual mastication of the scriptures. Only when the surface, the mere letter of the written text, is broken like the loaves before the feeding of the multitude, can the spirit emerge, and then it propagates truth in such rich quantity that even after the reader has taken his fill the remnant far exceeds the original provision (*HomLev* 4.10; p. 331 Baehrens).

Thus the enacted law portends the physical and spiritual immolation of the same Christ who is present as body, soul and spirit in the written law; the threefold nature which he shares with us is the foundation of Origen's longest sketch of a hermeneutic theory in the fourth book of his treatise *On First Principles.* Citing 1 Thessalonians 5.23, where Paul invokes a blessing on the body, soul and spirit of his correspondents, Origen suggests that scripture is likewise triple-stranded. In history its body is the bare narrative, in ethics the commandments in their simplest application. Its spirit, permeating texts of both kinds, is the mystery of salvation, providentially occluded in the Old Testament and revealed without disguise in many portions of the New. This obnubilation of the Gospel within the Law had been a presupposition of Christian exegesis ever since Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, had equated the Church with Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and the synagogue with his servile mistress Hagar.[51] In this one instance Paul eschews the noun *tupos* for the participle *allêgoroumenon* (Galatians 4.24). Nevertheless tradition has been so hostile to the term that it is sometimes not translated in English versions of Galatians; Chrysostom's peremptory verdict that allegory in this context is a synonym for typology[52] has been tacitly or openly applauded, notwithstanding the fact that Christ himself is the usual referent of typology in Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. Origen says, more warily, that Paul's allegory is the 'spiritual sense', and in his commentaries and homilies this term embraces everything that was done or instituted through the earthly mission of the eternal Christ.

If the Church as an institution is one referent of the spiritual sense, we must ask what constitutes the second order of meaning, which is styled the 'soul' of scripture in his writings and the 'ecclesiastical sense' in the most distinguished modern studies. This nomenclature is clearly justified by Origen's appeal to 1 Corinthians 9.9–10 as a proof that Paul himself was familiar with the soul of scripture.[53] In this verse, with the loaded question 'Does God care for oxen?', Paul construes the Deuteronomic precept, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth the corn'

(Deuteronomy 25.4), as an exhortation to pay the wages of the evangelist. It suffices for Origen's purpose to cite the question in the treatise *On First Principles*, but on a number of occasions in his other works he adds that Paul interpreted the oxen as the apostles. In the prologue to his commentary on the Song of Songs he states in so many words that the inferior of the two figurative senses in the scriptures is the ecclesiastical one, and when canvassing the spiritual intention of the Jewish law he often seeks a meaning for 'the Church'. How then, without inconsistency, can Origen treat the parable of the Church and synagogue in Galatians 4 as a distillation of the spirit from the patriarchal narrative? The answer is, it seems, that the 'ecclesiastical sense' does not subtend the Church as a body, but the reader himself, the Christian, as a member of that body; it is not so much the meaning *with respect to* the Church as the meaning *in* the Church. It is not without reason therefore that Rufinus speaks of a 'moral sense', though the adjective *moralis*, like its antonym *literalis*, lacks an equivalent in the cases where it is possible to collate his Latin with the original Greek. The disjunction between the moral and the literal is unfortunate, as Origen preached literal obedience to the majority of commandments, and is said to have carried this in youth to the point of self-castration. Nevertheless Rufinus has perceived the important point that we seek practical rather than theoretical edification from the soul of scripture; it could hardly have been otherwise, as the organ for discerning it is the human soul, whose characteristic function is the exercise of liberty in a reasoned choice of life.

Pedantic as this formula may seem, it is necessary to stress the coadunation of will and reason in the moral life in order to defend Origen against the appearance of inconsistency in his exegesis. It is well-known that he seldom carries out his threefold scheme,[54] and customarily stops short at the antithesis between flesh and spirit, or sometimes between the plain sense and a mystical or allegorical one. While the term 'mystical'[55] often seems to qualify the more sublime interpretation, and 'allegorical' (notwithstanding Paul[56]) the more practical one, a rigorous trichotomy – say, 'literal, allegorical, mystical' – is not maintained, and it may be hard to determine whether his reading aims to penetrate the soul or the spirit of a given text. Such questions become less pressing when we remember that in Origen's anthropology the spirit, joined to Christ by the logical faculty, is the seat of understanding and without its cooperation it is impossible for the soul to advance in virtue. Conversely when a saint is so proficient as to be, in the Apostle's words, one spirit with his saviour, his soul and body, far from being parted from his spirit, become entirely obedient to its promptings, and its purity is manifested in their activities. If we assume a similar covalence between the soul and spirit of scripture, it is evident that neither can be grasped without some inkling of the other, and indeed that a true cognizance of the spirit will involve an equally perfect apprehension of the soul. Nor have we any reason to suppose that exegetic speculation is a narcotic to activity: on the contrary, the spirit arms the flesh, and it is the labours of the outer man that verify the inner man's deduction of the spiritual sense. Thus we read in a homily on Leviticus:

> Let the priest of the Church, then, pray without ceasing that the people in his charge may overcome its invisible enemies, the Amalekites, who are the demons ... let us pray God that he himself will deign to reveal and show to us how we may observe the spiritual law

> not only in understanding but in deeds, so that we may be worthy to attain spiritual grace, enlightened by the law of the Holy Spirit. (*HomLev* 6.6; p. 370.2–10)

Elsewhere Origen asks why some commandments in Leviticus pertain to the 'soul' and others to 'the man'. He concludes that the former term is used of one who is merely capable of obedience, the latter of one who sanctifies obedience by uniting it with spiritual discernment (*HomLev* 2.2; p. 292.17–20 Baehrens etc.) Since the whole Law demands to be obeyed in spirit, precepts that appear to have the soul or body as their destination must, in Origen's view, be figures of synecdoche. The designation of spiritual agents by the term 'man' is another instance of this figure, as it is only by participation in Christ, whose image we are, that we can hope to achieve integrity of conduct in submission to the spirit. Every rational creature partakes of Christ by intellect, and every believer is 'one spirit' with him (*Cels.* 2.9 etc.). Although the Church is called his body in Paul's epistles, Origen chooses terms that are more in keeping with his exegetic scheme and his conviction that it is only the inner man who bears the likeness of his Maker: the Church, he argues, is the 'soul of Christ' (*HomLev* 5.13; p. 354.1 Baehrens).

The *Commentary on John* repeats the lesson that the inner man is holiest when the outer man is most at the disposal of God and of his human neighbour. This work, which was commenced some time before Origen's departure from Alexandria, admits not three but two modes of exegesis – the 'practical' explication of the letter and the more rewarding enterprise of *theôria* or reflection.[57] In translating one of the classical philosophers we should render *theôria* as 'contemplation', since for them it was an activity of the freed, or at least sequestered, intellect. The heights and depths of mind are not plumbed by reading, although reading may inform the exploration; while contemplation may prepare a man for social conduct, it is exercised at its purest in the society of friends. Very different is the *theôria* of Origen, which begins with the juxtaposition of like passages from scripture, so that one decree of God may be illumined by another. Through this interlocking, or rather mutual unlocking of authorities, the scholar learns to take the narrow way and to avert his feet from the broad path of destruction.[58] The latter is for those who are not aware that the ground on which they tread is holy, and who therefore will not loose the shoes that typify carnal knowledge of the Saviour;[59] the narrow way is for those who are prepared to walk unshod, without a wallet to contain the mere necessities of life. Even if Origen suffered these ordeals in mind alone, his life was the pilgrimage of one who had been ordained to preach the kingdom, not the cloistered odyssey that Porphyry enjoins on the philosopher in his allegorical treatment of the cave.[60] *Theôria*, the vision of the Good, may be the terminus of a quest for the philosopher; for Origen *theôria* is the vision of one's duty within the text, and thus the prelude to a new task which ends not in an act of seeing, but in union with Christ.

When in Latin renderings of Origen we meet the word *intentio*, we may guess that it corresponds to the Greek *dianoia*, which would signify, as in Porphyry, the intellectual tenor of a book, the truth that sleeps beneath its canopy of words. There is nothing to attest his use of *skopos*, but it is clear that Christ himself is the goal of every navigation in the scriptures. At the same time he lights the path, not only by his constant irradiation of the mind but by the afterglow of one corporeal epiphany.

In Leviticus there are two lamps, one for the people and one for the priest; by parity of reasoning, says Origen, there are two illuminations, one of soul and one of spirit. Porphyry's equation of the olive with wisdom represents the inferior, more diffuse illumination which plays midwife to the birth of allegory by an extension of the sense from the particular to the genus. In this there is, for Origen, no fallacy, but the summit of understanding is achieved by a return from the generic to the particular, the discrete and yet ubiquitous event of the Incarnation, whose concomitant is the unity of the human race in Christ. As the Valentinians may have seen, the Saviour cloaked his thought in riddles to stir a gradual awakening of insight in his followers; his ministry, as reported in the text of our four gospels, serves as prototype and catalyst to the reader's emancipation from the 'body' of that text:

> [C]ondescending occasionally to him who is unable to look upon the splendour and brilliancy of the Deity, he becomes as it were[61] flesh, speaking with a literal voice, until he who has received him in such a form is able, through being elevated in some slight degree by the teaching of the Word, to gaze upon what is, so to speak, his real and pre-eminent appearance. (*Against Celsus* 4.15)

Here we see *in nuce* what is at issue between the Christian and the Platonist. To know that the olive is a sign of wisdom one needs something more than a common education; but a Christian who simply believes the Gospel is (in Origen's opinion) saved already, though of course it is his duty, where he can, to attain a better understanding under the guidance of the Church. While there is a danger that the simple will see only the humanity of Jesus, that is a danger against which scripture itself can be seen to protest when we lay one verse by another and endeavour to trace the pattern from within. To say that wells or lamps or modes of sacrifice are literary surrogates for the study of the Bible seems as arbitrary to us as any Porphyrian exegesis; Origen, however, would reply that it is the study of the Bible which suggests and will corroborate his translation of the symbols.[62] Catechism, homily and commentary bring no extraneous wisdom but elicit what the Logos has already made incarnate in the text.

