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BECOMING ONE SPIRIT: ORIGEN AND EVAGRIUS PONTICUS ON PRAYER

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University,
Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Monastic Studies

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October 18, 2006

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Origen and Evagrius present a theology of prayer that provided the spiritual foundation for later monasticism, both in the East and in the West. Indeed, the influence of Origen and Evagrius on Christian spirituality is perceptible even today. Yet the works of both writers were repeatedly condemned by ecumenical councils, beginning with the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. In this thesis, I attempt to shed light on this paradox by setting the spiritual works of each writer within the context of the theological controversies of his time. When Origen's works are seen in relation to the Church's third-century effort to refute the theologies of Marcion and the Gnostic schools, such aspects of his thought as Platonic mythic cosmology, the pre-existence of souls and subordination within the Trinity come into clearer focus as aspects of his insistence on the importance of freedom against the determinism of the Gnostics. For Origen, God's grace works with human freedom, and God's providence allows for human freedom. In *On First Principles* and in his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen explores the moral responsibility of the individual soul to make the right choices; these are a challenge even with the help of God. Yet, God is always present, working through Christ and the angels to help the Christian return to holiness. Prayer is a key strategy for the Christian who wants to make progress, as well as the place of meeting for the human spirit with God. Thus, against the Gnostics, Origen is really a de-mythologizer. We also see that his allegorical approach to Scripture exposes the shallowness of the exegesis of Marcion, who sought to cut the Old Testament and much of the New from the Christian canon.

Writing a century and a half later, Evagrius systematizes Origen's cosmology, as well as his concept of freedom and grace. At the same time, against the Eunomian Arians of his day, he reinterprets the Trinity, following his friends and mentors, the Cappadocian Fathers, in his stress on an apophatic approach to the One and the Three. In the trajectory of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, Evagrius further analyzes the machinations of the demons, seriously-fallen spirits who hate and envy both human beings and God, hence work with human cognition and the human heart to prevent the process of prayer and the learning of good moral habits. For Evagrius too, prayer is the meeting "place" between God and the human spirit and finally, the only lens through which created reality can be truly seen.

With this theological background in mind, we can see that the points which the Church later judged to be heterodox do not outweigh each writer's deeply Christian spirituality.

This thesis may be duplicated.

Date _____

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I. The Anthropological Foundations of Prayer: Historical Overview

Origen and Evagrius both conceive of prayer as “conversation with God.” In our time,

conversation with God is presupposed as an aspect of prayer, and programs that train spiritual directors focus on ways of assisting others to converse freely with God. It is possible that we speak of such conversation too easily. For Origen, writing *On Prayer* in about 230 C. E. and for Evagrius, writing in the 390s, prayer is hardly mere chat. Prayer is a work of the whole heart, a turning of the whole mind to the God who is infinitely transcendent, infinitely holy. We can pray only by the redeeming will of the entire Trinity. We can pray well only after a good deal of moral preparation.

Origen and Evagrius were not the first to view prayer as the whole person's response to redemption. They develop the tradition begun by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis*, Book 7. Clement distinguishes between the outward act of talking to God and the inner cry of the heart:

σιν . . . μιλία πρ_ς τ_ν Θε_ν _ε_χή.¹

Prayer is . . . converse with God. Though whispering . . . and not opening the lips, we speak in silence, yet we cry inwardly. For God hears continually all the inward converse. So also we raise the head and lift the hands to heaven and set the feet in motion . . . following the eagerness of the spirit directed towards the intellectual essence; and endeavoring to abstract the body from the earth along with the discourse, raising the soul aloft, winged with longing for better things, we compel it to advance to the region of holiness, magnanimously despising the chain of the flesh.²

¹*Stromateis*, 7. 7. 39. 6 - 7. 7. 40. 1. The Greek text is that of Alain Le Boulluec, trans., *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates*, 7, SC 428 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997).

²In this thesis, I will be using the English translation of *Stromateis* at <http://newadvent.org/fathers/02107.htm>. Variations will be my own and will be placed in square brackets. Since this translation uses chapter numbers only, I will supply the section numbers from Le Boulluec's edition.

Paradoxically, for Clement, the whole body is involved in the effort to raise the soul *above* the realm of physical reality. Body, soul, and spirit are to reach toward the intellectual essence of God with longing and generosity. This prayer is a “conversation” of the entire person as the feet and hands move, the spirit eagerly longs for God, and the soul flies, letting go of its earthly preoccupations. Plato might recognize an echo of his conception of the soul as a charioteer driving two winged horses in *Phaedrus*, 246a- 248b. Because one of the horses prefers earth, Socrates says, it takes a great deal of self-discipline to rise above the hubbub of earthly opinions to the knowledge of intelligible reality.³ Clement warns that in order to pray, we must be ready to let go of all conflicting desires. Inner “work” is a necessary preparation for prayer, as we shall see.

Origen develops this theme, noting that the hands we raise must be “holy”; that is, we must be free of anger and quarreling (*On Prayer*, 9. 1) so that we can see the Lord’s glory. For him, “conversation” with God flows from the mind’s contemplation of God: “For the eyes of the mind (*οφθαλμοί το_ διανοητικο_*) are lifted up from their preoccupation with earthly things . . . and they arrive at the sheer contemplation of God and at conversing (*μιλε_ν*) with Him reverently and suitably as He listens” (*Prayer*, 9. 2).⁴ Following Origen and Clement’s definition but abstracting it from their contexts, Evagrius simply states that prayer is “conversation (*μιλία*) of the mind with God (*De Orat.* 3).⁵ However, he agrees with Clement and Origen that conversation with God depends on the mind’s purification; for without moral readiness, the mind is incapable of “reaching out unwaveringly toward its own Lord, to converse with him . . . who is above all perception” (*De Orat.* 3-4). Again, the mind must be willing to get rid of anger and other earthly preoccupations. Otherwise, mundane

³*Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

⁴Rowan Greer’s translation, *Origen*, The Classics of Western Spirituality edition (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1979) 99. The Greek refers to *Peri Euch_s*, ed. Paul Koetschau, *Origenes Werke I* (J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1899) 318. Citations of Origen’s *On Prayer* will be taken from these editions. In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to the English translation of Origen’s work as *On Prayer* (abbreviated as *Prayer*) and to both Greek and English versions of Evagrius’s text as *De Oratione*.

⁵Simon Tugwell’s translation and Greek edition (Oxford, 1987). These will be the texts to which citations of Evagrius’s *De Oratione* (abbreviated as *De Orat.*) refer.

preoccupations would preclude both recognition of God's presence and understanding of God's communication. In *De Oratione*, 62, Evagrius expands this idea:

When your mind gradually withdraws, as it were, from the flesh in great yearning for God, when it turns away all the thoughts (*νοήματα*) that come from brooding or memory or bodily temperament, being filled with reverence and joy, then you should consider that it has drawn near to the borders of prayer.

The thoughts must die, at least temporarily, that reverence and joy in God's presence may take their place. To thoughts and to Clement's discussion of prayer, we shall return.

From the Church's developing belief that Christ is both divine and human, Origen and Evagrius inherit two approaches to contemplation. We have just seen their focus on contemplation (*theoria*) as the intellectual vision of Truth or the Good which they inherited both from Plato and Clement, as well as from St. Paul, who speaks of the man caught up into the third heaven to hear unspeakable words (*ῥρητα ἡματα*).⁶ According to Thomas Keating, however, the Greek Fathers incorporated into the term *theoria* "the meaning of the Hebrew word "*da'ath*". . . experiential knowledge that comes through love".⁷ Bernard McGinn calls attention to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of 1 Enoch, in which one is united with God through "walking with God" (Gen 5. 24),⁸ that

⁶2 Cor 12. 2-4.

⁷Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994: rpt. 2005) 39.

⁸In Jewish apocalyptic literature, such as *1 Enoch*, a text from the 3rd century B. C. E., Enoch ascends to heaven and beholds the Great Glory of God; he is also the man who "walks with God" in earthly life. See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 13-14. For the derivation of the figure of the holy ascetic "abba" from the seer of Jewish apocalyptic texts such as I and II Enoch, see also Alexander Golitzin, "The Vision of God and the Form of Glory: More Reflections on the Anthropomorphic Controversy of AD 399" in *Abba: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 279.

is, through service which gradually deifies us, thereby uniting us with God and enabling us to contemplate God. Origen and Evagrius both understand *theoria*, contemplation, as intellectual vision united with love of God. They also assert that “love of God” is inseparable from love of neighbor. For Origen, love of neighbor is essential both here in this life and in the next because we are all connected to each other through Christ, who is sick with those who are sick and in prison with those who are in prison (Matt 25. 35-40). Christ, in fact, counts all sufferings as his own (*On Prayer*, 11. 2).

In his *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius shows the Son, voluntarily subordinating himself not merely to the Father, but also to us by assuming our sinful human nature and sharing our deprivations “in fellowship with us” (8. 18-26).⁹ Christ, Son of God and Son of Man is therefore the model of the Christian contemplative. The mode of service can vary with one’s role in life. Evagrius defines the role of the Christian Knower (*gnostikos*), for example, as “salt for the impure and light for the pure” (*Gnostikos*, 3).¹⁰ In a variety of ways, the one who knows more is to serve others. As we will see in more detail later, this service is a means to contemplation because it is through service that we enter *into* the human nature of Christ; but service also flows from and perfects our contemplation of the divinity of Christ and the mystery of the Trinity. As Tillich puts it, “truth in Christianity is something which *happens* . . . is something new, something which is *done* by God in history, and, because of this, something which is *done* in the individual life.”¹¹

For Origen and Evagrius, this “something” which God does in the individual life is transformation; God gives us the grace to move from our fallen nature, with its soiled image of God, to our spiritual nature which is in the likeness of the God who is charity. By interpreting Genesis 1. 26 to signify a movement from creation in God’s image to re-creation in God’s likeness, Origen and

⁹I am using the English translation at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202008.htm>. Variations from this will be my own and will be placed in square brackets. Greek references are to *Saint Basile: Lettres I*, trad. Yves Courtonne (Paris: Société d’Édition, 1957). References will be to section numbers. Until recently, *Letter on the Faith* was ascribed to Basil and is still found as Basil’s 8th Letter.

¹⁰*Évagre le Pontique: Le Gnostique*, trans. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, SC 356 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989).

Evagrius integrate into their conception of prayer both the intellectual vision of God and the idea of participation in God's life. Thus, they bring together intellectual contemplation and Christian service.

¹¹“Doing the Truth,” *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948) 116.

How well did Evagrius know Origen in the first place? What heritage did Origen pass on? Certainly they shared a commitment to understanding the truths of Scripture and assisting others to be united with the love of Christ. In order fully to understand their contributions to a theology of Christian prayer, it will be helpful to survey the relevant aspects of their lives as each struggled to know God in contemplation and to find the connection between knowing and doing. Born of Christian parents in 185 C. E. and growing up in Alexandria, Origen was educated both in the Hellenistic philosophies and in Scripture and the Christian life. He studied under Ammonias Saccas (as did Plotinus, his younger contemporary)¹²; and his works show that he had digested the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle as well as the teachings of Stoicism. They were all an on-going aspect of Origen's educational background, with the result that he could call on them at will. We shall see his philosophical versatility as this study progresses.

However, Origen did not reject, but chose to contribute to the Christian tradition in which he grew up. Clement of Alexandria, who ran a Christian catechetical school, was his tutor.¹³ Origen was therefore formed by Scripture and by the Church's project of distinguishing Christian doctrine from Gnostic and Marcionite perversions, as well as by the recurring persecutions of the church of his time. When Origen was seventeen, his father was put to the test by being asked to sacrifice; he chose martyrdom for Christ. After that, for Origen the possibility of being called to make the same choice was never far off.¹⁴ With the ever-present possibility of persecution came the overshadowing responsibility to make a choice for martyrdom. Although Origen technically did not die a martyr, he

¹²Mark Edwards argues that there are two Origenes, the (pagan) Platonist and the Christian theologian. Each studied under an Ammonius, the pagan Origen under Ammonias Saccas and the Christian Origen under Ammonius the Peripatetic. Edwards does not offer this theory as dogma but finds it probable because he does not see the Christian Origen as a Platonist. Whether or not there were two Origenes, Edwards rightly cautions against labeling Origen as "a Platonist"; for Origen works with several philosophical traditions. See his *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2002) 54-55.

¹³The only teacher that Origen mentions is his Hebrew teacher, and he does not mention him (or her?) by name. See Edwards, 12.

¹⁴Eusebius eulogizes Origen's bravery as a young man when he would accompany martyrs to their executions, narrowly escaping being lynched or stoned himself (*History of the Church*, VI. 3, trans. G. A. Williamson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975)).

came close, dying in 254 from injuries sustained in the Decian persecution. It is understandable that the freedom of the will and human responsibility for choice would be major themes for Origen.

A year or two after the death of his father, Origen took over the catechetical school, which, as Edwards reminds us, was not a modern school, with a campus and a set curriculum, but was an informal gathering of interested people, including both men and women. Occasionally Origen also gave public lectures.¹⁵ Because he soon became a controversial figure, his bishop, Demetrius of Alexandria, intervened in the school, assigning him to teach only advanced students and giving the others to Heraclas, one of Origen's former students.¹⁶ Even so, Demetrius's suspicion of Origen continued. Possible reasons are his speculations in *On First Principles*, his allegorical approach to Scripture,¹⁷ and perhaps also his radical commitment to Christian action, to the point of martyrdom if necessary. Opposed by Demetrius but supported by two bishops in Palestine, Alexander of Jerusalem and Theoctistus of Caesarea, who had ordained him priest against Demetrius's wishes in 234, Origen moved to Palestinian Caesarea, eventually settling there permanently.¹⁸

Origen considered his main task as teacher and writer to be the exegesis of Scripture, the Word of God. Because he makes use of common philosophical tools and concepts, such as Stoic constructs of logic and Platonic epistemology and cosmology, the question arises whether his Christianity ruled the philosophies or the philosophies ruled his Christianity. According to Heine, Demetrius was in some doubt about Origen's use of the philosophies, with the result that *On First Principles* "had the effect on the conflict with Demetrius that gasoline has on fire."¹⁹ Particularly

¹⁵Edwards, 18.

¹⁶Ronald Heine argues that Origen's assignment to the more advanced more probably arose from Demetrius's efforts to gain control of the school than from Origen's own decision. Introduction to *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Fathers of the Church 71 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1982) 12.

¹⁷Heine, *Homilies*, 14.

¹⁸Heine, *Homilies*, 15.

¹⁹Heine, *Homilies*, 14.

problematic was Origen's adaptation of Plato's creation myth in the *Timaeus* in Book 2 of *On First Principles*. It will clarify the discussion below to sketch both Plato's myth and Origen's use of it now.

In contrast to the biblical creation by God in Genesis 1, in Plato's *Timaeus*, the Eternal, the Good, or the highest principle, is not the creator. Rather, the eternal world (of the Forms) provides an eternal *model* for the creation. Because eternal, incorporeal Forms cannot be involved with matter, the actual creator of the universe is the demiurge (*δημιουργός*, or craftsman), an emanated second cause. The demiurge fixes his gaze on the Eternal and creates the universe after the model of the Eternal (29 a).²⁰ Gazing on the Eternal, he creates the cosmos in Time, itself "a moving image of eternity" (37 d). Time moves according to number, introducing plurality and change in an ordered manner that imitates the unchanging order of eternity. Eternity, in contrast, "rests in unity." Receiving the the patterns of all living creatures from the demiurge and bringing them forth in time, the cosmos itself is a living image of the Eternal: "The universe resembles more closely than anything else that Living Thing of which all other living things are parts, both individually and by kinds" (*Timaeus*, 30 c).

Thus, just as a person consists of body and soul, the universe itself consists both of body (the visible universe) and soul (the invisible life of the universe). "[The demiurge] put intelligence in soul and soul in body, and so he constructed the universe" (*Timaeus*, 30 b). The universal soul shares in the reason and harmony of the eternal (*Timaeus*, 37 a). As a microcosm of the universal soul and body, each human being has a soul as its living principle by which to participate in the eternal (*Timaeus*, 44 d - 47 e). Yet, human beings are also mortal; for in Plato's system, only the eternal Forms are beyond change. The human body, consisting of matter as well as form, is subject

²⁰Citations are to Donald J. Zehl's translation of the *Timaeus* in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

to change and death. We must therefore nourish our minds, our immortal part.²¹

²¹See, for example, *Phaedrus*, 248 b - c.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato posits that after death, souls are reborn to a life that is either wiser and more virtuous than the previous life or more bestial— it depends on one’s pursuit of wisdom and excellence in the present life (90 a - e). To think “immortal thoughts” is to “partake of immortality” (90 c). Therefore, through the proper use of the mind, all persons have the resources to rise above chance and death. The first step toward immortality is to achieve order through a balance of power between body and soul. We are “not to exercise the soul without exercising the body, nor the body without the soul, so that each may be balanced by the other and so be sound” (*Timaeus*, 88 b). Without this dual program of exercise, the desiring part of the soul (*epithum_tikon*) gets out of hand and involves the body in the search for pleasure.²² The proper role of the body is not to wallow in pleasure, but to stay healthy in order to contribute to the soul’s health, just as the soul should contribute to the body’s health by caring for it.

As we achieve this balance of body and soul, the second step to immortality is natural: we begin to direct our lives by the intelligence (*nous*), the highest part of the soul. The *nous* is the aspect of humanity which has the capacity to participate in immortality:

If a man has seriously devoted himself to love of learning and to true wisdom . . . then there is absolutely no way that his thoughts can fail to be immortal and divine . . . And to the extent that human nature can partake of immortality, he can in no way fail to achieve this (*Timaeus*, 90 b-c).

Moreover, this participation is knowledge, “learning and wisdom.” For Plato, human beings are knowers; indeed, they are meant to be lovers of wisdom and learning. There is an ontological dimension of knowledge as well, since pursuit of higher knowledge requires the philosopher to acquire a resemblance to the Good, both through virtuous action and the discipline of dialectic (*λεγγος*).²³ Knowledge involves “conformation of subject with object,” as in the *Timaeus*, “vision results from the confluence of ‘the pure fire within us, which is akin to that of day, with the kindred

²²Here, I am adding material from the *Republic*, 9. 588 c - 589 b.

²³By examining the assumptions that underlie one’s thinking, one purifies the *nous* of the conventional opinion that may be driven by earthly desires and prepares for higher levels of reality. See Robert Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato’s Conception of Philosophy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1958) 73.

fire without" (*Timaeus*, 45 b-d).²⁴ As we purify our thoughts, we grow in the capacity to know the Good because we activate our kinship to it.

²⁴Cushman, 154.

Plato's anthropology really incorporates two tripartite models, both of which support his epistemology. In the *Timaeus*, he uses the schema of body, soul, and intelligence, or *nous*. The body serves the soul by exercising and staying healthy. The soul has lower and higher parts. As the higher aspect of "soul," the intelligence (*nous*) can receive knowledge and immortality. Plato specifies further in the *Republic* that the *nous* has a special function as the "eye of the soul" (*Republic*, 7. 533d), which, when seeing properly, gives human beings knowledge of their kinship to the Good which guarantees their share in immortality.²⁵ However, the *nous* can be diverted from its pursuit of wisdom by other parts of the soul. In order to understand this possibility, elsewhere in the *Republic* and in the *Phaedrus*, Plato develops another tripartite model that pertains only to the soul. The "lower" soul consists of two parts: the *thumos*, or spirit, and the *epithum_tikon*, or desire. For two reasons, the *nous* (intellect) is the highest of the three: its resemblance to the incorporeal world of the Forms and its innate proclivity toward the Good. Ideally, the *nous* recognizes true values and governs the other two parts of the soul so that the whole person can grow to be more like the Good. To this end, the *thumos* supplies the energy and spirit necessary for moral and intellectual growth; the *epithum_tikon*, however, is a hindrance. Our desires go out towards earthly goals insatiably and mislead the *nous* toward false values, with the result that the *nous* becomes blind. Serving the pursuit of false values, the *thumos* degenerates into irrational anger. Thus, desire, for Plato, is a

²⁵Cushman, 147.

“many-headed beast” (*Republic*, 9. 588b-589a).²⁶

Inheriting Plato’s anthropology and epistemology, along with all the commentary since Plato’s day, Origen transforms Platonic thought, both correcting it and integrating it into his own Christian proclamation. With some qualification, he accepts the Platonic view that the temporal world corresponds to and reflects the eternal world. He also has the Stoic conception of the rational intellect in mind. However, he derives the whole vision scripturally, from Genesis 1. 26, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness,” rather than from a deduced eternal world of forms. Correcting Plato, he transfers the creation itself to God the Father, who creates all things in and through the Son, who is God’s Wisdom and Word. Therefore, the whole creation reflects God’s wisdom and God’s Word. For Origen, the Son is not Plato’s emanated demiurge, mediator between the transcendent forms and matter, but rather, the second *hypostasis* of the Trinity. The Son is inseparable from God the Father, himself God, exact image of the Father, eternally begotten (*Princ.* 1. 2. 9). The Son is the agent of creation because the Son is also Wisdom, as in Proverbs 8. 27: “When he established the heavens, I was there.” Moreover, the Son is Word, as in John 1. 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

²⁶G. M. A. Grube’s translation, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). Of this “many-headed beast,” more later.

With a little help from Stoic thought and some qualification, Origen accepts Plato's valuation of the soul and the intellect over the body. In *On First Principles*, 2. 9. 2, he posits a two-stage creation of which the first stage is the creation of intellects, or *logikoi*, rational beings.²⁷ God creates them all equal. They are all intellects able to contemplate God; but unlike Plato, Origen posits that God gives the intellects the freedom to move, to choose whether or not to continue contemplating God. Note that motion is a metaphor for choice. With the exception of the intellect of Jesus, all tire of turning their attention toward God and "wander away." This choice, in itself, is the Fall. As a consequence, by act of God's providence, the Son creates the worlds and bodies that are suitable to each creature in relation to the depth of its fall. The result is the world of the angels, who did not fall far, the world of human beings, who fell too far to become angels, and the world of the demons, who fell too deeply to become human beings.

²⁷*Z_*on *logikon* is Marcus Aurelius's term in *To Himself* (7. 11) and Origen's in *On First Principles* 3. 1. 3. Lampe's entries in the *Patristic Greek Lexicon* indicate that this term was common to many philosophies, so I wouldn't want to push it as "Stoic" too hard. Stoic traces in *On First Principles*, 3 will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Although placement in a body and in a world is a punishment, this punishment itself is not retributive, but pedagogical; the purpose is that all may learn (from straitened circumstances) to turn away from sin and return to being with God, in contemplation. For creatures retain their freedom to choose and to move; in fact, creatures *must* “move”; it is impossible to live without making one choice after the other.²⁸ In the end, indeed, God will bring all beings, angels, human beings, and demons, into the eschatological restoration (ποκατάστασις), which means both “return” and “restored state.” In *On First Principles* 3, Origen makes it clear that God progressively brings about this restoration by responding to the creature’s use of the freedom of its will. As creatures are ready to receive teaching, God gives them true doctrine, working through angels, human teachers, and Scripture. As each creature encounters temptation to evil, God sends human and angelic ministers to help. In each situation, God works with the individual soul, anticipating and aiding its rejection of sin and return to God.

Was Demetrius’s concern about Origen’s Platonism warranted? It may seem so if we do not remember the philosophical cast of Origen’s society. Alistair Stewart-Sykes distinguishes between pagan Platonism and Origen’s use of Plato for the purpose of expounding Christian truth:

The difference between Origen and his pagan contemporaries was that . . . for Origen, Plato simply supplied the intellectual framework by which the sacred text, namely the Bible, made present on earth in the person of Jesus, might come to be understood, whereas for pagan

²⁸Origen most fully develops the necessity of choice in *On Prayer* and in his *Commentary on Romans*, as we shall see in Chapter Two.

Platonists Plato himself was the sacred text.²⁹

²⁹ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, trans. *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen: On the Lord's Prayer* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004) 101.

In his use of Plato and other philosophers, Origen actually follows the lead of Clement, his tutor, who held that philosophy is “Hagar” to Christianity, which is “Sarah.” In other words, the philosophies contain some truth and help us prepare for true wisdom. But the true Teacher is Christ; and the Christian knower (gnostic) must correct the philosophies. For example, Clement asserts that “the world of ideas in Plato is the *Logos* of the Scriptures, who is also Jesus Christ the Word of God”(Strom. 4. 25. 155).³⁰ Fundamentally agreeing with Clement, Origen “corrects” the partial truth of Plato’s account of the creation, showing that the world was not made by a second cause but by God. Again, Origen finds partial truth in Plato’s belief that the intellect is the essence of human nature: we are (in Rufinus’s translation) essentially *rationabiles naturae*, rational natures. The particular myth in the *Timaeus* also allows him to focus on the will of God to make creatures both intellectual and moral. We resemble our primordial ancestors in having minds and wills of our own, as well as in the need for both vision and choice. For Origen, the creation-myth of the *Timaeus* provided a gloss on Genesis 1. 26. We are created in the image of God, who is the source of all intellect and moral choice; despite the Fall, our destiny is to move into, that is, to choose for ourselves, likeness to God by growing in goodness and wisdom.

³⁰Edwards, 23.

Origen saw the need to justify free the use of Hellenistic philosophies for the purposes of scriptural exegesis and theology; and he does so in the Prologue of *On First Principles*: Not all “decrees of faith” were directly communicated or even formulated by the apostles. Some truths were indirectly stated or left to be worked out later; other truths have yet to be defined and are open to free discussion (Prol. 3-4).³¹ Indeed, some tenets of present-day Christianity were not yet decrees of faith. Origen says, for example, “In regard to the Holy Spirit it is not yet clearly known whether he is to be thought of as begotten or unbegotten, or as being himself also a Son of God or not” (*Princ.* Prol. 4). Therefore Origen often floated possibilities for doctrines not yet settled. Although Edwards rightly says that, “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,”³² issues that were not yet decrees of faith could be investigated freely. Writing for educated people, Origen wants his hearers to think for themselves and to have access to the best philosophical tools available so that each can integrate the truths of Scripture with full conviction. As we have already seen, this view of Christian education was controversial even in his own time.

Evagrius was also a controversial figure, to some extent, in his own lifetime and certainly after his death. Born in Iborra in Pontus (modern Turkey) about ninety years after Origen’s death in 345, Evagrius was also educated in the Hellenistic philosophies and in Scripture, for his father was a country bishop (*chorepiscopus*). It is significant that at three different stages of his life he encountered the works of Origen. Moreover, he encountered Origen’s works through or with a wide variety of written sources, teachers, mentors, and friends. First he studied with Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzen, who had collected excerpts from Origen’s works into a *florilegium* entitled the *Philocalia*. Evagrius, then, would have studied Origen through the Cappadocian Fathers’ perspectives on the Trinitarian (Arian) controversies of the second half of the fourth century. Basil,

³¹Origen: *On First Principles*, ed. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973). English citations will come from this edition.

³²Edwards, 56.

who ordained Evagrius lector, was a more remote figure for Evagrius than Gregory, who ordained him deacon and served as a personal mentor.³³ Yet, Basil's modifications of Origen's thought on the Trinity proved a major influence on Evagrius. He was personally closer to Gregory, however. Evagrius revered him as "wise teacher," as, for example, in *Praktikos*, 89, where he refers to the "*sophos didaskalos*" who distinguished the three parts of the soul and the virtues that belong to each.³⁴ In 379, Evagrius accompanied Gregory to the First Council of Constantinople (381) and assisted him there.³⁵ Gregory's modifications of Origen's thought, particularly in *Oration 29*, are a source for Evagrius' model of the spiritual journey, even though Evagrius disagrees with his wise teacher on the limits of human vision.

³³ Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2004) 34.

³⁴ See the note of Antoine and Claire Guillaumont, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 171 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971) 683.

³⁵ Guillaumont points out that Evagrius and Gregory Nazianzen worked together in Constantinople for two and one-half years, from the first months of 379 to July, 381, when Gregory left the Council and the imperial city. This was the time when Gregory and Evagrius became close friends. See *Un philosophe*, 34-35.

Later, still in Constantinople after Gregory had left the Council, flaunting anti-Arian polemic and stymied by a messy emotional affair with the wife of a noble official,³⁶ Evagrius had a dream. In this dream, the Lord sends angels to him dressed like the prefect's soldiers. They arrest him without telling him the charges; but he thinks (privately) that the husband of the noble official has accused him to the prefect. Afterwards, an angel, now appearing as one of his friends, asks him why he has been arrested. Evagrius evades the truth, conjecturing instead that someone who was jealous of him must have denounced him to the judge. The angel does not probe but tells him that the city is unsafe for him and directs him to swear by oath to leave at once and to have a care for his soul.³⁷

Upon leaving Constantinople for Jerusalem and arriving at the monasteries of Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania the Elder, Evagrius would have found a circle of educated people who were involved in reading and discussing the works of Origen as well as those of Basil and Gregory; for this group too was opposed to Arianism.³⁸ Moreover, as both Melania and Rufinus had experienced Egyptian monasticism, Melania learning from Abba Pambo and Rufinus studying with Didymus the Blind, the group would have made a serious effort to relate Origen's works to their own ascetic lives. When Evagrius, not ready to settle down to ascetical choices, continued his former style of life in Jerusalem, he eventually made himself sick. Melania and Rufinus therefore sent him on to the Egyptian desert.³⁹ At Kellia, Evagrius encountered Origen again. Although some of the monks at

³⁶For the whole story, see Tim Vivian's translation of the unexpurgated Coptic version of Palladius's *Life of Evagrius*. *Four Desert Fathers: Pambo, Evagrius, Macarius of Egypt, and Macarius of Alexandria* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004) 74-79. The Coptic version says that Evagrius did not consummate the affair because she was married; the Greek version leaves out the husband, saying instead that the woman was of the highest social class. Vivian, 75, n. 34.

³⁷The angel's non-accusing behavior has an affinity with Poemen, 64: "If a man has sinned and denies it, saying: 'I have not sinned,' do not reprimand him; for that will discourage him. But say to him, 'Do not lose heart, brother, but be on guard in future,' and you will stir his soul to repentance." *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984 edition).

³⁸Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 43.

³⁹For Palladius's account of Evagrius's protracted illness and Melania the Elder's intervention, see Vivian's translation of *The Life of Evagrius*, 9 (*Lausiac History*, 38. 9).

Kellia, having no time for his erudition, put him in his place,⁴⁰ he joined the Tall Brothers (and perhaps others) who, like Melania and Rufinus, were studying Origen and integrating his ideas into their lives. Gradually Evagrius became the central figure in this group.⁴¹ Evagrius would also have read the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius, as well as Antony's *Letters*, both of which incorporate Origen's thought on spiritual warfare against demons.⁴²

⁴⁰Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 57.

⁴¹Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 56-57.

⁴²For the connection between Evagrius and Antony's "Origenism," see Columba Stewart's "Evagrius Ponticus and the 'Eight Generic Logismoi'" in *The Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005) 12-16.

As a result of all this reading and shared study of Origen among different groups of mentors and friends, Evagrius came to understand the practical life of the desert, the ascetic struggle against passions and temptations in which the monastics of the Egyptian desert were engaged, through the lens of Origen's views of temptation and spiritual progress in *On First Principles*. Origen taught that in this life the human soul can admit different energies, those of either good or evil spirits. The evil spirits (the created intellects who most decisively rejected God in the Fall) work to take control through all kinds of depraved suggestion, while the good spirits move the soul toward God (*Princ.* 3. 3. 4). Souls that habitually devote themselves to God find themselves in communion with God; those who habitually follow the opposing spirits end up filled with their powers (*Princ.* 3. 3. 3). For Evagrius it is the consistent habit of inner awareness that with God's help ultimately defeats the demons; and the point of transition to communion with God is the state he called *apatheia*. By this he does not mean modern apathy or a kind of emotional deadness, but a quieting down, a detachment, and a freedom from external distractions, internal defenses and knee-jerk emotional reactions.⁴³ Then, as he says in the *Praktikos*, we learn to perceive the principles of spiritual warfare (*Pr.* 83), to practice charity (*Pr.* 84), and to progress through knowledge of the visible and invisible levels of creation (*theoria physike*) to the ultimate knowledge of God which is "theology" (*Pr.* 84).⁴⁴

Because Evagrius had absorbed diverse perspectives on Origen's thought, he had as deep a knowledge of "Origen" as Origen had of the philosophies. Moreover, Evagrius had also studied the philosophies for himself during his education. Therefore, although the many correspondences between Origen's works and those of Evagrius could lead to the assumption that Evagrius is a

⁴³ *Apatheia* was originally a Stoic concept, and it means a state that is free of the passions, which are not feelings *per se*, but more like the modern psychological notion of complexes. Clement of Alexandria Christianized and developed this Stoic psychology. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 128-131. Columba Stewart, who believes that Evagrius took the system over from Clement, describes *apatheia* as a kind of psychological freedom: "the capacity to use the faculties of body and soul in their intended manner." Origen makes use of a Stoic notion of freedom, but does not use Clement's schema as such. See Stewart, "Eight Logismoi," 16. There will be further discussion of *apatheia* in Chapter 2, in connection with temptation.