The Mystery of Christian Maturation

Scripture, according to Origen's 'Hebrew master', can be likened to a hall with many doors; all are locked, and beside each is a key, though on most occasions it is not the key to that door but another (*Philokalia* 2.4; p. 39 Robinson, commenting on Psalm 1). The import of this parable is that the words of Holy Writ are used symbolically in some places and transparently in others, the latter serving as a gloss upon the former. The most serviceable keys are those that we see to have been applied by the Biblical authors. Thus the graduation from the lower to the higher sense is likened in Paul's letters to the weaning of a child from milk to meat;[63] Origen infers that any reference to diet, in the Gospel as in the Torah, is not only amenable to a higher reading, but a summons to the pursuit of such a reading. All talk of flesh, or of any carnal barrier, in the scriptures is transfigured when we meditate on the rending of the veil at the Crucifixion, the equation of this veil with

the flesh of Christ himself in Hebrews and Paul's citation of the veil of Moses as a simile for the ignorance of the Jews.[64] At other times the commentator must play the role of locksmith: first commonsense reflection will persuade us that the well perceived by Hagar was a symbolic one[65] and then we are free to impose the 'allegory' on all the other wells in scripture, be they those that were dug by Isaac,[66] the one in which Jacob languished or the one from which the Samaritan woman quenched the thirst of Christ.[67]

We see a metaphor of the classic type in such a saying as 'Our God is a consuming fire' (Deuteronomy 4.24), where the referent is stated and the complement cannot be taken literally:[68] comparison with the properties of God and fire in other texts reveals the meaning here, which is that God instils his power into the soul as a caustic antidote to filth and sin. At any time in history it would have been logical to draw the inference, with regard to the Mosaic code, that the most acceptable sacrifice is the inward purification of the worshipper; but only with Christ's own sacrifice did the literal application of these ordinances fall into abeyance, and the covenant that overthrew them instituted the eucharist in their stead. This, though received through the mouth, is to be digested in the spirit; throughout the work of Origen it is an axiom that the sustenance of the inner man, the proper field for the exercise of our 'spiritual senses', is the Word. The Word, being Christ, is the universal subject, and since almost every verse admits of two or three interpretations, almost every verse is an epitome of the hermeneutic process and the spiritual ascent that it entails. There are certain texts, the Song of Songs for instance, whose carnal sense could not be applied without prejudice to the virtue of the reader; but every text is patient of a spiritual construction, and Origen was blamed by later authors for his willingness to plumb the 'enigmas' of the Book of Proverbs. To him this book was an indispensable clue to the entire plan of the scriptures, for it was the first and the most perspicuous of the three works that are ascribed to Solomon in the Hebrew canon. Origen himself did not despise the Wisdom of Solomon, so perhaps he is repeating a lesson of his Hebrew master when he argues that these writings were arranged, with an eye to pedagogy, by Solomon himself:[69]

> There are three general disciplines, which the Greeks have styled *ethike, physike* and *theorike*: these we may call [in Latin] moral, natural and speculative (*inspectiva*). Some indeed there are among the Greeks who also put logic ... in the fourth place ... What we call the moral one is that whereby integrity in living is imparted to us and a mode of education that leads to virtue is set out. The one that we call natural is that wherein the nature of everything is discerned, whereby nothing in life is done in defiance of nature, but everything is directed to those causes for which the Creator fashioned it. That which is called speculative is the one by which, having risen above the visible, we contemplate something of the divine and celestial order and look upon it with the mind alone, as they exceed corporeal vision.

There may be more originality in this paragraph than its author claims for it. Divisions of philosophy into three branches – ethics, physics and logic, or physics, mathematics and theology[70] – were more widespread in the ancient world than the fourfold scheme that Origen attributes to the Greeks, but a tripos culminating in *theorike* does not appear in any pagan author. We ought to note at this point that the text is in dispute, as the manuscripts contain three credible readings for the Greek

name of the third discipline: *enoptike*, *epoptike* and *theorike*. Of these the first is now preferred by French and English scholars, perhaps following the example of De Lubac.[71] It is, however, confined to a single family of manuscripts, albeit the largest one, and is not elsewhere attested in Greek or Latin. Origen's vocabulary in other texts, the practice of his disciples[72] and the precedents in Greek authors all conspire to recommend the word *theorike* in this passage; if we prefer the *difficilior lectio*, *epoptike* has the merit of being Greek. It is clear in any case that Origen's sequence finds a match in the tripartite pattern of the mysteries – *dromenon*, *legomenon*, *epopteia*.[73] Ethics would, on this account, be the 'thing done' in obedience, physics (or, as I say below, cosmology) the 'thing stated', and *theoria* the vision at the climax. With an evasion worthy of the Greek initiate, Origen speaks in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* of experiences surpassing the richest fruits of intellection, 'which none but those who have felt them understand'. We have noted the old alliance between the mysteries and allegory, and we may add here that champions of the outward rites used arguments that remind us of Origen's plea that the appearance of absurdity or obscenity in the sacred text necessitates a figurative reading. It must be said, however, that whatever he may have borrowed from the mysteries his aim was to demonstrate the superiority of a cult that could do without them. Defending apparent blemishes in the Old Testament against Celsus, he denies that the same indulgence can be extended to the gratuitous scurrility of the Greeks, and had he written a *Protrepticus*, we may be sure that, rather than drawing on the mysteries with the piety of Iamblichus or Aristotle, it would have mocked them in the style of Clement. A mystery in Greek parlance is primarily an act of revelation in concealment, a twofold drama half-elucidated by the intervening narrative or *legomenon*; for Origen the mystery is itself the *legomenon*, comprehending practice, faith and insight to divulge 'that which was hidden from the foundation of the world'.[74]

The theory of derivation from the mysteries is by no means incompatible with my own conjecture that Origen wished Solomon to anticipate the pains that Plato's editors were to take in the ordering of his dialogues. In these arrangements, always made with some thought of discipleship, the most solemn texts were frequently assigned to the 'epoptic' or 'theoretic' category, and the end of the quest was represented as a 'sacred marriage' or immediate communion with 'the gods'.[75] None of the classifications is entirely congruent with that of Origen, but Albinus,[76] writing a century before him, sifts the dialogues into five groups, the first three of which would lend themselves to the terms in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

> So that one may expel false opinions, one must acquaint oneself with Platonic dialogues of a peirastic character [i.e. those that 'try' the intellect], for these contain the interrogatory and, as it is called, cathartic factor. And so that one may call to light physical knowledge, one must acquaint oneself with dialogues of a maieutic character [i.e. those that act as midwife; cf. *Theaetetus* 149–50], since this is their proper function. But in order to embrace the distinctive doctrines, one must acquaint oneself with dialogues of a hyphegetic character. For this is their proper function, in so far as some contain physical doctrines, some ethical, political and economic doctrines, of which some have reference to contemplation and the contemplative life, some to practical life, and both to likeness to god [cf. *Theaetetus* 176b–c)]. (Albinus, *Isagoge*, pp. 150–1 Hermann)

Here is a testimony that the dialogues were read in the second century, an age in which we might otherwise suppose that the sole utensils of the student were florilegia and handbooks. As in Origen, physics succeeds to ethics, and both lead to theology, which, far from annihilating, subsumes and unites the two. Yet, except in the discussion of the myths and the narrative setting, no commentator on the Platonic corpus shows a disposition to allegory, typology or any departure from the literal plane; a distinction between philosophical and philological treatments was acknowledged, but it was rare to praise, let alone to practice both. Homeric criticism remains the standard by which Origen's should be measured, and the distance between the Christian and the pagan becomes apparent when we contrast Odysseus with Solomon. Odysseus, as we have noted, is only metaphorically admirable, the recovery of his little island kingdom being a nugatory object by comparison with the philosopher's deliverance of his soul. On the other hand, the worldly wisdom of Solomon and the insight into the ways of God displayed in Ecclesiastes are of value in themselves, as well as an indispensable preparation for the higher enlightenment of the Song of Songs. To indicate his passage from works to wisdom and from wisdom to the summit of revelation, the author speaks of himself in a different manner in successive writings: in the first he is Solomon, in the second 'king in Jerusalem' – a more pregnant appellation – while in the last he has no name, but as bridegroom has acquired the attributes of Christ himself (Proem, pp. 84–6 Baehrens). Though Plato's Socrates is his own best pupil in the dialogues, the commentators make him the omniscient tutor, a mouthpiece of the active rather than the potential intellect, of divine love rather than aspiring *eros*. In an age when so much rested on authority it could hardly have been otherwise: philosophy had no Christ. Solomon himself performs a dual role for Origen: as son and heir of David, he is a type of Christ, yet his graduation in wisdom is not unique but an example and exhortation to all believers; we may say that he stands for each of us by metonymy, by synecdoche for the Church. As life in Christ is the consummation of life in the Church, the spiritual and ecclesiastical senses of the Song of Songs are also metonymically related. The literal sense alone is to be discarded, for it is only by a metaphor – more properly, by a figure of substitution – that carnal desire can stand for the love of Christ.

The manhood of Christ is not a metaphor, nor is the fellowship of all humanity in his spirit; we shall consequently apply the salve of metaphor less frequently to scripture than, say, to Homer, and this in turn implies that there is less in it that requires an explanation from without. Of course the reader must be aware of the principle of typology – that male figures in the Old Testament, though historical, may also be prefigurements of Christ – and the principle of allegory – that one character may represent the whole species, or a universal quality of the species. But these are presupposed in the epistles of the New Testament, and there will seldom be any need of further help from the worldly sciences, such as music, mathematics or astronomy, which Plato recommends as a propaedeutic to the higher fields of knowledge. Not that such pursuits are to be despised in Origen's view; on the contrary, he suggests that God reserves them for the delectation of the righteous soul on its separation from the flesh.

Such, we hear in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, is the matter of *scientia*, a possession of no small value, but inferior to wisdom (*HomLev* 7.3; p. 371.6–10 Baehrens). The

information about the natural world that can be gleaned from Ecclesiastes is not speculative or empirical – the belief in previous worlds, for example, relies upon the verbal inspiration of the saying 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Nevertheless the Preacher has built a firmament for cosmology with his doctrine that our lives and deaths, with all times, fates and seasons, are in the hands of an inscrutable but surely wise Creator. The knowledge acquired by Solomon in his second stage of maturity foreshadows that which is granted to the soul in a state of freedom; as the body is addressed in Proverbs and the spirit in the Song, there is much common ground between Solomon's plan as author and Origen's practice as a critic. All that is required to complete the homology is a broader name than 'ecclesiastical' for the second sense in the threefold scheme of *On First Principles*: it is after all the absence of the Church in many contexts that leads Rufinus to prefer *moralis*.[77] Perhaps 'sapiential', a technical term in modern study of Solomonic literature, would convey the point that the faculty of wisdom, which Christ imparts to souls for the edification of the Church, is also the one whereby, with God's assistance, we intuit the grand design of providence.[78]

This discussion of Origen's exegesis has so far made little mention of allegory, and his own usage would suggest that this is a term to be employed with circumspection. We have seen that the participle *allêgoroumena* in the treatise *On First Principles* is a loan from the Apostle;[79] the cognate noun acquires a pejorative sense on two occasions in the *Commentary on John*, when Origen rebukes those who adulterate Christian doctrine by the multiplication of specious allegories.[80] When he defines his own reading of the text as *allêgoria*,[81] it is clear that the justifications of this practice which have satisfied pagan critics or modern theorists would have held no allure for him. He will not, for example, permit the Greek apologists to justify the odious veneer of a Hesiodic or Homeric myth by recourse to this device;[82] if he confesses, in his response to Celsus, that the Bible too makes use of allegories, he argues at the same time that the exterior is never so indecorous, and prefers such terms as 'figurative' or 'mystical' for the deepest meanings, which he is not prepared to disclose to his adversary.[83] Nor would he embrace 'reception theory' or any other school of modern criticism which maintains that the perceptions of the reader may be valid, and yet at odds with the intention of the author; on the contrary, in a comment on the Psalms preserved in the *Philokalia* he urges that it is only by discarding the apparent literal meaning and embracing the allegory that we can comprehend the 'will of the Holy Spirit in composing' words that would otherwise give offence.[84] As for the ancient commonplace, endorsed by Porphyry and Heraclitus, that the purpose of allegory is to ensure that wisdom is granted only to those who are wise already, enough has already been said above to demonstrate that Origen held the opposite position. Accordingly, in the *Commentary on John*, he speaks of allegory as an *anagôgê*, a 'leading up' of the intellect, thus condensing into a single word the cardinal premiss of his threefold exegesis – that the text of scripture is itself the stair by which the reader climbs to a higher understanding of its contents.[85] We should speak not so much of an allegorical meaning in the scriptures as of an allegorical process of ascent. When, for example, he argues in the tract *On Prayer* for an 'allegorical' reading of the verse 'in earth as in heaven', equating the Church with one and Christ with the other, he is not presenting us with a single reading, ecclesiastical or spiritual, but as it were with a hermeneutic

rainbow, spanning the interval through which the soul must fly on the wings of knowledge.[86]

Christology, anthropology and hermeneutics coalesce in Origen's opening *Homily on Genesis*, which also illustrates the coinherence and the mutual dependence of the three senses. According to the first chapter of Genesis, God created first heaven and earth, then light and on the second day a firmament to divide the upper from the lower waters. As it is to accommodate the sun the moon and the starry host, this firmament is identical with the heaven of the astronomers. If the narrative is to be preserved in its literal sense, we must surmise that the first creation is an incorporeal heaven, and therefore the abode of God himself. Christ has his seat as Logos in the realm above the firmament, but becomes incarnate in the sphere below it. If we aspire to join him in that region, we must live below as members of his body, the Church, in which the cultivation of the soul, in life and scripture, is the bond of sanctity. Since, however, we do not reach beatitude through the love of soul for soul, but through the union of our spirit with God's spirit, each must bear within him a microcosm of the two heavens, one contained in the spiritual and one in the psychic man. In so far as the Church is the body of Christ and a society of embodied saints, the firmament represents the veil of flesh which (as Paul says and the evangelists intimate) must be torn away so that the deeper sense of the text becomes apparent. The studious reader of Origen will, however, be aware that the visible firmament, of which flesh and the graven word are mundane symbols, is the barrier through which the soul must literally ascend on its path to spiritual fellowship with God. It is through the metaphors to which the physical world gives rise that we learn to understand that world as the nursery of our salvation.

Like the dichotomy between soul and spirit, that between the Church and Christ, the body of the Lord and the Lord himself, will be annulled at the Final Judgement, when each of the redeemed will become one spirit with his Maker. In the field of hermeneutics, this entails that the ecclesiastical sense is, properly speaking, not transcended but transmuted by the increase of understanding. We expect the same to be true of the literal sense, for it is not the body itself but the accretions of mortality and sin that will be doffed at the threshold of eternal life. To press the analogy once again, we can say that the historical text which constitutes the body of the scriptures, once it has been purged of its inconcinnities, contradictions and obscurities, is not merely an acceptable concomitant but an indispensable vehicle of the spirit and the soul. If God had never exercised his providence in Israel, had he not become incarnate at the birth of the Roman Empire, there would be nothing to guarantee the truth, or even circumscribe the content, of the spiritual meaning. Of course, before the body of the text becomes diaphanous to the reader, he himself must participate in the Trinitarian narrative of salvation. First his spirit must be perfected by the Holy Spirit to make him capable of the ethical life; next his soul must be imbued with the wisdom of the Logos; finally the Father grants the everlasting life which will necessitate the possession of a refined corporeal substance (*First Principles* 1.3.8 = pp. 61–2 Koetschau). This speculation, making the soul a lathe for the refashioning of the body, could be said to exemplify a Pythagorean strain in Origen; but where the object of the Pythagorean was to keep faith with a handful of versified precepts, Origen had the larger purpose – clearly indigenous to Christianity – of bringing about a harmony in scripture between philosophy and

rhetoric, history and morality, critical analysis and the regulation of life. Just as spirit is saved before the body, so we must apprehend the spirit in scripture in order to redeem the literal sense.

Mysticism, Platonism, Jewish Literalism

We have seen that Origen sometimes styles the latent sense in scripture the mystical one, and may have taken the ceremonial mysteries of the Roman world as the pattern for his reading of the Solomonic corpus. When it has a meaning at all, the word 'mystical' in modern English usually connotes an experiential knowledge of God acquired in solitude, distinct from (though compatible with) subscription to authoritative doctrines inculcated by the Church. Since the patristic era, those authors who are styled mystics, by themselves or others, are seldom either architects of dogma or continuous expositors of scripture; they are scrutineers of inward states, exponents of a higher sensibility, inducing or assisting the effervescence of the spirit by a voluntary mortification of the flesh. A mystical exegesis of the scriptures, on this view, would be verified only by the private illumination of the reader, and would be unconditioned by objective factors such as philology, lexicography, the age of the text, the stated or deducible intentions of the author or the character and capacities of his audience. Such an approach, we need hardly say, would be at variance with logic and commonsense as these are commonly exemplified by the academic critics of our own day; and such an approach, we are bound to say, would be equally foreign to the practice of Origen and to that of his philosophical contemporaries who venerated Plato only a little less than he revered the oracles of God.

If the axiom of historico-critical scholarship is that 'scripture should be interpreted from scripture', few moderns have observed it so assiduously as Origen; the principal difference is, perhaps, that the modern critic looks first at the adjacent passages, Origen at the analogous ones, whatever their proximity to his text. It is obvious that neither the first, the 'metonymic' method, nor the second, the 'metaphorical' one, has much hope of success without the other: Origen has elected, after all, to go verse by verse in all his commentaries, while the modern expositor retains his fondness for compact annotations beginning with 'cf.'. The commentator still concedes to Origen that words are applied both literally and figuratively, narratives constructed both as history and as parable; he assumes, however, rejecting Origen's synecdochic hierarchy of meanings,[87] that the literal and tropic senses are mutually exclusive, and that where the former is possible it is also the only one that is mandatory. Abandoning the plenary inspiration of the Bible, we are wont to distinguish, not between the inward and outward senses, but between interpretation and application: the former is circumscribed by the (now immutable) intent of the human author, while the latter, however edifying, is but the short-lived progeny of time and circumstance.

A middle way, familiar to theologians, is to treat the prophets and lawgivers of Israel as the bearers of sealed letters from the Spirit to posterity, and the death of Christ as the breaking of the seal. On this account the Old Testament is consciously enigmatic and unwittingly typological, while the New is to be read in a literal

manner, but for a peppering of metaphors and a difficult epilogue in Revelation. Plato was the New Testament and Homer the Pentateuch of the Greek philosophers who took issue with the Christians in Origen's time and after. The former, once his myths were perceived to be myths, was plain enough, although the philosophical (as opposed to the philological) exegete would view the Platonic corpus as a whole, and was always ready to engage the perspicuous teaching of one dialogue as his key to the obscurities in another. At times such an interpreter discards the obvious meaning of a passage in the light of general principles; at times a sort of intellectual heraldry enables him to divine the principal subjects of the dialogue in its characters and setting. The study of epic poetry, on the other hand, gives employment to the novice and a chaste veneer of eloquence to doctrine; unfortunately, criticism excuses rather than justifies the literary medium, being primarily a search for palliatives to the literal sense. Origen is much the more literal – even to the point of literalism – in three respects: he regards whatever is set down in letters as the province of the interpreter; he reads where he can 'according to the letter'; and where he supplements or countermands such a reading, it is always by appeal to the letter of some other text. By contrast, even such a sedulous exegete as Proclus restricts himself to those passages in Homer that had been denounced by Plato, seldom attaches any weight to the superficial tenor of a narrative, and elucidates the majority of these narratives with no touchstone but his private intuition. Porphyry, while more rigorous, is eclectic in his hermeneutic principles: evidence for his commentary on Homer's cave is gleaned from the *Republic*, from the precincts of Demeter, from Mithraic iconography – all on the presumption that the ancients neither did nor imagined anything in vain. One might compare the appeals to prayer and sacraments in doctrinal controversy among the Christians of the fourth century; but for Origen, as we shall see when we come to his sermon *On the Pasch*, practice acquires authority only as an extension of the written word.