⁴⁴ Simon Tugwell's translation (Oxford, 1987).

carbon copy of Origen, this perspective is too simple. Evagrius has modified some of Origen's ideas and even rejected others, to form his own synthesis, adapted first to the developments in Trinitarian doctrine during the Arian Controversy, then to his life in the desert, with its ascetic practices of work, prayer, inner vigilance and radical dependence on God. Thus he accepts and even develops Origen's conception of the creation, fall, and return. However, as a student of Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius rejects Origen's subordinated processions in the Trinity. Origen's anthropology highlights either the Platonic stress on the intellect's pursuit of the Good, the Stoic stress on governing reason (*h_gemonikon* or *logos*), or St. Paul's model of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5. 23), which he sometimes conflates with the model of spiritual warfare between flesh and spirit in Galatians 5. 17. Evagrius, in contrast, makes most use of Plato's tripartite model of the soul from the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, relating it at times to Paul's conception of body, soul, and spirit.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Further discussion follows in Chapter 2. For a good overview of the differences between the anthropologies of Origen and Evagrius, see Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*", 19-20.

Origen and Evagrius both addressed some of their works to specific people, such as Origen's friends, Ambrose and Tatiana, and Evagrius's friends, Anatolios and Melania. However, Evagrius's general audience differs significantly from the urban hearers and readers of Origen, many of whom are not monastics or ascetics, though Origen hopes to increase their commitment to Christian life as he expands their understanding. Origen addresses his audience as fellow inquirers with him. Evagrius, on the other hand, writes for other monastics who have already committed themselves to asceticism and separation from the ordinary world and are having trouble. Like Origen's audience, they have reached various levels of progress, ability, and education; but Evagrius presumes that all struggle and that many have little understanding of the commitment they have made. He therefore expresses his thought, for the most part, in easily memorable⁴⁶ gnomic statements (*kephalaia*), intended to educate by startling the hearers/readers out of the self-destructive ruts in their thinking, whether despondent or vainglorious, so that they may replace destructive thoughts (*logismoi*) with the constructive thoughts in Scripture. Columba Stewart points out that Evagrius's style does vary, however. The *kephalaia* decrease in length as the teachings they contain become more difficult. In the most advanced teachings, such as the *Kephalaia Gnostika* and the *Reflections (Skemmata)*, "the texts become extremely dense, and are often koan-like in requiring focused meditation in order to crack them."⁴⁷ As the difficulty increases, the *kephalaia* retain the interest of more advanced students; the "code" also prevents "access by the

⁴⁶Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy" in *Abba: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia*, ed. John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 259.

⁴⁷Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 260.

uninitiated.”⁴⁸ The “uninitiated” might include monks unsympathetic to Evagrius’s use of Origen or monks not yet ready for advanced contemplation. Evagrius felt that those disciples still entangled in the passions need to persist in the task of self-awareness and not escape their own issues to pursue contemplations that would, in any case, be beyond their capacity.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Stewart, “Monastic Pedagogy,” 261.

⁴⁹Stewart, “Monastic Pedagogy,” 257.

Even in the more expansive elementary works, such as the *Praktikos* and *On the Thoughts*, though, there are few unnecessary words to distract the hearer from the process of inner awareness; Evagrius does not want his words to get in the way of the hearer's conversion and transformation. Proceeding in a different way from Origen, he also encourages even beginners to acquire a basic understanding of the psychological and spiritual struggle in which they are engaged. In *Praktikos*, 43, for example, Evagrius urges his students to be aware of "the differences between demons and to notice their different occasions" in order to be able to "speak to the thoughts" and, with God's help, deprive them of their power by naming them.⁵⁰

Despite these differences, the freedom of the will and human responsibility constitute as central a theme for Evagrius as they do for Origen. Although neither writer has the "faculty psychology" developed in scholastic thought or a clear concept of an entity called "the will," both explore human freedom and responsibility. As it is for Origen, for Evagrius the freedom to choose is the gift of God's creation which which allows us to progress and to keep the progress we have made, or instead, allows us to regress. By the intellect we see, but by our choices we move. Freedom interacts with the intellect; if not, we fail to improve. We are visionaries, both literally and figuratively; and we are equally choosers, movers, and do-ers. We have to do the truth (John 3. 21) as well as see it. And in the doing we may not see; obedience takes some trust. There is necessarily a dimension of *not* seeing (but believing) to the Christian concept of contemplation.

⁵⁰I will be using Simon Tugwell's translation of the *Praktikos* (Oxford, 1987).

Origen, priest and teacher in Alexandria and Palestinian Caesarea, and Evagrius, deacon of Constantinople, anchorite of Kellia, and student of the Cappadocians and Origen— these two Christian thinkers laid the foundations for a Christian theology of prayer which would combine the intellectual vision of God with a relational union with God. Beginning with their emphasis on the will, the paradoxical notion of doing the truth began to characterize Christian contemplation and take it beyond the Platonists' gaze at an eternal archetype.⁵¹ Plato, of course, assumed that the philosophers would serve the city by helping to rule it according to the forms of justice and truth that they had seen. For Origen and Evagrius, however, the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity themselves extend charity toward us which enables us both to love God and to love each other in the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is therefore more than an eternal archetype and model. Union with the Holy Trinity is eternal life for us, both now and hereafter. One of the main entrances to eternal life is prayer, the act of paying attention to God. Before prayer can be conversation with God, it must be paying attention, i.e., turning one's heart toward God in obedience.

⁵¹Cassian develops “doing the truth” too in his discussions of humility in *Inst.* 4 and *Inst.* 12. In these conferences, he seems more at ease with lowering oneself, descending, into the contemplation of God along with the human Christ, than he is with Christian Platonist models of ascending to God. Humility allows God to lift us up, which is safer than trying to climb. In *Conference* 1, however, Cassian firmly says that “the Lord considered the chief good to reside in *theoria* alone— that is, in divine contemplation.” Our forebears, then, wrestled with the relationship between Martha and Mary, service and contemplation, as much as we do. *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, *ACW* 57 (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997).

Works as diverse as the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* and Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and *Way of Perfection* reveal the heritage left by Origen and Evagrius. Yet twice, at the turn of the fifth century, and again in the mid-sixth, the teachings of Origen and Evagrius were condemned. In all, the Anti-Origenists comprised a wide variety of people: Coptic monks in 399, sixth-century Palestinian monks, several bishops, one emperor, and two women, Jerome's friends, Paula and Marcella.⁵² The bishops began the controversy as early as the 370s. Epiphanius of Salamis wrote two works, the *Ancoratus* (374) and the *Panarion* (376), in which he accused Origen of providing the basis of Arianism by teaching that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father within the Trinity.⁵³ Following Methodius, Bishop of Tyre (d. 311), Epiphanius also rejected Origen's allegorical approach to Scripture and his doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul.⁵⁴

⁵²See Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 27-30. According to Jerome (Letter 108), Paula publicly proclaimed an Origenist to be an enemy of God and privately turned him over to Jerome, who dealt with him; and Marcella wrote "countless letters" to Origenists asking them to defend themselves. She also found witnesses who could speak to being "led astray" by Origenists.

⁵³Clark, 87.

⁵⁴Clark, 94. Clark points out that Methodius misunderstood Origen in some respects.

Despite these considerable Trinitarian and anthropological issues, no official action was taken against Origen's teachings for approximately twenty-five years. Origen remained under suspicion, however. In 394, Epiphanius attacked again with a letter to John of Jerusalem, warning him to protect his flock against Origen's teachings. He now denounces Origen's treatment of the body and widens his concerns to three more of Origen's anthropological tenets: "the original bodiless condition of humans and their fall into bodies in the 'second creation,'" the ultimate salvations of demons and the devil, and Adam's loss of the image of God.⁵⁵ John of Jerusalem, however, took no action. He had no axe to grind against Origen, and he did have reason to oppose Epiphanius, who in Palestine, part of John's jurisdiction, had ordained Jerome's brother without John's consent.⁵⁶ Epiphanius's charges had more effect on Jerome, a student of Origen up to now. In the 380s, indeed, Jerome had translated several of Origen's works and even modeled his women's ascetic study group on Origen's coeducational school. At that time, Jerome "took for granted the profound identity of the minds of men and women," and with such learned and interested women in Rome as Marcella and Paula, he was able to make "the person of Origen his own."⁵⁷ But when Origen was impugned, fearing guilt by association, Jerome turned against Origen (and his own earlier educational convictions) and dissociated himself from him as early as 396.⁵⁸ Later, as the Pelagian Controversy heated up in the early years of the fifth century, Jerome blames both Origen and Evagrius for supplying Pelagius with the foundation for his heresy.⁵⁹ In Letter 133, *To Ctesiphon*, (written in 415), Jerome says that: "Evagrius of Ibera in Pontus . . . has published a

⁵⁵Clark, 95.

⁵⁶Clark, 14 and 95.

⁵⁷Brown, 368-369.

⁵⁸Brown, 379-380. Clark connects Jerome's fear with the publication of Rufinus's *Apology against Jerome* in 396: Clark, 122; see also 130-132.

⁵⁹Jerome also blamed Evagrius for his theological influence on Melania and Rufinus. See Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 251. On the same page, Stewart also supplies the date of Jerome's letter.

book of maxims on apathy . . . a state in which the mind ceases to be agitated and— to speak simply— becomes either a stone or God.”⁶⁰ Having, perhaps sarcastically, misinterpreted Evagrian *apatheia* as either total lack of feeling or the delusion of becoming God, Jerome dismisses it as Pythagorean doctrine.⁶¹ Earlier in the same letter, Jerome rightly ascribes Evagrius’s stress on overcoming the passions to Stoic doctrine but without in this context mentioning Evagrius by name.⁶² So far as I know, this letter contains the only mention of Evagrius’s connection with the Origenist Controversy at the turn of the fifth century.

⁶⁰ *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, NPNF Second Series VI, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995) 274.

⁶¹ However, Jerome misinterpreted Evagrius, who by *apatheia* did not mean loss of all feeling, but freedom from the control of intense and wrongly directed “passions.” See John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 19, and Brown, 131. Aware of its Stoic origins, Evagrius takes pains to situate *apatheia* within the Christian’s spiritual journey. See the *Praktikos*, 81. Writing later in the fifth century, Cassian avoids the Origenist Controversy by changing the term to “purity of heart” (Matt 5. 8). See, for example, *Conf.* 1. 10. 4.

⁶² This teaching substitutes “mere wishes for sound teaching” in Jerome’s view. Letter 133, *Jerome*, 272.

Friend of both Jerome and Evagrius and student of Origen, Rufinus was in the middle of the conflict; and he refused to abjure Origen. Continuing to translate Origen's works, Rufinus was convinced that where they veered toward heresy, his manuscripts had been altered by heretics.⁶³ Jerome never forgave him. Thus, in the late 390s, battle-lines were being drawn, though still no official action had been taken. In 399, the conflict came to a head. First, Pope Siricius, who was sympathetic to the possibility of Origen's orthodoxy, died. His successor, Pope Anastasius, lost no time in condemning Origen's works.⁶⁴ Next, in the last days of 399, Egyptian monks, "anthropomorphites," approached Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, to complain about their Origenist *confrères*, for teaching that God is immaterial. The Anthropomorphites "following descriptions of God in Scripture and the affirmation that human beings are made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1. 26)," believed that God had a human form (*μορφή*).⁶⁵ When Theophilus, who

⁶³Heine, *Homilies*, 33-34.

⁶⁴Clark, 30.

⁶⁵Vivian, 39.

admired Origen's theology, issued a letter refuting anthropomorphism, the monks returned to threaten him with physical attack unless he condemned Origen.⁶⁶ Theophilus gave in and condemned Origen's doctrine of God; and the Origenist Controversy formally began.⁶⁷

⁶⁶For a different interpretation of "Anthropomorphism," see Golitzin, 289-294. As represented in the *Life of Apa Aphou of Pemdje*, the *imago dei*, mentioned in Genesis 1. 26, was, through Second Temple Jewish mystical tradition and later, Clement of Alexandria, connected with the "divine form" of God ascribed in early Christian tradition to the Son, who supplies the "form" of the human body. In partaking of the "Body of the Glory" in the Eucharist, Aphou argues that Christians "become" that body and anticipate "that day when [all] shall be fed by the light of the Body of the Glory" (295). Both before the incarnation and after the resurrection, the Son has a heavenly form, which to us is "light unapproachable." It supplies the form of our physical bodies nonetheless (293). There is a connection between "eating," "knowing," and "becoming" which Evagrius also makes, e.g., in *Gnostikos*, 14. However, following Philo, Origen had moved the "heavenly form" from the body to the mind, a move which Evagrius and Cassian both endorse (286-288). This article belies the common Origenist caricature of the anti-Origenist monks as uneducated bumpkins, expressed by Cassian in *Conf.* 10, though Golitzin allows that some may indeed have been uneducated (294).

⁶⁷From 401 on, Theophilus condemned several other teachings of Origen: subordinationism in the Trinity, the restoration of demons and the devil, and the possibility of another fall after the restoration. Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostika' d'Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962) 98.

The final condemnation of Origenism, however, came only a century and a half later. A conflict broke out in Palestine between the monks of the New Laura, who were students of Origen and Evagrius, and those from the Great Laura and the Laura at Mar Saba (founded by St. Sabbas) who were disturbed because Origenist ideas, taken mostly from Evagrius's *Kephalaia Gnostika*, were spreading rapidly.⁶⁸ There were two groups of Origenists at this time: the Isochrists, who believed that because Christ, like us before the Fall, is a created intellect, we will all be equal to (*isos*) Christ in the Restoration, and the Protoctistes (*πρ_τος*, first, plus *κτιστός*, created), who believed that Christ is always superior to us because he was created first. The other monks were alarmed by the strange christologies of both groups. Emperor Justinian had already issued an edict against Origen's doctrines in 543, basing ten anathemas mostly on *On First Principles*. Now, in 553, Justinian felt that Origenism should be brought before the Second Council of Constantinople. However, the doctrines brought to the Council, though recognizably related to Origen's teachings, were not the same as those condemned in 543. Guillaumont has shown that in fact, the fifteen anathemas in 553 were aimed at the christology of Evagrius.⁶⁹ The main anathemas of the Council are as follows:

- against anyone affirming the fabulous pre-existence of souls and the monstrous restoration (*apocatasis*) that follows from it (#1),
- against anyone saying that the creation consists only of immaterial intelligences that gave themselves over to other inclinations than the contemplation of God and so took on bodies; that some took human souls, and some became demons according to the depth of their wickedness (#2-5),
- against anyone saying that Christ had pity on the divers falls of the spirits who had been united in the same unity (of which he himself is a part), and that to restore them he passed through divers classes, had divers bodies, and has . . . finally taken flesh (#7),
- against anyone saying that God the Word is so only in an inaccurate manner and because of the Fall of the intelligences (#8),
- against anyone saying that the consubstantial Trinity did not create the world, but rather "the working

⁶⁸This discussion follows Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 82.

⁶⁹Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostika'*, 151-159.

intelligence (*Nous demiourgos*)” which is more ancient than the world (#6),

- against anyone saying that it was not the Divine Logos who descended into hell and ascended into heaven, but that it was the *Nous* that did this, called Christ by virtue of his knowledge of the Monad (#9),
- against anyone saying that the heavenly powers and all humans 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 (#12),
- against anyone teaching the two-stage eschaton which ends in the restoration (*apocatastasis*) of all the intellectual beings (including the demons and Satan) to unity with God and the final destruction of bodies, number, names, and worlds (#1, 11, 14),
- and against anyone saying that the life of the spirits at the end shall be like their life at the beginning, so that the end is just like the beginning (#15).⁷⁰

Guillaumont shows that the sharp distinction which these anathematized teachings make between the uncreated Son and Christ is traceable to Evagrius’s *Kephalaia Gnostika*. In this work Christ is a created intellect (*nous*), equal essentially to all the other created intellects in the original Unity, distinct from them only in strength of will, since the intellect that was Christ remained focused on God when all the other intellects fell away. Rather than the Word assuming humanity, the created intellect of Christ cleaves to the Word, willing only to contemplate (know) God. Cleaving to God, he is united with the Word through this choice. As a result, there is a moral union, but no clear ontological union between the human nature of Christ and God the Son; nor is there a clear ontological distinction between Christ and the rest of us. It is not even clear that the created soul of Christ is *human*, as the created intellects fell to three degrees, or into three ranks, angels, human beings, and demons. According to the Council of Chalcedon, Christ is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with God and consubstantial with humanity; therefore, we are able to participate in Trinitarian life in Christ. However, we are never “equal” to Christ, whose human nature is joined to the uncreated Son

⁷⁰The anathemas are taken from the New Advent texts at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-14-116.htm>, 1-4.

of God in the hypostatic union. In ascribing the union to the created will of Christ, Evagrius inadvertently embraces a version of adoptionism and aligns himself with Arius. He had different reasons for thinking of Christ as a creature than those of Arius; that is, Evagrius does not, like Arius, have the aim of upholding the monarchy of the One God (the Father). Rather, following Origen's lead, Evagrius upholds the importance of Christ's free choice to cleave wholly to the Word. Origen's antagonists were the Gnostics and other types of fatalists, however; hence, Origen needed to insist on moral freedom. Writing at the close of the Arian Controversy, Evagrius needed to stress Christ's ontological union with both God and humanity. When he sets forth his own doctrine in the *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius resolutely opposes Arius, as well as his philosophical descendants, Aetius and Eunomius, and clearly asserts Christ's union with God and with us. Nevertheless, by Chalcedonian standards, the christology of the *Kephalaia Gnostika* leaves some fatal loopholes for heresy.

Despite the omission of the name of Evagrius in the anathemas of 553, it is obvious that both Origen and Evagrius were implicated and recognized; for after the Second Council of Constantinople, their works were suppressed. As a result, we know them only in part. Much of Origen's work was lost, both the original Greek versions of works that we now have only in Latin translations and many of the works which had not been translated. Latin translations were also lost: notably, Jerome's "literal" translation of *On First Principles*.⁷¹ Of the remainder, in Greek we have portions of *On First Principles*, eight books of the *Commentaries* on Matthew and John, twenty homilies of Jeremiah, *On Prayer*, *The Exhortation to Martyrdom*, *Against Celsus*, Basil and Gregory Nazianzen's collection of works in the *Philocalia*, and Greek fragments of a previously unknown book of the *Commentary on Romans*, discovered in 1941. Before the first wave of the Origenist Controversy flared up, Jerome translated into Latin several homilies on the Song of Songs, Isaiah,

⁷¹Jerome undertook this translation as evidence for his allegations against Rufinus, whom he accused of covering up Origen's heretical statements. See Butterworth, 1 -li. See also Heine, *Homilies*, 25-26. He notes that Origen's works were lost for more than one reason. In addition to the effect of the anathemas, Heine cites the great number of Origen's works: "There was simply too much to copy" (25).

Jeremiah, and Luke. These we still have.⁷² Because Rufinus continued his translations despite the controversy, we also have Latin translations of *On First Principles*, ten books of the *Commentary on Romans*, four books of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and numerous homilies on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, and Psalms. However, even some Latin translations have been lost, among them Jerome's literal translation of *On First Principles*.⁷³

⁷²This discussion follows Heine, *Homilies*, 26-27.

⁷³Butterworth, "Preface," 1.

Because Rufinus sometimes shortened Origen's text, corrected it when it veered toward heresy or seemed ambiguous, and translated for the general sense rather than word for word, a major question of scholarship has been the reliability of his translations.⁷⁴ To me it seems reasonable to accept Heine's conclusions: that Rufinus transmits the sense, but "except in those few places where Rufinus retains the Greek word in his translation [or in those places where the Greek version coexists, as in some parts of *On First Principles*], it is not possible . . . to ascertain with any confidence Origen's precise words."⁷⁵ Rufinus says himself that he corrects where Origen's texts have been changed by heretics.⁷⁶ In correcting, he may have supplied fourth-to-fifth-century answers to questions that Origen left open. We need to be especially careful with Rufinus's translations of statements about the Trinity and the resurrection of the body. Where we have both Greek and Latin versions, we can compare them. But it seems probable that when no Greek version exists, we can trust that Rufinus has transmitted at least the gist of Origen's thought. New discoveries are always possible. According to Maureen Beyer Moser, for example, the Tura papyrus, discovered in 1941, has revealed Greek fragments of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*; and where they can be compared with the Latin version, they have established that Rufinus's translation is

⁷⁴For a survey of the controversy to 1981, see Heine, 30-39. In his Preface to Origen's *Commentary on Romans* (2001), he reasserts his conclusion that Rufinus is faithful to Origen's ideas in the main.

⁷⁵Heine, *Homilies*, 37.

⁷⁶Preface to *On First Principles*, Butterworth, lx3

more reliable than scholars had thought.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ See Maureen Beyer Moser, *Teacher of Holiness: The Holy Spirit in Origen's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias Press, 2005) 10-11.

Evagrius's writings had already begun to disappear from view in the early fifth century as a result of Jerome's attack in his *Letter to Ctesiphon*, which probably resulted in Cassian's decision not to credit Evagrius with the schema of the eight principal faults and his change of the concept of *apatheia* to that of purity of heart.⁷⁸ Jerome's denunciation was offset, however, both by Palladius's positive presentation of Evagrius in the *Lausiaca History* and by Rufinus's Latin translations, as well as his eulogy of Evagrius in the *Historia Monachorum*.⁷⁹ Since Evagrius wrote practical works, such as the *Praktikos*, *On the Thoughts*, *On Prayer*, and several others, it was not absolutely necessary to confront his Origenist speculations, although there are traces of them even there. Indeed, the Latin world knew Evagrius only from his practical works despite what Jerome had written.⁸⁰ Evagrius's gnomic style may also have made it easier to regard him as orthodox. That is, Evagrius tends to allude cryptically to his speculative theology rather than spell it out, so that its presence in the practical works is encoded, so to speak. As far as we know, he expresses it "directly" in only two works: the *Kephalaia Gnostika* and the *Letter to Melania*. After the Second Council of Constantinople, however, Evagrius's works in Greek were suppressed; and Evagrius suffered what

⁷⁸Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 77.

⁷⁹Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 78.

⁸⁰Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 78.

Clark and Guillaumont have termed a *damnatio memoriae*.⁸¹ Not only were the Greek versions of these two works lost, but also many of the practical works. In addition, his sayings in the *Aphophthegmata Patrum* were reduced and sometimes ascribed to others.⁸² In short, his name, his literary presence, and his sayings almost disappeared. It is also probable that Palladius's account of Evagrius in the *Lausiaca History* was shortened and expurgated.⁸³

⁸¹Clark, 84. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 84.

⁸²Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 84-85 ff.

⁸³Vivian, 31-52. The question of Anti-Origenist editing of Palladius's text has not yet been definitely settled, however.

Yet it was not until the Lateran Council of 649 that the name of Evagrius was added to Origen's when that council affirmed the anathemas of 553.⁸⁴ However, even after the Third Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the anathemas for the second time in 680, people did not want to suppress Evagrius's works entirely because they had become so central to the monastic way of life. Some were preserved in Greek under a different (orthodox) name, especially that of St. Nilus, or translated into Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, and other languages, with the Origenist speculations sometimes removed or toned down.⁸⁵ In "Nestorian" and "monophysite" areas of the Church⁸⁶—that is, in the Church of the East⁸⁷ and in the Oriental Orthodox Churches,⁸⁸—there was more openness to the value of Evagrius's writings and less respect for the authority of Greek church councils because of the doctrinal schisms after the promulgation of the christological formula of Chalcedon. For example, Babai the Great, a theologian of the Church of the East writing at the end of the seventh century, thought that the true heretics were those who had condemned Evagrius,⁸⁹ while in the tradition of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, in a letter that has been lost, Philoxenus warned a young theologian, Stephen Bar Soudaïli against reading the *Kephalaia Gnostika* because it contained some deviant theological formulas. Later, in the 12th century, Denys Bar Salibi writes that in reality, Philoxenus meant that the *Kephalaia Gnostika* should be read only by the advanced

⁸⁴Guillaumont, 'Les *Kephalaia Gnostika*,' 136.

⁸⁵Guillaumont compares and translates unexpurgated and expurgated versions of the *Kephalaia Gnostika* in *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962).

⁸⁶“Nestorian” and “monophysite” are now considered to be reductive and highly offensive terms. Though they are still in use in theology text books as a kind of shorthand or mnemonic device, it is better to avoid them.

⁸⁷The “Church of the East” (the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Assyrian Church of the East) opposes the rulings of Ephesus and Chalcedon that Mary is “*Theotokos*” and claims a special relationship with the apostle Thaddeus. See <http://www.jmahoney.com/eastern.htm> for further detail.

⁸⁸These include the Armenian and Syrian Churches as well as the Coptic Churches of Egypt and Ethiopia. While they reject the christological formula of Chalcedon, they do not, as is commonly believed, teach that Christ has only a divine nature. Rather, they stress the perfection of the union of divinity and humanity, not sufficiently expressed by the Council of Chalcedon in their views. See again <http://www.jmahoney.com/eastern.htm>.

⁸⁹Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 88.

because it was not for “sages” of the exterior realm, but only for those whose intellects were sufficiently purified to understand it.⁹⁰ In the end, even in Chalcedonian Christianity, Evagrius’s works were not entirely suppressed because they were too foundational to monasticism and simply too good. Instead, many of them were integrated into the teachings of others, such as Cassian, Diodochus, and Maximus the Confessor, or circulated under other names, such as that of St. Nilus.

⁹⁰Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 88-89.

Guillaumont notes the profound influence of Evagrius's works on Christian spirituality, especially his vocabulary for the practical and contemplative stages of spiritual growth, such as, for example, *theoria* (contemplation, with its different stages), *apatheia* (impassibility, purification of the passions), and *hesychia* (designating the silence and solitude necessary for prayer)⁹¹ as well as the eight thoughts (*logismoi*) which obstruct spiritual progress. In the *Institutes* and *Conferences*, Cassian introduced the *logismoi* to the West (with their remedies), while in the East, John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor, and Dorotheus developed them further. At the turn of the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great reduced their number to seven and they became the Seven Deadly Sins of medieval penitential handbooks and general literature.⁹² Evagrius is also the spiritual ancestor of Gregory Palamas and others, who "saw" the divine light in the intellectual vision of God, devoid of form and concept.⁹³

Origen too had an enormous influence on Christian spirituality, from biblical exegesis to Trinitarian doctrine to anthropology to the theology of prayer and the relation of all of these to the ordinary life of the Christian. Thus we have a contradictory situation. *De jure*, the Church said "No" to their cosmology, anthropology, soteriology, and to certain aspects of their Trinitarian teachings, affirming the anathemas of the Second Council of Constantinople both in 649 and in 680. Yet, *de facto* the Church said "Yes" to Origenist spirituality and even to one tenet of Origen's doctrine of the Trinity: the Father's eternal generation of the Son. As a result, there has been an implicit disjunction

⁹¹ *Un philosophe*, 92.

⁹² Gregory combined *akedia* with sadness; vainglory with pride and added envy.

⁹³ Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 94.

between their (heretical or dangerous) doctrines of God and salvation, on the one hand, and their (orthodox or acceptable) spirituality on the other. Neither for Evagrius nor for Origen was truth divided, however. Though revealed on many levels and in different ways to different people, truth is one. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Origen makes this point explicitly:

“For every person imaginable would admit that the truth is one. . . . Now if truth is one, it is clear that its elaboration and demonstration, which is wisdom, would reasonably be thought of as one, since . . . [it] would not properly be called wisdom if it did not possess the truth (2. 39).”⁹⁴

Indeed, as Jaroslav Pelikan reminds us, in the first four centuries of Christianity, *everyone* believed that he was defending the one truth: “one’s opponents were not merely espousing a different form of Christian obedience, they were teaching false doctrine.”⁹⁵ Always at stake was salvation, which everyone agreed was jeopardized by a faith that does not come down to us from the Apostles, but is a deviation from that norm.

How, then, are we to account for the fact that two theologians, declared heretical at several points, gave the basic framework and much of the vocabulary for understanding Christian life in general and Christian prayer in particular? In answering this question, I will argue that Origen and Evagrius both saw Christian prayer as the “intersection” of the knowledge of God and the knowledge

⁹⁴ *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, Fathers of the Church 80 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1989).

⁹⁵ *The Christian Tradition I: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971; paperback ed. 1975) 69.

of the self as creature. Accordingly, Origen and Evagrius both had to deal with the difficult issues of who God is and who “we” are. In order to clear the way for all Christians to pray, Origen had to refute the arguments of both the Gnostics and the Marcionites that the God of the Old Testament, who created men and women in the image of God, was a brutal, lesser deity than the God of the New (in whose image, it was argued, we are not created). In order to defend the unity of the Christian Scriptures, Origen developed his typological and allegorical approaches to Scripture, in the process, demonstrating that “higher truths” lie concealed in the very parts of Scripture that his opponents rejected. Origen also needed to refute all forms of fatalism and to assert that salvation is available for anyone who desires and seeks it. As long as we believe that we are fated, either to be saved or to be condemned, we will not believe that it makes sense to pray. But God created us “in the image,” thereby giving all people the freedom to turn to God voluntarily and thus move into “God’s likeness,” which is charity (*agapē*). As we become like God in holiness and love of one another, we become capable of knowing God and of understanding the ways in which God teaches us, whatever level we have reached.

Therefore, divine and human freedom are both crucial to Origen’s doctrine of God as Creator. In God’s goodness, God *chose* to create intellectual beings and to endow them in turn with the goodness and the freedom to make the choices that are analogous to God’s own creative choices (*Princ.*, 2. 9. 2). In Origen’s view, Plato had a partial idea of the truth when he posited that the demiurge created the world out of his will to spread the excellence of the Good by creating a world as much like himself as possible (30a). In the light of Clement’s striking description of the whole person in prayer in *Stromateis* 7. 7, it is probable that Origen developed his conception of the will on a trajectory suggested by Clement. Using the metaphor of physical movement to express the intellect’s choice of focus, Origen posits that the created intellects were free to move in the direction they chose. When they withdrew their attention from God, they moved away from God and “fell” into the worlds and bodies which God created for them, both as their punishment and as their pedagogical situation. In other words, God planned both the appropriate world and the path of

return for each creature, in response to each decision that each creature would make. For all creatures who follow this path of return, there is a correlation between making the right moral choices and knowing the glory of God in contemplation. This correlation means that even to read Scripture with understanding requires confronting one's own temptations both of thought and deed. The mysteries of God can be understood only by those who have prepared themselves morally through the practice of confronting temptation. To see how we confront temptation is to begin to know who we are. Apart from learning to know ourselves, we cannot understand the divine love which the Scriptures proclaim.

The strength of Origen's vision consists in its inclusiveness and in its absolute avoidance of dualism. The term "created intellects" includes all beings who are now angels, human beings, and demons. That is, a demon is not some demonic essence that would be opposed to God's goodness by its very nature, but a created intellect who chose to turn away from God to such a degree that it now has a demonic body and identity. But God respects the will of even a demon and gives it a chance to change direction and return. The weakness of Origen's vision consists in the loopholes it leaves for heretical interpretation and in its failure to reckon with the exclusive tendency in human nature: that is, many theologians lacked Origen's inclusive spirit. Jerome and others, for example, did not like the idea of redemption being open to demons. They wanted an ontologically defined separation from demons as well as complete separation from them in eschatological life. In my view, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. Granted, Origen's stress on freedom led to the Trinitarian and christological challenges which Origen could not have foreseen, given the context of his time. But his conception of freedom also opened the possibility for us to conceive of God as a teacher who works very personally with each of us, both in life and in prayer, through the choices we make, given the possibilities we have.

In taking Origen's system as his framework, Evagrius keeps the cosmological account of the Creation (that is, its two stages, the original intellectual creation and the second creation as a consequence of the Fall) and develops Origen's metaphor of movement for choice. Recall that he

does not talk about “the will” as an inner entity so much as he analyzes its movements. For example, we try to move toward God; but the demons, being opposed to this movement, do what they can to drag us away from God and “down” to their level. Evagrius needs the whole spiritual geography which he inherited from Origen in order to treat the full subtlety of the conscious and unconscious choices of the will. The concrete metaphor of movement, adopted from Origen, is a more flexible way of dealing with choice, sin, and grace than an abstract theological language would be because, as we shall see in Chapter Two, it allows him to survey both the conscious and unconscious realms in one view and at the same time to suggest viscerally the damage done to the human person by sin. That is the strength of Evagrius’s Origenism. Its weakness is once again Trinitarian and christological problems of which Evagrius, educated by the Cappadocian Fathers, seems at times to have been aware; for example, in his treatment of the eschatological unity of the rational creation with the Trinity, as we have already seen.

Why did he not resolve such questions as these? Although we cannot know for certain, I think that Evagrius may have been upholding the promise of 1 Corinthians 15. 28: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.” Evagrius refers to this passage in the *Letter to Melania* (5. 165):

There will be a time when the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and their rational creation which constitutes their body will cease to be separate. . . this can be concluded from the text, ‘God will be all in all.’”⁹⁶

⁹⁶*Letter to Melania*, trans. Martin Parmentier in *Forms of Devotion*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999) 272-309.