Whatever Origen learned from the Platonists it was not the art of commentary: Porphyry says as much when he accuses him of filching his allegories from the Stoics.[88] The 'Hebrew master' to whom he alludes was evidently a Christian,[89] but it is possible to be such and still be, as St Paul avers, a 'Hebrew of the Hebrews' (Philippians 3.5). Origen reports, as a current practice, that perusal of the Song of Songs was forbidden among the Jews to those who lacked maturity of years and judgement; the infrequency of reference to this book in the Mishnah, coupled with attestations of its outstanding holiness, proves that he is speaking from acquaintance with the rabbis.[90] In the first of his *Homilies on Genesis*, he waives his usual preference for the Septuagint and construes the text of Genesis 1.26 to mean that humans were created, not in the 'image and likeness' of God, but in the 'image of his likeness'.[91] This is a Hebrew variant, and seems to bespeak a typically rabbinic circumspection in attributing human features to the Deity. In his comments on the formula, Origen maintains a discrimination between the image and the likeness which a modern exegete would think pedantic and, in so far as it relies on the Epistle to the Philippians, anachronistic; such a scholar would not admit to neglecting the literal sense, but when he takes the doublet 'image and likeness' as a pleonasm, he shows that he lacks that reverence for every jot and tittle of the Torah that was professed by Christ and later induced his countrymen to declare that, if the tail of a single character should be lost, the world would fail.

Rabbinic exegesis is not mystical in the usual sense: like Origen, it assumes that all theology is interpretation of the extant scriptures, and it accepts no gloss on scripture, natural or supernatural, but another word of scripture.[92] Origen takes this canon and weds it to an anthropology that he inherits from the New Testament, and to a threefold hierarchy of readings that he believes to be exemplified in the works of Solomon. His adherence to the letter is not violated by his frequent reference to the 'spiritual senses', for these are employed primarily in the parsing of the scriptures, and often appear to be characterized as 'spiritual' only because they yield a substitute for the literal meaning. Even where he is reasonably suspected of alluding to supersensual communion with God, this is no alternative, not even a preliminary, to exegetic practice, but a fugitive, intermittent and (above all) unsolicited corollary.[93] In the comparable passages which were cited in the last chapter from the pagan Neoplatonists, there is steadfast toil and no elusive Bridegroom; Origen for his part lays claim to no ascent, and they for theirs are conscious of no beckoning from above. Plotinus may commence an exploration of Plato's teaching, Proclus may conclude a meditation on Plato's language, with a mystagogic vision,[94] but in neither case is the ecstasy spontaneous, and in neither case does the vision bring them closer to the book.

In Protestant theology it is fashionable to distinguish between the aspiration of man to God and the condescension of God to us, with the rider that one is a manifestation of pride and one its remedy, one a badge of mere religion and one the staff of faith.[95] The Luciferian arrogance of the first way is stigmatized by the Greek word *eros,* while the Biblical virtue of *agape* is held to consist in a meek surrender to the sacrificial love of God. Origen is charged with having set a fatal precedent by urging in his proem to the Song of Songs that *eros*, as it is felt by the enraptured soul, is not a sin but a nobler and more ardent form of *agape.*[96] Fears that the intellectual cupidity of a Platonist has ousted the humility of Christian love in Origen may be heightened by the juxtaposition of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* with that of Proclus on the *First Alcibiades.* In the former Solomon as Bridegroom assumes the aspect of the Saviour, who, according to Origen, is consummate Eros; in the latter Socrates is the image and exemplar of that *eros* which the teacher aims to sow in his disciple as the seed of an indefatigable yearning for the true pleasures of the soul.[97] If anything, it might appear that Socrates, who is prompted by his love to commence a long interrogation of the wayward Alcibiades, is a more agapetic figure than the Bridegroom in Origen's commentary, who teases the reader by his fitful presence. The salient difference is, however, that Socrates, a dead man, is merely a symbol to the reader of the task that his mind must undertake in the fashioning of his soul; Christ, on the other hand, is always present, visibly if not apprehensibly, in the Biblical text, allowing himself to be touched and masticated by the reader as he once allowed his body to be handled by the unconverted mob. The death of Socrates is a past event, though it is movingly depicted in one dialogue and prophesied in others;[98] the life and death of the Word incarnate, tacitly but ubiquitously prefigured in the Old Testament, furnish us with the axes of theology and hermeneutic method in the New.

It would not be false to say that Origen thinks of the text of scripture as the continuing embodiment of Christ.[99] Such statements may, however, be rendered vacuous by a lingering ambiguity in the word 'text'. Occasionally we mean by this

a collection of significant marks on an artificial surface; more frequently, however, we refer not to the artefact itself, but to the abstraction that we may call its 'lexical content'. This is infinitely reproducible, indifferent to the medium, and therefore omnipresent, or at least potentially so, to the literate public. This is what Origen styles the body of scripture, though in slighting it he speaks at times as though it were identical with the ink-and-paper substrate. The soul and body of this text he differentiates much as the analytical philosopher of modern times distils the proposition from a sentence: the proposition is the logical essence of the thing said, it is what remains when metaphors are reduced to bland expressions or the sentence is correctly translated into another language. It is thus more universal than the sentence, rising above the temporal circumstances of the author and his audience, just as the soul or inner sense of Moses' law, in Origen's view, transcends the obsolete ceremonies in which it was once embedded. Analytic philosophy appears to lack a concept of the spirit, but when the canonical status of a 'text' is to be defended in any discipline, one seeks criteria of its lasting value, of its 'meaning for today'. Origen would have shrunk from such a phrase, because for him the real 'I' is not the mayfly consciousness of fallen man but the sempiternal spirit, which is most itself when most at one with Christ in the timeless future. But just as the prerequisite of this eschatological fellowship is the body, so the lexical content of the scriptures, mortal in origin and bound to a transient medium, is the vehicle of the everlasting Word. Whatever is true 'for me' in the revelation is so because it is true for everyman; through writing it can speak to the present hour as a prolonged reverberation of eternity in time.

Word and Sacrament

The body of scripture as Origen conceives it may be divided into history and ethics. The first is largely true as it stands, but will be of only antiquarian interest if it is not construed in a spiritual manner. The second may be further subdivided into ritual and quotidian regulations. The rules for moral guidance remain in force or are susceptible of a tropic application; the rites of the Mosaic code, however, have been surpassed and hence annulled by the work of Christ. We shall deal below with charges based on Origen's supposed indifference to the facts of history; of course no ancient Churchman would have quarrelled with his premiss that the ceremonial law, in its literal sense, is obsolete. The Epistle to the Hebrews had contrasted the death of Christ, his one oblation for humanity, with the repetitive and futile sacrifices of the old covenant (10.1–12; 13.10–13); in offering up the blood of bulls the Levitical priesthood reinforced the barrier of flesh that had been pierced on our behalf at the Crucifixion (Hebrews 10.20). Another early letter ascribed to Barnabas – sometimes thought to have been written in Alexandria – is even more polemical: not only is the cultic law rescinded for the Christian, but even when it was promulgated to Jewry it was not meant to be literally observed.[100]

Modern animadversions on the allegorical handling of the law protest that it is indifferent to the historical environment and false to the intention of the authors. Commentators of Origen's school reply that it is God himself who determines the purpose of his revelation, and that in the Incarnation he displayed the substance of

which ancient authors saw but shadows. More worrying for Churchmen, if not for scholars, of any period is the imputation that those who turn the ritual laws into ordinary precepts of morality will be equally contemptuous of the rituals of the new covenant, the eucharist and baptism, which scripture itself presumes to be the focus of assembly in the Church (Romans 6.3–6, Hebrews 6.1–2). The frequency with which Origen alludes to these ceremonies tempts his catholic apologists to proclaim him a 'sacramentalist';[101] but the homilies in which he asserts most clearly that the sacrificial code has been supplanted by the sacraments are also the ones in which he says that the spiritual fulfilment of the text is to be accomplished through obedient meditation on the scriptures. By sacrament he generally means a mystery of revelation rather than an act of collective worship.[102] His treatise *On the Pasch* reveals that, while he would encourage participation in the eucharist, he denies that it should be understood as either the recreation or the memorial of a discrete event; he contends that the death of Christ at the hands of sinners, though carried out 'according to the type' of the Biblical Passover, was not itself the 'antitype' that the festival was intended to prefigure (12.30–13.16). The Lamb whom we must take, slay and consume after the manner of the Jews is Christ himself, the everlasting Christ who is formed anew within the soul of each believer:[103]

> ... we partake of the flesh of Christ, that is, of the divine Scriptures ... of the true Lamb, for the Apostle professes that the Lamb of our Passover is Christ when he says *For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed* (1 Cor 5.7); his flesh and blood, as shown above, are the divine Scriptures, eating which we have Christ; the words becoming his bones, the flesh becoming the meaning from the text (33.1–2 and 18–30).