In addition, Evagrius explored the meaning of a formless, imageless type of prayer that takes the person praying beyond human words and concepts to a knowledge of God and a unity with God. It has been well established that Evagrius held that the mind must discard visual concepts and depictions, beginning with those that are impassioned.⁹⁷ Biblical and theological concepts are a more complicated issue. Although Evagrius is not an antinomian who rejects Biblical and theological concepts as valueless, for him, such an immediate union with God demands a letting go of *all* concepts to the “uncircumscribable” reality behind the concepts. While his trajectory may be Neo-Platonic, he also owes it to the Cappadocians’ response to Eunomius in the Arian Controversy. As we shall see, this letting go is not a rejection of theological concepts but a recognition of their ultimate limitations. Thus in the end, his approach to prayer is more radically apophatic than Origen’s and is probably more similar to that of Gregory of Nyssa, as expressed in the *Life of Moses*. Unlike Gregory, whose theology escaped censure, Evagrius did not cast aside Origen’s problematic cosmology because it was too useful for him in his project of viewing human sin and delusion in the perspective of the amazing creativity and love of God.

Jaroslav Pelikan points out that the formation of Christian doctrine is conditioned by the opponents against whom one is fighting. In the first four centuries, Christianity competed against several philosophies which offered not only an understanding of human existence and the world, but also a way of life. Therefore, in the early Christian centuries, apologists for Christianity had to argue against several forms of dualism and an equal number of forms of fatalism.⁹⁸ It is important to consider the relationship between Origen’s concept of freedom and his doctrine of God against the backdrop of the theological controversies of his day, the disputes with the Gnostics and with Marcion. Of course, the disputes provide only the direction against which Origen worked; the positive direction was provided by Scripture. However, a closer look at the disputes clarifies

⁹⁷Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *JECS* 9: 2 (2001) 173-204. We will return to Evagrius’s treatment of concepts and depictions and to Stewart’s article in more detail.

Origen's direction: that is, his reasons for choosing "movement" as his central metaphor for choice. As we shall see, for Origen, the freedom of choice is as essential to the image of God in human beings as is the intellect. Human freedom is grounded in Origen's thought about the Trinity.

⁹⁸Pelikan, 280-284.

In the second generation of the Arian Controversy, one of the main issues is whether God is knowable. Evagrius stands on the shoulders of both Basil and Gregory Nazianzen as he formulates his own answer, works out his own teaching on the Trinity in his *Letter on the Faith*, and formulates his thought on imageless prayer. Once the Arian controversy was settled, however, christological issues and the anthropological issue of sin and grace, began to come to the fore; and Christian theology was unsettled once again.⁹⁹ On the one hand, Evagrius continued to uphold Origen's conviction that freedom of choice is part of being human. He therefore would seem to line up with Pelagius. On the other hand, he would have radically disagreed with Pelagius that each person is born in Adam's original state of innocence.¹⁰⁰ Evagrius agreed with Origen that the creation of the material world results from the Fall. He did not reach Augustine's conclusion, however, that humanity can do nothing to contribute to the process of salvation because the human will is terminally enslaved to sin.¹⁰¹ With Origen and (later) Cassian, he would have assumed not only that we can cooperate with God's grace, but that the freedom to choose to cooperate with grace defines us as human.

Like Origen, Evagrius asks the question of "how far" a creature has fallen, whereas for Augustine, "fallen" is "fallen," separated from God and helpless to rise. To discuss the degree to which different individuals might have fallen would, for Augustine, be pointless.¹⁰² Evagrius's anthropology is more pessimistic than either Origen's or Cassian's, however. In his effort to analyze the human struggle with negative thoughts and demons, Evagrius had to face the damage done by sin to the human person. Sin blinds, deceives, enslaves; and we share the responsibility for doing

⁹⁹See Pelikan's excellent discussion, 224-227.

¹⁰⁰McGuckin, "Pelagius–Pelagianism" in *Westminster Handbook*, 257. Augustine's discussion of the behavior of actual babies in Book I of *The Confessions* is enough to refute Pelagius without further discussion.

¹⁰¹I am following McGuckin's concise summary of Augustine's position in *Westminster Handbook*, 40.

¹⁰²See Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace*: "Fallen though it be, humanity retains its basic dignity and goodness . . . And yet the corruption is radical. Humanity is held in bondage by ignorance, concupiscence [self-divinizing egoism], and death." (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993) 92.

these things to ourselves. Conversion to God is therefore a narrow path with many wrong turns. Because of the constant danger of self-deception, Evagrius came to see human freedom as fragile indeed. Prayer, therefore, is crucial because it teaches us to see the principles of the struggle, that is, to know the price of our salvation in contrast to the price of rejecting it.

II. Chapter One: How Do We Know the One True God?

A. Sources of Understanding: Scripture and the Hellenistic Philosophies

A fitting preface to an exploration of any doctrine of God is provided by Catherine Mowry LaCugna's introduction to *God for Us*: "For Christian theology, the mystery of God can be thought of only in terms of the mystery of grace and redemption. We can make true statements about God . . . only on the basis of the economy, corroborated by God's self-revelation in Christ and the Spirit."¹⁰³ In other words, we cannot speak metaphysical truth about God *in se* separately from God's plan of salvation, carried out in history and revealed in Scripture. Nor can we divorce this "salvation history" (*oikonomia*) from who God is *in se* (*theologia*). The first option would result in a doctrine of God having no relation to human experience; the second would result in unanswerable questions about whether the God revealed in Scripture is truly God.¹⁰⁴ Because we necessarily read the record of salvation history in Scripture through the lens of our own history, there is always need to reinterpret the relation between *oikonomia* and *theologia*. Ecumenical councils and papal definitions define the limits and possibilities of orthodox doctrine, but they cannot exhaust the meaning of revelation.

¹⁰³ *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ *God for Us*, 4.

Because each generation has new concerns which result in new readings of Scripture, the relation between *oikonomia* and *theologia* (in the above strict sense) can never be taken for granted.

Origen and Evagrius both make serious attempts to relate the realm of *oikonomia* to that of *theologia*. There are two aspects of this challenge. They need to answer not only the question of who God is, but also the related question of how we can know God. As we have seen, they work in a Platonic context which serves them well; for Plato too struggled with the problem of how anything real could come to be known in a world characterized by constant change.¹⁰⁵ We will also find Origen and Evagrius adverting to Stoic thought and to Aristotle's categories and logical paradigms, both in themselves and in their later development by the Stoics.

Aside from the account of creation which Origen borrowed from the *Timaeus*, there is one other Platonic construct that is essential to an understanding of the way in which Origen and Evagrius understand knowledge of God: the divided line of knowledge in Book Six of the *Republic*. Having established that the Good is both the object of knowledge and the source of knowledge (as the sun is both object and source of eyesight), Socrates maps the intelligible world and the visible world on an unequally divided line, then divides each realm in two according to the same ratio. The result is four ways of knowing arranged from the highest to the lowest: Understanding (*no_sis*), Thought (*dianoia*), Belief (*pistis*), and Imagination (*eikasias*). Use of thought and understanding will bring us into knowledge (*epist_m_*) of intelligible reality; but we also need belief and imagination, even though the knowledge they reveal is uncertain, because they are necessary stages of learning.

¹⁰⁵ Stewart-Sykes, 99.

Two points of Plato's analysis are important for our exploration of Origen and Evagrius. First, the human mind (*nous*) is intrinsically oriented to the Good. The Good is both the final object of knowledge and the source of the mind's power to know. The human *nous* corresponds to reality; indeed, the reality of the Good is co-extensive with the human *nous*. Thus, as the mind becomes more capable of knowing, it finds truer objects of knowledge. By the time one is able to know the Forms and the overarching Good, there is "such conformity between *nous* and its Object that all further questions are rendered meaningless . . . the true First Principle of thought" has been found.¹⁰⁶ The process of ascending to truth is complex, however, because the ascent is not merely intellectual, but also moral. The whole person must prepare both body and soul to receive truth, first by engaging in appropriate diet and exercise, then by living a life of virtue. For Plato, physical health supports moral virtue; and moral virtue is a pre-requisite for the knowledge of the Good from which all virtue stems.¹⁰⁷

Second, each level of knowledge provides an image (or copy) of the superior knowledge in the level just above it: "As the opinable is to the knowable, so the likeness is to the thing it is like" (*Republic* 6. 510 a).¹⁰⁸ Thus, the visible world provides an image of the intelligible world; and belief provides an image of thought, which itself is an image of true understanding. In an extended sense, the entire knowable world is ordered to the need of the human *nous* to apprehend the Good. Both the visible world and intelligible reality form a ladder of knowledge. At the bottom, imagination is uncertain, comparable to the shadows cast by the firelight in the cave, according to Plato's instructive myth in Book Seven of the *Republic*. Because we perceive through our senses, even images have their use. But it is dangerous to be content with images; for they are untrustworthy, as

¹⁰⁶Cushman, 179-180.

¹⁰⁷Knowledge exists "in the moment of conformity of the mind with Being." This conformity is effected by virtue, which is a precondition of knowledge. See Cushman's discussion of "decisional truth," xix.

¹⁰⁸G. M. A. Grube's translation: *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

can be seen by the fact that a stick, partially inserted in water, appears bent. The same deceptiveness characterizes conventional opinion, which might judge, according to appearance, that the stick actually is bent.

Above sensible knowledge is the lower intelligible level, where conclusions are reached by the use of generally accepted postulates, as in mathematics. Mathematical knowledge is not about particular squares and rectangles, etc. (*Republic*, 6. 527 c), but about the intelligible truth that is true of all squares, all rectangles, etc. (6. 510 b).¹⁰⁹ This level is thought (*dianoia*), but not truly knowledge (*epist_m_*) because the postulates are not referred to a higher principle which gives them validity, but are just accepted as true.¹¹⁰ To find the underlying truth of a postulate, one uses philosophical dialectic (*elenchos*),¹¹¹ a process of cross-examination which seeks the first principles that ground all postulates. Dialectic is not argument that supports a thesis, but rather, a process of inquiry that uncovers assumptions, thereby helping the inquirer to separate truth from the falsehood that is part of conventional opinion.¹¹² When the true first principles are found, these are the Ideas or the Forms. Only this knowledge of first principles qualifies as *epist_m_*, the certain knowledge which gives understanding (*no_sis*). Because Plato believed that the world is intelligible, he held

¹⁰⁹Cushman, 175.

¹¹⁰Cushman, 178.

¹¹¹Liddell and Scott gloss “_λεγχος” as “cross-examination” or “scrutiny” for the purpose of refutation.

¹¹²Cushman, xvii-xvii.

that there “must be a good in relation to which and for the sake of which whatever is good finds its justification” (or reason for being). The final good requires no justification because it is the source of justification for everything else. Thus, the Good is the *ἀρχή*, the first principle of truth and the first principle of the human mind.¹¹³ The knower, the *nous*, and the known, the Good, are kin.

¹¹³Cushman, xix and 176.

Plato's ideas are not the standard of truth for Origen and Evagrius, but a lens through which to understand the truth. Like Plato, they search for the "first principles." Like Plato, they understand the visible world, or God's visible creation, as an image of God's intelligible creation of the virtues and angelic powers. However, Scripture, as the revealed word of God, is for them the starting-point of knowledge. In affirming that despite the Fall, human beings can respond to God's grace and be restored to the intellectual purity necessary to contemplate God and participate in God's life, Origen grounds his affirmation in the scriptural account of the creation of man and woman in the image of God (Gen 1. 26-27): "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness' . . . So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NRSV). This passage already takes Origen beyond Plato, who would have said that created reality reveals only the intelligible level just above it; for humanity, that would have been merely the angelic level. Building on his definition of Christ as the "exact image" of God, Origen associates the image of God in humankind with Christ, in whom all people are created.¹¹⁴ Thus, through Christ, human beings have an analogous affinity with God in both intellect and will: "We, therefore, having been made according to the image, have the Son, the original, as the truth of the noble qualities that are within us. And what we are to the Son, such is the Son to the Father, who is the truth" (*Princ.* 1. 2. 6).

The Fall has, however, muddled the truth of this correspondence. Sin subjects the intellect to demonic suggestions and weakens the will. Thus, instead of following God's will, we blindly follow "many wills," those of both the flesh and the [evil] thoughts which tempt us.¹¹⁵ Scripture is a difficult road to the knowledge of God because sin impairs our ability to read it. Nor is our weakened condition the only reason for the difficulty of Scripture. Some passages of Scripture are intrinsically

¹¹⁴See "Genesis: Homily 1," 13 in *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FC 71 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1981) and my discussion below.

¹¹⁵*The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, ed. Ronald E. Heine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 123-124, col. 1.

obscure, containing depths of meaning which even an attentive and persistent reader may not be able to discern:

Divine wisdom has arranged for there to be certain stumbling blocks or interruptions of the narrative meaning, by inserting in its midst certain impossibilities and contradictions, so that the very interruption of the narrative might oppose the reader, as it were, with certain obstacles thrown in the way (*Princ.* 4. 2. 9).¹¹⁶

According to Origen, God intends that we be frustrated when Scripture does not make sense, when “wisdom denies a way and access to the common understanding.” Not that divine wisdom truly destines us for ultimate frustration; but the difficulties we find in Scripture are a sign that we are called to “the beginning of another way,” that by reading even more attentively and purifying our minds with care (*Princ.* 4. 2. 7), we may take the narrow path to “the immense breadth of divine knowledge” (*Princ.* 4. 2. 9). While God invites us and provides grace for the journey, we must respond to God by taking the narrow path of ongoing study and moral practice in order to reach that immense breadth of contemplation.

For Origen, then, the main question is how to interpret scriptural texts which present differing “windows” to the mystery of God so that one can safely “mount up” from the historical accounts in Scripture to the mystery of God as Trinity. Without going into full detail here, I offer three points which will guide my study: First, neither Scripture nor the most profound of theological discussions can remove the mystery from the being of God. For human beings, the goal is reverent contemplation, participation in divine life, not the possessive grasp of academic knowledge. Second, in order to know God as mystery, one must prepare, through both study and the living of a Christian life. Third, Christ, as Son of God and Word, is the only means by which we know the Father,

¹¹⁶Rowan Greer’s translation of *On First Principles*, IV. *Origen*, 187.

whether in Scripture or in life. Therefore, we make progress only in and through Christ, in whose image all are created and to whose image all are to be restored.

At stake is our salvation, for misinterpretation of Scripture results in false teachings. The false teachers that Origen targets are Marcion and the Gnostics, Basilides, Valentinus, and Valentinus's disciple, Heracleon. Although Marcion and the Gnostics differ in several respects, they agree in their presumed freedom to alter Scripture, Marcion having cut out the Old Testament and much of the New, while the Gnostics had assumed the Scriptures into their eclectic, free-floating mythological systems. In Origen's view, both groups were equally guilty of misinterpreting Scripture and changing it to reflect "new and improved" beliefs that deviated from the apostolic Rule of Faith. Thus, it was his aim to show that their epistemologies were as false as their versions of the doctrine of God. For Origen, contemplation of a false version of God does not help anyone draw closer to the true God. Marcion and the Gnostics propose dead-end roads; and their adherents are in real danger.¹¹⁷

Fundamentally, Evagrius shares Origen's conviction that the destiny of all created beings is to contemplate the mystery of God and to participate in it. He also develops Origen's idea of the need for preparation through study and inner purification. For him too, freely chosen moral practice is the key to contemplation. Only by facing the challenges of Christian service and scores of inner and outer temptations, can we emerge from knowledge that is partial and sinful into the vision of the mystery of God. In the ascetic tradition of the Egyptian desert, Evagrius presumes that no one can progress without the help of others who have traveled the same path. Indeed, both by writing and by giving spiritual direction, Evagrius spent much of his monastic life assisting others to travel that true road toward knowledge of God. However, his vision differs from Origen's in certain respects. Where Origen corrected Marcion and the Gnostics, Evagrius was formed by the second generation of the

¹¹⁷In his tenth Conference, Cassian provides the example of Serapion, whose anthropomorphic concept of God has resulted in the contemplation of a false version of God. See *Conf.* 10. 3. 1 - 4. 1. As Serapion's example demonstrates and modern spiritual directors know, movement from illusion to increased understanding of God can be extremely painful.

Arian Controversy. His teachers, Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, were engaged in refuting Aetius and Eunomius, who based their ontological subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit on a particular epistemology: the theory that there is a univocal relation between human theological language and the essence of God. That is, Aetius and Eunomius contended that theological *words* provide full knowledge of God's *being*. Basil and Gregory Nazianzen (and Gregory of Nyssa as well) needed to refute this theory of knowledge as well as the subordinationism to which it led. Evagrius, who, as we have seen, admired Basil and served as Gregory's assistant at the First Council of Constantinople, reflects the entire controversy.

Therefore, in distinguishing between human knowledge of God and God *in se*, Evagrius is able to define the Trinity more systematically than Origen, who taught by exploring questions that he did not always answer definitively. At the same time as he uses theological language more precisely, however, Evagrius is also more sharply aware of the limitations of all human theological language than Origen needed to be. In this chapter, I will discuss Origen's doctrine of God against the backdrop of his Marcionite and Gnostic opponents. Against them, he develops a view of the Trinity which is both ontological and moral. Against them, he also insists on God's mystery as an important ingredient of God's revelation. I will then trace Evagrius's development of Origen's Trinitarian thought as he worked it out through the contemporary challenge of the Arian Controversy.

B. One in Divinity and Participation: Origen's Answer to Marcion and the Gnostics

Since Basilides, Valentinus, Heracleon, and Marcion all flourished in the mid-second century, they were long-since deceased by the time Origen was writing. Gnostic and Marcionite churches lasted through the fourth and even into the fifth century in some areas, however;¹¹⁸ and Origen's

¹¹⁸The Marcionite movement declined earlier in the West, as some followers were absorbed into Manichaeism. See Couliano, 154. Basilides's movement died out during the third century; but Valentinian Gnosticism continued through the fourth, splitting into two schools of thought. See Procter, 2-3 and T. Apiryon, "Valentinus," <http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/valentinus.htm> .

patron and friend, Ambrose, was a converted Valentinian.¹¹⁹ Hence, even though Tertullian had already trounced Marcion, and both Irenaeus and Clement had exposed the errors of the Gnostics,¹²⁰ Origen needed to continue the combat, if only for the sake of Christians of his own time who might stray. For Origen, the most dangerous tenets are these three:

- the plurality of deities which results from Gnostic reliance on emanated hypostases;
- the dualism of both Marcion and the Gnostics, as they posit both a “good” God and a “bad” God, thereby severing the Old Testament from the New and the Creator from the Father of Jesus Christ; and
- Gnostic fatalism.

Origen’s response to these challenges was twofold: an ongoing and updated reflection on how Scripture reveals the nature of God to us and a doctrine of the Trinity that holds in balance the distinction of God’s *hypostaseis* while strongly affirming their unity.

¹¹⁹McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 12.

¹²⁰According to Joseph Smith, there are parallels between Irenaeus’s works and those of Clement of Alexandria. It is therefore possible that Origen knew Irenaeus, either directly or indirectly, through Clement. See Smith, trans., introduction, *Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, ACR 16 (New York: Newman, 1952) 39. Origen’s exegesis of Genesis 1. 26 has affinities with that of Irenaeus. See below, 125. Citations of *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* will be to section numbers in Smith’s translation.

Origen's main contribution to Trinitarian doctrine is universally agreed to be the Father's eternal generation of the co-eternal Son. In taking the begetting of the Son out of time, so to speak, Origen could have forestalled one of the errors of Arianism: a time or a primordial "when" the Son was not. Origen makes another valuable contribution, however, which was to influence the Cappadocian Fathers and Evagrius. In essence, Origen explains the relations of the Three to the One by forging a combination of ontological union with moral union. While presupposing the ontological union of the three *hypostaseis* of the Trinity, albeit in subordinated order — all three are God, but within the Godhead, the Father is highest — Origen is not content with ontological language because of the possibility of understanding "essence" (*ousia*) as some sort of refined material "stuff,"¹²¹ as the Stoics understood "spirit," for example.¹²² He prefers the language of participation and shared will. Anticipating Thomas Aquinas, who conceived of God as pure act, Origen suggests that we think of God as power, love, and glory: as creating, sharing divine life, teaching, intervening, and shaping the return of the whole creation to its original contemplative unity. Indeed, created beings are endowed with freedom of will, the created and finite form of God's freedom to create. With the common goal of assisting creatures to move toward holiness, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are active in our lives. As a corollary to this stress on choice and act, the image

¹²¹ John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 2001) 187.

¹²² Another reason for avoiding ontological language would be the possibility of interpreting the divine essence as a universal, "Godness," the three *hypostaseis* as members of the class of "Godness." This is the possibility against which Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa argue a century and a half after Origen, but I cannot find that Origen raises the issue.

of God in human beings consists not only of intellect, but also of will, the freedom to move. We are created to make choices; and God responds to the choices we make. Thus, Origen's rejection of fatalism is absolute.

In formulating this doctrine of God, Origen had to meet a twofold challenge: to derive it from the best exegesis of Scripture he could manage while simultaneously refuting the exegesis of his opponents. Note that opposed as they were, Origen, Marcion, and the various Gnostic thinkers shared a common intellectual and spiritual heritage. First, they were all educated in the major philosophies of Late Antiquity: Stoicism, Aristotelianism, and Middle Platonism. Second, they shared a knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Marcion, Basilides, and Valentinus all saw themselves as Christians; it was only later, as a result of the Apologists' polemical writings, that Gnostics separated from the Christian churches and formed their own communities,¹²³ as did the Marcionites.¹²⁴ Where they disagreed was on the question of how to interpret Scripture. Marcion favored a literal approach (as Origen's bishop, Demetrius of Alexandria may also have done, though he was not a Marcionite);¹²⁵ while the Gnostics' approaches to Scripture were eclectic and their systems an idiosyncratic amalgam of Scripture, Middle Platonism, and mythology. Origen read

¹²³ Everett Procter, *Christian Controversy in Alexandria: Clement's Polemic against the Basilideans and Valentinians* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 3.

¹²⁴ Ioan Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis*, trans. H. S. Wiesner (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992) 154.

¹²⁵ Heine, *Homilies*, 12-13.

Scripture allegorically and typologically in order to show its essential unity. Moreover, as Khaled Anatolios has shown, for Origen, the essential unity of Scripture is the proclamation of the coming of Christ in the Incarnation.¹²⁶ As Word and Wisdom, “Christ is not only the author of the Scriptures but also the interpreter of them The Incarnation . . . is thus the decisive interpretation” of God’s interactions with humanity in all of salvation history.¹²⁷

¹²⁶“Christ, Scripture, and the Christian Story of Meaning in Origen,” *Gregorianum* 78: 1 (1997): 62-63.

¹²⁷Anatolios, 64-65.

Thus, although each group could make use of the same building blocks in their search for Christian truth, they used them in ways that are radically different. The Gnostics, who worked out several theological systems, appear to have put everything on the same level of truth: Jesus, the Platonic Demiurge, the paired Aeons in the Ogdoad, the Creator God of the Old Testament—any element of their mythical systems can be taken from any other system. Marcion, in contrast, will have nothing to do with mythology; he sticks to Scripture with a fundamentalistic tenacity, demanding from it a literal consistency. In an effort to explain the existence of evil, he begins with Luke 6. 43: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit.” He concludes logically that good and evil do not have a common origin. Yet in Isaiah 45. 7, God claims to be the creator of both good and evil. If his claim is true, the Creator must be evil, the *bad tree*. Therefore, the Creator, the God of the Old Testament, is not the God of the New Testament; he is a deity who is just but not good.¹²⁸ From this point, Marcion reasons that the Old Testament should be rejected. Eventually, he rejects much of the New Testament as well, allowing only Paul’s letters and part of Luke’s Gospel.

Against his opponents, Origen argues that their false conclusions about God result from their misinterpretations of Scripture. Reading the Old Testament literally and finding much of it inconsistent with the New, Marcion has resolved the conflict by positing two gods, one good, the other inferior, just but not good. As for the Gnostics, their inability to cope with figurative language led them to posit separate emanations for each attribute of God. Sharing the assumption that matter is evil, both groups failed to come to terms with the Incarnation, as well as with the affirmation of Genesis that God created heaven and earth directly.¹²⁹ But for Origen, Christians do not have the right to subordinate Scripture to another system (as the Gnostics did) or to reject the parts of Scripture that are difficult or even, on appearance, ridiculous. If we are to discern the meaning of

¹²⁸This paragraph follows Couliano, 146.

¹²⁹For a discussion of the various forms of Gnostic docetism, see Couliano, 130-132; for a discussion of Marcion’s docetism, see Couliano, 148.

difficult passages, allegorical and typological approaches to Scripture are an interpretive necessity. Origen does not mean that the literal narrative should always be ignored. In fact, “the passages that can be established according to the narrative meaning are far more numerous than those that contain only the spiritual meaning”; and many passages contain both levels of meaning (*Princ.* 4. 3. 4).

How are these distinguished? In general, Origen follows Paul in distinguishing an inner, or spiritual meaning from the outer, or fleshly meaning:

Therefore, since we have been taught by Paul that there is one Israel according to the flesh and another according to the Spirit, when the Savior says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15. 24), we do not understand him as do they who have an earthly wisdom . . . Rather, we understand that there is a nation of souls named Israel. Even the meaning of the name itself suggests this, since Israel is translated “the mind seeing God” (*Princ.* 4. 3. 8).

This spiritual sense of “Israel” derives from the literal chosen people of Israel who, Paul asserts, had the first opportunity to receive Jesus as savior and Messiah but turned it down (Rom 9. 6-8). Without the literal sense of “Israel,” a spiritual sense of “Israel” would have no meaning.

In Origen’s hands, then, allegory and typology are not mechanical substitutions for what is written in the text of Scripture but rather extensions of the literal meaning which reveal the underlying unity of Scripture, the whole of which reveals Christ from different perspectives. Marcion’s mistake was not to value the literal meaning of the text but to deny the spiritual sense of it. Therefore, when he encountered apparently conflicting statements about God, his only recourse was to reject the major part of Scripture.

Although the weakness of the allegorical and typological methods is a tendency toward a collapse of the distinctions of history and genre,¹³⁰ its strength is its provision of various figurative glimpses of the redeeming work of Christ. In his homilies on Joshua, for example, Origen begins with the fact that in Hebrew, Jesus and Joshua are variants of the same name. Therefore, Joshua, who leads the battle against the peoples of Canaan, is a type of Jesus of Nazareth, who leads his Church

¹³⁰For a critique of the view that allegory and typology *always* ignore historical context as well as a survey of the scholarly debates about the use of allegory and typology in the patristic era, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 70-103.

in the battle against the powers of darkness. Joshua said, “Every place you have set the soles of your feet will be yours” (Jos 1. 3). Jesus promises to “crush Satan under our feet” (Rom 16. 20).¹³¹ For anyone who works with him, Jesus will defeat the powers of darkness within each person (*Hom. on Jos.* 1. 6). From Origen’s viewpoint, Marcion failed to perceive the typology, probably because he was one of those people who “bring too little zeal to the training of their minds” (*Princ.* 4. 2. 2). He therefore saw only a warlike God with his warlike leader and missed the message of God’s love which is present to us at any time or place.

For Origen, even the most difficult scriptural passages provide gateways to contemplation and divine wisdom (*Princ.* 4. 2. 3):

And what must we say about the prophecies, which we all know are filled with riddles and dark sayings? Or if we come to the gospels, the accurate interpretation even of these, since it is the mind of Christ, demands that grace that was given to him who said, “We have the mind of Christ” . . . As for the apostolic episodes, [who of those who understand the texts] would think them to be plain and easily understood, when even in them there are thousands of passages that provide, as if through a window, a narrow opening leading to multitudes of the deepest thoughts [Butterfield’s translation of the Greek; Rufinus’s translation has the narrow opening through which pours “the brightness of an immense light”¹³²].

¹³¹Citations are to *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, trans. Barbara J. Bruce and ed. Cynthia White (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 2002).

¹³²In Greek, this analogy is ε_δι’_π_ς. Lampe cites Ex. 33. 22, to which Origen may have been alluding: the Lord’s plan to put Moses into a cleft in the rock so that he can see the back of the Lord passing by: “θήσω σε ε_ς_π_ν_τ_ς_πέτρας,” LXX. The concern of that passage is the vision of God. *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s. v. πή.

Thus, Origen insists that whatever the apparent obscurity in a given passage, the whole of the Old Testament speaks of Christ and the Church. Throughout Scripture, God's message is the same: love of God's people. There is no "just- but- cruel" God set against a good God, but only a variety of perspectives on God's ways of working with fallen human beings. It therefore makes sense that Origen understands the Song of Songs, for example, as an explication of the "love with which the blessed soul burns and is on fire in regard to the Word of God" as well as the song which the soul sings "through the Spirit, by which the Church is . . . united with its heavenly bridegroom Christ."¹³³

Even Old Testament passages which bespeak an unjust God are not what they appear to be. Understanding the soul as both pre-existent and immortal (thanks to his Platonic heritage), Origen reasons that death is no barrier to God's work in us. The most famous of Origen's examples is the archetypal enemy of Moses, Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened by God (Ex 7. 3) in order to reveal to the Egyptians that the Israelites' God is Lord (Ex 7. 5). Although for Christian readers, Pharaoh was a stock type of the devil, Origen sees him as a person, a human being who has so consistently denied the will of God that God can work with him only by hardening his heart still further so that he will "hit bottom," by suffering defeat and by drowning in the sea. He drowns, but "[God's] . . . care for him does not stop at this point. For when he was drowned, he was not destroyed" (*Princ.* 3. 1. 14). Even after Pharaoh's death, in other words, God will continue to work with him in whatever way is most appropriate. Origen is not bothered by the fact that Scripture does not offer Pharaoh further opportunity for conversion in so many words because he conceives of Scripture as inviting the reader to discover further revelation, or knowledge of God's providence and mercy that has not been set down in words. Why did God not inspire the writers of Scripture to write down every aspect of the truth? The reason is that the process would be too easy, as Origen indicates in *Princ.* 4. 3.11:

All these truths . . . are concealed, hidden, and buried in the narratives of holy Scripture because "the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mt 13. 44). . . . The meaning

¹³³"Prologue" to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Greer's translation, *Origen*, 230.

according to the letter is the “field” . . . while the deeper and more profound spiritual meaning is the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2. 3).¹³⁴

¹³⁴Using related imagery of the “firstfruits” the first-ripened harvest that was given to God, ” Origen finds the four Gospels to be the “firstfruits” of Scripture and the “firstfruits” of the four Gospels to be the Gospel of John because John’s Gospel speaks the most clearly of Christ’s divinity. These are the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” See Anatolios, 62-63.

As Plato maintained that a student ought to progress from sensible knowledge through the study of dialectic to intelligible knowledge in a gradually ordered way, so Origen holds that Christian learners need to begin with the literal levels and moral teachings of Scripture, progressing in an ordered way to the mystery of the uncreated Word and the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*Princ.* 4. 4. 10). Note that for Origen, the understanding of divine mystery requires not only study of Scripture, but also intense moral preparation; without living in a way that is similar to Christ's way, we cannot understand the Trinity, the nature of which is "loving Affection."¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Greer's translation, *Origen*, 225.

In moving from reflection on how we know God to the development of his doctrine of God, Origen did not want any trace of Gnostic emanations, dualism, or fatalism. In avoiding these errors, Origen accepts the Father's superiority to the Son and the Holy Spirit as an axiom correlative to the Father's role as Source, or *μόνη ῥχή*.¹³⁶ Hence, he does not escape a subordinationism within the Trinity that was later considered heterodox; however, Origen argues against the ontological subordinationism which the Arians later pressed for. In *Metaphysics* (v. 11. 019a1-14), Aristotle had defined "priority of being," or priority according to nature and being (*κατ' φύσιν κα_ο_σίαν*), as a kind of ontological independence¹³⁷ which can be diagrammed thus: "A is prior in being to B if A can exist without B but B cannot exist without A."¹³⁸ Conceiving of the Father as Source, as Origen does, it would be easy to conclude that the Son cannot exist without the Father, since he draws divinity and being from the Father, but that the Father, as Source, could exist without the Son. However, for Origen, the relation is mutual. The Father generates, or begets, the Son *eternally*; there is *no time* when the Father was not the Father of the Son. The two are coeternal and interrelated; "God was always the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was indeed born of him, but is yet without any beginning" not only in time, but also in any other conceivable way that could be discerned by "bare intellect and reason" (*Princ.* 1. 2. 2). Therefore, the Father could not and does not exist alone, without the Son. Hence, Origen's subordinationism is not the ontological subordinationism of the Arians, which consigned the Son (and the Holy Spirit) to being creatures. Rather, it consisted of an "economic subordinationism" within the Godhead.¹³⁹ In *On First Principles*, 1. 3. 5, he says (translation from Greek text):

¹³⁶ On the pre-Arian view of the Father, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us" in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 87.

¹³⁷ Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) 138, n. 2. The same definition of priority of being can be found in *Aristotle's Categories and Propositions*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1980) 12. 14a30.

¹³⁸ Witt, 81.

¹³⁹ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 23-24.

The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father); the Holy Spirit is still less, and dwells within the saints alone.¹⁴⁰

Here, concerned with the Father's role as Source, Origen finds a hierarchy within the Trinity. Yet he also reaches toward a Trinity that is truly a divine community, a communion of wills that is able to include creatures in divine life. In *On First Principles* 1. 3. 8, he gives testimony to the unity of the Three which is based on their common purpose in (will toward) the economy. This approach to the Trinity also grounds a pedagogical understanding of the Fall, sin, and grace in which humanity is never separated from the love of God.

¹⁴⁰The Greek fragment is from Justinian and out of context. It is susceptible of a heterodox interpretation; but Butterworth cites Justin's *First Apology* to show the equal possibility of an orthodox interpretation. See Butterworth, 33-34, n. 6. We also have Origen's statement of God's three *hypostaseis* in his *Commentary on John*, 2. 75. His difficulty is finding a word for the Spirit's procession. If the Father is unbegotten, and the Son is only-begotten, "created" is all he can come up with for the Spirit; however, the Spirit remains within the Trinity.

The Gnostics of Origen's day, in contrast, had established churches for the spiritually elite. There are earthly hierarchies in Gnosticism which reflect the heavenly hierarchy of being and knowledge. To begin with, as Couliano points out, "Gnostic myth works with hypostases;" and hypostases arise from "the deification/personification of abstract concepts, the elaboration of divine parts or powers into active entities."¹⁴¹ For example, Valentinian Gnosticism postulated the Father: Pater Agennetos (unbegotten), the Ineffable, and the Abyss, or Depth, who is paired with Silence. Silence, a female entity, coexists with the Father and knows the Abyss only as "incomprehensible."¹⁴² The Father also emanates the Son, who is Knowledge.¹⁴³ The Father Abyss and Silence emanate thirty Aeons (hypostates of God's attributes and institutions), who are also paired, to make up the Pleroma, or fullness.

Note that the Aeons are not equal; those last created are farthest away from the Father and therefore the most ignorant. Thus difference in time becomes a metaphor for varying degrees of knowledge; yet, the Father can be known only as unknowable. Sophia, the last of the Aeons, not knowing that the Father is ineffable, breaks the law of the Pleroma by falling into a passion for the Father. An Aeon named Limit saves her by teaching her the Father's ineffability; and the Father follows up by instructing the Son to make known to all the Aeons his Ineffability.¹⁴⁴ Her passion is then separated from her and thrown out of the Pleroma. This separated passion becomes the lower Sophia, who gives birth first to Christ, then to the Demiurge, who is the God of the Old Testament. The Demiurge in turn, acting under the direction of the lower Sophia, who imitates the Father so far as possible, creates the Rulers and Archons of this world. He is ignorant, knowing neither his own

¹⁴¹Couliano, 70, , quoting H. S, Wiesner, "Hypostasierung," *Reallexikon für Antike un Christentum*, no place of publication or page # given.

¹⁴²Procter, 10-11.

¹⁴³Thus, Heracleon, Valentinus's disciple, denies that all things were made through the Word (as John 1. 3 states) because according to his version of the myth, the aeons were emanated before the Word (*Comm. on John 2.* 100).

¹⁴⁴Procter, 12-13.

origin nor the existence of the Pleroma:

Since he did not know the one who operated through him [Sophia], he supposed that he created by his own power, being industrious by nature. . . . And a particular proof of his involuntary action is the fact that he blessed the Sabbath and was exceedingly fond of rest from his labors.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵Procter, 19.

He is “Sophia’s abortion, stupid, and mad,”¹⁴⁶ most opposed to the Father in ignorance. Unfortunately, it is the Demiurge’s image and likeness in which we are made (Gen. 1. 26).¹⁴⁷ Human beings are not the creatures of the Immaterial Father at all.

There are many variants of the Gnostic account of creation, and they are difficult to keep straight. In all of them God the Father is utterly transcendent, having no part in the creation of the world because he cannot get involved with matter. In all of them too, we find three levels of human creation: **physical being**, ruled by a created demiurge who is close to consisting completely of matter, **psychical being**, in which people have souls but lack the spiritual seed which would make spiritual life easy, and **spiritual being**, given in seed form.¹⁴⁸ Those with spiritual being will easily ascend from ignorance to knowledge of higher truth. Matter, associated with the passions and with ignorance, is close to being an evil principle, that of disorder.

¹⁴⁶Couliano, 95.

¹⁴⁷Procter, 20.

¹⁴⁸Here, the Gnostics advert to the Stoic concept of *logos spermatikos*, the “seed” of reason which comes to the child through its father’s sperm. “As in the universe the *logos* permeates all things, so in the sperm, the *logos* permeates all [people]” and is the foundation of human relations. See Kerry A. Shirts, “*Λόγος*: The Significance of Jesus Christ” at <http://www2.ida.net/graphics/shirtail/logojand.htm>, 4.

At this point, agreement among Gnostic creation-myths ends. In one version, the Archons of the Demiurge create Adam physically and psychically, while unbeknownst to the Demiurge, the lower Sophia inserts spiritual seed into some of the people to be born.¹⁴⁹ In another version, before bearing the Demiurge, the lower Sophia gives birth to Christ. When Christ flees Sophia and is welcomed into the Pleroma, he in turn gives birth to the Savior as well as to a host of male angels.¹⁵⁰ In this version, it is the male angels who, at the lower Sophia's behest, give the seed of spiritual life to some of the human beings at their creation, while she herself gives the seeds of psychic life to others. The Demiurge creates only material people, who can live, but cannot come to spiritual life.¹⁵¹ When Christ enters the world to give human beings the knowledge which is the way to salvation (saving *gnosis*), he communicates only with a subset of humanity: the people who have spiritual seeds within, although those who have psychic seeds can hear him with much effort and come to salvation. The material people cannot be saved, but will burn up with matter at the end of time.¹⁵²

Christ himself, of course, cannot mix with matter. He has a docetic body, visible but psychic (rather than material), to use while on earth.¹⁵³ He did not need a human body and soul because his role was not to take on the burden of humanity but to be seen, to reveal knowledge— yet this revelation is only for those who are spiritually constituted. The *Gospel of Philip*, for example, presents Jesus as a docetic trickster:

Jesus tricked everyone, for he did not appear as he was, but he appeared so that he could be seen. . . . He appeared to the great as great, he [appeared] to the small as small, . . . to the angels as an angel and to humans as a human. For this reason his word was hidden from everyone.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹Couliano, 100.

¹⁵⁰Procter, 13-14.

¹⁵¹Procter, 14.

¹⁵²Procter, 54.

¹⁵³Procter, 40.

¹⁵⁴Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005) 56.

For Gnostics and Marcionites, matter, seen as opposed to spirit, comes close to being identified with evil, as it is for Plotinus, who states the case more clearly:

There must . . . be some Undetermination-Absolute, some Absolute Formlessness . . . What will this be? That Kind (Matter) whose place is below all the patterns, forms, shapes, measurements, and limits, that which has no trace of good by any title of its own . . . a mere image as regards Absolute-Being, but the Authentic Essence of Evil— insofar as Evil can have Authentic Being. The bodily Kind, in that it partakes of Matter, is an evil thing (*Enneads*, 1. 8. 3).¹⁵⁵

However, Plotinus attacks the Gnostics from his own viewpoint, finding their systems lacking in coherence; and despite his above statement about the body, he asserts that “to despise this sphere and the Gods within it, or anything else that is lovely, is not the way to goodness . . . How can they [the Gnostics] deny that the Lord of Providence is here?” (*Enneads*, 1. 9. 16).

¹⁵⁵ Plotinus: *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Ithaca: Larson Publications, 1992).

Although Origen sometimes uses the word, “emanation,” he dissociates the Christian doctrine of God from the Gnostic pleroma. While agreeing with the Gnostics that God the Father is immaterial and ineffable— he begins Book 1 of *On First Principles* by showing that God is not a body¹⁵⁶— the Son and the Holy Spirit are more than hypostases of the Father’s attributes, and there is no descending chain of emanated hypostases from them.¹⁵⁷ This dissociation occurs early in *On First Principles*. Instead of hypostasizing the aspects of the Son and thinking of them as separate emanations, Origen reduces the number of types of heavenly being. He says that Christ “is called” both Wisdom and Firstborn, then explains: “The Firstborn is not, however, by nature a different being from Wisdom (*nec tamen alius est primogenitus per naturam quam sapientia*),¹⁵⁸ but is one and the same (*Princ.*, 1. 2. 1).¹⁵⁹ Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is called Wisdom because he is the Father’s Wisdom. Only in Christ, then, does Wisdom exist, inasmuch as Christ is God’s Wisdom (1. 2. 2); but neither Wisdom nor any other of the Son’s attributes has hypostatic existence

¹⁵⁶Origen addresses the Stoics, who conceived of God as having a very refined body. See Stewart-Sykes, 164, n. 50.

¹⁵⁷Here Origen follows in Clement’s footsteps: Procter, 72.

¹⁵⁸Rufinus’s Latin translation is the edition of Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, *Origène: Traité des Principes*, Tome 1, *Sources Chrétiennes* 252 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978 and 1980).

¹⁵⁹Origen continues Clement’s trajectory, as Clement also argued against the emanations of both Basilides and Valentinus. Procter, 65; 71-72.

independent of the Son. Similarly, although the Holy Spirit is the source of both inspiration and grace (*Princ.* 1, 3, 8), Origen does not hypostasize either of these attributes. In his *Commentary on Romans*, where Origen characterizes the Holy Spirit as Teacher,¹⁶⁰ teaching is a ministry of the Holy Spirit, not an Aeon by the name of Teacher (5. 2. 22).¹⁶¹ Origen's "pleroma" does not have separate Aeons; it is instead the Trinity and the Trinity only. All fullness is in God.

¹⁶⁰For the Holy Spirit's role as Teacher, I am indebted to Moser, 118-119.

¹⁶¹*Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Thomas P. Scheck, *Fathers of the Church* 103 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 2001).

The Gnostics were not the only groups to make use of emanations, however. Neo-Platonism, just emerging under Ammonias Saccas, did the same. In the system of Plotinus, for example, the One emanates the Intellectual Principle, and the Intellectual Principle emanates the Soul.¹⁶² Therefore, both to distinguish Christianity from Gnostic systems and the Trinity from Neo-Platonic Primal Hypostases, Origen must show that the Son and the Holy Spirit themselves are neither increasingly distant emanations of the Father nor mere personifications of the Father's attributes, but that the Three are truly distinct and truly one God. Related to this issue is the nature of the Father, split in two by both the Gnostics and the Marcionites. Origen, therefore, also needed to reject dualism by showing that the Father, though immaterial and ineffable, is not divorced from the world, that rather, he is author of both the creation and the redemption.

By positing eternal generation of the Son, Origen rejects Gnostic emanationism. He does also allow gradations of being within the Trinity; but it is significant that these gradations of being are *within* the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit are not creatures.¹⁶³ Origen's interpretation of Joshua 1. 12-17 is evidence of this point. Why are the twelve tribes divided into two-and-a-half tribes plus nine-and-a-half rather than into a division of three and nine? For Origen, this situation signifies the state of belief of the people in the two-and-a-half tribes: they believed the Lord's dispensations but lacked knowledge of the Incarnation. Therefore, "these tribes are neither two, lest the fathers be outside the faith and salvation of the Trinity, nor three entire and perfect, lest the mystery of the Trinity seem

¹⁶²Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5. 1. 10.

¹⁶³Justinian thought that Origen did think of the Son and the Spirit as creatures, basing his opinion on two passages which we have only in fragmentary form: Fragments 7 and 8. Without a context, I am unconvinced. See Butterfield, 31, n.4 and 32, n. 2.

already fulfilled among them” (*Hom. on Josh.* 3. 2). Bruce and White note that we need not ascribe this passage to Rufinus, for Procopius confirms the Greek version of this passage in his *Catena in Joshua* 87. 1. 997A.¹⁶⁴

Origen, then, defines the Son as eternally begotten by the Father, explaining that the Father has never been without his Wisdom or Word (*Princ.* 1. 2. 2). By identifying the Son as the Father’s wisdom, Origen not only establishes the Son’s identity as Wisdom and Word; he also establishes the Son’s coeternity and shared divinity. Although his description of the Son as “God’s wisdom hypostatically existing” (*Princ.* 1. 2. 2) could recall Gnostic hypostases, clearly the Son is co-eternal. There was no time at which the Son was emanated, nor did the Son have some kind of logical beginning. Instead:

God was always the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of him and draws his being from him, but is yet without any beginning, not only of that kind which can be distinguished by periods of time, but even of that kind which the mind alone is wont to contemplate in itself and to perceive . . . with the bare intellect and reason” (1. 2. 2).

Using the same argument, Origen says that “the Holy Spirit would never have been included in the unity of the Trinity, that is, along with God the unchangeable Father and with his Son, unless he had always been the Holy Spirit” (*Princ.* 1. 3. 4). Thus, despite his stated uncertainty as to whether the Holy Spirit is another begotten Son or not (*Princ.* Prol. 4), Origen does uphold the co-eternity and common divinity of all three *hypostaseis*.

Gradations of divinity enter in when Origen tries to define the distinct identity of the three *hypostaseis*. In *On First Principles* Origen struggles to emphasize their unity and yet define their distinctions. The Father is the ultimate source for him, therefore “good without qualification,” while the Son “perhaps . . . while being good is yet not good purely and simply,” that is, he is the image

¹⁶⁴ *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 144, n. 24.

of the goodness, drawing the Father's goodness into himself, eternally born from the Father's goodness as the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father's goodness (*Princ.* 1. 2. 13). Similarly, in relation to the creation, the Father "who holds the universe together," is superior to the Son, who is second to the Father; and both the Father and the Son are superior to the Holy Spirit (*Princ.* 1. 3. 5). Yet all three are God; and Origen more convincingly demonstrates their distinct identities in their common divinity when he develops their shared ministry to the world in *On First Principles*, 1. 3. 8. The Father "bestows on all the gift of existence," and this gift is revealed in its glory when Christ, the Son, Word, and Wisdom, gives to all the gift of righteousness, which enables us to advance in holiness; and the Spirit, working with us as we go forward, sanctifies us.

Origen's explorations of the Trinity in Books 1 and 2 of *On First Principles* implicitly reject Gnostic elitism, a tenet which he will also explicitly reject in Book 3. Recall that the Gnostics held that at the creation, spiritual seeds were given to few, while most received psychic or material seeds. "Psychic souls" can receive saving knowledge only with difficulty, and the "material souls" cannot be saved at all. This ontological subdivision of humanity amounts to a fatalism which in Origen's view is utterly opposed to Christian truth and must be rejected out of hand. He insists, in Book 3 of *On First Principles* (1. 8), that there are no "lost natures which cannot receive salvation" or "saved natures which are incapable of being lost." No one gets the security of being among the saved by nature or inherits the despair of being among the lost. If we make bad choices, the process toward evil and ignorance inevitably begins; but it is gradual, and we can for awhile reverse it by good choices (*Princ.* 3. 4. 1). What we cannot do is forget the importance of choosing well. If Origen sacrifices security for freedom, he gains inclusiveness, however; for salvation is open to all. Each person is therefore responsible for accepting it or else choosing to turn away. For Origen, positing saved and lost natures is tantamount to attacking the justice of God and to denying the image of God in humanity, which consists both of intellect and of the freedom to make choices.

Origen's conviction that salvation is open to everyone is also grounded in his view of the

Trinity and their work in the economy. As he defines the Trinity, the three *hypostaseis* are coeternal and share in divinity, but in the graded order of Father as Source, Son as only-begotten Wisdom and Word, and Spirit as Sanctifier, drawing divinity from the Son. Despite his subordination of Son and Spirit, soon to be out of date, Origen views the Trinity as a union of charity which is both a model for the human community and its destiny. There are no “lost natures” or “saved natures” because God’s charity extends to all creatures who want to receive it, even the demons. Yet, in *On First Principles* (3. 1. 23-24), Origen faces the issue which might lead to a belief in lost or saved natures or even to doubt about divine justice: why do some people progress from worse to better while others consistently go from bad to worse? As he sees it, Scripture gives two different answers. In Romans 9. 20 - 21, God is the potter. God therefore has the right to make both vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor; and we have nothing to say about God’s choices. However, 2 Timothy 2. 21 says the opposite: if we purge ourselves, we shall be vessels of honor, fit for the master’s use.

Origen’s solution is to take them together. God does not create “vessels of dishonor”; but God allows those who consistently choose evil to experience the pain of degenerating into vessels of dishonor. Irenaeus said that we must learn the value of the good through experiencing evil. Origen goes further to say that the experience of evil is part of the process of healing. In order to receive God’s grace, we have to realize that we need it: “In regard to the immortality of the soul and the eternal world it will be to [sinners’] advantage that they should not be brought quickly to salvation but should be brought more slowly after having experienced many ills” (*Princ.* 3. 1. 13). Origen’s God is a patient instructor of souls. Origen’s God would therefore have taken in stride Augustine’s enjoyment of stealing the pears and his wanting chastity, but “not yet.” These sinful inner movements would have been part of Augustine’s pedagogical process. Origen’s God would have been relieved by Augustine’s repentance, however, and overjoyed by the self-knowledge and the longing for God that Augustine expresses in the *Confessions*.

Origen suggests that unless we desire to pay attention to God, we cannot know God,

whatever God might do. Apart from the knowledge of God, no one can make progress; however, the knowledge of God alone will not help us make progress unless we continue to exert effort. Thus we become vessels of honor not because we have been created as such but because “God finds a ground of difference in our will, as it inclines to the better or to the worse” (*Princ.* 3. 1. 24). The Trinity enters in by virtue of the fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all take part in bringing us into a life of grace through their special operations:

There is . . . a special activity of God the Father, beyond that which he exercised on all things in giving them natural life. There is also a special ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ towards those on whom he confers the natural gift of reason, by means of which well-being is bestowed upon them in addition to mere existence. There is yet another grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon such as are worthy, a grace ministered indeed through Christ, but put into operation by the Father in proportion to the merits of those who become capable of receiving it (*Princ.* 1. 3. 7).

Origen envisions a harmony of wills between the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity which reaches out to include the will of the person struggling to live a Christian life here on earth, that is, the will of the one who works to “become capable of receiving” God’s grace and keep on trying.

For Origen, the Trinity is our model for building a human community which is based both on the love within the Trinity and on the common heritage of all people as created intellects that have fallen. Within the Trinity, the community consists of distinct *hypostaseis*, each of whom has special operations; and their unity consists both in divine essence which is charity and in the divine will which is charity. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, he begins with 1 John 4. 7-8: “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love God does not know God; for God is love” (NRSV). Attention to the words that Scripture uses for “love”: *amor/erast_s*, *dilectio*, and *caritas/agap_*, reveals that they are to some extent interchangeable. Although *amor/erast_s* (lover) generally mean human love, all three terms can be used for love of virtue or love of God, as in 2 Kings 13. 1-2, where the term for Amnon’s sinful passion for his sister is *agap_* (LXX; *dilectio* in Rufinus’s Latin); or in Wisdom 8. 2, where Solomon is said to be a passionate lover (*erast_s*; *amator* in Latin) of

Wisdom.¹⁶⁵ Origen gives pride of place to *agap_ (caritas)* because in 1 John this term defines the nature of God: God is Charity. This means that the Father is Charity, and the Son is also Charity; for “the Father and the Son are one and the same in every respect” (*unum est et in nullo differt*; Prol. 2. 26).¹⁶⁶ However, in the light of the Great Commandment, to love (*agapa_*) God with all one’s heart, soul, [mind] and strength (Luke 10. 27), it is all right to talk of having passionate love (*amor*) for God or of God’s having passionate love for us (Prol. 2. 36).

The charity of God looks in two directions: toward both God and our neighbors, whom we are to love as we love ourselves and “with whom [we are] in kinship as being similarly created in incorruption (*utpote similiter creatum in incorruptione*; 2. 32).” Because we all shared in the original intellectual creation and the fall alike, everyone is our neighbor, as is made clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Ontological neighbors by nature of our creation and fall, we become neighbors in love when we benefit someone else when we can. We also become more like God.

In short, says Origen, Christ, the Son:

requires in us something like himself (*sui simile aliquid requirit in nobis*); so that through this charity which is in Christ Jesus, we may be allied to God who is Charity, as it were in a sort of blood relationship through this name of charity; even as he, who was already united to him, said: *Who shall separate us from the charity of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?*” (Rom 8. 35; 39; *Songs*, Prol. 2. 29).

Therefore, it is one and the same love by which the soul seeks the Word of God as that by which the Scriptures sing the marriage of the Church to Christ (Prol. 2, 46). No people are excluded

¹⁶⁵ *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson. *Ancient Christian Writers* 26 (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1956) 32. The English version has chapter numbers only. I have taken the section numbers from *SC* 375, cited in the next note. For the Greek and Latin terms, see Lawson, 316, n. 39 and n. 40.

¹⁶⁶ Rufinus’s Latin is from *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Tome 1, ed. et trad. Luc Brésard et Marcel Borret, *Sources Chrétiennes* 375 (Les Éditions du Cerf: Paris, 1991).

except by their own choice because it is the will of God the Trinity to invite all to the life of charity.

Even Origen's Trinitarian analogies, some of which are awkwardly subordinationist from post-fourth-century standards, serve his intention to show that the entire Trinity wills that we participate in divine life. In explaining Trinitarian relations in *On First Principles*, Origen makes particular use of three analogies: light and its brightness, prototype and copy, and source and the being participating in the source. I shall begin with Origen's comparison of the Father's relation to the Son to light and its brightness in *On First Principles* 1. 2. 8. This analogy follows what seems to be a rather unsuccessful comparison of the Father to an immense statue too big to be seen and the Son to the same statue but in smaller, visible form. One is "an exact image" of the other, differing only in scale. Thus the relative size of the statues is analogous to the different degree of Godhead between the Father and the Son. Aside from its insistent subordinationism, the idea of two statues suggests ditheism because two statues are separate physically even if the "ratio" of form to matter is the same; but such is far from Origen's intention. His shift from the two statues to the light and its brightness parallels a shift from intra-Trinitarian relations to the mystery of the Incarnation:

It is by some such likeness as this that the Son, in emptying himself of his equality with the Father and showing us a way by which we may know him, becomes an 'express image' of God's substance, so that through this fact of his becoming to us the brightness, we who were not able to look at the glory of pure light while it remained in the greatness of his godhead, may find a way of beholding the divine light through looking at the brightness (1. 2. 8).

Because light is experientially inseparable from its brightness, yet is distinct, as when we see the sun's brightness without looking straight at it, this analogy succeeds in conveying the co-eternity and shared Godhead of Father and Son while indicating that it is only through the Son that we know the Father. Here Origen alludes to Wisdom 7. 25: "For [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of [God's] goodness" (NRSV). Since God (the

Father) is light everlasting, it follows that the Son is eternal, that “the Son’s existence springs from the Father himself, yet not in time, nor from any other beginning except, as we have said, from God himself” (*Princ.* 1. 2. 11).¹⁶⁷ This is christology from above. Staying with his analogy of light, Origen applies it to his first analogy of the two statues, thereby turning both to a meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation and showing that theology is really christology from below. In all its awkwardness, the image of the two statues applies to the awkwardness of being human and the resulting need to see divine truth through a clumsy medium or a narrow opening. Origen explains that he used the two statues:

to show that the Son of God, though brought within the very narrow compass of a human body, yet gave indications, in the likeness of his power and works to those of God the Father, of the immense greatness that was in him; witness the words which he said to his disciples, “He that has seen me has seen the Father also” (*Princ.* 1. 2. 8).

The image of light and its brightness suggests that *any* image of God that is taken from the material world can serve only as a narrow window through which to glimpse God’s greatness; for the Son in himself is the invisible image of the invisible Father (1. 2. 6). It is Jesus who, like the second statue, is the visible image of the invisible Father. Human nature by itself is inadequate to reveal fully all the mystery of God’s action on our behalf. Human nature is like the small statue and like the awkward analogy itself. Yet it is human nature in which Christ actually does reveal that God is Father. Henceforth, to be human is to possess the nature in which Christ reveals the Father. Against the elitist groups of Gnostics with their docetic Incarnation, Origen proclaims that the Father reveals himself both indirectly, through the prophets, and directly in the life and preaching of Jesus that has been handed down by the apostles. This is Christ’s function, to make

¹⁶⁷The philosophical basis for the co-eternity of the Son may be Aristotle’s eternal relation between God and the world, e.g., *Metaphysics*, A. 8, 1073a. But Origen’s scriptural source is likely to be John 1. 1: “And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Rufinus may have fine-tuned Origen’s Trinitarian language in order to close any loophole for Arianism.

the Father known— not just to an elite group, but to anyone who desires to turn to God.

In Book 2 of his *Commentary on John*, Origen's concept of the co-eternity of the Father and the Son becomes a participatory union of divine wills that is a prototype for the destiny of the human community. Origen begins by setting out a pastoral problem: that many people "who wish to be pious" have a great deal of difficulty even conceiving of the Father and the Son, let alone of Father, Son, and Spirit, as one God:

Either they deny that the particularity (ἰδιότητα)¹⁶⁸ of the Son is other than that of the Father, while confessing as God the one they call, at least in name, "Son"; or they deny the divinity of the Son, making his particularity and essence as an individual (τὴν ἰδιότητα καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν) to be different from the Father (*Comm. on John* 2. 16).¹⁶⁹

The first error would be modalism: that is, reducing the Son to a mode or appearance of the Father; the second error anticipates Arianism: reducing or denying the Son's divinity by defining the Son as different from the Father in essence. Neither choice is acceptable to Origen, who wants to teach both the hypostatic distinction between the Father and the Son and their co-eternity and common divinity. Avoiding the concept of a common essence (*ousia*) in God for fear of a materialistic connotation, Origen uses the metaphor of participation in order to express unity in the Godhead. His argument, on the face of it a bit strange, will make more sense if we remember Plato's depiction of the progress of knowledge as progress up a divided line: from images to right

¹⁶⁸Origen's Greek comes from *Origène: Commentaire sur Saint Jean*, Tome 1, ed. Cécile Blanc, *Sources Chrétiennes* 120 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966) 2. 16.

¹⁶⁹John Behr's translation, *Way to Nicaea*, 186.

belief to thought to understanding. Each level of knowledge serves as an image that reveals the existence of the level above it; thus, the visible world provides an image of the intelligible world of the Forms.

For Origen, the Father is source of all divinity as well as source of everything in creation. Therefore, in the *Commentary on John*, the Father is not simply “God,” but “the” God,” as in John 17. 3, for example: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God (τῷ μόνῳ ἀληθινῷ θεῷ) and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (NRSV). According to Origen, whenever John means “the uncreated cause of the universe,” he uses *theos* with the definite article. Taking this point as his departure, he finds the paradigm for the relation between the Father and the Son in John 1. 1: “Ἐν ἄρχῃ λόγος, καὶ λόγος πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ὁ λόγος,¹⁷⁰ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν), and the Word was God (θεός). The Son is Word, God, true image of the Father, “firstborn of every creature” (Col 1. 15), but not “the” God. Because Origen eschews ontological language, his discussion allows a loophole for the later interpretation of Arius that the Son is less God than the Father, even created. What would restrain us from Arius’s interpretation is Origen’s own awareness of the problem, stated in 2. 16 (quoted above) that to deny the divinity of the Son or make his individual essence different from the Father is one of “the false and impious beliefs.” The Son, then, is God, and not only God, but also “the” Word, ὁ λόγος. So the Son has a dignity parallel to that of the Father, signified by the scriptural use of the definite article; both Father and Son are “the’s.” As the Son is the archetypal image of the Father, so lesser gods are “images of the image,” and human beings are created “according to the image” (*Comm. on John*, 2. 20).

¹⁷⁰ Nestle-Aland, *Greek-English New Testament*, 8th edition.

It may come as a surprise to those brought up on the Second Commandment, but for Origen, there are other gods, beings who share in the Father's divinity. Origen gets them from Ps 49.1 (LXX): "The God of gods ($\theta\epsilon_{\varsigma} \theta\epsilon_{\nu}$) has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting." Who are these "gods"? Origen posits that they are heavenly beings, like the sun, the moon, and the stars, created intellects who participate in divinity.¹⁷¹ However, they participate in divinity only through the Word, who is "the archeypal image of the many images" (*Comm. on John*, 2. 18). The Word/Son fully draws divinity into himself and shares divinity with the other gods: "It was by his [the Son's] ministry that they became gods, for he drew from God that they might be deified, sharing ungrudgingly also with them according to his goodness" (2. 17). The "other gods" are not the same as "false gods" because they truly participate in the Father's divinity through the Son. But they are not part of the Trinity either.

Although the phrase from Colossians, "first-born of all creation," was pushed by Arian theologians to define the Son as an ontological creature, hence God by courtesy only, Origen does not seem to me to be pushing the phrase in that direction, but rather to be trying to express the distinct individuality of the Son, generated or begotten by the Father, a full member of the Trinity, but not a mode of the Father. Because the Son is not "Source," Origen sees him as dependent on the Father, yet also as participating fully in the Father, indeed, as drawing divinity into himself and sharing divinity with the lesser gods. As long as these continue to participate in the Son's divinity and partake of the Word, they are not false gods (*Comm. on John*, 2. 19, 23). They can be accepted as serving the limited pedagogical purpose of instructing and receiving the worship of those who still need a visible focus for their spiritual lives.

This conception of the other gods makes it clear that for Origen, the economy of salvation is like a school of sanctification. The most advanced can receive the full mystery of the Incarnation, which is to know God as Father. Advanced Christians know the Father by participating fully in the

¹⁷¹"The ancient world took it for granted that heavenly bodies were living beings." Stewart-Sykes, 129, n. 21.

Word who is “with God” (*Comm. on John*, 2. 28). They contemplate the Trinity. Others, less advanced, “take their stand” on God the Son, the anointed one, in his humanity: “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2. 2). These participate fully in the humanity of Jesus and accept the resurrection but do not relate to the uncreated Word and the Trinity (2. 29). They are not wrong in centering their worship on Jesus in his humanity; but they lack the contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity.

Still others, not yet Christians, worship “the visible gods,” such as the sun, the moon, and the stars. These heavenly bodies are not the modern swirls of flaming gasses. They are lightly embodied angelic intelligences, in short, “the gods” of Ps 49. who participate in the divinity of the Son who in turn shared divinity with them. People who worship heavenly bodies at least worship beings that *participate in* the Son’s divinity; so they are not totally divorced from truth (*Comm. on John*, 2. 25-27). In fact, God the Father assigns holy intelligences to serve as objects of worship for those not yet ready for Christian teachings “so that those who are not able to rise to the spiritual nature, being moved concerning deity by gods perceived by the senses, might stand contentedly in these and not fall to idols and demons” (2. 26). Finally, on the last step of the scale, are those who “give the name of gods to the works of [people’s] hands, gold and silver” (2. 27) because things can be worshipped only as idols.¹⁷² Moving up the scale from the complete illusion of idolatry to worship of heavenly lights to contemplation of the sacred humanity of Jesus to contemplation of the Father and the Trinity resembles the progress up Plato’s divided line. Each step of truth (except perhaps idol-worship) can serve as an image or a reflection of the next step up. Idol-

¹⁷² Along these lines, Origen says in *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Prologue 2. 40): “Everyone who loves money or any of the things of corruptible substance that the world contains is debasing the power of charity, which is of God, to earthly and perishable objects and is misusing the things of God by making them serve purposes that are not his; for God gave the things . . . to be used, not to be loved.”

worship, or the worship of false gods, is not, for Origen, part of the “divided line.” It is not an image of truth at all, except in the sense of a perversion. Idols are rather falsehood to be turned away from.

Origen does a parallel “divided line” for the Son who is Word of God. At the top of the line is the uncreated Word, Son of God. Second is the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ in his human nature. Third are words which participate partially in the Word; and the people who follow them are “those who follow the popular and prevailing schools in philosophy among the Greeks” (2. 30). Fourth, at the bottom of the scale, are those who follow words that are completely corrupt, words which deny providence and “approve some other goal than the good” (2. 31). They are the only people who are outside the school of sanctification. All words that have value must participate in the Word in some way; yet God the Son and Word transcends all created words. Only those who follow words that are completely corrupt or for God substitute things or powers that are opposed to God are outside the school of sanctification — and that, perhaps, only temporarily.¹⁷³ Everyone who responds to the drawing of divinity and listens to the drawing of truth will be given the way of relating to God that s/he needs.

Although there is no parallel “line” of participation and knowledge for the Spirit in the *Commentary on John*, Moser has brought out a comparable treatment of the Spirit in Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*. The Holy Spirit, both “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ,” is the ultimate sanctifier and teacher of human beings. But other ministering spirits, sharing in the holiness of the Holy Spirit, work with human “students” until they have grown sufficiently for the Holy Spirit to work with them directly.¹⁷⁴ Even the evil spirits participate in teaching. Evil in their own intention and will, they yet do God’s will by bringing the punishment that is necessary in order for the suffering sinner

¹⁷³In the *Commentary on John*, Origen does not deal with the people at the bottom of the scale; however, he says in Book 3 of *On First Principles* that God allows souls to fall as far as they need to in order to be revolted by evil and turn around. When they “hit bottom,” as AA would put it, they become ready for God to send ministers of truth, human or angelic, to work with them.