The bread of the eucharist is a material representation of his spiritual flesh which, being palpable, visible, audible only to spiritual and not to carnal senses, is not made present to them through the physical elements but through the more intangible, and therefore more intelligible, medium of the word:[104]

> For since there are five senses in the human being, unless Christ comes to each of them, he cannot be sacrificed and, after being roasted, be eaten. For it is when he *made clay with his spittle* and *anointed our eyes* (John 9.6–7) and made us *see clearly* (Mark 8.25), when he *opened the ears* (cf. Mark 7.33–5) of our heart so that *having ears* we can *hear* (cf. Matt 11.15; 13.19), when we smell his *good odour* (cf. Eph 5.2; 2 Cor 1.15) ... and if we touch him with the touch of which John speaks: *That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life* (1 John 1.1), then it is that we shall be able to sacrifice the lamb and eat it and thus come out of Egypt (18.11–19).

Here as elsewhere[105] the argument rests on exegesis rather than psychology: the existence of the spiritual senses is not divined by introspection but is to be inferred from the presence in the scripture of sensual idioms that could not be applied to God without blasphemy in the literal sense. This notion, so pervasive in Origen's writings, has no parallel in the thought of the Neoplatonists,[106] whose goal was liberation from the senses, not the supersession of a corporeal by a spiritual aesthetic. A Platonist might characterize the mere words of a dialogue as the matter of the thought, but not as the living flesh of either Socrates or Plato; and freely as he

availed himself of the mystical vocabulary, he would not think it reducible to language that connotes the enlightened reading of a text. Incantations, offerings and conjurations were practised by the heretics of Origen's day and by the dominant school of Platonism a generation after him; although Iamblichus furnishes these rituals with an intellectual charter in *On the Mysteries*, they were thought to be efficacious in themselves for the lower soul.[107] The discipline of the higher soul, a combination of bodily and mental exercises, was prescribed in such a work as the *Republic* and prefigured in the Iamblichean syllabus for the reading of the dialogues; but reading is no more than a preparation for an end which Greekless nations had achieved by other means, and it is only in Christian authors, as they insist on the uniqueness of the Biblical revelation, that the word itself becomes a sacrament.

Objections and Replies

There is in modern minds a distaste for allegory, sometimes amounting to bigotry, which the present chapter will probably do more to reinforce than to dispel. Those who harbour this sentiment as a theoretical prejudice may be referred to the literary theorists; but scholarship has a duty to protest on its own account against the groundless but tenacious belief that all figurative readings of the Bible are Greek accretions, foreign to the intention of its authors or its Author. Most English-speaking readers who have swallowed this anachronism receive it on the authority of the eminent Biblical scholar C.H. Dodd;[108] but it has in any case been the common opinion ever since Benjamin Jowett and Matthew Arnold[109] wrote to similar effect, with much less learning, in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless the Old Testament proves that parables were familiar tropes in the literature of Israel long before it became a province of the Greek world; the tortuous allegories in the books of Daniel and Enoch, composed under Macedonian rule but with no clear Greek precedent, can trace their descent from Ezekiel and from prophecies that travelled under the name of Zechariah.[110] As regards the New Testament, one would have to be very ignorant of the Talmud,[111] or unreasonably sceptical as to the dating of its contents, to deny that Jesus, in his role as rabbi, might have uttered the long and circumstantial parables that our Greek evangelists ascribe to him. Numerology, symbolism and other such artifices are no longer slighted by New Testament scholars; many now find, like Origen and in contrast to Maurice Wiles, that when the fourth Evangelist depicts himself as leaning on the bosom of Christ, the memory of the 'only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father' thrusts itself upon the mind.

It is equally false to say – though the objection is not new, and had its patrons even in the patristic era[112] – that Origen and his followers use allegory to make the text mean whatever they desire. It was never Origen's purpose to set the Bible against the Church, and the tedious ingenuity with which he extracts the same trite precepts from the law of sacrifice, the same orthodox Christology from the *obiter dicta* of the fourth Evangelist, is more offensive to many modern readers than his intermittent flights of speculation. His Pauline anthropology, his devotion to the Trinity, his adhesion to the Hebrew canon of Solomon's writings[113] all conspire to limit him to three ascending levels of exegesis, of which the first must always be

the literal one and the third the typological. The Platonist, on the other hand, could avail himself of as many different species of forced reading as his wit or his erudition could suggest. Five are enumerated in the treatise *On the Gods and the World* by Sallustius, a friend of the Emperor Julian; but as each of these is apportioned to a different race, it is clear that he is beating the bounds of anthropological knowledge in his century, and the number five is neither ancient nor immutable.

There is a third, more fashionable objection, that Origen had no use for history. Richard Hanson states that his conception of history is 'essentially Greek', which appears to mean for Hanson that he 'dissolves' it into 'religious experience'.[114] A conservative who believes that the Christian proclamation is based on fact and consequently 'vulnerable to history', Hanson praises the 'candour' of Origen's handling of the Old Testament, and is glad to remark that for him the crucifixion still took place at a 'point in time'.[115] Nevertheless he regrets that the fruits of this event are conveyed to us in Origen not by a sacramental 'meeting' with the Saviour, but through timeless meditation. He ignores the fact that this is a meditation on the written word, which is Origen's temporal image of eternity;[116] he pays no attention to Origen's own precept that we are nourished by the flesh of the risen Saviour and not simply by his passion; in the fervour of his polemic he goes so far as to insinuate that the treatise *On Prayer* prohibits any orisons to Christ.[117] One might suspect that Hanson is simply pleading the case for *agape* against *eros*, were it not for his hint that Origen was out to render the Christian faith invulnerable to history: *agape* trumps history, as it trumps all human action, not in Origen but in such 'kerygmatic' theologians as the Protestant Karl Barth.

There is no definition of history in Hanson's claim,[118] no rumour of the theological warfare that has raged about this term in the twentieth century. From his silence here and his arguments elsewhere, it is reasonable to infer that he shares the plain man's view of history as a veridical, sequential and discriminating record of events. He declines to say how many of the events rehearsed in scripture must be verified if it is to deserve the name of history; conservative as he is, we do not find him setting out to prove, with Origen, that every breed of animal could have been accommodated within the Biblical dimensions of the Ark. Ignoring the distinction which is drawn by German scholars between *Historie* (the mere chronicle of happenings) and *Geschichte* (the discovery of significance in these happenings),[119] Hanson cannot tell us how the knowledge of what was done or said in an ancient kingdom can enrich the faith or steer the life of a modern Christian. For Origen there was no chance of prescinding from this question, as he wrote in times before it was deemed admissible for a doctor of the Church to use one style when he wrote for scholars and another when he preached to multitudes.

Had Origen been as inimical to history as is often supposed, he would not have collated manuscripts and traversed the land of Palestine to determine whether the Baptist performed his ministry at Bethany or Bethabara (*CommJoh* 6.40–1 (24)). Had he ignored the structure of the Gospels, he would not have felt obliged to ask why the sequence of events succeeding the baptism of Jesus in the fourth Gospel is unanimously contradicted by the other three.[120] Critics will protest that he resorts to etymology in one case and to a spiritual construction of the fourth Gospel in the other. Yet, far from overruling the topographical information in the Gospels, the analysis of names is designed to show that the events occurred not only literally but

with historical propriety at the sites to which the authors have allotted them.[121] His argument against taking John at his word in his account of the early ministry is that then we should be forced to impeach the veracity of the evangelists or adhere to one in preference to the rest (*CommJoh* 10.8 (6)). This reasoning may be directed against the Marcionites, who acknowledged only the Gospel of Luke, as well as against Heracleon, who favoured that of John. Both heresies are said to have denied the Incarnation, but for Origen the same rule holds of scripture as of the Saviour: the spirit, unlike the letter, is always inalienable, but where the body serves spirit as an instrument, its reality is not to be denied.

Almost alone of ancient commentators, Origen takes the historian at his word when he relates that the Witch of Endor raised the ghost of Samuel;[122] against men of better judgement he maintained that even the Septuagintal portions of the Book of Daniel are an ancient record;[123] in short, he declares an interest in the veracity of inherited traditions that we do not see in Plato. There is no doubt that in Plato's thought the timeless has entirely displaced the temporal, and on the rare occasions when he undertakes to write history he is only half in earnest. The *Menexenus* appears to be a parody of the funeral orations (*epitaphia*) which perennially regaled the pride of Athens; such is the plasticity of memory in the *Timaeus* that whole epochs are alleged to have been obliterated, the legend of Atlantis being one scene from an age of forgotten glories.[124] In his *Republic* he sketched an ideal commonwealth, much as Christians spoke of a 'city of God' or polity in heaven; unlike them, he never thought, and barely wished, that such a city might be built on earth. It is not true, as is often claimed, that the Greeks maintained a cyclic view of history:[125] it is only the stars in Plato who inexorably return to their old positions, and no Greek ever wrote history as cyclic as the Book of Chronicles. It is, however, true that they possessed no eschatology, no notion of a predetermined end to the human comedy. Origen had such a notion; modern theologians, speaking generally, do not.

In fact those who maintain the superiority of *Geschichte* to *Historie* often intimate that faith has nothing to do with facts of 'scientific' history, and conversely that a narrative in scripture may convey a truth to faith though it is quite devoid of fact. But we cannot foist on Origen a principle which, if it were transferred from hermeneutics to Christology, would justify the 'docetic' claim that only an illusory assumption of the flesh was necessary for our salvation. This tenet was accompanied, or thought to be accompanied, by a belief in the redemption of the soul without its body; Origen's eschatology, on the other hand, implies not the extinction but the sublation of the body, and he likewise held that the past is not suppressed but becomes eternal when it enters the crucible of allegory. The school of Rudolf Bultmann will consent to entertain as 'myth' such episodes as the Fall, the Incarnation and the Second Coming, none of which have a place in scientific history; of the miracles of Jesus, the machinations of his royal forebears and the sacerdotal rituals which the early Church construed as anticipations of his sacrifice, a modern faith in their view will say nothing. And although Bultmann insists that eschatology was the heart of Jesus's gospel,[126] the only resurrection that he will countenance is an inward one, since in the modern world it would be pedantry to demand the immortality of the flesh. The *Heilsgeschichte* (history of salvation) which was preached in Bultmann's wake by Oscar Cullmann[127] may be history in so far as it

professes to trace the invincible consummation of God's purposes from the morning of the world to its final day; but once again it is history of too lofty a character to stoop to evidence. Origen for his part thinks the world and its transactions merely shadows, but in scripture and dogmatics, as in life, there is no shadow without a substance. From the actions of the body we deduce the inner man, and through the transient phenomena that vex us we descry another world, which will outlive the present one and yet make sense of all that has occurred here. At home in the body, Paul says, we are absent from the Lord;[128] but even an absent monarch may do much through intermediaries who display his signature. The signature of God, in Origen's thought, is history.