¹⁷⁴Moser, 70.

to turn away from sin. Then the spirit of remorse leads the sinner further away from sin. Key to this system is the human spirit, the human conscience. The human spirit is “the individual person’s potential for participation in God’s Spirit . . . the potential for intimacy with God’s own Spirit.” Although a person must make good choices in order to activate this potential, intrinsically the human spirit within is good.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, just as we have *the* Father and *the* Son who is Word, we also have *the* Holy Spirit, in whom all other spirits who are holy participate.

¹⁷⁵ See Moser’s discussion, 66-76. On the human spirit as conscience, see Moser, 62-64 and *Comm. in Rom.* 2. 9. 3-4.

In all this, Origen evolves a divine community with its common source being God the Father and its shared mission being the salvation of human beings. In relation to God, the Son draws divinity into himself by “unceasing contemplation”: “By being ‘with *the* God’ he [the Word] always continues to be ‘God.’ But he would not have this if he were not with God, and he would not remain God if he did not *continue in unceasing contemplation* of the depth of the Father” (2. 18; italics mine). Thus the Son’s whole will is contemplation; contemplation is a chosen union with the Father; yet the Son’s will to contemplate the Father does not cancel out his sharing in the Father’s divinity through eternal generation. Eternal generation implies eternal being. Origen therefore holds together the Son’s eternal nature as God with his will to contemplate the Father unceasingly.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶Origen’s union of moral language with ontological presuppositions would fall apart during the Arian Controversy and during the Christological controversies of the fifth century. As exemplified by Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Antiochene position on the union of natures in Christ alarmed the Alexandrians, who held out for ontological language. Theodore preferred to say that Christ’s natures were united *kat’ eudokian*, by good pleasure (of will) rather than *kat’ ousian* (ontological union) or even *kat’ energeian*. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, www.newadvent.org/cathen/14571b.htm.

In relation to us, the Word becomes flesh to enable us to participate with him in contemplation of the Father. Herein lies a complication in Origen's doctrine of the Incarnation which Evagrius later inherits: the nature of the created soul of Jesus. With Platonic correspondence, the soul of Jesus mirrors the Uncreated Word, the Son, and unceasingly contemplates and clings to God. But the soul of Jesus, like all human souls, has a pre-existent state as a created intellect. Of all the created intellects, Jesus was the only one who did not fall away from God. For this reason, he "being the soul of the wisdom and word of God . . . and receiving him wholly . . . was made with him in a pre-eminent degree one spirit": and it is this created intellect, made one with God, who enters humanity to be born of Mary (*Princ.* 2. 6. 3). In *On First Principles*, this view of Christ is only one aspect of Origen's exploration of the nature of the Son. People could overlook it. For Evagrius, the same view becomes central to his vision of the eschatological restoration. It could not be ignored because of the christological controversies which followed in the wake of the resolution of the Arian Controversy. To some, that teaching would have a tang of Apollinaris's teaching that Christ descended as a "heavenly man."¹⁷⁷

The risk of emphasizing will and participation as principles of unity within the Trinity is that with the notion of "will" goes the possibility of change. Origen seems aware of this possibility when he remarks that the Son would not have divinity if he should cease contemplating the Father. It seems to me, however, that this possibility is forestalled by Origen's strong emphasis on the *eternal* generation of the Son. The Son, unlike any creature and certainly unlike Gnostic Aeons, transcends time, even though those who try to write about eternity cannot really fathom what transcendence of time could mean. We might even get the unfortunate idea that the Son is "stuck with" his divinity because of his eternity; but such an idea would be time-bound, not penetrating the nature of eternity at all. The closest scriptural approach to eternity might be Rev 1. 8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and was and is to come, the Almighty." Origen

¹⁷⁷John Behr, *The Nicene Faith 2* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 2004) 401-408. My discussion follows in the section on Evagrius below.

prevents his stress on freedom and voluntary participation from introducing change into the Trinity by positing that both the Father's generation and the Son's participation are *eternal* acts. Indeed, the Father's generation and the Son's participation are one eternal act, an act that points outward, embracing the economy and embracing all time; for the common eternal will of the members of the Trinity is to create, sustain, redeem, and sanctify all the members of the created world.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸See Origen's discussion of the "activities" of the Trinity in *On First Principles*, 1. 3. 7-8.

In one more analogy concerned with light, in his *Commentary on John*, Origen suggests the limitations of human thought and language. Distinguishing “the light in which there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1. 5) from “the light which shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it” (John 1. 5) as the light of the Father and the Son respectively, he distinguishes two senses of “darkness.” The Father’s light, absolute, is darkness from a human perspective because the Father’s light transcends light, just as the Father also transcends wisdom because he is the Father of wisdom (2. 150-152).¹⁷⁹ To us, the Father’s light is darkness, resisting human efforts to understand it: “‘He made his hiding place’ in this darkness (Ps 17. 12) when he ordained that the things which are infinite about himself be unknown” (*Comm. on John*, 2. 171). Although there are many “doors” to contemplation in Scripture, not all of them are open to us, or if open, they lead to mystery. This apophatic emphasis on the inscrutability of God the Father will become important for the Cappadocians, Evagrius, and Pseudo-Dionysius in their development of Trinitarian doctrine.

In contrast (*Comm. on John*, 2. 163 ff.), one cannot say of the Son that there is no darkness in him because “Christ . . . took our darkneses upon himself that by his power he might destroy our death and completely destroy the darkness in our soul, that what Isaias said might be fulfilled: ‘The people which sat in darkness have seen a great light’” (Is 9. 1; Mt 4. 16). “Darkness” now means the deprivation of God’s light that is the result of sin. Christ restores our ability to see the “great light” at the price of taking on himself the darkness of sin— this exchange will be another important piece of Basil’s and Gregory Nazianzen’s arguments against the subordinationism of Eunomius and thence, part of Evagrius’s understanding of the Incarnation. Once again, Christ provides the narrow window or hole through which mysteries that are beyond us may be . . . well,

¹⁷⁹For Plato, the Good is beyond being, though the source of being for other things (*Republic*, 6. 509b). For Plotinus too, the Good (One) must transcend both being and act because it is the cause of both being and act. If it participated in either, it would have to have another First Principle behind it, and on into infinite regress (*Enneads*, I. 7. 1).

almost seen.

The Holy Spirit is more difficult for Origen, in part because he thinks that John 1. 3, “All things were made through him,” has to mean that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son; yet in other passages, the Spirit seems to rank above the Son, for example, Matthew 12. 32: “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the world to come” (NRSV). For Origen, the question of the Holy Spirit is still open. But Origen asserts (in Greek, not in Rufinus’s translation) that “We . . . are persuaded that there are three *hypostaseis* (τρε_ς_ποστώσεις), the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we believe that only the Father is unbegotten (γέννητον)” (2. 75).¹⁸⁰ Finally, although still groping for the Holy Spirit’s exact place in the Trinity, Origen reasserts the cooperative activity (unity of wills) on behalf of human beings in the economy:

Or perhaps it is also possible to say that the creation (but also the human race), in order to be set free from the slavery of corruption, was in need of an incarnate, blessed, and divine power which would also restore the things on earth to order. This activity fell . . . to the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit cannot bear it, he sends forth the Savior because he alone is able to bear such a great conflict. And although it is the Father, as leader, who sends the Son, the Holy Spirit joins in sending him in advance, promising to descend to the Son of God at the right time and to cooperate in the salvation of men (*Comm. on John*, 2. 83).

Thus, Origen is very clear on the moral union of the Trinity; and as we have seen, he develops the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy in the *Commentary on Romans*. In this passage, the Holy Spirit lacks ontological clarity, though Origen includes the Spirit in the Trinity. The third homily on Joshua has a stronger statement (section 2):

I think that probably not even in the coming of Jesus or in his Incarnation do we learn what is perfect and complete. . . . We still have need of another who uncovers and reveals everything to us. . . . You see that . . . even Jesus says to his disciples, ‘You are not yet able to hear unless the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth,’ because through him and in him is fulfilled the perfection of the Trinity.

Although the ontological unity of the Trinity is not fully defined, varying from passage to passage,

¹⁸⁰ As we shall see, Aetius and Eunomius took γέννητος to be the Father’s essence and concluded that the Father was by essence different from the Son, whose essence was γέννητος. Origen’s subordinated order within the Trinity leaves a loophole for this interpretation, but he does not draw the conclusion from it that only the Father is God.

all three *hypostaseis* are consistently God. Thus the unity of the Trinity is on its way to being constituted both ontologically and morally.¹⁸¹

In sum, Origen's doctrine of God assumes a gradation of rank within the Trinity because he sees the Father as Source. The three *hypostaseis* are therefore distinct; yet all of them are the One God (in distinction from "the gods," or lesser divine beings). Where they are ranked as the Three, they are One in unity of will. This is an eternal unity of will, though in explaining it, Origen says that the Son would not be God if he stopped contemplating the Father. The possibility of the Son's sinning is prevented by the doctrine of eternal generation. Within the Trinity, the Son is "the invisible image of the invisible Father"; and in the world, the Son is the "visible image" of the invisible Father. With the help of the Holy Spirit, his role is twofold: to make the Father known and to empower creatures to "move," to find the way back to God. Thus for Origen, the Trinity's relation to us guarantees a destiny which is both contemplative and active. Prayer does not exist apart from care for our neighbors; and in all this, the role of the human will is as crucial as the intellect.

B. "One by Nature, Not by Number": Evagrius's Answer to Eunomius

In his *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius writes his own doctrine of the Trinity; and parts of it have no resemblance to any thought of Origen's. For example:

¹⁸¹Origen cannot imagine the Trinity except as willing—eternally— to be Trinity. He might have been puzzled by the conflict between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria during the fifth century because he would have seen truth on both sides.

Number relates to quantity; and quantity is conjoined with bodily nature. We believe our Lord to be Creator of bodies. Wherefore every number indicates those things which have received a material and circumscribed nature. Monad and Unity on the other hand signify the nature which is simple and incomprehensible. Whoever therefore confesses either the Son or the Holy Spirit to be number or creature introduces unawares a material and circumscribed nature (2).¹⁸²

Origen had conceived of the Father as source and the Son and the Spirit as second and third, both deriving their divinity from the Father in a moral union. Yet Origen did not deny the ontological unity of the three *hypostaseis*. He merely preferred to focus on the language of will and participation, with the result that the image of God in humanity includes both intellect and will. But in this passage from *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius will have nothing to do with any ordering of first, second, and third within the Trinity. Evagrius refers to Aristotle's categories of quantity and number only to exclude both from discussions of the Trinity. Created nature consists of compounds of qualities in a variety of quantities; it can be defined, or "circumscribed." Simple uncreated essence has no compounds, no quality or quantity, and therefore cannot be circumscribed through definition. This simple essence, for Evagrius, is God. The act of definition sets the limits of what a thing is, thereby allowing us to understand it. Since God is simple, undefinable essence, God is incomprehensible to the human mind.

¹⁸²Until recently, this letter was ascribed to Basil of Caesarea; and it can still be found in collections of Basil's letters as "Letter 8: To the Caesareans." On its definitive establishment as the work of Evagrius, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 142. I am using the English translation at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202008.htm>. Greek references will be to *Saint Basile: Lettres I*, trad. Yves Courtonne (Paris: Société d'Édition, 1957). References will be to section numbers.

We see in this passage a new insistence on the oneness, the unity of the Trinity. Although Evagrius does uphold the moral unity of the *hypostaseis* and even develops its significance, he also takes a firm stand on their ontological unity. Moreover, in Evagrius's doctrine of God, subordinationism within the Trinity is all-but-gone; only an echo of it remains. Although the Father is logically prior, being Father to the Son and Principle to the Holy Spirit (*KG* 6.4),¹⁸³ this logical priority does not appear to entail an ontological subordination. All three *hypostaseis* share one uncreated divine essence in what he calls the Unity (*Henad*); the absolute oneness of God he terms the Monad. Thus, Evagrius's doctrine of God is in line with the fourth-century Nicene position as ratified by the First Council of Constantinople.

Yet, Evagrius's doctrine of God still owes a great deal to Origen. Evagrius retains and develops Origen's understanding of the *imago dei* as intellect and will. The philosophical foundation of Evagrius's interpretation of the *imago dei* is, as for Origen, Plato's epistemological journey, symbolized by the divided line (*Republic*, 6). Thus, for Evagrius, the human *nous* is "in the image" of God, naturally configured to know God. Because of the Fall, human beings cannot contemplate the Trinity or know God's love directly. The world is therefore sacramental, a ladder of love and knowledge for those who, to varying degrees, are ignorant because of the Fall. The world cannot be seen properly, however, without Scripture, which Evagrius follows Origen in seeing as the beginning of true knowledge (*gnosis*). For Evagrius too, the doctrine of the Trinitarian

¹⁸³ *Kephalaia Gnostika*, S2, trans. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les Six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostika" d'Évagre le Pontique*. Patrologia Orientalis 28. Paris, 1958. Quotations of the *Kephalaia Gnostika* will come from Guillaumont's translation of MS S 2 (Syriac text).

nature of God reveals the destiny of the human community: loving unity with the loving divine community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in all, Evagrius follows five of Origen's tenets:

1. Origen's stress on the voluntary unity (as well as the essential unity) of the Trinity as a model for the redeemed human creation. Evagrius develops his own understanding of both types of unity.
2. Origen's view that as Trinity, God is transcendent mystery, only partially accessible to the human mind.
3. Origen's analysis of the human mind as "fallen," enclosed in a body and subject to all kinds of inner and outer distraction. Although creation indirectly speaks of God and Scripture is God's revelation, both provide only "doors," "windows," or "gateways" to the fullness of divine life. In order to contemplate or even catch a glimpse of the being of God, we must "mount up," purifying ourselves of all distractions and concerns that are unworthy of God.
4. Origen's confidence in the final return of all created minds to God in an intensely contemplative union in which bodies will no longer be needed and in which, somehow, all created intellects will participate in the Unity.¹⁸⁴ Evagrius grounds this confidence in the image of God in human beings (Gen 1. 26).
5. Origen's two-stage model of creation borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*, to which he added a corresponding two-stage eschaton.

¹⁸⁴See, for example, *KG IV*. 51: "Dans la contemplation naturelle seconde, on dit que les uns sont chefs et les autres soumis à des chefs, par nécessité. Mais dans l'Unité, il n'y en aura pas qui soient chefs, ni qui soient soumis à chefs; mais tous seront dieux."

As we shall see, the doors and windows to the higher contemplation seem narrower than they are in Origen's works, the dangers of self-deception greater, and God more highly transcendent. Clearly, Evagrius's Origenism is filtered through other lenses than Origen. I will focus on the influence of two of Evagrius's teachers and mentors: Basil of Caesarea, who, in the process of refuting the Aristotelian Neo-Arians and the Pneumatomachians, contributed a systematic approach to understanding the transcendence of God, and Gregory Nazianzen, who focused on the paradox of human contemplation of a God beyond human knowledge, finding the model for this paradox not in either Plato or Aristotle, or in any of their followers, but in Scripture. As a result of his own effort to refute the Neo-Arians, Gregory also took the whole question of human contemplation (knowledge) of God in a more apophatic direction than Origen's.¹⁸⁵ By tracing Basil's and Gregory's answers to the questions raised by the Arian Controversy, I will attempt to shed light both on Evagrius's doctrine of God and on his view of how we come to know God. For Evagrius, God transcends human knowledge. Yet, God reveals divine life to us through Scripture and through the creation. "The creation" consists both in visible nature and in the capacity we have for self-knowledge.

With regard to his doctrine of God, it is not surprising that Evagrius would insist on ontological language at the same time as he conceives of the Trinity as a participatory unity; for theological concerns had shifted during the century-and-a-half between Origen and Evagrius and were still shifting. Origen's challenge was to distinguish the Christian understanding of God from the teachings of the Gnostic and Marcionite churches. Against Marcion, who rejected the validity of

¹⁸⁵It seems odd to me that Evagrius evidently was not in contact with Gregory of Nyssa, who in the *Life of Moses* explored the paradox of seeing God in darkness and knowing God in ignorance. See Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 31-32.

Scripture at will, Origen developed allegorical and typological approaches to Scripture that allowed him to find truth in all of it. His answer was the Father's eternal generation of the Son, the eternal procession of the Spirit, and an insistence that the entire Trinity is responsible for both stages of the creation. In regard to the creation, he used Plato's myth from the *Timaeus* because he saw the relation between the Good and the demiurge as a pedagogically useful, but defective parallel to the relation between the Father and the Son. Origen also needed to combat all forms of fatalism. Finally, against the elitist anthropology of the Gnostics, he argued that salvation is open to all people. In all of these endeavors, Origen derived his conclusions from Scripture (read both literally and allegorically).

The main challenge to the faith in Evagrius's time came from Aetius and Eunomius, who taught a radical ontological subordination of the Son to the Father. In the process they denied divinity both to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. They argue that since the Father is Unbegotten (ἄγεννητος) and the Son is Begotten (γέννητος), then the Father and the Son have different natures. Therefore, since the Father is God, the Son (and the Spirit) must be creatures. In distinction from the Homoian Arians, who wanted to say that the Son is "like the Father" but avoid committing themselves on the subject of the Son's *ousia*,¹⁸⁶ Aetius and Eunomius, usually termed Neo-

¹⁸⁶ The Homoian avoidance of *ousia* language was not so much to leave a wide margin for interpretation of the word "like" as to be faithful to Scripture, which does not mention the Father or the Son's *ousia*. R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318 - 381* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 558.

Arians,¹⁸⁷ stressed the difference in essence (*ousia*) between the Father and the Son along with the created status of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as well.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷Neo-Arianism was a phenomenon of the eastern half of the empire and was characterized by its use of Greek philosophical terms and logic as well as its strong emphasis on the created *ousia* of the Son; Homoian Arianism avoided *ousia* language as well as Greek philosophy and held to the literal scriptures. It was known in both east and west. See Hanson, 557.

¹⁸⁸Behr quotes usefully from the Dated Creed (Seleucia, 359), which concludes that “henceforth there should be no mention of *ousia* in regard to God.” The creed was a compromise between Arian bishops and *homoiousians*, for whom Basil of Ancyra added “in all things” to “like the Father.” It seems that this creed was too vague to satisfy anyone. *Nicene Faith* I, 90-91.

Behind their position is a theory of language which is connected with the epistemological question of how and to what extent human language about God (*theologia*) reveals the essence (*ousia*) of God. According to M. C. Steenberg, the issue of human knowledge of God was implicit in the Arian Controversy from the beginning, when Arius insisted that Alexander of Alexandria and others were presenting ideas of God that were inconsistent with what is known of Jesus's nature in Scripture.¹⁸⁹ Even in the writings of Origen this epistemological question is implicit, inasmuch as Origen's answer to Marcion involved showing that Scripture must often be read allegorically or typologically. As we have seen, for Origen, the words of Scripture instruct beginners; but they also provide many "doors," or "windows" for higher, unexpressed truths about the nature of the Trinity and God's operations. Although those who are morally prepared can "read" these mysteries, they are not communicable by the literal words of revelation.

But Aetius and Eunomius effectively forced an explicit consideration of the power of human language to reveal the essence, or "whatness" of God; for they taught that the term "unbegotten," before this time considered an attribute of the Father, is God's very essence; while the term "begotten" is the very essence of the Son. Basically, this is a question of the function of theological language. As Behr has put it, "Do our words refer to God as [God] is, or not? And if not, how can we even claim to know God?"¹⁹⁰ Aetius and Eunomius said that "unbegotten" expresses the exact essence of God. If "begotten" expresses the exact essence of the Son, then the Son does *not* share God's essence; therefore, the two are of unlike (*anhomoian*) essence, and the Son is not

¹⁸⁹“The Cappadocian Fathers on Essence and Energy and the Knowledge of God: The Process of *Epinoia*,” http://www.monachos.net/patristics/epinoia_ennioia.shtml (2002) 1.

¹⁹⁰Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 282.

God.

Evagrius's teachers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzen, spearheaded the effort to refute Eunomius (though he promoted a similar theology, Aetius was not as much in the forefront, perhaps because he died in 366). In response to Eunomius's *Liber Apologeticus* (359), Basil wrote *Against Eunomius* (364).¹⁹¹ Beginning in 379, Gregory Nazianzen wrote five theological orations against Eunomius: *Oration*s 27 to 31.¹⁹² In the 380s, Gregory of Nyssa wrote his version of *Against Eunomius* in response to Eunomius's second *Apology*. In all this dispute, the Cappadocians take issue with Eunomius (and implicitly with Aetius also) both for their doctrine of God and for the false epistemology on which they base their doctrine of the Son's subordination to the Father. Evagrius, therefore, could not simply follow in Origen's footsteps as he worked out his own position. He needed to explore for himself the issues which Aetius and Eunomius had raised. For this task, he was aided by conversations with Gregory and at least the writings of Basil. In the process of assisting Gregory with various works and in helping him to draft his presentation to the Ecumenical Council in 381, Evagrius wrote his *Letter on the Faith*, the letter until recently ascribed to Basil.¹⁹³ Later, in his monastic life at Kellia, Evagrius remained concerned with the issue of human knowledge of God as Trinity, especially as it relates to prayer. His answer to the challenge of Aetius and Eunomius is complex and paradoxical: our words do not speak of God univocally

¹⁹¹ Steenberg says that while Basil wrote the first two books, most modern scholars believe that a later author wrote Books 3 and 4. See p. 8, n. 2.

¹⁹² These began as lectures given at Constantinople around the time of the Ecumenical Council. John McGuckin *The Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004) 151.

¹⁹³ Are some of Gregory Nazianzen's *Theological Orations* really the work of Evagrius? Reinoud Weijenborg, "Les cinq *Discourses théologique*, attribués à Grégoire de Nazianze, en partie oeuvre de Maxime Héron le Cynique, alias Évagre le Pontique d'Antioche," *Antonianum* 48 (1973) 476-507, proposed that Evagrius was the real author of Gregory's *Theological Orations*. F. W. Norris refutes this theory on the basis on insufficient evidence in his article, "The Authenticity of Gregory Nazianzen's Five Theological Orations," *VC* 39 (1985) 331-339. He does allow, however, that it is likely that Evagrius both shared some of Gregory's positions and contributed his own ideas; and it is "not inconceivable" that Evagrius wrote drafts for Gregory. However, one cannot assume that Gregory was not the author of his *Orations* without a great deal more evidence. See p. 338. From reading the *Orations*, I agree with Norris. But the dispute witnesses to the closeness of Gregory's and Evagrius's association.

because the essence of God is beyond human knowledge. Yet, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, through moral preparation, human beings can attain to a knowledge of God that transcends human senses, words, concepts, and speech. This “knowledge” is based on likeness to God, on sufficient growth in charity.¹⁹⁴ In the *Skemmata*, Evagrius says that the mind comes to “see” the “formlessness” which is the “place of God” within itself (20); for, purified of selfish passion and stripped of all concepts, “the mind is the temple of the Holy Trinity” (34).¹⁹⁵ Evagrius comes close to saying that in this dimension of contemplation, one receives the grace to know God essentially, even while remaining here on earth. As Evagrius puts it in the *Letter to Melania*: “Every human mind has understanding because the Word and the Spirit make everything known to it, as it is itself their true image and their likeness is communicated to it” (4. 140-143) .

Evagrius insists, on the one hand, that even to speak of knowing God is problematic — not only because human language is finite, though it is, but also because revelations of God are so easily counterfeited by demons or even fabricated by wishful thinking. Because of the Fall, our thoughts are not only finite (while God is infinite), but also deceptive. Thoughts about God are no exception to this rule.

On the other hand, Evagrius maintains the conviction that through a process of quieting the passions, absorbing the Scriptures, and seeking God’s help, one can progress through purification of thoughts and passions to contemplation, first to the contemplation of created physical nature, then to the contemplation of intelligible being, and finally, to contemplative union with the Trinity. This confidence, as well as this three-stage contemplative journey (termed *praktik_*, *theoria physik_*, and *theoria theologik_*), he inherits, to a large extent, from Origen. One can also see that his analysis of the journey is an application of Plato’s divided line of knowledge and being.

¹⁹⁴See the *Praktikos*, 84. Charity is the end, or completion (*peras*) of the *praktik_*; the end of knowledge is knowledge of God (theology). The parallel construction links charity with essential knowledge of God. This linkage is scriptural, as we can see, for example, in 1 Cor 13. 11-13.

¹⁹⁵The English text of the *Skemmata* is that of William Harmless and Raymond Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *TS* 62 (2001).

In contrast to Evagrius, with his many-layered, paradoxical approach to the knowledge of God, Aetius and Eunomius have basically one focus: the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, whose essence is alone Unbegotten. Although we do not have all of their writings—many were destroyed after their defeat in the conflict—in the fragments we have, they proceed straightforwardly, building their arguments on Aristotle’s categories and Scripture, not seeing the host of possibilities and complexities that Evagrius saw.¹⁹⁶ One reason for this difference is their educational background. In comparison to Evagrius, educated by Basil and Gregory Nazianzen in grammar and rhetoric, the classical philosophies, Scripture, and the Church Fathers,¹⁹⁷ Aetius and Eunomius grew up in humble backgrounds and came to education only later in life.¹⁹⁸ Aetius, born around 280, worked as a goldsmith to support himself and his mother after his father died in the 290s. When he gained the means to study, he studied with disciples of the martyr Lucian of Antioch, who had taught Arius. Thus, he is linked to the first generation of Arians. With these teachers, he studied logic, the Pauline epistles, and the prophets.¹⁹⁹ Eunomius, born between 310 and 320, was the son of a farmer who taught him to read. Learning shorthand, Eunomius worked as a secretary and a pedagogue until his parents died and he was free to study rhetoric in Constantinople. After moving to Antioch, he was sent to Alexandria in order to become both secretary and student of Aetius. Thus, the two were closely related; and through Aetius and his teachers, they could trace their heritage back to Lucian, the teacher of Arius himself. They were

¹⁹⁶Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) xv. Theodosius began issuing decrees against the Arians even before I Constantinople. In the end, they could not own church property or meet for worship within the walls of any town. When Eunomian churches continued nonetheless, Emperor Arcadius ordered that Eunomian writing be burned. See also Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 270.

¹⁹⁷Guillaumont emphasizes the ease with which Evagrius alludes to these traditions, sometimes not mentioning them by name. *Un philosophe*, 31-32.

¹⁹⁸I owe the history of Aetius and Eunomius to John Behr, *Nicene Faith*, 2, 267-268.

¹⁹⁹Both Aetius and Eunomius studied Scripture from an Arian viewpoint according to which passages such as Colossians 1. 15 and Proverbs 8. 22 were read literally and taken as proof-texts for the Son’s ontological subordination to the Father.

therefore a new breed of “old school” Arians who wanted to demonstrate the irrefutable logic of Arianism, in distinction from the Homoians, who objected to *ousia* language because Scripture does not use it.

The premise on which Aetius and Eunomius built their theology of the “Trinity” is that we know God’s essence (*ousia*) from the words that are used of God in Scripture and apostolic tradition. Epiphanius quotes Aetius as saying: “With such entire clarity do I know God and so fully do I know him and am acquainted with him, that I do not know myself better than I know God.”²⁰⁰ Language reveals divine essence, and there is no gap between human knowing and the reality of God. If human language does not reveal the essence of God, Aetius reasons, then theology is merely a fantasy.²⁰¹ In his *Syntagmation* (written about 360²⁰²; the name means little “ordering,” or treatise), Aetius argues that if the word “unbegotten” (ἄγεννητος) is merely a human description of God and does not actually reveal God’s essence, then “the utterance of humans is of more worth than the substance of the Almighty, adorning God . . . with an incomparable preeminence.”²⁰³

Here, Aetius touches upon a basic issue of religious faith. He anticipates the modern question of whether humans project God out of psychological need, then endow the projection with qualities such as Almightyness. If words about God do not actually reflect God, he argues, then we are creating God with our words; and a door opens for skepticism about God’s existence, let alone God’s nature. For Aetius, either form of doubt would mean despair because “the hope of Christians” would be founded on spoken words alone rather than on “natures which are what their names signify.” Applying Aristotle’s principle of the priority of being: A is prior to B if A can exist without B, but not B without A (*Categories* 12. 14a.30), Aetius argues that if “the unbegotten” is not

²⁰⁰ *Panarion* 76. 4. 1, 2. Translation is Hanson’s, 606.

²⁰¹ Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 271.

²⁰² Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 268-269.

²⁰³ Behr’s translations of the *Syntagmation*, *Nicene Faith* 2, 272.

revelatory of God's essence, then "unbegotten" signifies nothing. But if "unbegotten" signifies nothing, then "**far more** does 'the offspring' (*γέννημα*: the term for the Son) mean nothing;²⁰⁴ and the result is precisely "nothing": a complete divide between the human mind and the nature of God.

Eunomius agrees. In the following passage, Vaggione finds an echo of Ex. 3. 14 which reinforces Eunomius's claim that anyone who disagrees with him is refusing not merely to allow his interpretation of "unbegotten," but also to let God be, in fact, what he is:

²⁰⁴Behr, *Nicene Faith 2*, 272; emphasis mine.

When we say “Unbegotten,” then, we do not imagine that we ought to honour God only in name, in conformity with human invention (ο_κ_νόματι_μόνον_κατ’_πίνοιαν_νθρωπίνην); rather, in conformity with reality (κατ’_λήθειαν), we ought to repay to [God] the debt which above all others is most due God: the acknowledgment that [God] is what [God] is (τ_ν_το_ε_ναι_ _σιν_μολογίαν).²⁰⁵

“And God spoke to Moses, saying, I am THE BEING (Ων”; LXX).²⁰⁶ If THE BEING of God is Unbegotten (ο_σία_γγένητος), then Unbegotten is THE BEING of God. At the same time, the Son’s being is clearly Begotten; therefore, Eunomius says, they are of different natures; and anyone can know this from the words. Should anyone be in doubt, Eunomius provides two arguments. First, Eunomius alludes to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 1004a15-16: “in privation there is also an underlying nature of which the privation is asserted;”²⁰⁷ that is, the underlying nature is prior to the assertion of deprivation. Assuming that even his adversaries agree that God the Father is unbegotten (they would at least say that “unbegotten” is one of the Father’s attributes), he asks *how* God is unbegotten. In answer, he argues that God cannot be unbegotten through deprivation of begottenness because “if privatives are privatives with respect to the inherent properties of something, then they are secondary to their positives”; and God cannot be secondary to anything.

²⁰⁵ *Liber Apologeticus*, 8. Vaggione’s edition and translation, 42-43.

²⁰⁶ N. b, 42. Behr picks up on this note, *Nicene Faith* 2, 274.

²⁰⁷ *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966). Future references to the *Metaphysics* come from this edition.

Second, “Unbegotten” cannot be applied to a part of God, for God is simple and uncompounded. “Parts” pertain to quantity and division (*Metaphysics*, 1032b11-14). Therefore, “the Unbegotten” must be simple, unbegotten **essence**”(*Apol.* 8).

In *Apol.* 8, Eunomius also contrasts “in truth” (κατ’_λήθειαν) with “in thought” (κατ’_πίνοιαν). Basil relates the word “*epinoia*” to “*ennoia*”; and both derive from “*νοέω*,” which, according to the *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, has a range of meanings related to thought: “to perceive (with the eyes),” “to think,” and “to contrive.” Both words are also related to “*νο_ς*,” which has the primary meaning of “mind” and the secondary meanings of “that which distinguishes human nature” and “the human capacity for knowing God.”²⁰⁸ For “*epinoia*,” the basic meaning is “thinking on (i.e., reflecting),” or “thought.” But just as *νοέω* can signify “contrive,” *epinoia* can signify “invention.” Eunomius takes the second sense: for him, *epinoia* means “invention” or “empty conception,” a thought not leading to truth.²⁰⁹ An opponent who cannot agree that the essence of God is Unbegotten and conversely, that Unbegotten is the essence of God, is arguing by human conceptions and inventions, not κατ’_λήθειαν. For Eunomius, “the *ousia* of the Father is . . . knowable [as unbegotten] through the precision of terminology applied to it.”²¹⁰ Actually, since Eunomius acknowledged only the Father as God, it is the *ousia* of God that is knowable as unbegotten.

²⁰⁸Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. *nous*, I. A. and I. C. Note that “*Nous*” has a broader range of meaning than modern “intellect” or even “mind.”

²⁰⁹The *Intermediate Lexicon* sets out these two meanings clearly, listing “thinking on” and “thought” first. Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, *_πίνοια*, s.v. 2, contrasts Eunomius’s use of the word with that of Basil, discussed below.

²¹⁰Steenberg, 3.

In order to address Eunomius's subordinationism, the Cappadocians had first to address his erroneous epistemology, both his belief that we can know God essentially through theological language and his denial that we can truly know God only through reflection on revelation, that is, God's operations (*energeia*) in the world. For the Cappadocians, knowledge of God is not a choice between terminology which reveals God's essence and invented human conceptions which reveal nothing. There is a third (and correct) way which relies on a better understanding of what *epinoiai* really consist of. In Book One of *Against Eunomius*, Basil applies Plato's divided line of knowledge by distinguishing between God's *essence* and God's *energies*, or activities in the world.²¹¹ He reaches a new conclusion, however. God's essence is utterly transcendent, beyond our knowledge and unintelligible to us.²¹² In essence, then, God is beyond the divided line of knowledge. We know only God's energies, which are revealed by God's works and in written revelation (Scripture). The energies of God are the manifestations of God's power, observable activities which reveal to us God's attributes. They tell us *how* God is ($\tau\ \pi\ \varsigma$), not *what* God is ($\tau\ _ \nu$).²¹³ For example, says Basil, through creatures we know the Creator and from all God's works we know God's goodness and wisdom (1, 14).²¹⁴

This knowledge of "how God is" is not, for Basil, an empty human construct. It is true knowledge of God, the whole revelation of God, and God's real presence among us. The essence of God, however, is another matter. Only the Father knows the Son; no one knows the Father except the Son; and it is only the Holy Spirit who can probe the depths of God (Matt 11. 27 and 1

²¹¹The term *energeia* is defined as God's activity in the world both by Hanson (626) and by Behr (*Nicene Faith* 2, 286). Gregory Palamas's concern (in the 14th century) with whether God's energies are created or uncreated does not appear to have been an issue for Basil, for whom the energies of God are simply the way in which God reveals Godself to us, the basis of revelation.

²¹²For the remainder of this paragraph, I follow Steenberg, 3-5.

²¹³For the distinction between " $\tau\ _ \sigma\ \iota\ \nu$ " and " $_ \pi\ \omega\ \varsigma\ _ \sigma\ \iota\ \nu$," see Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 287, n. 71. Behr notes that the distinction between the "what" and the "how" of an entity was originally Aristotle's.

²¹⁴For the Greek text, see *Basile de Césarée: Contre Eunome, Tome I*, trans. Bernard Sesboué, SC 299 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1982).

Cor 2. 10-11; *Against Eunomius*, 1. 14). Thus, human beings cannot know God's essence. Through God's energies, though, all people can truly know God.

With these limits set, Basil addresses the question of human *epinoiai*, the mental conceptions which Eunomius regards as mendacious. He argues that in theology, we begin from perceptions of the works of God, either from our own observation or from Scripture. These perceptions of God's activity in the world, both sensory and mental perceptions, are *ennoiai*. From these perceptions or observations, we form concepts of God such as "good," "unbegotten," "simple," "immortal," and so forth; and these concepts are, strictly speaking, *epinoiai*. In the process of knowing, the human mind moves reflectively from perception (*ennoia*) to concept (*epinoia*).²¹⁵ Basil explains:

We say that the God of all things is "indestructible" and "ingenerate," calling him by these names according to different points of view (*κατ_ διαφόρους_πι_ολάς*). For when we look to the past ages, we find [observe] the life of God extending beyond every beginning and [therefore] say [reflectively] that God is "ingenerate" (*Against Eunomius*, 1. 7. 525c).²¹⁶

The *epinoiai* do not reach to God's essence, which is unintelligible to us; but they provide true knowledge of God insofar as God can be known by created human beings. In fact, the process of progressing mentally from sensory or intellectual perceptions of God's works (*ennoiai*) to conceptualizations of God's attributes (*epinoiai*) is integral to our way of engaging in theology. Therefore, the *epinoiai* are not "empty concepts" or mere inventions, as Eunomius believes. They do provide true knowledge of God's uncreated energies (*energeiai*) according to human perception

²¹⁵“For Basil . . . it is this very process of reflection . . . which enables us to acquire knowledge” and speak of God (or anything else) meaningfully. Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 286.

²¹⁶Steenberg's translation, 5. For the Greek, see *Contre Eunome* I, ed. Bernard Sesboüé, SC 299 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1982).

and scriptural revelation. But they cannot signify, describe, reveal, or in any way “be” God’s essence.

Instead of correcting Eunomius’s understanding of the domain and the language of theology, as Basil does, Gregory Nazianzen shifts the philosophical basis of the discussion from Aristotle’s *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, which are Eunomius’s area of strength, to his own forte, the Platonic correspondence between the world of the Ideas (or Forms) and the created world of becoming. After his opening *ad hominem* attack on the character of Eunomius and his followers in *Oration 27*,²¹⁷ Gregory deploys Plato to attack Eunomius’s position head-on in *Oration 28*:

It is difficult to conceive God, but to define [God] in words is an impossibility, as one of the Greek teachers of Divinity taught [Plato: *Timeaeus*, 28 E] . . . but in my opinion it is impossible to express [God], and yet more impossible to conceive [God] (28. 4).

For Gregory, as for Plato, mind and reason constitute the image of God in humanity. Despite this likeness, however, humanity, the image, cannot penetrate the essence of the archetype. Human beings are indeed created to seek God; for included in Gregory’s concept of human reason is a “hard-wired” desire for God that has been implanted by God in the first place: “Thus reason that proceeds from God, that is implanted in all from the beginning and is the first law in us . . . leads us up to God through visible things” (*Or.* 28. 16). In addition to the echo of Plato, there is also a trace of Origen’s pedagogical model of the creation in this passage. Switching over to Scripture, Gregory invokes Paul (1 Cor 13. 12): we see only dimly, as in a mirror; or in Gregory’s words, “in our present life all that comes to us is but a little effluence, and as it were a small effulgence from a great Light” (28. 17). Although our minds even now have the *desire* to ascend to God, their Archetype (28. 17), they do not have the ability to do so, in part because our “little effluences” of light are too small, being created, and in part because we are easily tricked by the Evil One into worshiping the wrong objects (cf. Rom 1. 23; *Or.* 28. 15). Moreover, the power of sense, which

²¹⁷ For example, Gregory opens by addressing Eunomius like this: “to begin with a text of Scripture, ‘Behold, I am against thee, O [you] proud one,’ not only in [your] system of teaching, but also in [your] hearing and in [your] tone of mind” (*Or.* 27. 1). See Gregory Nazianzen, *Select Orations*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, *NPNF* Second Series 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rpt. 1996). I will cite by oration number and section number.

holds us back from perceiving intelligible reality, is simply too strong:

As it is impossible for the eye to draw near to visible objects apart from the intervening air and light . . . so it is quite impracticable for those who are in the body to be conversant with objects of pure thought apart altogether from bodily objects. For something in our own environment is ever creeping in, even when the mind has most fully detached itself from the visible . . . and is attempting to apply itself to those invisible things which are akin to itself (28.12).

It is possible to see in this paragraph a nutshell-version of Evagrius's thought on prayer, which is for him a futile struggle to run (*δραμε_ν*) while being tied up if one cannot detach from impassioned thought (*νόημα*) which carries the mind "hither and thither" (*On Prayer*, 72). However, for Gregory, human nature is stubbornly embodied; we are unable to divest ourselves of our senses "by which we are borne hither and thither" and which are always with us (28. 21). In the final third of *Oration 28*, Gregory figuratively "mounts up" through a contemplation of created nature to "pass the first veil" and step beyond the realm of sense to "look into the Holy Place, the Intellectual and Celestial creation"(28. 31), only to discover that "even the secondary natures surpass the power of our intellect; much more than the First and . . . only Nature" (28. 31). Both Gregory of Nyssa's account of the ascent of Moses in *The Life of Moses* and Evagrius's journey of the mind through the second and first natural contemplations to God derive (at least in part) from Gregory Nazianzen's account of the mind's ascent to God in *Oration 28*.²¹⁸ And yet, for Gregory Nazianzen, it is an ascent that fails; for the mind cannot completely divest itself of sense. Nor, Gregory finds, can human beings comprehend the breadth and the depth of God.

Indeed, according to Gregory in *Oration 29*, Eunomius has already implicitly admitted that he does not know the essence of God; for instead of declaring what it is, Eunomius has merely rejected what it is not (29. 11): "For your word signifies that [God] is not begotten; it does not present to you what is the real nature or condition of that which has no generation."

²¹⁸See also Philo's description of Moses as the man of God who "entered into the darkness where God was, namely into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal, and archetypal essence of existing things, thus beholding what may not be seen by mortal nature." *De Vita Mosis*, 1.155-159, in *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections*, trans. David Winston (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 269-270.

In refutation of Eunomius, Gregory concludes that we can, as Paul said, “know in part and prophesy in part” only. Scripture nourishes our desire for God and tells us that God is Trinity, but in this life at least, the essence of God is beyond our words and beyond our knowing. As we will see in Chapter 2, Evagrius absorbed Gregory’s views, finding in *Oration 28* an outline of the soul’s progress. But he needed to qualify Gregory’s conclusions in order to make room for his own teaching of the contemplative passage to God.

Evagrius develops his epistemology mainly from Basil’s discussion of *ennoiai* and *epinoiai*, with which he fundamentally agrees. Though different, Evagrius’s terminology is cognate. Also related to “*νόεω*” is Evagrius’s primary word for “thought”: “*no_ma*” (*νόημα*), which has a similar range of meanings to *epinoia*: perception, thought, understanding, and purpose, or design. As Columba Stewart has shown, Evagrius has a “highly visual epistemology” which incorporates several levels of perception and distinguishes two kinds of “thought”: *logismoi*, thoughts which originate from without, usually instigated by demons, and *no_mata*, which are concepts or “depictions.”²¹⁹ Originating, as most *logismoi* do, from demons, who aim to obstruct knowledge of God, *logismoi* are usually negative; they have a trajectory toward evil, either in the form of action or mental preoccupation, and they prevent human beings from perceiving truly. For example, in *Skemmata*, 24, Evagrius says:

“Demonic thoughts (*O_ δαιμονιώδεις λογισμοί*) blind the soul’s left eye (*τ_ν ε_ώνυμον_φθαλμόν τ_ς ψυχ_ς_κτυφλο_σι*) which is involved in the contemplation of things that have come into being (*τ_ν_πιβάλλοντα τ_ θεωρί_ τ_ν γεγονότων*).”²²⁰

If demonic thoughts preoccupy the mind, it is impossible to see what really exists; one is blinded, hence deluded. In contrast, *no_mata* “are simply the way the mind functions”; they are the interior

²¹⁹ My discussion in this paragraph is based on Stewart’s article, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *J ECS* 9: 2 (2001) 173-204. For Evagrius’s visual epistemology, see especially 287-288. Page numbers will be noted in the text henceforth.

²²⁰ The Greek text of the *Skemmata* is Joseph Muyltermans’s edition: “Note Additionelle: Evagriana,” *Le Museon* 44 (1931) 369-383.

conceptualizations that thinking requires:

All thinking and acting requires interior conceptualization, even of one's own thinking and acting. If I hand someone a glass, my mind "imagines" myself doing it as I physically hand over the glass. The mind, being without a body, must act via such representations. The *no_mata* carry the "form" (*μορφή*) of objects or ideas, enabling the mind to function (Stewart 187).

No_mata arise from three sources: sensory stimulation, especially sight and hearing, the memory, or even from demonic suggestion (Stewart 188), as the demons suggest "mental representations" to the mind that are likely to arouse passion.²²¹ Evagrius thinks of these depictions as making an impression on the mind, or "imprinting" the mind, especially if they arise from sight. *No_mata* are often charged with passion, as with a seeing or hearing or memory that arouses strong feeling; but Evagrius also conceives of "bare depictions" (*ψιλ_ νοήματα*) or the depictions which imprint lightly because they are not charged by passion (Stewart 188). In all these cognitive possibilities, we have the responsibility to use them wisely (Stewart 187); in a Stoic sense, their use is "up to us." I will return to human responsibility for *no_mata* in Chapter 2; for now it will suffice to note that the *no_mata*, like Basil's *ennoiai* and *epinoiai*, allow us to function in this world and to speak of God.

In formulating his epistemology, Evagrius implicitly agrees with Basil that we move from observation to concept; the two are discrete acts because we can think only one thought at a time (Stewart 188-189). Evagrius may have chosen a term which could apply to either *ennoia*: "observation" or *epinoia*: "concept" because his purpose is to demonstrate the necessity of the mind's transcending *all* thought in the ascent to God. Also, as Stewart observes, for Evagrius, *no_mata* succeed one another in our minds with amazing speed (189). Thus, the mind can move so rapidly from observation to concept that one would be aware neither of the movement nor of the distinction. Would our ability to think only one thought at a time mean that we could not think a compound, like "a red cup" or "a running dog" as one *no_ma*? Perhaps for Evagrius, the *no_mata*

²²¹See *Thoughts*, 2, cited by Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 188, n. 65. Evagrius gives the example of the depiction of the face of someone who has angered us, which signals the approach of the thought or demon of resentment. Terminology overlaps a bit here, since demonic suggestions are generally considered *logismoi*; overlapping also occurs with the *nous*, which Evagrius sometimes sees as the highest part of the soul, other times as mind which is above the soul.

involved would really be “cup: red” or “dog: running,” two depictions in each case but in such rapid sequence as to be experienced as one. I am not certain of his account of complex perceptions.

Like Basil's *ennoiai* and *epinoiai*, the *no_mata* of Evagrius provide the basis for rational as well as theological thought. But they do not take us to essential knowledge of God. Unlike Basil, Evagrius asserts that the *nous* can reach a state that transcends concepts (*noemata*) and contemplates God by “essential knowledge” (ο_σιώδης γν_σις; *Skemmata*, 20). Though admitting the impossibility of such a state, since “the knowledge of Being is un-revelatory and has no parallel to knowledge of being” (*Skem.* 20), Evagrius maintains his conviction that such a state exists and can be reached in this life. However, he would agree with Basil that human conceptions and depictions do not reach to God's essence. The *no_mata* arising from Scripture and the works of God would provide what we need in order to reflect discursively on God's Providence, his designs and works in the economy. For Evagrius, as for Basil, however, “essential science,” or knowledge of God's essence, transcends human thought.

Having dealt with the issue of how we know God, the Cappadocians and Evagrius then needed to address the Neo-Arians' subordinationism. In what did this consist? Hanson distinguishes Neo-Arian subordinationism, which is based on the Father's ingenerate essence, from Homoian subordinationism, which is based on the subordination of Jesus in Scripture and on the incomparable glory of the Father.²²² Both types of Arianism preserve the monarchy of the Father, as LaCugna points out, but at the price of relegating the Son and the Spirit to a finite, intermediary domain.²²³ To say that the Son was of the same or of similar essence to the Father was for Arians tantamount to saying that there are two Gods, either two Fathers or two Sons. In addition to the Arians there were the “Pneumatomachians,” who accepted the divinity of the Son but denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit for fear of worshiping three Gods. Because Basil and

²²²Hanson, 563.

²²³*God for Us*, 34.

Gregory opposed both groups and aimed to give their own positive views of the Trinity, they sometimes focus on the relationship between the Father and the Son, while at other times, they focus on the divinity and the identity of the Holy Spirit. My discussion, like theirs, will vary in its focus. But their purpose in refuting Eunomius and the Pneumatomachians is unwavering: to establish the unity of three distinct *hypostaseis* in the Trinity — a unity free of ontological subordinationism and even of the Pre-Nicene subordinationism which conceives of the Son and the Spirit as deriving from the Father, hence less God than the Father, even though equally uncreated. The latter system we have seen in Origen.

Eunomius attacks the integrity of the Trinity with single-minded logic, arguing that as unbegotten essence, God cannot share this essence with an offspring without undergoing separation or division—and division would destroy God’s incorruption.²²⁴ Vaggione notes that “division” and “separation” are being used in two senses. Eunomius invokes a philosophical tradition in which “the same words represent both logical operations and ontological realities: if we are said to know the divine essence by the logical operation of distinguishing or separating it from something else, [in other words, as in distinguishing the Father from the Son as *hypostaseis* sharing divine essence] then the essence itself is considered to have been divided or separated.”²²⁵ Moreover, asserts Eunomius, the Unbegotten cannot be related in any way to the Begotten, nor can there be a comparison between the two; for since “a comparison cannot be made between things with nothing in common. If [one compares them], the fundamental principle of the essence will be made common. But if that happens, the name will be made common as well” (*Apol.* 9). In other words, one would wind up either with two Unbegottens or two Begottens; and this conclusion would be nonsense:

If, then, God is the only true and only wise God because only [God] is unbegotten, the Son, being

²²⁴ Behr notes that Eunomian churches, in solidarity with this teaching of God’s One *Hypostasis*, baptized with only one immersion, with the result that converts to Nicene Christianity had to be rebaptized. *Nicene Faith* 2, 270.

²²⁵ *Eunomius*, n. 4, 45.

only-begotten because he is the Unbegotten's only offspring, could not in fact be anything 'only' at all if his nature were made to share a common property with some other by means of a 'similarity' (*Apol.* 22).

Instead of either of these alternatives, Eunomius concludes that the Son has a different essence from that of the Father and that he was begotten at some time by the will of the Father: "We assert, therefore, that [the Son's] essence was begotten— not having been in existence prior to its own coming to be — and that it exists, begotten before all things by the will of its God and Father" (*Apol.* 12). Thus Eunomius rejects Origen's doctrine of eternal generation of the Son.

In order to argue that the Father generated the Son at a particular time, Eunomius distinguishes sharply between God's essence and God's will. What God is cannot have an end; but what God wills is an action which can have beginning and end. In particular, God's essence is Unbegotten, and God cannot share this essence with any being. God's will, however, pertains to God's action, which was to beget the Son. The essence of God has no beginning and no ending. If God's begetting of the Son had no beginning and no ending, then either God's action would be unproductive (i.e., he would not succeed in begetting the Son but would eternally keep on trying) or being eternal as the Father is, the Son would also be unbegotten (*Apol.* 23). For Eunomius, begetting cannot (by definition) be eternal. To be begotten is therefore to begin in time. Accordingly, God's will (*βούλησις*) is an action (*energeia*), and "this action is not essence" (*Apol.* 24).

His distinction of essence from *energeia* allows Eunomius to prove the Son's essential difference from the Father in two ways, or by "two roads": one either begins with essence, by comparing "generate" and "ingenerate," and sees from the difference of the terms that the essences must be different; or one starts from God's activity in the world and is led up to God's essence as ingenerate and the Son's essence as generate (*Liber Apologeticus*, 19). He does not want to rely on mere *energeia* for knowledge of God, however, because he thinks it possible to go

straight to essence through theological terms.²²⁶ Therefore, Eunomius concludes, the Son is not similar to the Father essentially but is similar only with respect to God's will, which is contingent.

Once assigned to the begetting (i.e., creating) of the Son, or once the begetting of the Son is assigned to them, God's will and action are split off from God's essence and subordinated to it. Again, using Scripture this time, Eunomius argues that as the "image of the invisible God" and "the first-born of all creation" (Col 1. 15-16), in whom all things were created, the Son does not share the Father's essence but reflects the Father's will: "The word 'image,' then, would refer the similarity back, not to the essence of God, but to the action unbegottenly stored up in his foreknowledge prior to the existence of the first-born and of the things created 'in him'" (*Liber Apologeticus*, 24).

Action is not essence. Eunomius's analysis consigns God's will to an ontological limbo, outside God's essence, even though its action exists within God's foreknowledge. Whereas for Origen, the willing participation of the Three in divine charity constitutes the One God's essence (*Comm. on John* 2. 18), Eunomius sharply separates God's will from God's essence and subordinates it, not specifying its ontological status, yet giving it an intermediate place between God's Unbegotten essence and the created order, which begins with the Son:

For we confess . . . that what the Son is everlastingly is what he is rightly called: Offspring, obedient Son, most perfect Minister of the whole creation and will of the Father . . . In all these things the pre-eminence and sole supremacy of God is preserved, for the Holy Spirit is clearly subject to Christ, as are all things, while the Son himself is subject to his 'God and Father' in accordance with the teaching of the blessed Paul (1 Cor 15. 28; *Apol.* 26).

Eunomius's subordination of God's will can be seen more clearly by contrast with the theology of a later student of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, who in the *Summa Theologiae* answers the question

²²⁶Hanson, 627.

of whether there is a will in God:

There must be a will in God because [God] has a mind. And as [God's] understanding is [God's] being, so also is [God's] willing. . . . The will is an appetitive part in our case. Despite the fact that it is named from wanting, 'appetite' or desire is active not only when seeking what is not yet possessed but also when delighting in what is. It is in the last sense that we attribute will in God, for [God's] will always holds the good which is its objective, since . . . this is not distinct from the very nature of [God's] being (1a. 19, 1).²²⁷

Whereas for Aquinas, God's intellect and God's will are both essential, that is, "not distinct from the very nature of God's being," Eunomius posits an ambiguous, yet subordinate relation between God's essence and God's will.

Evagrius does not have the benefit of Aquinas's distinction between willing what one does not have and delighting in what is which would allow him to assign God's will (with God's mind) directly to God's being. Rather, in his *Letter on the Faith*, he returns to Origen's emphasis on the moral unity of the *hypostaseis*. Defining three types of creation: coming from non-being into being, turning from worse to better (conversion), and the resurrection of the dead, Evagrius says, using the term "*sunergon*" that the three *hypostaseis* of the Trinity cooperate in creation: "ἡ τὰ ταύταις ἐργασίαις συνεργῶν Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα," or, "in these (creations) you will find the Holy Spirit cooperating with the Father and the Son" (11). Yet, earlier in this letter, Evagrius clearly states that both Son and Spirit are "of one essence and substance with the Father" (9-10). As we will see, Evagrius's Origenism has been balanced by his knowledge of both Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, as well as by the project of refuting Eunomius. As a result, Evagrius argues for the ontological unity of the Trinity in a more precise way than Origen was willing to do, even as he upholds the unity of the Trinity as a moral one.

²²⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Thomas Gilby, O. P. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963).

For Eunomius, however, the unity of the Trinity does not exist, nor even the Trinity itself. The outcome of his logic is a strict ontological hierarchy of one God and two created beings. By the principle of subnumeration (*παριθμησις*), there is an order of First, Second, and Third. According to Aristotle, to “subnumerate” is to count beings unequal to a first being. If the beings are equal, one is to “connumerate” (*συνναριθμεσθαι*) them.²²⁸ The essence of God is Unbegotten, and the Unbegotten comes first. The Unbegotten and the Only-Begotten are two different essences and cannot be compared (*Apol.* 24). The term “Father,” therefore, pertains not to the essence of God, but only to the action of God in begetting the Son (*Apol.* 24). The Son comes second. Created by the will of God alone, not “out of nothing,” like other creatures, the Son is to be honored above the rest of creation (*Apol.* 15). But the Son is still a creature, (*ποίημα*; *Apol.* 20). The Holy Spirit is created by the will of the Father, yet not directly, because “through [the Son] all things were made (John 1. 3). The Holy Spirit, “brought into existence at the command of the Father by the action of the Son,” comes third. The Spirit is to be “honored in third place as the first and greatest work of all, the only such ‘thing made’ of the Only-begotten, lacking indeed godhead and the power of creation, but filled with the power of sanctification and instruction” (*Apol.* 25). According to “A Eunomian Confession of Faith” appended to the manuscripts of the *Apology*, “The Unbegotten is first, incomparable, and God; the Son is second, created by the will and power of the Father and maker of all other creatures; and the Spirit is third, the first and best creature made by the Son at the command of the Father, but inferior to both Father and Son.”²²⁹ Superficially, this order resembles Origen’s, with the Son being second and the Spirit third; however, for Origen, the Son and the Spirit are constituted by their voluntary sharing of divine essence. The Son and the Spirit are within the Godhead, not outside it.

²²⁸ See Benoît Pruche’s Introduction, *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968) 159. In *Apol.* 25, Eunomius argues that the Spirit is different in essence from the Son because otherwise he would not be numbered after him (subnumerated). Pruche traces subnumeration to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 7-8; I have to confess that I could not find mention of subnumeration in these sections of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

²²⁹ Vaggione, 75.

For Gregory and Basil, Eunomian subordinationism arises from misunderstanding both of terminology and of the unique nature of the being of God, who transcends logical categories. As they see it, Eunomius writes *τεχνολογία*, a logic-chopping argument, rather than *θεολογία*, true speech about God.²³⁰ In *Oration 29*, Gregory Nazianzen puns on the two senses of *γέν(ν)ητος* in order to show that these Arian sticklers for precise language have confused being begotten with being created :

²³⁰Behr, *Nicene Faith 2*, 283.

In what sense do you assert that the Unbegotten and the Begotten (τὸ ἄγεννητον καὶ τὸ γέννητον) are not the same [of the same essence]? If you mean that the Uncreated and the created (τὸ μὴ κτισμένον καὶ τὸ κτισμένον) are not the same, I agree with you; for certainly the Unoriginate and the created are not of the same nature. But if you say that he that begat and that which is begotten are not the same, the statement is inaccurate (29. 10).²³¹

LaCugna notes that Pre-Nicene theologians, trying to preserve monotheism, had “used the word *agen_n_tos* (unbegotten) to express God’s ineffability and transcendence, when the word *agen_tos* (uncreated) would have done just as well.”²³² Better, in fact. For Gregory, the terms “begotten” and “unbegotten” have nothing to do with the essence of either Father or Son; they are attributes which pertain to God’s *hypostaseis*. Therefore, to say that the Father is unbegotten while the Son is begotten does not preclude arguing that the two are of the same essence, as Eunomius had assumed. In contrast, *agen_tos* and *m_ektismenon* are not homonyms, but synonyms, as are their opposites. Whichever set of words is used, Gregory means that what is uncreated is not the same as what is created; and being created (or not) does pertain to the Son’s essence. Eunomius should speak more accurately, for to say that the Son is begotten differs from saying that the Son is created. The second does not follow from the first. The way is now open for showing that the Son is “begotten, not created.”

²³¹The Greek version is *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27-31*, trans. Paul Gallay, SC 250 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978).

²³²*God for Us*, 33.

For Gregory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all uncreated *hypostaseis* of the Trinity. In essence they differ from any created being. LaCugna's summary of the Trinitarian definition of Constantinople may be useful here: "The Father is *agen_tos* and *agenn_tos*, uncreated and unbegotten; the Son is *agen_tos* and *genn_tos*, uncreated and begotten; the Holy Spirit is *agen_tos*, uncreated, and, strictly speaking, *agenn_tos*, unbegotten."²³³ If only it can be agreed that all three *hypostaseis* are uncreated, the way is open to seeing them as coeternal and even coequal within the essence of Trinity. However, Gregory characteristically shies away from precise definitions of God's essence. Reading Ex 33. 23 allegorically, as a spiritual quest for vision, Gregory follows Basil's insistence that human reason cannot reach God's essence but allows only the analogical knowledge available to us in revelation.

I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the Mount [Sinai] and drew away the curtain of the cloud and . . . away from matter and material things and as far as I could I withdrew within myself . . . [and saw] not the First and unmingled Nature known to itself— to the Trinity . . . but only that Nature which at last even reaches to us (*Oration 28. 3*).

How is the Son begotten? "The begetting of God must be honored by silence" (*Oration 29. 8*). We can "sketch" God's attributes (*Oration 30. 17*); but in the question of Who God Is, we are like Moses on the mountain, who received God's name simply as "I Am" (Ex. 3. 14). God's being is absolute, and we cannot grasp it (*Oration 30. 18*). Evagrius shows the influence of Gregory's refusal to define God's essence when he says of Christ, "there is one whose nature, person, and name God only knows. And he, as he stands in his nature is the only one among all the beings whose place and name are unknown. His nature . . . is naked mind and he himself is able to say what his nature is" (*Letter to Melania 6. 198*).

²³³ *God For Us*, 49, n. 61.

For Basil too, the essence of God is utterly transcendent. It follows from his argument that God's essence cannot be known, as Unbegotten or by any other term, that human definitions and categories also fall short of revealing the truth about God; and Scripture provides the most certain guide. In *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil never explicitly defines the Holy Spirit as God; why not? According to Gregory Nazianzen, Basil was trying to be tactful, to avoid offending those who were not ready to take that step. But surely Behr is right in suggesting that Basil wanted to adhere to Scripture, which does not directly state that the Spirit is God.²³⁴ This interpretation would be consistent with his conviction that unless philosophical terms and categories coincide with the message of Scripture, they are *technologìa* instead of *theologìa*. Thus, Basil confronts both Eunomius and the Pneumatomachians, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, with their misuse of Aristotle's categories to argue the subordination of the Son and/or Spirit.²³⁵ Eunomius, for example, orders his "Trinity" of Unbegotten, Begotten, and Spirit/Counselor as first, second, and third according to "subnumeration" (*Apol.* 25), Aristotle's term for the counting of unequal entities. But to "sub-numerate" is to "sub-ordinate." Hence, Basil insists that both counting and ordering are inappropriate to the Trinity; nor are the *hypostaseis* divided "parts" of God to be numbered and ordered:

It is by no means easy to understand what our opponents mean by the term *subnumeration*. . . . Do they define subordination as the division of the whole into lesser parts? I am unable to believe that they have gone so utterly mad, treating the God of all like a *thing* only to be perceived by the human mind, having no real personal existence. They chop [God] up into subordinate pieces and call this process *subnumeration* (*Spirit*, 41)!²³⁶

In the first place, says Basil, numbers have nothing to do with either superiority or inferiority of nature (*φύσις*). To use the orders of numbers to express inferiority in nature would be like claiming

²³⁴*Nicene Faith* 2, 314. Of course, the Arians and Pneumatomachians also claimed the authority of Scripture. The search for the doctrine of God was in some sense the search for the best scriptural hermeneutic.

²³⁵Eunomius's subordination of the Son may have led others to subordinate the Holy Spirit. See Pruche, 72.

²³⁶*St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

that tin is subordinate to gold on the basis of weight. Numbers determine quantities, but they have nothing to do with the nature of a thing (*Spirit*, 43).

In the second place, numbers are an aspect of quantity; and quantity means “that which is divisible.” Therefore, quantity, whether intelligible or material, applies only to the created world.

The source is Aristotle again: *Metaphysics*, Δ. 13 (1029a. 7-14):

‘Quantity’ means that which is divisible into constituents, either of which or each of which is by nature one and a *this*. . . . It is called ‘a plurality’ if it is divisible potentially into parts which are not continuous, but ‘a magnitude’ if it is divisible potentially into continuous parts. . . . Of these, a limited plurality is called ‘a number.’

If the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity were members of a finite class within the created world, they could be counted, weighed, measured, and divided; but Basil denies that Aristotle’s categories apply in any way to the *hypostaseis* of God, each of whom is unique. Moreover, Basil’s opponents have replaced the issue of salvation with “a stupid arithmetic”:

We are saved by faith; numbers have been invented as symbols of quantity. . . yet these men honor arithmetic more than the divine nature, lest they give the Paraclete more honor than [the Paraclete] is due! . . . We declare each Person [*hypostasis*] to be unique, and if we must use numbers, we will not let a stupid arithmetic lead us astray to the idea of many gods (*Spirit*, 44).

Although the uniqueness of each of the *hypostaseis* could be construed to mean that there are three Gods, Basil guards against this interpretation by insisting on “the unity of the Monarchy” that is present in all three *hypostaseis*. As he puts it, the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; what the Father is, the Son is also; and through the Son, the Spirit is joined to the Father. Thinking of the unity of the Monarchy properly requires that the meanings of both “One” and “Three” stretch almost beyond conception:

If we count, we do *not* add, increasing from one to many. We do not say, “one, two, three,” or “first, second, and third” . . . As unique Persons, [Father and Son] are one and one; as sharing a common nature, both are one. How does one and one not equal two Gods? . . . Since the divine nature is not composed of parts, union of the persons (*ἡ ἑνωσις τῶν θεότητος*) is accomplished by partaking of the whole (*ἡ σὺν ἡ κοινωμία*) (*Spirit*, 45).

We do not count the three *hypostaseis* of the Trinity by numbers, as we could count three objects, nor can we rank them in any order because their uniqueness makes them “one and one

[and one].”²³⁷ In their common nature, they are not three sharing one essence. Instead, they are one *koinonia*, or communion, partaking of the one Monarchy, which is the Father.²³⁸ There is an echo of Origen’s participatory language here. For Basil, the Father’s monarchy does not subordinate the Son and the Spirit, however, because the Father cannot be thought apart from the Son and the Spirit; in fact, Father, Son, and Spirit must always be thought together: “We learn that just as the Father is made visible in the Son, so also the Son is recognized *in* the Spirit. . . The Holy Spirit cannot be divided from the Father and the Son in worship” (*Spirit*, 64). In the same section, Basil goes on to say that outside the Spirit, we cannot worship at all.

The only ordering that takes place is the ordering of grace, an ordering that does not pertain to the relations of the *hypostaseis*, but to the way in which God works with human beings. When the Spirit is said to be “in” someone, this expression does not imply any reduction in the Spirit’s rank; for the Spirit is always with the Father and the Son in co-eternity:

When we consider the Spirit’s *rank*, we think of [the Spirit] as present *with* the Father and the Son, but when we consider the working of [the Spirit’s] grace on its recipients, we say that the Spirit is *in* us. If we say, “Glory to the Father through the Son *in* the Holy Spirit,” we are not describing the Spirit’s rank, but confessing our own weakness, since we show that we are not capable of glorifying God on our own; only *in* the Spirit is this made possible (*Spirit*, 63).