Notes

1 Quintilian, *Institution* 8.6.44; Marius Victorinus, *On Galatians* 2.1185c, p. 54 Locher.
2 Fletcher (1964), 260–8 concludes that allegory persists wherever an 'iconographic vocabulary' is in use.
3 Thus Frye (1957), 91 writes: 'The basis of poetic expression is the metaphor, and the basis of naive allegory is the mixed metaphor.'
4 See Jakobson (1956), though often the name of this great linguist is cited without a reference to his works. A similar distinction is often drawn between allegory, which creates an artificial doppelganger for a tale that might be told otherwise, and the symbol, which 'partakes of the reality that it signifies' and possess an intrinsic value even before it functions as a sign. As Todorov (1977), 235–53 demonstrates, this is not (as it often claims to be) an ancient platitude, but an innovation of the Romantic period.
5 So also Todorov (1979), 11.
6 Cf. Frye (1957), 90.
7 Todorov (1979), 15 remarks that this term has suffered the degradation of the third sister in certain folk-tales and *King Lear*.
8 Auerbach (1968), 195–202.
9 They are not even true personifications, for as Lewis (1936), 69 observes, 'fighting is an activity that is not proper' to most of the virtues. In fairness to Prudentius, one should add that they may be exhibited incidentally: patience, temperance and humility do not fight, but one can fight patiently, temperately and perhaps on occasion humbly.
10 The examples that I have cited in this discussion show that personification is frequently a tool of allegory, even if, as Steadman ((1974), xxv–xxvi observes, they are different tropes and each can function independently of the other.
11 Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.32 on the spiritual character of this book.
12 Cf. Quintilian, *Institution* 8.6.52.
13 As an opponent of Arius, Marcellus of Ancyra deprecated the citation of Proverbs 8.22 as evidence that Christ was a created being (Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.2.13–14), and proceeds to denounce the interpretation of this verse in Origen (*ibid.* 1.14.19.3). In the former passage Eusebius retorts that Proverbs cannot be set aside as an enigma, as it is merely the first of three Solomonic books that were arranged in sequence for our edification.
14 See Frye (1982), 84–5; Frye modifies Jakobson's definitions on p. 15, dividing metonymy into three species, the second of which, analogy, supplies the true complement to metaphor.
15 *Orator* 27.94 quotes the word in Greek; cf. Longinus, *On the Sublime* 9.7.

16 Von Arnim, *SVF* 1.118; cf. Longinus, *On the Sublime* 32.7.
17 For Theagenes see DK, 1, 51–2. Though Schibli (1990), 16 accords to Pherecydes only grudging recognition as the father of allegories concerning Time. The evidence from Origen's *Against Celsus* is not felt to merit inclusion in Schibli's book.
18 See Edwards (1990) on a possible debt to Numenius in the citation of Pherecydes at *Against Celsus* 6.42; also Numenius, Fr. 37 Des Places.
19 See Laks and Most (1997) for modern studies.
20 *Epidrome* 32, pp. 65–6 Lang. Not all Stoics concurred, as Most (1979), 2047–8 observes with reference to Seneca.
21 *On Listening to the Poets* 31e (against Chrysippus); at 33c he notes that Antisthenes, a Socratic admired by Stoics, purged Homer of immoralities by gratuitous emendation.
22 See especially the treatment of the rescue of Odysseus by Leucothea at Oration 11.10, with the notes of Trapp (1997), 102–5.
23 See Lamberton (1986), 54–77 for a survey of the allegorical fragments of Numenius, which I go on to cite in detail here.
24 The assaults of the Epicurean Colotes were answered by Macrobius, *On the Dream of Scipio* 1.9.9, and Proclus, *On the Republic* II 109–10 Kroll. On the provenance of Er, who was sometimes thought to have been a mask for Zoroaster, see Edwards (1988). The name 'Pamphylian' may imply 'of every race', as at *Politicus* 291a.
25 See esp. Frs 35–7 Des Places, with Edwards (1990) for an attempt to trace the later interpretation of Pherecydes to Numenius.
26 Fr. 37 Des Places; see above on Pherecydes.
27 *Against Celsus* 1.5 = Fr. 1b Des Places; 4.51 = 10a; 5.38 = 53; 5.57 = 29.
28 See Edwards (1996), 98 on *Cave* 78.8–13 Nauck.
29 Heath (1999) has made it possible once again to believe that the famous treatise *On the Sublime* is the work of this author.
30 Fr. 475 Smith. For *hermêneia* as the analysis of the plain sense cf. Origen, *On Prayer* 26.3, p. 361.5 Koetschau.
31 Edwards (1996), 100, citing Aristotle, *Ethics* 1094b12 and 1098a28 in conjunction with Cave 81.9–10 Nauck.
32 See *Art of Rhetoric*, 552–3 Walzer on categories; 554 on the senses.
33 See Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 4a, p. 9.29–30 Diehl. Note also the title, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, of Augustine's longest commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis. While many of his elucidations appear to us both figurative and fanciful, he held that he was eschewing allegory because he treated the corporeal universe, rather than the soul, as the principal subject of the book.
34 *First Principles*, p. 333.4 Koetschau.
35 My argument in this chapter is consonant with, but not inspired by, that of Dawson (1997).
36 *On the Making of the World* 71, *Who is the Heir?* 69 etc. At *Migration of Abraham* 34–5 he boasts of having experienced such raptures in thousands while perusing scripture.
37 Dawson (1992), 125–6.
38 *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?* 130–40.
39 See *Special Laws* and *Allegories on the Laws*. These texts contribute to their own decipherment; for example *Special Laws* 1.327–44 enumerates five classes of person excluded from the cult by Moses, and argues that these signify the five heresies which lead to the adoration of the creature at the expense of the Creator.
40 *On Mating with Preliminary Studies* 71–80. Clement reveals his knowledge of the Philonic interpretation at *Stromateis* 1.30.1.
41 Wolfson (1947), 1, 91–3 for brief discussion and bibliography.

42 See Chapter 1 and De Lange (1976), 8–25.
43 Runia (1995) concludes that the sobriquet hints at the application of numerology to figurative reading of the Old Testament, or else is a synonym for 'Platonist'. After an inventory of the numerous passages in which Clement reveals his knowledge of his Alexandrian predecessor, Runia (1993), 155–6 contends that Philo taught him 'how to combine his Platonism with Biblical thought'.
44 See Burkert (1972) on the sources of the tradition. There may be a vestigial distinction between mere listeners (*akroatai*) and adepts (*zelotai*) in Neoplatonism, for example in Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3.
45 See Edwards (1993b), 236, citing Hierocles, *On the Golden Verses* p. 482 Mullach.
46 See for example the contrast between the *sarkikos* reading and the *nous* of Matt 19.21 at *On the Rich Man's Salvation* 5.
47 Mark 4.12, ignoring or refining the irony of Isaiah 6.9; cf. also Isaiah 44.18. In the light of this passage Kermode (1979), 28–34 contends that secrecy is an inalienable property of narratives; Matt 13.14–15, where the notion of purposive secrecy is eliminated, is clearly at odds with this thesis, and Origen's practice implies that the text is polysemic rather than ambiguous or permanently obscure.
48 On Origen's use of Philo see Runia (1993),
49 *On Prayer* 14.4; Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25; *CommCant,* proem, p. 88.5–6 Baehrens.
50 Hanson (1954), 53–90 contrasts the appeal to an esoteric teaching in *Stromateis* 1.1 etc. with Origen's occasional reserve in the interpretation of public documents.
51 Gal 4.21–30. Hanson (1960), 81–2, unable to deny the presence of allegory, distinguishes it from the 'Alexandrian mode', which would entail a 'transmutation' of the sense into a 'moral sentiment or philosophic truth'. Paul's maxim that 'these things happened to them as types, but were written for our admonition' (1 Cor 10.11) is echoed in Origen's *CommMatt* 16.9, p. 501.11–12 and 503.5–6 Benz and Klostermann. It is notable that the Latin text of Jerome here omits the stipulation in the original that the 'historic sense' is true.
52 See Edwards (1999), 68–9.
53 *Philokalia* 1.6 at *First Principles* 4.2.6; p. 315.8–9 and 25–6 Koetschau.
54 Though when he himself admits that not every passage can be read in a threefold sense, he means that the literal one may be inadmissible: *HomGen* 2.6 (p. 37.6–7 Baehrens).
55 At *Philokalia* 1.9 at *First Principles* 4.2.9; p. 321.13–16 Koetschau, we are told that where a historical narrative can be harmonized with a mystical sense, scripture employs the narrative form to conceal the higher meaning from the multitude; this is the admitted purpose of the ritual mysteries in the later Roman world.
56 Whose usage Origen borrows in *Philokalia* 1.6 at *First Principles* 4.2.6; p. 316.14 and 30 Koetschau. He does not employ the word *allegoria* elsewhere in the treatise, and in quotation is equally fond of *tupikos* and *tupos*, as at loc. cit. 316.6 and 8 (1 Cor 10–11). The word *tupos* also occurs to him spontaneously in *Philokalia* 1.8 at *First Principles* 4.2.1; p. 309.10 Koetschau. In *CommJoh* the term *allêgoria* and its cognates are more frequent, and appear to be synonymous with references to the 'more tropic' (*tropikôteros*) reading, for example at 6.42 (35) and 6.55 (37).
57 See for example *CommJoh* 2.36, where *theoria* supervenes on the purification of practice; 6.54 (36) where it gives insight into the 'symbol' that is embedded in the text.
58 *CommJoh* 6.19 (11), with reference to Matt 7.13 and 25.21, as well as John 14.6.
59 Cf. Exodus 3.8, and for the equation of the shoe-latch with the embodied state see *CommJoh* 6.34–5 (18).