For Basil, the Spirit is always “with” the Father and the Son. It is in relation to us that the Spirit enters and leaves, in response to our wavering receptivity. No one (other than Christ) is united to the Spirit indissolubly. For us, the grace of the Spirit comes and goes (*Spirit*, 63). Therefore, Basil says, it is more fitting to say that the Spirit is “in” human beings rather than “with” them because no human being is eternally indivisible from the Holy Spirit. Even those in whom the Spirit dwells *continually* are not *indissolubly* united with the Spirit. “In us” is a metaphorical term which Basil uses in connection with the scriptural metaphor of the “place” of contemplation in the Spirit:

²³⁷Gregory of Nyssa, in *On Not Three Gods*, reasons that the *hypostaseis* cannot be counted because counting implies limit, and “we believe the divine nature to be unlimited.” See *NPNF*, Second Series 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1892) 335.

²³⁸Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2, 307-308. It is, he says, important to see what lies behind the formula of “three *hypostaseis*, one essence.”

Although paradoxical, it is nevertheless true that Scripture frequently speaks of the Spirit in terms of *place* — a place *in* which people are made holy. . . In reference to the Spirit, God says, “Behold, there is a place by me: you shall stand upon the rock”(Ex 33. 21; LXX). This “place” is contemplation in the Spirit, and when Moses entered this “place,” God revealed [Godself] to him. Only in this special “place” can true worship be offered (*Spirit*, 62) .

The paradoxical idea of the Spirit’s being “located” in a place does not mean that the Spirit is a lesser member of the Trinity who can be contained by physical places. Rather, the metaphor of place is Scripture’s way of describing God’s assumption of our humanity as we engage in the act of worship, which is essentially an act of contemplation. True worship cannot, in fact, happen unless, as we are open to it, the Spirit embraces us and gives us our “place” in God.²³⁹

For Basil, working with another spatial metaphor, worship itself is a “way of divine knowledge” that ascends from the Spirit (in which we pray) through the Son to the Father. Basil explains that the Spirit reveals the Son, as Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 12. 3: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” The Son, in turn, reveals the Father; “No one knows the Father except the Son” (Mt 11. 27). Thus, we ascend to the Father on the road of knowledge/worship:

The way [of] divine knowledge (ὁ δὲ τῆς θεογνωσίας) ascends from one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father. Likewise, natural goodness, inherent holiness, and royal dignity reaches from the Father through the Only-Begotten to the Spirit (*Spirit*, 47).

God’s grace, on the other hand, descends to us as goodness, holiness, and royal dignity from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Like Origen, Basil emphasizes the cooperation of the entire Trinity in the work of salvation. On this point, Gregory Nazianzen concurs:

The Father was the true light which lightens everyone coming into the world, the Son was the true light which lightens everyone coming into the world, the other comforter was the true light which lightens everyone coming into the world: Was and Was and Was, but Was One Thing, Light thrice repeated; but One Light and One God (*Oration* 31. 3).

As Father, Son, and Spirit are one God, the light of God coming into the world (John 1. 9) is (and

²³⁹Basil presupposes, I think, that worship and contemplation are supplemented by Christian service. In his *Long Rules*, Basil recommends community life over solitary life because in solitude there is no opportunity for compassion: “Whose feet will you wash? To whom will you minister? In comparison to whom will you be the lowest if you live alone?” (Q. 7). *St. Basil: Ascetical Works*, trans. S. M. Monica Wagner (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1950).

was and will be) one God. Gregory, however, is more willing than Basil to use the word “three”:

To us there is one God, for the Godhead is one . . . though we believe in three persons [*hypostaseis*]. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power . . . and there is one mingling of light, as it were of three suns joined to each other (*Oration 31. 14*).

Again, these “three suns” are three, but they form one light, as God is one, both in essence and in operation. Later, Gregory of Nyssa also develops Basil’s formula of oneness of essence and operation, using it to prove that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God and not three Gods:

Every operation which extends from God to the creation and is named according to our variable conceptions of it has its origin from the Father and proceeds through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. For this reason the name derived from the operation is not divided with regard to the number of those who fulfil it because the action of each concerning anything is not separate and peculiar, but whatever comes to pass . . . comes to pass by the action of the Three, yet what does come to pass is not three things (*On Not Three Gods, 334*).

Not only are the three *hypostaseis* one essentially, but even with regard to the distinct operations of each *hypostasis* in the economy of salvation, one plus one plus one does not equal three. In Trinitarian math, one plus one plus one equals one. “The power is not divided, nor the glory separated” (Basil, *Spirit, 45*).

As can be seen in his *Letter of the Faith*, Evagrius follows Basil and Gregory Nazianzen in formulating his doctrine of the Trinity, continuing Basil’s discussion in *On the Holy Spirit* of how God, as Trinity, is one. On the question of how we know God, Evagrius agrees with Basil with Gregory Nazianzen that the divine essence of God transcends human knowledge— or, at any rate, God’s essence transcends *discursive* human knowledge, conceived and transmitted in language. However, Evagrius’s practice of prayer took him to a wordless, formless state of “pure prayer” which comes infinitely close to essential knowledge of God. Exploring this realm takes him past Gregory Nazianzen’s clear denial that human beings can attain to essential knowledge of God in *Oration 28*. Although Evagrius agrees with Gregory that knowledge of God surpasses the capacity of the human intellect, he cannot be as certain as Gregory that we can never know God

essentially. Yet, Evagrius is far from being a follower of Eunomius, who believed that the correct *terminology* reveals the essential nature of God. In fact, Evagrius is capable of stretching the meanings of theological terms to the point at which their insufficiency to convey an understanding of God becomes obvious: for example, his discussion of God's oneness in *Letter on the Faith*, to be explored shortly. Thus, both argument and method are grounded in Basil's and Gregory's convictions that God cannot be essentially known through theological language.

More specifically, Evagrius grounds his theory of the knowledge of God in Basil's arguments against the Neo-Arians and the Pneumatomachians, as well as on Basil's insight into the nature of the three *hypostaseis* as one God. Evagrius draws attention to the paradox implicit in Trinitarian language in such a way as to underline the Cappadocian argument that God is essentially unknowable. However, Evagrius puts more stress than Basil on the moral and participatory unity of the Trinity. For his understanding of the moral cooperation of the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity in the economy, Evagrius returns to Origen. It is Evagrius's theological grounding in Basil and Origen that will be the concern of the remainder of this chapter. I will begin with Evagrius's *Letter on the Faith*, his explication of the Trinity that owes the most to Basil.

Immediately noticeable in this letter is a pronounced stress on God's oneness with an argument that stretches the meaning of normal theological language. For Evagrius, God is both "Monad and Henad (μον_ς κα_ _βάς)," or "Unity and Unicity." These words have a long history of being difficult to conceive. Guillaumont traces the conjunction of these terms for oneness to Plato's discussion of the Forms in *Philebus*, 15. a-b, then to Origen, *Princ.* I. 1. 6.²⁴⁰ Butterfield's note on the latter passage traces the terminology back to the later Pythagoreans, who distinguished the Monad (Unity) from "the bare One," an absolute not related to anything. He then supplies Clement of Alexandria's explanation of *Monas* in *Stromata* V. 71. 2: one can imagine the Monad by thinking of a body, then mentally removing its depth, breadth, length, and position (n. 1, p. 10).

²⁴⁰*Un philosophe*, 340.

What is left, supposedly, is the primal Unity. Origen connects both *Monas* and *Henas* to God's simple intellectual being::

God . . . must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence . . . Unity, or if I may say so, Oneness throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind.

Guillaumont points out that in the *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius uses both terms (*Monas* and *Henas*) for intensification; his objective is to defend the unity that exists within the Trinity.²⁴¹ In addition, Evagrius's agenda is to reinforce Basil's argument by showing the *inconceivable* unity of God, that is, the difficulty with which our conceptions stretch to be able to conceive of God at all. Implicit in *Letter on the Faith* is Evagrius's later explication of the *no_mata*, our human depictions and conceptions that are part of our created mental reality, but do not serve us in the contemplation of God.

Accordingly, Evagrius begins his discourse on the Trinity by continuing Basil's discussion of how God is one "against those who cast it in our teeth that we are Tritheists"(2).²⁴² Adverting to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Basil had discussed the inappropriateness of "subnumerating" the *hypostaseis* of God, or even of counting them, for two reasons: first, number is a category belonging to quantity; and quantity is irrelevant to the nature of a thing; second, quantity and number can be predicated only of divisible things, that is, things in the created world. Early in *Letter on the Faith*, Evagrius denies the charge of tritheism on the grounds that "we confess one God not in number, but in nature" (2). "One in number," he says, pertains to the counting of composite things. For example, one human being would be one in number; but as all humans consist of both body and soul, one human being would not be one in nature. Developing Basil's distinctions, Evagrius contrasts the way in which the world is one, as a composite whole that is composed of fire, water, air, and earth, with the way in which God is one: as being that is simple,

²⁴¹*Un philosophe*, 340.

²⁴²New Advent translation, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202008.htm>. Passages will be cited by section number.

not composite, and concludes, "God is therefore not one in number" (2); that is, God is not a whole formed of constituent parts. He continues:

Again, [human nature] is called one in number. We frequently speak of one man, but [human nature] . . . composed of body and soul, is not simple. Similarly we say one angel in number, but not one by nature nor yet simple, for we conceive the *hypostasis* of the angel as essence with sanctification. If, therefore, everything which is one in number is not one in nature, and that which is one and simple in nature is not one in number . . . how can number be charged against us when we utterly exclude it from that blessed and spiritual nature (2)?

Because "one" is a term which in ordinary speech designates number, when we use it of God, we think we know what we are talking about. Evagrius would say, however, that we need to remember that "one" is actually *not* a number in relation to God. But is it possible to think "one" and not think of number or at least of quantity or at the very least of wholeness? Yes, but probably not consistently; for we can do it only to the extent that we can let go of the meanings the word normally has. These are *no_mata*, the depictions and conceptions of our minds, which need to be transcended even to begin to fathom the mystery of God.

Evagrius uses a similar argument to exclude the category of quality from the essence of God. Referring to the Homoian Arians, who taught that the Son is *like* the Father and to the Neo-Arians, who were believed to teach that the Son is *unlike* the Father, Evagrius says that both terms are "equally impossible," for "like" and "unlike" "are predicated in relation to quality, and the divine is free from quality" (*Letter*, 3). This distinction too goes back to Aristotle, who in the *Metaphysics*, defines "quality" as "the differentia of the substance" and the "differentia of motions," even the motions of moving affections, such as virtues and vices:

Virtues and vices . . . indicate differentia of motion and activity, according to which things in motion act or are acted upon well or badly. . . "Good" and "bad" signify a quality most of all in things having a soul, and of these, most of all in those which have *choice* (Book Δ. 14: 1020b.14-25).

Although Evagrius bases his analysis of the human spiritual journey on this very discussion, he rejects "quality" in the Trinity. Involving, as it does, both difference and movement, "quality" applies to created being. God, being One Simply, does not admit difference and transcends movement. The only possibility left is to "confess identity of nature" and to accept the consubstantiality of the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (3). To assert consubstantiality avoids importing quality into discussions of God.

Would Evagrius say that we cannot predicate attributes, such as “good” and “wise” of God? In the *Letter to the Faith*, he has no argument against the scriptural passages that ascribe wisdom and goodness to God, Rom 16. 27 and Luke 18. 19 respectively (3). However, it seems that Evagrius would warn us not to mistake the attributes of God for definitions of God’s nature (*ousia*). There is danger, for Evagrius, in “circumscribing” God with definitions that are based on human categories, such as quantity and quality. To be “circumscribed” (*περιγραπτός*) in nature means to be limited and created. Creatures can be defined by qualities as well as by quantities, but God is not comprehensible (*Letter*, 2). Here Evagrius recalls Origen’s distinction between God, who is essential goodness, and creatures. As Origen said (*Principles*, 2. 9. 2), created beings have their goodness accidentally rather than essentially, with the result that this goodness can be lost; and, in fact, it was lost in the Fall, when the created intellects “wandered away.” For Evagrius, to be circumscribed also means to be vulnerable to sin: “Every holy thing . . . of which the nature is circumscribed and of which the holiness is acquired is not insusceptible of evil. But the Son and the Holy Spirit are the source of sanctification” (*Letter*, 3). Therefore, the Son and the Spirit and indeed the Father as well are not to be defined. If they could be defined, they would be creatures; and salvation would not be assured.

Conversely, if we think that our human definitions really capture the nature of God, we will be deceived. However, words do have symbolic value for Evagrius. Like Origen, he finds the words of Scripture to be doors to the mysteries of God. For example, in *Letter on the Faith*, he takes issue with the Arians who interpret Jesus’s saying in John 6. 57: “I live because of the Father, to mean the Son’s subordination to the Father. Evagrius says no, “I live because of the Father” refers to Jesus’s life in the flesh and in this time. Here, Evagrius makes use of the Nicene tradition of “partitive exegesis”: the distinction between what Scripture says of Christ as divine and what it

says of Christ as human, assuming that divine and human, Christ is the same personal subject.²⁴³ But having marked the distinction, he sees past it. For Evagrius, as for Origen, the human life of Jesus is never merely human. Because of Jesus's union with the Son, God's Word, Jesus's life in the flesh is a "door" to further mystery and meaning. Evagrius therefore takes "flesh" in two senses, as referring both to the human life of Jesus and to his resurrection-body. Thus, Evagrius relates Jesus's words, "I live because of the Father," to what he says just before, in John 6. 56 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." For him, John 6. 56-57 recapitulates the economy of salvation (*Letter on the Faith*, 4):

He did not say, "I have lived because of the Father," but "I live because of the Father," clearly indicating the present time; and the Christ, having the word of God in himself, is able to call the life which he leads "life," and that this is his meaning we shall learn from what follows. "He that eats me," he says, "he also shall live because of me," for we eat his flesh and drink his blood, being made through his Incarnation and his visible life partakers of his Word and his Wisdom.

If we participate in the economy of salvation, we both eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood sacramentally²⁴⁴ and we "eat and drink" the Word and Wisdom that is the Son by the three-fold path that Christ sets out for us:

For all his mystic sojourn among us he called "flesh and blood," and [he] set forth the teaching consisting of practical science, of physics, and of theology, whereby our soul is nourished and is meanwhile trained for the contemplation of actual realities (*Letter on the Faith*, 4).

For Evagrius, eating and drinking are metaphors for knowing and doing. He sets out here

²⁴³Behr, *Nicene Faith* 1, 13-14, explains partitive exegesis and notes that Non-Nicenes interpreted Scripture univocally, making no distinction between passages that concern Christ's humanity and those that concern his divinity.

²⁴⁴See Jeremy Driscoll's discussion in *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, O. S. B., *ACR* 59 (New York: Paulist Press, 2003) 321-327. Driscoll points out that receiving the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist is, for Evagrius, the way in which Trinitarian life is "transferred to us in the Incarnation" (322). Thus, the spiritual journey is grounded in the Incarnation (321).

three stages of Christian life: “the *praktik_*,” the practice of purifying our passions; “*physik_*,” the contemplation of God’s Providence and the principles (*logoi*) of material and intelligible created reality; and “theology,” the contemplation of the Holy Trinity.²⁴⁵ In these stages, we enter more and more deeply into the Body of Christ and we gradually learn to contemplate the triune God who is beyond us to define. Reception of the flesh and the blood of Christ in the Eucharist symbolizes the whole journey; and the journey symbolizes partaking of Christ’s body and blood. In *Ad Monachos*, Evagrius states this with naked clarity.²⁴⁶

Flesh of Christ: virtues of *praktik_*;
he who eats it, passionless shall he be.

Blood of Christ: contemplation of created things;
he who drinks it becomes wise.

Breast of the Lord: knowledge of God;
he who rests against it, a theologian shall he be (118 - 120).²⁴⁷

Thus, broadly considered, theology is not a matter of defining God’s nature by the use of categories and definitions (though one has to engage in that to combat heresy), but a

²⁴⁵ Evagrius does not conceive of a strictly linear progression through these stages, although the second and third presuppose the first.

²⁴⁶ Evagrius also alludes to the symbolic link between the Eucharist and the journey to God in *Gnostikos*, 14. In that context, he is aware of priests who celebrate the Eucharist without knowing the fullness of its significance; of those, some can be instructed, and some cannot. Perhaps he alludes to the oncoming Origenist Controversy, in which the Anti-Origenists objected to finding so many “doors” in Scripture and wanted things to mean what they seemed to.

²⁴⁷ *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, O. S. B., *ACR* 59 (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

contemplative partaking of God's love through Christ. This partaking comprises the whole of Christian life and ends in "theology" strictly considered, which is a loving and intelligent union with God. Made possible through the Incarnation, this union is full participation in the life of the Trinity.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Evagrius does not merge creatures with the uncreated God, however.

Before exploring Evagrius's view of that contemplative journey, it is necessary to consider his conception of God's Unity and Unicity in relation to his Christology. Being "essential intellect," God is also essential contemplation: the archetype of the human intellect. In God, for Evagrius, knowledge is being. As Guillaumont has said, "Dieu, Unité ou Trinité, est défini comme 'science essentielle,' γν_σις ο_σιώδης; en cela se distingue le vrai Dieu du 'dieu étranger' . . . La science est l'essence de Dieu."²⁴⁹ "God, Unity or Trinity, is defined as 'essential knowledge'; on this point one may distinguish the true God from the false (strange) God." Knowledge is the essence of God. Essential knowledge is, then, the Unity within the Trinity; essential knowledge also characterizes the relations of Father and Son: "Le Père seul connaît le Christ et le Fils seul le Père, celui-ci en tant qu'unique dans l'unité et celui-là en tant qu'unité et unicité" (KG 3. 1): "The Father alone knows Christ, and Christ alone knows the Father, the latter insofar as he is unique in the unity, the former insofar as he is the unity and the unicity." The Father is Monad, absolute one, but the Trinity is Henad. As for Basil, Father and Son are "one and one," not two. Each is a unique *hypostasis*, but one in being and operations. Evagrius refers here to Matthew 11. 27: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son." Because the Father generates the Son, the Father is the generator of "essential knowledge" also; and the Son *is* essential knowledge of the Father within the Trinity.²⁵⁰

This identification of being and knowledge may derive from Origen's development of Scripture's stress (Prov. 8. 22 and John 1. 1) on the Son as the Father's Wisdom and Word, always with the Father. The role of the Spirit in relation to essential knowledge is harder to determine because Scripture does not state it so exactly. But Evagrius gives a suggestion of it in *Letter on the Faith*, 11, where, having delineated three creations: creation out of non-being, conversion from sin, and resurrection from the dead, he brings out the cooperation of all three

²⁴⁹ *Un philosophe*, 341.

²⁵⁰ Guillaumont refers to KG 6. 28: "The Father is the generator of essential knowledge" [my translation of his French

hypostaseis. In speaking of the creation of the world,²⁵¹ he cites Psalm 32. 6 (LXX), as Basil does in *On the Holy Spirit*: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath (*pneuma*) of his mouth.” In commenting on this passage, Basil also emphasizes the cooperation between the Word and the Spirit:

The Word is not merely air set in motion by the organs of speech, nor is the Spirit of his mouth an exhalation of the lungs, but the Word is [the one] who was with God in the beginning, and was God and the Spirit of God’s mouth is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. Perceive these three: the Lord who commands, the Word who creates, and the Spirit who strengthens (*Spirit*, 38).

Also quoting the verse, Evagrius connects Psalm 32. 6 with the baptismal formula, in which the Holy Spirit participates with the Father and the Son in making each person a new creation. In the third creation, the resurrection of the dead, Evagrius gives the Spirit the role of renewing the face of the earth. Finally, Evagrius nails down his argument that all three *hypostaseis* cooperate in the ongoing work of creation by citing Ephesians 6. 17: “And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God”:

God is called *θεός* either because he placed all things or because he beholds all things (*παρ_τ_τεθεικέναι_θε_σθαι_τ_πάντα*). If he is called *θεός* because he “placed” or “beholds” all things, and the Spirit knows all the things of God as the spirit in us knows our things, then the Holy Spirit is God. Again, if the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, then the Holy Spirit is God, inasmuch as the sword belongs to him of whom it is also called the Word (*Letter*, 11).

Thus, for Evagrius, it appears that the Holy Spirit knows the Father through the Son and can even

translation of S2]. See *Un philosophe*, 341.

²⁵¹Evagrius does not use Origen’s model of the two-stage creation, the second stage of which was caused by the Fall, in this letter.

wield the Word who is essential knowledge as a sword. Although human language separates and compares, Evagrius agrees with the Cappadocians that in the Trinity there is no separation or subordination according to essential knowledge.

It is Evagrius's christology that was problematic enough to get his works condemned in 553. Here, he follows Origen, who in *On First Principles*, borrowed from Plato the account of creation in the *Timaeus*. For both Origen and Evagrius, the original creation was intellectual: God's choice to create intellects who would be with him as his Word and Spirit are with him, but in an analogous way, as creatures. Because they are creatures and not God, Origen stipulates several times that they do not have goodness essentially (e.g., *Princ.* I. 5. 3), but must make it their own by practicing it. However, the primordial created intellects chose to wander away (intellectually) from God. God then provided for them in the "second creation," bodies and worlds appropriate to their spiritual distance, with the result that some became angels, others human beings, and still others, demons. Origen, defending the freedom of the human will against Gnostic fatalism, insists that all created intellects started out in a state of goodness. Moreover, they had (and have) freedom of choice to be with God or not. Each created intellect lives in the world and is given the helpers he, she, or it needs in order to return to God. Every world and body has a pedagogical (not merely punitive) purpose.

For souls are, so to speak, innumerable, and . . . equally so are their movements, their purposes, their inclinations, and their impulses, of which there is only one perfect superintendent, who has full knowledge both of the times and the appropriate aids and the paths and the ways, namely the God and Father of the universe (*Princ.* 3. 1. 14; Greek version).

Only one created intellect did not fall; and that was the intellect which clung to God, namely Christ. It is this Christ, in union with the Word, who is the Son of God, who comes to save humanity. In *On First Principles*, this vision of Christ, the ever-faithful created intellect, lives peacefully with the usual version of the uncreated Son of God assuming human nature in the Incarnation, as stated in *Princ.* I. 2. 1: "First we must know this, that in Christ there is one nature, his deity, because he is the only-begotten Son of the Father, and another human nature, which in

very recent times he took upon him to fulfil the divine purpose.“ But the two versions are not in harmony. Because created intellects became angels, humans, and demons as a result of the Fall, the notion of Christ as a pre-existent created intellect gives rise to the question of whether Jesus is truly human as well as truly God. Also, as we have seen, the Arian Controversy called for ontological language, rather than moral language, to answer the Arian claim that both Son and Spirit are creatures and adequately define the Trinity. The Cappadocians emphasized ontological language without discarding the importance of the will. The three *hypostaseis* “cooperate” in salvation because their will and their work “is” One.

Although Evagrius fundamentally agrees with them, he also agrees with Origen that the created Christ began not as a human baby,²⁵² but as a pre-existent intellect who clove to the Word so thoroughly that he did not wander away, but became united with the Word by an inseparable moral union. Thus, Christ is connatural with the Trinity only by moral union:

Le Christ n'est pas connaturel de la Trinité. En effet, il n'est pas aussi science essentielle; mais seul il a en lui toujours la science essentielle inséparablement. Mais le Christ, je veux dire celui qui est venu avec le Verbe Dieu et en esprit est le Seigneur, est inséparable de son corps et par l'union il est connaturel de son Père, parce qu'il est aussi science essentielle (KG, 6. 14).²⁵³

What Evagrius is getting at, I think, is that as created intellect, Christ is not “part” of the Trinity as a fourth *hypostasis*; he therefore is not “essential knowledge.” Nor is Christ’s union with the Word strictly ontological. Nevertheless, having chosen to be inseparable from the Word, the created soul of Christ is united to the Word in a permanent moral union. He therefore has “essential knowledge” of the Trinity within him in a uniquely voluntary, quasi-ontological manner. Similarly, in the Incarnation, he is united voluntarily both to the human body of Jesus and to the

²⁵²But see the *Letter to Melania*, 12. 443-447: “God, because of his love for us . . . was born of a woman because he wanted it so, without bringing to naught what he was in order to deliver from conception and birth us that are subject to the curse and to sin, that he might give us second birth to which blessing and righteousness belong.” For Evagrius, holding to Christ’s pre-existent intellect was not contradictory to conceiving of Christ’s human birth.

²⁵³“Christ [as created intellect] is not connatural to the Trinity. In effect, he is not also essential knowledge; but he alone has within him essential knowledge, always and inseparably. But Christ, I want to say he who has come with God the Word and in the Spirit is the Lord, he is inseparable from his body, and through the [hypostatic] union, he is connatural with his Father because he is also essential knowledge.”

Word/Son. The union is not given a clear ontological expression.

Moreover, Evagrius seems to be aware of the ambiguity; for in the *Letter to Melania*, he does use the language of being to express Christ's union with God and humanity. The context is his rejection of the notion that there are two Christs, a human Christ and a divine, intellectual Christ. There is only one being, Christ, who is God and "man":

Our Lord has appeared as a man in our time, in our world, and in our measure. But in his own time, in his world, and in his kingdom, this man does not only appear to be God, but he truly is. And as in this world there were not two beings, God and man, but one, God for Himself and man for us; thus in his world too, there are not two beings, God and man, but one God who for himself is God and God who is man because God has become man (*LM*, 12. 473-479).

In making the case against "two beings," Evagrius suggests the possibility that the union between Christ and the Word is ontological as well as moral: "in his own time, in his world, and in his kingdom, this man does not only *appear to be* God, but he truly *is*." Evagrius reaches for a balance between the need for ontological language to account for the Incarnation and the need to keep Origen's focus on the importance of the will, the free choice of Christ to cleave to the Word in obedience as well as the free choice of God to become incarnate.

The Christological controversies of the fifth century are foreshadowed here. In the *Kephalala Gnostika*, Evagrius denies again that there are two Christs: "Celui qui dit deux Christs ou deux Fils est semblable à celui qui dit la sagesse et le sage deux sages ou deux sagesse" (6. 16). In English, we read: "The one who says [that there are] two Christs or two Sons is like one who says [that] wisdom and the sage [are] two sages or two wisdoms." Hence, through the union, there is only one Christ, one Son. Does this statement ring true? — that is the question.²⁵⁴

Whereas Basil and Gregory Nazianzen drop Origen's cosmology but keep his stress on God's unchanging will to love, shared by each of the *hypostaseis*, Evagrius keeps Origen's cosmology because it accords with the spiritual pedagogy that he worked out in monastic life. Yet,

²⁵⁴ McGuckin comments, [Origen's] scheme failed because "it never saw Jesus as synonymous with the Word incarnate." Later, after many modifications, some having resulted in schism, theology took the direction of Athanasius, who "set out a fuller elaboration of the Word as the single psychic subject of the Christ." See "Incarnation," *Patristic Theology*, 181.

he also makes an attempt to harmonize Origen's system with that of his Cappadocian mentors. The result is a hybrid with Platonic elements that are problematic, even to some extent, for Evagrius, as the above passages witness. However, Evagrius does establish a moral and quasi-ontological union between God and human beings in Christ that provides the basis for his theology of prayer. Despite his retention of Origen's creation-myth and his resulting failure to define the Incarnation in clear ontological language, nevertheless, in the *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius continues his discussion of the Incarnation by clarifying God's purpose:

That which is natural to [us] is that [we were] created in the image of God. What is supernatural is that we may come to be in [God's] likeness according to the word, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it in abundance" (John 10. 10; *LM*, 12. 484-487).

Thus, in the twelfth section of the *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius gives his own version of Athanasius's formula: God became human that human beings can become God.²⁵⁵ This is the underlying tenet that keeps Evagrius — barely — on the Christian side of the divide between Gnostic myth and Christianity. To his theology of prayer and to Origen's, we now turn.

²⁵⁵See *On the Incarnation*, 54. 3.

III. Chapter 2

The Movement from Image to Likeness: A Theology of Prayer

A. The Heritage of Clement of Alexandria

In the process of reaching a definition of the Trinity at the First Council of Constantinople in 381, the Cappadocians and Evagrius had made great progress in defining the nature of God and in dealing with the question of how God is known. Following Origen's idea of the higher mysteries hidden in the words of Scripture, they taught that the human mind cannot know God directly through the words and the theological concepts that address the nature of God. God can be known only through revelation; and revelation provides true knowledge of God's will and energies, but not knowledge of God according to essence. The latter transcends the human mind.

In any consideration of prayer, however, the parallel question of self-knowledge arises. How and how well can we know ourselves? "*Γν_θι σεαυτόν,*" Socrates is supposed to have said; know yourself, but how?²⁵⁶ For Origen and Evagrius, self-knowledge begins with Genesis 1. 26: creation in the image and likeness of God. Plato and the Stoics provided analyses of the human person

²⁵⁶This advice was engraved over the entrance to the Delphic Oracle; it has been ascribed to Socrates and to various members of the Seven Sages of the Ancient World. Who actually first said it is uncertain. What is certain is that self-knowledge was a necessity to anyone trying to interpret the often-ambiguous words of the "god."

which Origen and Evagrius in different ways use as their interpretive lens for Genesis 1. 26. For Plato, human beings have a natural orientation to goodness and truth because the human *nous* is modeled on the Good and has the capacity to know the Good. By endeavoring to know truth, the mind activates its inherent share in immortality, which itself derives from the mind's kinship to the eternal Good. Plato's stress on the relationship between knowing and being provided Origen and Evagrius with the framework for interpreting humanity's relationship with God as essentially contemplative. Plato also provided models for moral and spiritual education, as well as the schema of the tripartite soul that proved so important for Evagrius.

In Stoic thought, human beings are "rational beings," oriented to Reason (*Logos*) by nature. As Marcus Aurelius put it, "τ_ λογικ_ ζ_ _ α_ τ_ πρ_ ξις_ κατ_ φύσιν_ στ_ κα_ κατ_ λόγον": To the rational creature, the same act is [both] according to Nature and according to Reason.²⁵⁷ However, "Reason" is not an Ideal Form, eternal and transcendent, but a natural principle that pervades the world and encompasses change. What is natural is reasonable; what is reasonable is natural. Our minds have a spark (or sperm) of Reason (*logos*); they correspond to Nature. Therefore, faced with endless changes in our circumstances, we have the capacity to make decisions that harmonize with the flow of Nature. These are, *ipso facto*, the most reasonable decisions.

Stoics thought of Reason as working out in a necessary chain of causality; whatever happens is according to providence and has to happen. Providence is the order that lies behind the apparent chaos of change. We cannot change what must be. Because we are part of the order of the world, we must accept the way things work out. Yet, we have a limited sphere of power, the freedom to choose whether to accept what happens, thereby harmonizing ourselves with Nature, or to resist. Harmony (hence happiness) is "up to us" (τ_ φ' _ μ_ ν). Because human beings have a spark of reason (*logos*), they are able to consider circumstances rationally, then decide on the choice which most harmonizes with Providence, that is, the choice that is most reasonable. This choice will

²⁵⁷*To Himself*, 7. 11. Loeb edition, ed. and trans. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979).

be the best even if it does not seem personally satisfying. In order to harmonize themselves with Providence, however, human beings have to master their self-centered passions and reach the state of clarity known as *apatheia*.

Because Providence does not transcend, but rather pervades the world, the focus of Stoicism is on this world. What are we doing with this choice, here and now? Moreover, in Stoic thought, we cannot understand the workings of Providence and contemplate them by use of a ladder of knowledge; in harmonizing with Reason, our own reason must learn to trust that all is for the best without insisting on figuring everything out. It will all be forgotten anyway, and everything will have forgotten us, says Marcus Aurelius (*To Himself*, 7. 21). Stoicism's stress on trust went well with the pedagogical system of Origen and Evagrius in which we are asked to use all the circumstances of our lives on earth to learn the ways of God.

Yet, as Origen and Evagrius both understood, general overviews of the human person can be misleading in particular situations. Misunderstandings of Scripture and philosophy result in Marcion's scriptural deletions or lead to endless heresies: Gnosticism, Arianism, Anthropomorphism. From these follow damaging or fatal illusions about one's own identity and spiritual state — recall Cassian's example of the monk used to praying to a physical "God" in *Conference* 10. Accordingly, Origen and Evagrius both stipulate that studies should proceed in a pedagogical order, so that students can be prepared gradually for the more difficult teachings, as well as for the "higher" forms of prayer.²⁵⁸ For them, prayer is not an undertaking that can be abstracted from the difficult task of

²⁵⁸Origen and Evagrius both made use of Hellenistic educational models, some of which will be discussed below. See Origen's Prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 3. Proverbs comes first for its moral teachings, then Ecclesiastes, which teaches the transience of corporeal nature, and third, Song of Songs, which teaches the love of God by use of metaphors of physical love. In Lawson's edition, this discussion is on pp. 43-46. Evagrius associates Proverbs with moral improvement (*praktik*), Ecclesiastes with natural contemplation, and the Song of Songs with "theology," or the contemplation of God. See *In*

self-knowledge; nor is “self-knowledge” merely a matter of individual self-understanding, important as that is. In fact, neither prayer nor individual self-knowledge can be divorced from a basic understanding of what it means to be a human being created “in the image and likeness of God.”