60 Note that the word *exikhneuein* at *CommJoh* 10.1, p. 171.4 Preuschen denotes a quest for the higher meaning of the text.

61 The translation is that of Crombie (1872), 175. Origen is not throwing doubt upon the Incarnation, as he is speaking of the presence of Christ in the body of the scriptures. See Edwards (1997) on the role of scripture as mediator to the saints of the present epoch.

62 See Wiles (1960), 22–30 on Origen's account of the symbolism of the Bible.

63 1 Cor 3.2; Heb 5.13.

64 Matt 27.51; Heb 10.20; 1 Cor 3.15.

65 *HomGen* 7.6 (p. 76.12–30 Baehrens), arguing from Gen 21.9 ('and Hagar opened her eyes) that the literal sense would commit us to believing that she was travelling with her eyes shut.

66 *HomGen* 7.5 (p. 75.18 Baehrens), with a comment at 75.26–27 on the defects of the literal record. At *HomGen* 13.2–3 (pp. 115–6 Baehrens) the wells are likened serially to the Old Testament, the New Testament and the spiritual interpretation of these documents. At *HomGen* 11.3 (105.15–20) the gradual discernment of the three senses is imagined as a three-days' sojourn at the well of vision.

67 See *CommJoh* 13.5.31, p. 230.16–18 Preuschen; Fr. 55 (2, 269.25 Brooke).

68 See *First Principles* 1.1.1 (p. 17.1 Koetschau) on the absurdity of a literal construction.

69 Text at Baehrens, p. 75, though with the substitution of *theorike* for *enoptike*. Other texts which illustrate the pedagogical character of scripture are collected in Torjesen (1986); the same author (1987) finds anticipations of Origen's theory in Clement. See especially *Stromateis* 4.1.2, where the 'canon of Gnostic truth' is said to advance from physical knowledge (which in itself is an *epopteia*) to theology.

70 The first Stoic and Platonic, the second Aristotelian; see Hadot (1979). Clement, *Stromateis* 4.25.142 acknowledges the former triad.

71 De Lubac (1959), 205, though *inspectiva* is correctly noted as the Latin equivalent at footnote 6. He is followed by Greer (1979), 231 and Louth (1981), 59, though Trigg (1983), 202 introduces his own term 'mystics'.

72 See De Lubac, loc. cit. For references to Evagrius and others.

73 On the *epopteia*, and its offspring in philosophy, see Burkert (1987), 69; Riedweg (1987), 5 on Plato. At 91 n.77 Riedweg suggests that *epopteia* becomes a technical substitute for *theoria* in Philo.

74 Matt 13.35, enlarging on Psalm 78.2; cf. Rom 16.25, 1 Cor 2.7. Eph 3.9, Col 1.26. See Bornkamm (1967) for comparison of Greek and Christian usage.

75 See Tarrant (1993), 98–100 on Theon of Smyrna. The term is authorized by *Phaedrus* 250c4, though *Republic* 540a–c can be taken as a gloss.

76 Not to be confused with the author now called Alcinous. On the hermeneutic method of Albinus see Tarrant (1993), 38–46.

77 In the *Homilies on Genesis* the moral sense is generally the last to be divulged: 2.6 (p. 37.9 Baehrens), 11.3 (105.19).

78 Cf. *HomLev* 9/8 = p. 433.16 Baehrens, where 1 Cor 9.9 is said to illustrate the 'minute and subtle' operations of divine providence.

79 Though *sunallêgoroumena* occurs at 4.3.5. At *HomGen* 6.1 (p. 66.12 Baehrens) and 7.2 (.72.3) the Latin equivalent is *allegorica.*

80 At 13.9 (I, 255.26 Brooke) the sixth consort of the Samaritan woman at John 4.17 is said to represent an unsound interpretation which the Christian of pure intelligence will abandon for the true *logos* in Christ. Again at 20.20 (II, 63.14–15 Brooke) the rejection of the senses by Heracleon is alleged to have been justified by a fallacious allegory on John 8.43. In a more faithful allegory, sensory perception is enhanced but not eclipsed by the inward light.

81 Not infrequently where he seems to be in debt to Philo. Instances of the term *allegoria* are, as might be foreseen, particularly common in the *Homilies on Genesis*: 1.11 (p. 13.20 Baehrens), 1.16 (20.5), 1.17 (20.22), 2.1 (22.21 and 27.10), 3.5 (45.4); 6.2 (69.6).

82 See especially *Against Celsus* 3.23, 4.44 and 6.42. For Celsus' sneers at Christian use of allegory see 4.39, 4.49, 4.51.

83 See *Against Celsus* 2.37 on the thirst of Christ and 4.45 on the rape of Lot by his daughters, which, even if construed as an historical occurrence, is said by Origen to be defensible. His further observation, that what is told in scripture is not always approved by scripture, is commonsensical and requires no precedent; none the less one can be found for it in Plutarch's vindication of immorality in Homer in *On Listening to the Poets*.

84 *Philokalia* 1.29 = p. 34.30 Robinson; cf. 18.5 = p. 100.27 Robinson. At 24 (p. 236.20) Origen steers his opponents toward an allegorical reading that will negate a premiss hostile to the law.

85 *CommJoh* 6.4 = I, 113.15 Brooke; cf. the participle *anagôn* at Numenius, Fr. 35.21 Des Places. At 13.17 (I, 263.21–4) *allêgoria* is complementary to the literal sense or *lexis*, both being valid; cf. Fr. 55 at II, 269.25. At 13.22 (I, 268.25) allegory supersedes the literal reading which requires us to attribute wings and limbs to God the Father.

86 *On Prayer* 23.2, p. 350.29 Koetschau and 23.4, p. 353.2.

87 For an appraisal of Origen not unlike the one offered here see Dawson (1997).

88 Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.8. It is curious that Grant (1959), 99–100 should endeavour to prove that Origen's exegesis is Platonic from a passage in which the school of Plato, as his source of doctrine, is contrasted with the Stoics, as his mentors in the application of allegory.

89 Hanson (1960), 78–9 notes affinities between the Jerusalem Targums and the Alexandrian practice of allegory.

90 At Neusner (1988), 1123 the Song is said to defile the hands by three rabbis, only one of whom unequivocally accords the same sanctity to Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth). Cf. Bockmuehl (1988), 18 n.45 on Yemenite midrash.

91 See Bockmuehl (1988), 16–17, with the whole of Bockmuehl's article on the application of this text to the Philippian Hymn.

92 On Origen's debt to the rabbis in his handling of the Song of Songs see Blowers (1988), especially p. 113, where he concludes that 'Origen refuted the rabbis precisely by attempting to best their allegories'. Kimelman (1973) maintains that Origen was in constant dialogue with his great contemporary, Rabbi Yohanan.

93 Louth (1981), 64 and 71 surmises that this and cognate passages in the Commentary allude to the flash of insight – some other writers might say 'fulguration' – which accompanies a laborious but successful exercise in hermeneutics. Crouzel believes that the passage describes a mystical experience, but concedes (1963), 496–508 that Origen never alludes to an unmediated vision of the Father in this world.

94 See previous chapter on Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1 and Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10.

95 See Nygren ([1930] 1953).

96 See Osborne (1994), 166–9 in defence of Origen. Osborne notes that Origen sometimes calls the love of God for his human creatures by the name *philanthropia*, a standard term for the munificence of rulers and also, among the Stoics, for a cardinal virtue of the sage.

97 Proclus, *On First Alcibiades* 103A–B (chapters 30–97), conflating the *daimonion* of Socrates with the daemonic *eros* of the *Symposium*.

98 See *Phaedo* 115–118; *Republic* 361b–d; *Gorgias* 486a–b.

99 Cf. Dawson (1997).

100 See Carleton Paget (1991) on Jewish antecedents and Christian analogues to Barnabas 9.4 on circumcision.
101 Hermans (1996), 211–25.
102 *HomGen* 2.5 (p. 35.14 Baehrens); 13.8 (114.8). It appears to be a synonym for *mysterium* (33.27 etc.).
103 Translation by Daly (1992), 45; the original Greek is very lacunose.
104 Translation Daly (1992), 37. Origen ignores the allusion to the historic Christ at 1 John 1.1.
105 Relevant texts were collected by Rahner (1932).
106 Although the rhetorical theory of Longinus (see above) may have acted as a catalyst.
107 Iamblichus, however, shows more affinity to the Christians than Porphyry, for as Shaw (1993), 126 observes, he does not equate the advance of soul with egress from the body.
108 See Dodd (1961), esp. 14–16 against allegory.
109 Thus Arnold (1876), 95–6 derides typology, and at 301 holds up a medieval allegory as a pretext for his wholesale condemnation of patristic exegesis. Arnold (1989) attempts to acquit the fourth Gospel of such 'arid mysticism' at 195, tacitly contrasting its vibrant metaphors with the allegories of Philo at 196, yet finding no defence for the apparent incongruity of John 14.31b at 168. Ironists will be pleased to note that Arnold brands the attempt to squeeze propositional truth from symbols as a form of 'materialism'.
110 Above all the allusions to the Son of Man (Enoch 2.49 etc.) or to 'one like a son of man' (Daniel 7.13) can be traced to Ezekiel 1.26–8, while the judgement of the nations by the saints at Dan 7.27 is foreshadowed at Zech 14.5. See Fishbane (1985), 474–99 on Daniel's revision of ancient prophecy, with Dodd ([1952] 1965) on the Christian appropriation of these passages.
111 Though D. Stern (1991), 224–5 regards the (undefined) practice of *allegoresis* as a medieval innovation.
112 For the animadversions of Theodore of Mopsuestia see Edwards (1999), 68–9. Injustice is even-handed, and Theodore suffered posthumous condemnation along with Origen at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.
113 Cf. the enumeration of the Hebrew books at Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25.
114 Hanson (1960), 286, 281.
115 Hanson (1960), 287, 262, 287.
116 Edwards (1997) maintains that Christ fulfils the iconic role ascribed to time at Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.
117 Hanson (1960), 276.
118 Smith (1912), 214 in an essay initially published in 1870, puts the Protestant case succinctly: 'The real reason why men failed to rightly understand the record of redemption was because they had no true comprehension of the work of redemption. The theological conception of Christianity as a new law did justice neither to the Christian consciousness of personal union to Christ nor to the historical facts of Christ's work.' As to the first, however, one may wonder how many Christians have exhibited such a 'consciousness' if Origen did not; as to the second, it was Smith's distinction to be charged with a heretical denial of the 'historical facts' related in the Old Testament.
119 Traced to Martin Kahler (1892) by Julius Schniewind in Bartsch (1961), 82–2. On history and the project of 'demythologization' see Macquarrie (196), 58–101.
120 *CommJoh* 10.3 (2) ff. Here and at 10.8 (6) the synoptics are called 'the three'. As at 6.34 (18), so at 10.3 (2), the Gospels are described as 'memorabilia' (*apomnêmoneumata*) of Jesus – a term reminiscent not only of Xenophon's memoir of his teacher Socrates,

but of Justin Martyr's usage in the *First Apology*. Wiles (1960), 13–24 observes that Origen does not follow a uniform rule in accounting for discrepancies, and will sometimes deny the historicity of a consecutive narrative, even though on most occasions he will point to inconsistencies in chronological sequence as a sign that a deeper meaning must be sought.

121 See for example *CommJoh* 10.8 (6) and 10.9 (11) against Heracleon's denial that Christ did anything at Capernaum, the 'place of comforting'. It seems that Heracleon would not have acknowledged the texts that Origen adduces from the three 'synoptic' Gospels.

122 See Eustathius, *On the Sorceress*, which, as Young (1997), 163–4 observes, contradicts the obvious meaning of the narrative more blatantly than Origen. Indeed Eustathius chides the literalism of his adversary, and his efforts to detect fissures in the narrative of 1 Samuel 28 resemble those of Origen in commentary on other parts of scripture.

123 See the exchange of letters with Julius Africanus at Eusebius, *Church History* 6.31.3.

124 *Timaeus* 22b–e, but with no implication of an eternal recurrence: on the contrary, history once obliterated is in danger of being lost for ever.

125 Cullmann (1947), 36–42. Puech (1951) distinguishes the cyclic time of pagan thought from the linear time of Christians and both from the discontinuous time of Gnosticism. On p. 71 he cites Koetschau, p. 344 to support the claim that Origen imagined a time '*se deroulant encycles successifs*'.

126 See for example, Bultmann (1957).

127 Cullmann (1947), 137–50.

128 Citing 2 Cor 5.6 at Letter 119, Jerome infers that 'we shall not all sleep' at 1 Cor 15.51 means not we shall not die, but we shall not sin. His subsequent remarks on negligence as the cause of sin in the embodied soul are reminiscent of Origen, and confirm my interpretation of the latter's account of *koros*.

Conclusion

The question whether Origen was a Platonist entails another: what is Platonism? In the parlance of some modern theologians, a Platonist may be anyone who believes that God is of a higher nature than his creatures; that his mind contains the imperishable essences of transient phenomena; that the soul outlives the body and enjoys more lasting pleasures; that the flesh is weak and its passions must be bridled for the sake of the inner man; or that revelation may be enigmatic, so that the true sense of a sacred text does not in every case lie on the surface. These are of course the rudiments of traditional Christianity, but these new evangelists labour to convince us that it is only the verbal sorcery of Plato that has caused the Church to preach a gospel of 'dualism' and 'otherworldliness' for two millennia. Fasting, sexual continence and every form of abstinence are seen as approximations to a false ideal, from which we must be delivered by a revival of 'holistic Hebrew thinking'. Meanwhile one cannot help but note that the world wags much as it always has, and none of the cardinal sins has become less prevalent because academic theologians now proclaim the bankruptcy of metaphysics, the goodness of the body and the holiness of sexual intercourse. We have seen already how the attempt to purge the Greek ingredients from theology fares when judged against the (Greek) New Testament; for the present we may leave its stubborn spokesmen to defend themselves at the bar of experience and common sense.

If instead we look to the ancient world for our criteria (and a historian can do nothing else), we find that in Origen's time the thought of Platonists was almost always characterized, and thus estranged from the thought of catholic Christendom, by the following premisses:

1 Objects in the present world are fleeting, and susceptible of a definition only because they participate in, or imitate, eternal Forms which do not dwell immanently in material particulars, but in an incorporeal and timeless realm.
2 The present universe, while it has no temporal beginning, is the creation of a demiurgic intellect, itself divine and good, but only by participation in the form of the Good itself. Even where the Demiurge is assumed to be the author of the paradigm which he copies in the formation of the world, he is at best the second mind; although the highest principle is a prerequisite of all determinate being, it is remote, inert and best described by negative, or even contradictory, predications.
3 The business of the human soul is to contemplate the Forms, and every soul commences its existence as an incorporeal denizen of heaven. If embodiment is not the penalty of transgression in this higher sphere, transgression is the inevitable corollary of embodiment in the lower one; in either case, the soul is

not the partner but the captive of the body, and if it has the luck to be a philosopher or a lover of true beauty, it will yearn for a better home.

4 Few souls return to heaven at the close of an earthly life, because the original delinquency is compounded by new sins, and any lingering recollection of the Forms is further eroded by the encroachment of new passions. Consequently the common lot of souls when they depart from a mortal body is to pass into another one; they choose this in the interval between lives, and, with the connivance of the gods, they enter the new state after all memories of the old have been erased.

5 The obscenities and absurdities of Homer, like those of the popular mysteries, conceal deep truths which the ancients were unwilling to divulge to the impious multitude. The philosopher, by assuming a congruity between the archaic myths and those of Plato, is able to plumb the mind or *dianoia* of the narrative – a metaphor which justifies itself in interpretations of the *Odyssey* as a *roman-à-clef*, depicting not so much the escapades of a wily vagabond as the peregrinations of the shipwrecked soul.

Origen was generally believed in late antiquity to have entertained all five of these opinions, every one of which is a Christian heresy. The majority of scholars in the modern age have upheld this verdict, based though it is on the strength of vague and unsupported depositions. The conclusion of the present book, however, is that he subscribed to none of them, and indeed that he rejected a number of them if a controversy brought them to his notice. To summarize the results of the last four chapters:

1 He denies that any being, except the members of the Trinity, can survive without a substrate to preserve its form and individuality; consequently he denies that there can be a creation populated only by incorporeal entities. Even in his *First Principles* he roundly declares the Ideas or Forms of Plato to be chimerical; the worlds which, on the evidence of scripture, he believes to have predeceased us were as physical as the present one; and if he suggests that forms and genera of all species and particulars have subsisted eternally in the divine intelligence, he means no more than Paul meant when he wrote that the whole creation is fulfilling the plan of God, and that he elects his saints to glory before the foundation of the world.

2 So far from being superior to thought and predication, the God of Origen is finite; he does indeed transcend what we call mind, and remains invisible to the unassisted reason of his creatures, but he volunteers a knowledge of himself through revelation – above all through the revelation of his Son, the eternal Logos, whose cosmic operations are inseparable, at least in exegesis, from his incarnation in time as Jesus Christ.

3 Although he maintains that every rational creature is by nature incorporeal, he nowhere speaks expressly in his extant works of a fall of the soul from heaven, and so far as can be seen he accords to it only an instantaneous pre-existence in the hand of God before embodiment. The passages in his writings which are commonly presumed to imply the previous existence of the soul could no less plausibly refer to its actions in the present life. The purpose of embodiment is

not punishment but exercise in virtue, so that the image of God, imparted in creation, may be completed by the likeness, which was purposely withheld. The goal of our Christian strife is not that the soul may be delivered from the body, but that soul and body may be subsumed in spirit; the object of the consummating vision is not the Form of the Good, but God.

4 He does not admit that souls pass from one body to another, though he does hold that our characters may become more bestial, or more angelic, as our souls descend or rise on the scale of virtue. While he has learned from scripture that a demon is a fallen angel, he never says a human being may sink to this condition, and it is only in rare instances, and for our good, that an angel descends from heaven to inhabit a human frame. On such occasions, the benefactor assumes a grosser body, but transmigration has not occurred because there has been no death.

5 He holds that scripture is threefold, consisting not of body and soul but of body, soul and spirit. The spirit of scripture, like that of the regenerate saint, absorbs both soul and body without destroying them, and a spiritual interpreter will consequently uphold the literal meaning of most passages that purport to describe historical occurrences; on the other hand, historical truth is never a sufficient explanation for the presence of an episode in Holy Writ, and the deeper sense must always be pursued. The literal sense is purged but not discarded when we detect the latent spirit, just as the body is purified but not lost on the final day when it becomes transparent to the inner man.

Origen's is an autonomous philosophy, designed to answer, not to flatter, the teaching of the schools. No doubt he has turned his pen to many questions that would never have occurred to him had he been ignorant of Plato, the Stoics or Aristotle, just as it might not occur to apologists of our own day to reflect on the laws of nature, on institutional poverty or on the origins of consciousness had they never heard of Einstein, Marx or Freud. Often it is those who are most conversant with the fashions of the age who are least enslaved to them, and if Platonism was such an epidemic in Alexandria as scholars have supposed, the surest vaccine was to read Plato. If we may be permitted to sustain the medical simile – in the manner, though not the spirit of the early heresiologists – we may say that, far from exhibiting the symptoms of contagion, Origen's work contains the antibodies to Platonism as proof that he has suffered and resisted its attacks.

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