For Origen and Evagrius, Genesis 1. 26 is the ontological basis of the very possibility of relationship between God and human creatures. Thus, creation “in the image and likeness of God” grounds their theology of prayer. The question for them was how to interpret this scripture; for Genesis leaves its meaning open. In the early Christian centuries, some thought that Genesis 1. 26 referred to a physical correspondence between human beings and God, while others located the image of God in the heart or the mind. Origen and Evagrius followed the latter trajectory originating with Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish exegete of the early first century, and proceeding with Clement of Alexandria, Origen’s mentor and tutor. With Philo and Clement, they identify the image and likeness of God as the human *nous*, the human mind and spirit.²⁵⁹ As we shall see, this was not a mere matter of theological theorizing. For Origen and Evagrius, a basic understanding of one’s own creation in God’s image was a necessity for anyone who wanted to learn to pray. To this end of understanding, St. Paul and the pagan philosophies contributed their anthropological constructs.

As an entry-way into the intricate relations between prayer, self-understanding, and anthropology, it will be helpful to return to the “root definition” of prayer given by Clement of Alexandria and quoted at the beginning of this thesis:

Prayer is, then, to speak more boldly, converse with God. Though whispering . . . and not opening the lips, we speak in silence, yet we cry inwardly. For God hears continually all the inward converse. So also we raise the head and lift the hands to heaven and set the feet in motion at the closing utterance of the prayer, following the eagerness of the spirit (*τ_προθυμί_το_πνε_ματος*) directed toward the intellectual essence (*νοητ_ν_ο_σίαν*); and endeavoring to abstract the body from the earth along with the discourse, raising the soul (*ψυχή*) aloft, winged with longing for better things, we compel it to advance to the region of holiness, magnanimously despising (*καταμεγαλοφρονο_ντες*) the chain of the flesh (*Strom. 7. 7. 39. 6-40. 1*).

²⁵⁹Gabriel Bunge discusses the correspondence between *nous* and *pneuma* in *Évagre le Pontique: Traité Pratique ou le Moine*, trans. Paul Peternell (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996) 28.

Significantly, Clement's adaptation of Plato's intellectual goal for the human person—the joining of the human spirit to God's intellectual essence — does not involve a Gnostic rejection of the body. While on the one hand, the flesh is a chain which keeps us tethered to earthly matters, on the other hand, the body participates effectively in the endeavor of the mind to rise to God. Bodily gestures, indeed, both express and reveal the “eagerness of the spirit directed toward the intellectual essence.” In *On Prayer*, Origen allegorizes bodily gestures thus: “This is how [a person] should come to prayer, stretching out his soul . . . instead of his hands, straining his mind (*nous*) to God instead of his eyes, raising his governing reason [*h_gemonikon*] from the ground and standing it before the Lord instead of standing (31. 2).” Evagrius condenses the whole passage into one sentence: “Prayer is conversation of the mind with God” (*De Orat.* 3); but he actually shares Clement's interest in the body's literal ability to express the state of the soul, as when, for example, in a very different application from Clement's, he explains that the demons, unable to read our minds directly (as God does), must rely on our bodily gestures in order to plan their attacks (*Thoughts*, 37).²⁶⁰

Thus, one way or another, this passage was a major source for both Origen and Evagrius.²⁶¹ In it, Clement blends both Stoic and Platonic anthropologies with that St. Paul, as expressed in 1 Thessalonians 5. 23: “May the God of peace . . . sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁶² First, Clement develops Paul's anthropology by showing that all three aspects of humanity, body, soul, and spirit,

²⁶⁰ I will be following Robert E. Sinkewicz's translation in *Evagrius Ponticus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁶¹ While Evagrius certainly could have read this passage in Clement's *Stromateis*, he could also have taken Origen's version of it in *On Prayer* or even have done both. That he states it without context (*De Oratione*, 3) makes his access to it difficult to determine, but Clement's stress on abstracting the body and raising the soul in prayer does correspond with Evagrius's idea that in the first stage of the *apocatastasis*, body and soul will be raised to *nous* (*Letter to Melania*, 5. 158-161); I think, therefore, that he read both Clement's and Origen's versions directly.

²⁶² See the discussion of Origen's Pauline anthropology in Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 19-20.

share in the act of prayer. Yet, in the “magnanimous despising of the chain of the flesh,”²⁶³ we also see Clement’s Christian version of the “Stoic Sage,” to borrow Peter Brown’s term for the person who has conquered the passions and become “free to collaborate joyfully . . . with the hidden action of the Supreme Mind.”²⁶⁴

²⁶³This phrase translates Clement’s terminology: *το_δεσμο_καταμεγαλοφρονο_ντες_το_σαρκικο_*: being high-souled, despising the bond of the flesh.

²⁶⁴See Brown, 128. Brown notes that the Stoic views and Platonic metaphysics reflected in Clement’s works “were part and parcel of the intellectual *koiné* of the age.

Every situation was to be perceived for exactly what it was— not as an occasion to experience fear, frustration, or inappropriate hope, but as an opportunity for joyful service. . . . What stood in the way of such a state of lucid and alert availability were what are misleadingly called, in modern summaries of Stoicism, “the passions.” . . . The “passions” colored perceptions of the outside world with nonexistent sources of fear, anxiety, and hope; or else they bathed it in a false glow of pleasure and potential satisfaction.²⁶⁵

Therefore, Clement urged the goal of *apatheia*, freedom from the passions; and this state, as Brown explains, means “a state of final serenity of purpose,” of no longer being held back “by the fears and uncertainties engendered by the passions.” Good actions then can be done in response to “right knowledge” and in a spirit of generosity.²⁶⁶

Finally, in connection with Clement’s description of conversation with God, we should recall Plato’s figurative anthropology in *Phaedrus*: the charioteer (*nous*) who drives two winged horses, one horse “a lover of honor with modesty and self-control,” the other horse “companion to wild boasts and indecency,” hard to control unless given its head toward earthly desires (253d-e). Because Plato defines the two horses only loosely, his framework proved useful for theologians as different as Clement and Evagrius. Clement uses Plato’s framework in order to highlight the intensity with which the whole person must reach out toward God. For him, the “flight” of the soul is a metaphor for a change in focus, from the visible world of mundane affairs to the invisible, but intelligible reality of the God who is truly present to us. In transcending the mundane, we do not lose ourselves but find “conversation with God.” Like a charioteer, then, the mind (*nous*) is meant to rule

²⁶⁵Brown, 129.

²⁶⁶Brown, 131.

the lower parts of the soul so that the whole soul can “ascend” from the physical world, with its uncertainty, to the world of intelligible forms, of which this world provides only images and shadows. Of course, the body cannot literally be abstracted from the earth; but Clement sanctions its physical expression of the longing for God in the human soul and spirit. Like Clement, Origen and Evagrius also stress the yearning of the spirit to ascend to God; however, as we shall see, they develop all three of Clement’s anthropologies in order to explore the dynamics of psychological conflict and spiritual warfare.

For Plato, the human *nous* is actually kin to the intelligibility of the “upper” world and is therefore capable of perceiving it, provided that the *nous* is not overcome by the “bad horse,” the strong desire for bodily satisfaction and the laziness that leads one to settle for conventional opinions rather than struggle for truth. In Book 9 of the *Republic*, Plato names the three parts of the soul as the *logistikon* (*nous*), the *thumos*, or “spirited part,” and the *epithum_tikon* (desire).²⁶⁷ For Plato, desire is by far the most dangerous; for earthly desires are insatiable. Plato compares desire to a many-headed beast (*Republic*, 9. 588 b - 589 a). The *thumos* can boil with wrongful anger; but it has the function of protecting the *logistikon* from following mindless desires. It is therefore like a lion, noble, but needing to be tamed. Only the reason can be symbolized by a human being, however; for only the reason can recognize justice (and hence, the Good).

Although Clement suggests that in prayer, the spirit must strain intellectually toward God’s essential intellect, he gives equal emphasis to the will’s longing, as expressed by the inward cry of the heart. What God hears is the inward conversation that results from the eagerness of the spirit to receive divine knowledge. Note that the relationship between intellect and will is reciprocal. The intellect needs that eagerness, the drive toward God, which Plato expresses through the figure of the good horse. The “drive toward God” also needs the understanding of the intellect to provide the right direction for its energies. Accordingly, Clement grounds his definition of prayer in the two-fold

²⁶⁷ See the *Republic* 9. 571 d - 572 b and 9. 588 c - 589 b. Evagrius uses the terminology of Book 9, changing “*logistikon*” to *nous*, perhaps because the latter term is closer to the biblical sense of “heart,” or center of the person.

correspondence he finds between the human person and God, a correspondence both of mind and will:

But if voice and expression are given us for the sake of understanding, how can God not hear the soul itself and the mind, since assuredly, soul hears soul and mind, mind (*ψυχ_ ψυχ_ς κα_ νο_ς νο_ς_ παίει*)? Whence God does not wait for loquacious tongues as interpreters . . . [but] our thought (*_ ννοια*), which even before the creation he knew would come into our mind, speaks to God. Prayer, then, may be uttered without the voice by concentrating the whole spiritual nature within [on intelligible discourse (*ε_ς φων_ν τ_ν νοητήν*)] in undistracted turning towards God (*Strom.* 7. 7. 43. 3 - 5).

“Spirit, “ or *pneuma*, is the highest part of the soul for Paul; Plato characteristically thinks in terms of “mind,” or “*logistikon*”, or “*nous*.”²⁶⁸ Clement makes use of both *pneuma* and *nous*. By concentration of the spirit and undistracted (*_ περίσπαστον*) turning toward God, we actually speak with God, not in spoken words, but from mind to mind, soul to soul, immediately and intelligibly. Clement may be alluding to Romans 8. 5b-9b: “Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. . . . you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” The theological foundation for this connection between the prayer of the inner mind and the spirit’s spontaneous turning toward God is two-fold: the kinship between the human and divine mind based on Genesis 1. 26, and the will of God, God’s own choice. For Clement, God is good not by necessity, but by free choice; and God has given human beings the freedom and the responsibility to choose to be saved:

For neither is God involuntarily good, as the fire is warming; but in [God] the imparting of good things is voluntary, even if [God anticipates the request]. Nor shall [the one who] is saved be saved [unwilling: *_ κων*], for s/he is not inanimate; but s/he will above all, voluntarily and of free choice, speed to salvation. . . . Wherefore God does not do good by necessity but from . . . [deliberate choice: *κατ_ προαίρεσιν*] benefits those [of them] who . . . turn [toward God] (*Strom.* 7.

²⁶⁸Plato names the three parts of the soul in the *Republic*. In Book 9, for example, he recommends that before going to sleep, one rouse one’s rational part (*logistikon*) with good arguments and speculations, quiet one’s anger (*thymos*), and give one’s desiring part (*epithumetikon*) just enough food to let it sleep quietly (571 d-572 a). Here, Plato sees the desiring part as especially dangerous because it has a lawless dimension (572 b). Even more clearly than in the *Phaedrus*, Plato’s terms in the *Republic* suggest Evagrius’s schema.

7. 42. 4 - 6).

Clement finds the reason for God's choosing to help us in divine condescension, or compassion "for our weakness," in the same way as a shepherd serves the sheep or a king his subjects. In return, we serve God most of all simply by turning toward God wherever we happen to be: "Each place . . . and time in which we entertain the idea (*epinoia*) of God is, in reality, sacred" (*Strom.* 7. 7. 43. 1). However, as God does not need our "loquacious tongues as interpreters," the words we use in the process of entertaining the idea of God are less important than the turning of attention to God without distraction (*Strom.* 7. 7. 43. 5). In his work against the Gnostics, then, Origen develops Clement's stress on divine and human freedom even as he develops Clement's conception of the contemplative goal: the sharing in God's wisdom and knowledge.

Clement's Platonic emphasis on the likeness between the praying mind and God depends, as Bernard McGinn points out, not only on "a seeing, but [also on] an awareness of identity with the present Ultimate Principle." Thus:

The contact between the Absolute Principle and the philosopher . . . is possible only because the philosopher's soul—or, to speak more precisely, the higher dimension of the soul that Plato often calls *nous*—is itself of divine origin, as *Timaeus* 90[a-c] insists. . . . Hence, the soul is both divine in origin and capable of being divinized.²⁶⁹

Clement probably also proceeds from Genesis 1. 26: creation in the image and likeness of God. Yet, humanity fell away from this image with the disobedience of Adam and Eve.²⁷⁰ As a result, there is also division between humanity and God; and the divine *Logos* is met by the human *alogon*, the irrationality now present in each person.²⁷¹ Because sin means intellectual and moral division from God, Clement conjectures that it is dangerous for the wicked, those who are ignorant of what is

²⁶⁹Mc Ginn, 33.

²⁷⁰Clement does not have Tertullian's understanding that sinfulness is passed on by a father's sperm; nor does he have any doctrine of original sin. Yet, he sees all humanity as united in sin, so that Adam and Eve become symbolic of the human race. See Duffy, 49-51.

²⁷¹Duffy, 51.

really good, to pray. If they receive what they ask, it may not really be good, or if it is really good, they will not know how to use it (*Strom.* 7. 7. 44. 1 - 2). Therefore, each one must prepare for prayer by “obtaining command of all influences which war against the mind” (*Strom.* 7. 7. 44. 7). In order to be ready to turn to God, then, we have moral homework to do; for the more closely we can know and follow God’s will, the more fully we will be able to receive knowledge of God, receiving this knowledge “from the mystic choir of the truth itself” (*Strom.* 7. 7. 45. 1).

Thus, Clement suggests two stages of prayer: moral purification and contemplation, or reception of the knowledge of God. These are not linear stages of life; that is, Clement does not say that a person must attain to a final purity before he or she can pray. Instead, Clement presents them as two movements of the act of prayer, both necessary every time we pray because we need to turn to God without distraction and “concentrate the whole spiritual nature within on intellectual discourse” with God.

In their reflections on prayer, Origen and Evagrius bring out different aspects of Clement’s anthropologies. In *On First Principles*, Origen uses Plato’s anthropology in the *Timaeus* as his source for the primordial creation in Book 2. In the *Timaeus*, the human intellect is the “most sovereign part of our soul [and] god’s gift to us, given to be our guiding spirit” (90a).²⁷² For Origen, the gift of creation is the intellect, the “image of God” (*Princ.* 3. 1. 13).²⁷³ However, his conception of the intellects themselves is closer to the *z_a logika*²⁷⁴ of Marcus Aurelius in *To Himself*, 7. 11; for Origen’s intellects are rational creatures whose “reason” includes freedom of will, or “the power of free and voluntary movement” (*Princ.* 2. 9. 2), given in order that the intellects might freely choose

²⁷²The other two parts are appetite, recognizable in Evagrius’s concept of *epithumia*, and ambition, which does not square exactly with Evagrius’s *thumos*.

²⁷³In the *Timaeus*, the soul is tripartite, but Plato does not use the figure of the charioteer and the horses, which might have been awkward in a discussion of primordial intellects.

²⁷⁴Origen uses exactly this Stoic terminology in *On First Principles*, 3. 1. 3.

whether to remain with God or not.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵In *On First Principles*, 3. 6. 3, Origen relates the eschaton to the original misuse of human freedom in Genesis 2. 17: “nor will one who is always in the good and to whom God is all things (1 Cor 15. 28) desire any longer to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” If the intellect is the image of God according to Genesis 1. 26, the power of free choice is the gift of Genesis 2.

This originally Stoic understanding of freedom, Origen unites to Plato's conception of inner conflict within the tripartite soul between the *nous*, seeking intelligible knowledge, and the lower parts of the soul, seeking earthly goals instead.²⁷⁶ For Plato, the conflict need not even be moral; it can be generated by the mere fact that the lower parts trust sense-impressions and the educated *nous* knows better (*Republic*, 10. 602e-603a). For Origen, inner conflict is generally moral and spiritual as well as epistemological; therefore, he prefers Paul's schema of body, soul, and spirit.²⁷⁷

Yet, Origen shares Plato's utter conviction that human beings are knowers by nature. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato figuratively presents knowledge as food for the mind and indeed, for the whole soul. He conceives of many souls pursuing knowledge, only to settle for the easier goal of conventional opinion. Yet the many took off after knowledge; why? "The reason there is so much eagerness to see the plain where truth stands is that this pasture has the grass that is the right food for the best part of the soul, and it is the nature of the wings that lift up the soul to be nourished by it" (248b-c). Origen and Evagrius absorbed this metaphor.

In Book 3 of *On First Principles*, Origen shifts to a Stoic anthropology, which emphasizes reason (*logos*) and the decision of the will (*h_gemonikon*) in order to lay bare the dynamics of moral choice and the possibilities for training the will. Origen supplements this Stoic framework with Paul's bipartite division of flesh and spirit (Gal 5. 17), plus his tripartite division of body, soul, and spirit from 1 Thessalonians 5. 23 (*Princ.* 3. 2. 4). In his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen develops Paul's tripartite model more fully, linking it to a tripartite process of spiritual growth. But even in the

²⁷⁶See, for example, *Phaedrus*, 248a-b.

²⁷⁷Origen found no biblical correspondence with Plato's anthropology. He therefore preferred Paul's model. See Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismon*," 19- 20,.

Commentary on Romans, Origen alludes to the Stoic model in order to deal with the issue of choice itself. Thus, Origen's use of all of his anthropological sources is flexible, varying with his pedagogical purpose. In his discourse *On Prayer*, he adverts to all three.

In contrast, as at least two scholars have shown, Evagrius narrows his focus, selecting almost exclusively Plato's tripartite soul from Book 9 of the *Republic*. The result is Evagrius's own tripartite anthropology of *nous* (intellect or spirit), *thumos* (the irascible part of the soul), and *epithumia* (the concupiscible part of the soul).²⁷⁸ In his *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius joins Plato's anthropology to Paul's anthropology of body, soul, and spirit, arriving at body, soul, and *nous*, a hybrid which fits both his conception of the unity of the created intellects with God in the *apocatastasis*. However, as Gabriel Bunge has pointed out, since *nous* and *pneuma* are close in meaning, Evagrius's vision of the final unity as knowledge for the intellect should be understood as spiritual relationship, as in John 17. 3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (NRSV).²⁷⁹ Never, as far as I know, does Evagrius conceive of contemplation as a distant, uninvolved stance of intellectual consideration. As it does for

²⁷⁸The anthropological differences between Origen and Evagrius have been explored at length by Michael O'Laughlin, "The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and its Sources" in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Peterson (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998) 357-374, and by Columba Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 19-26. On Evagrius's tripartite soul, see Stewart, 22, and Bunge, 28-30.

²⁷⁹Bunge, 28, notes Evagrius's preference for reserving the term "spirit" (*pneuma*) to the Holy Spirit.

Origen, contemplation of God requires participation in God's love; and this participation can take place only through Christ's love and desire to teach us. We have to become loving in order to see the God who is love. That is why Evagrius says in *Praktikos*, 84 that the end of the *praktik_* is charity (*agap_*).

Evagrius's adaptation of Plato's anthropology is thus a constant, though we find an important echo of Clement's Stoic Sage in Evagrius's concept of *apatheia*. With this exception, however, Evagrius develops Plato's threefold schema in the *Republic* (4. 439 d-440 c) and Book 9 (571 b - 572 b). This he relates to two other schemas which Origen had suggested: the eight "generic" thoughts²⁸⁰ and the three stages of spiritual progress, *praktik_*, *theoria physik_*, which includes the visible and invisible creations,²⁸¹ and *theoria theologik_* (or *theologia*).²⁸² Most relevant to this study is the schema of the three stages of spiritual progress, for which Evagrius's immediate source is Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Origen distinguishes the stages of Ethics, Physics, and Enoptics. He decodes these terms to mean "moral, natural, and inspective." By "moral," he means the learning of virtuous habits; by "natural," he means study of the nature of created things (undertaken so that we do not go against nature), and by "inspective," he means the study "by which we go beyond things seen and contemplate somewhat of things divine and heavenly, beholding them with the mind alone" (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue).²⁸³

Origen himself did not invent these three stages, but modified a schema from later Stoicism, which distinguished a moral (*ethikos*) stage, a "natural" (*physikos*) stage, and a "logical" (*logikos*)

²⁸⁰ Stewart discusses a range of moral literature which inspired Evagrius: lists of vices in biblical Wisdom literature and in the New Testament, deuterocanonical and pseudepigraphal works, as well as Hellenistic philosophical works. See his discussion in "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 26-27 plus a useful chart of Origen's lists of vices, 28-29.

²⁸¹ The invisible (incorporeal) creation includes the orders of angels and other heavenly beings. These have bodies, but their bodies are of a spiritual fire, and we cannot see them. We cannot see demons either, though their bodies are colder and heavier than ours.

²⁸² See also Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 253-254.

²⁸³ Lawson, 40. For Origen's entire discussion of the three stages, see Lawson, 39-42.

stage of development.²⁸⁴ Evagrius would also have known the model derived from Plato and Aristotle which distinguished the active life (*praktikos bios*) from the contemplative life (*gnostikos* or *theoretikos bios*).²⁸⁵ This model distinguishes classes of people rather than steps of progress; for as Guillaumont reminds us, Plato and Aristotle thought of artisans and workers as living the active life, while the philosophers led the contemplative life. Basil and Gregory Nazianzen followed their own modified version of the system of Plato and Aristotle;²⁸⁶ Origen draws from the Stoic system which allowed him to develop stages of growth.

²⁸⁴Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 205.

²⁸⁵Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 50. See also Guillaumont's survey of the philosophical models, *Un philosophe*, 205-206.

²⁸⁶Basil and Gregory see priests and bishops as living the active life, while monastics live the contemplative life. For them, the distinctions apply only to those living consecrated states of life. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 206.

Evagrius therefore had several alternatives to choose from.²⁸⁷ Following the Stoic model of spiritual progress as modified by Origen, Evagrius presents the *praktik_* as a discipline which involves both body and soul. One learns to restrict intake of food and hours of sleep; one learns to study and pray the Scriptures; above all, one learns the moral struggle against evil, self-destructive thoughts. Evagrius has departed from the Cappadocians; for the *praktik_* is a moral and physical discipline that must precede and accompany contemplation rather than an active *type* of life. When fidelity to the *praktik_* produces *apatheia*, freedom from selfish and inordinate passions, the monastic moves on to the two stages of *theoria physike*: the contemplation of the visible creation (“second natural contemplation”) and the contemplation of the invisible creation (“first natural contemplation”). The monastic must maintain the *praktik_* and engage in both degrees of natural contemplation in order to be ready to receive the vision of God (*theoria theologik_*), which transcends human knowledge.

I want to stress the non-linear nature of the “stages”; for the *praktik_* is necessary through the whole of monastic life. Evagrius is not talking of a detached observation here, but of a contemplation that is also committed participation in the wisdom of Christ and the Holy Spirit, through whom all creatures were made. The fruits of ongoing discipline in *praktik_* are therefore forms of being like Christ: *apatheia* and charity (*Pr.* 81). These states must continue if the monastic is to remain in Christ’s wisdom and in the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the *praktik_* can never be abandoned without the risk of a moral fall into sin and its accompanying state of theological ignorance. Through the *praktik_*, which includes both works of charity and the practice of prayer, progress continues up the “ladder” of contemplation. As we continue to know the movements and confront the passions within ourselves, we remain open to God and we grow in knowledge and

²⁸⁷Guillaumont points out that before Evagrius, the Platonic-Aristotelian schema was prevalent. After Evagrius, the tripartite schema of *praktik_*, *theoria physik_*, and *theoria theologiae* (*theologia*) came to characterize the stages of monastic life, so that the active stage is actually lived out within the monastic structure of retirement from the active world. *Un philosophe*, 206.

understanding. This progress is also an anthropological movement: from “the image of God” to God’s likeness (Genesis 1. 26).

Thus, by reducing the variations that Origen allowed, Evagrius can offer a consistent pedagogical system which presents challenges to advanced students but provides firm guidelines for all. Indeed, “one rarely goes far in Evagrius’s writings without encountering one of the fundamental terms or concepts of his theological vision.”²⁸⁸ Plato’s vision of the intellectual journey in *Phaedrus* also fit Evagrius’s own “decidedly noetic” monastic theology.²⁸⁹

Another reason for Evagrius’s choice to simplify Origen’s alternative doors to truth is his sensitivity to the different levels on which human beings encounter evil. Plato’s model of the three parts of the soul, all of which, without philosophical training, have different preferences and aims, enabled Evagrius to show the effects of the “opposing powers,” to use Origen’s term, on three distinct levels: the passions, or the level of drives and emotions, the thoughts, or the level of cognition, and the demons, intent on causing chaos in the *nous* and necessitating spiritual warfare in its strict sense. Keeping the model of the soul constant allows Evagrius to shift his focus rapidly from one level of attack to another. Both from Origen and from monastic literature, written or oral, Evagrius inherited a demonology.²⁹⁰ Athanasius’s *Life of Antony* provided what Stewart has termed

²⁸⁸ Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 16. See also Stewart’s discussion of the importance of a personal guide in “Monastic Pedagogy,” 255-257. Evagrius’s teachings were meant to work in tandem with a teacher who could serve as model and personal guide in a way that was tailored to each student’s level of self-awareness.

²⁸⁹ Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 22.

²⁹⁰ See especially Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 13-16.

“an ascetic primer for interpreting the reader’s own struggles.”²⁹¹ Evagrius’s aim is, therefore, to move beyond the first level, refining Origen’s insights and providing even fuller analyses of the demons’ varied ways and common deceptions than Athanasius and Antony had provided. In Book 21 of *On First Principles*, Origen shows the soul to be poised between the opposing spirits and God. Evagrius aims to improve the odds that his students will travel with God.

A theology of prayer emerges from the intersection of the doctrine of God and the understanding of the self. Because Origen and Evagrius have three anthropologies to draw from rather than one, their understanding of the self is complex. Each anthropological choice opens up different possibilities for self-knowledge. In other words, each anthropology offers a point of view, its own distinct perspective on what it means to know oneself as a person who turns to God in prayer. The tripartite Platonic model of the soul allowed both Plato and Evagrius to explore inner conflict, as the *nous* desires transcendent knowledge, while the desiring aspect of the soul (*epithum_tikon*) focuses on bodily desires. The *thumos* defends desire. If it supports the *nous*, it gives the person the energy and determination necessary for the ascent to truth. If, however, it supports the *epithum_tikon*, the *thumos* defends the pursuit of pleasures and boils over with rage whenever they are denied. Evagrius develops both aspects of Plato’s *thumos*.

Thus, the ascent of the *nous* to the intelligible world in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Republic* provided the lens through which Origen and Evagrius—and Clement before them—understood the mind’s ascent to God. Stoic thought opened up a way to consider the freedom of the will and the significance of choice (whether for good or evil) in this visible and present world. Using the Stoic model, Origen and Evagrius can explore the ways in which human beings help bring order to the

²⁹¹ Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 14.

world through their daily choices. Finally, Paul's model of body, soul, and spirit enables Origen and Evagrius to make a connection between moral choice, spiritual knowledge, and ontological rank. Although the anthropological thought of Origen and Evagrius is greater than the sum of its parts, a study of the sources on which they drew enriches our understanding of the true depth of their vision of prayer.

B. Self-Knowledge and Prayer: Origen

Because Plato conceives of human beings as knowers, his main concern is the search for the eternal truth that anchors the changing world we live in. For him, knowing is an ontological process as well as an epistemological process; for knowledge means an "ascent" from the world of becoming to the eternal world of being which culminates in the Good. Indeed, to make this ascent is to become truly human. Thus, Plato's conception of philosophy transcends modern distinctions between epistemology, ontology, and anthropology. Philosophy is a process of becoming real (immortal), a process of becoming fully human, and a process of knowing what is real. Having absorbed Plato's thought, Origen finds it supportive of his own thesis that human beings are created to grow in their ability to contemplate God's glory and participate in God's life. For Origen too, human beings have an innate desire for unending contemplation of God. In the mythic language of *On First Principles*, derived from Plato's *Timaeus*, Origen posits that pre-lapsarian human beings (as well as pre-lapsarian angels and demons) were created intellects, graced to contemplate God's goodness and to preserve the good so that the good might become their own (*Princ.* 2. 9. 2). For sinful human beings in the present, the consistent effort to grow in goodness, allowing oneself to be formed by Christ, is the movement from creation in God's image to creation in God's likeness. Thus, Origen bases his conception of spiritual growth on Genesis 1. 26.

Origen's interpretation of Genesis 1. 26 entails an application of Plato's figure of the divided line of knowledge in Book Six of the *Republic*. In particular, we need to recall Plato's concept of the

relations between one level of knowledge and the next: “As the opinable is to the knowable, so the likeness is to the thing it is like” (6. 510 a). For Plato, “the opinable” describes everything in the material world, both objects and their images or shadows: visible, yet not enduring and not always what they seem to be. Plato’s equation could therefore be stated in this way: As the opinable is to the knowable, so the visible world is to the intelligible world, the world of the Forms, which provides the truth behind all the visible appearances. The entire material world is merely an imperfect copy of intelligible reality. The “really real” does stand behind the changing situation of this world; but it can be known only intellectually, not sensibly. Yet, we are so used to knowing through our senses, that it takes an ordered process of learning before we can know intelligible reality.²⁹² Plato held that this process was a *paideia* that first led the student from sense experience to mathematical knowledge, which is reasoned from postulates down to conclusions that are valid regardless of particulars. In proving that equilateral triangles have three equal angles and three equal sides, for example, one reaches a conclusion that is valid for *all* equilateral triangles, not merely for one particular equilateral triangle.

For Plato, mathematical reasoning is “thought” (*dianoia*), but not yet knowledge (*noesis*) because it does not reach beyond its assumed postulates. In order to gain full knowledge, one must be taught the use of dialectic (*λεγχος*) which questions all kinds of postulates, thereby separating the true from the false and discovering the principles of truth, the Ideas or Forms. Grounding all of them is the absolute first principle: “the unhypothetical first principle of everything” (*Republic*, 6. 513 b - c). This First Principle is the Good. The discovery of the Good and of its role as the source of all the Forms allows the philosopher to know them all without making a separate ascent from conventional opinion in order to find each one of them (6. 513 b). In planning the ideal city, for example, the philosopher can begin with the Forms of justice and reason and “copy” them, in the same way that

²⁹²Plato develops this education in the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic*, 7. An echo of this myth can be seen in Origen’s discussion of the levels of Scripture in Book IV of *On First Principles*; but in treating human growth, he puts more stress on the struggle with opposing powers which strengthens the will. To analyze spiritual warfare, he needs the Stoic analysis of struggle with the passions.

the demiurge in the *Timaeus* creates the world, giving the Forms concrete expression here on earth. The disposition of particulars falls into place when the Forms are known.

Thus, for Plato, the proper sphere of the human mind is the intelligible world; for just as the creation is a copy of the intelligible world (*Timaeus*, 29a); the human mind is the image of the divine intelligence.²⁹³ Because the human intellect is *like* the divine intellect, the soul naturally desires to ascend from the unreliable images of physical reality to the unchanging world of the Intelligible Forms. The “most sovereign part of our soul,” the intellect, “raises us up away from the earth and toward what is kin to us in heaven” (*Timaeus*, 90a).

Origen transforms Plato’s concept of intellectual kinship in his exegesis of Genesis 1. 26. This passage is the scriptural source of Origen’s teaching in *On First Principles* that as creatures, we are meant to preserve the good and make it our own. The created intellects could have reached this goal by consistently willing to keep on contemplating the glory of God, that is, by willing to “be with” God; for rational creatures are images of the Son, who himself is the exact Image of God, “with God” eternally by eternal generation and willing participation in the Father’s divinity.²⁹⁴

²⁹³When Plato’s philosopher-kings craft the ideal city by looking to the Forms of justice, beauty, and moderation, as well as to a balance of crafts and ways of life, the result is a city that is the “the divine form and image” (*Republic* 6. 501 b). The source of this phrase for Plato is not Genesis, however, but god-like Homeric characters, such as Telemachus in *Odyssey* 3. 416.

²⁹⁴See Origen’s *Commentary on John*, 2. 17-20. The Son, exact image of the Father, has “drawn divinity into himself” by continuing “in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father” (18). This is the meaning of “being with” God. The Son is the source of divinity for lesser gods and the source of reason for human beings, whose reason (*logos*) has the same relation to the Word (*Logos*) which God the Word has with God the Father. Through the Son and the Holy Spirit, all creation can return to “being with” God.

Although in Genesis, “image” and “likeness” are parallel, even synonymous terms, Christian thinkers, notably, Irenaeus, had begun to interpret the Christian’s ascent to God as a moral and intellectual movement *from God’s image to God’s likeness*. For Irenaeus, a somewhat-older contemporary of Clement, Christians make this move through the grace of God in Christ, the new Adam, whose obedience to God overcomes the first Adam’s sin and the death that resulted from it (*Proof*, 31).²⁹⁵

Thus, Origen’s conception of making the good one’s own has its roots not only in Platonic contemplation, but also in the exegesis of Genesis 1. 26 in the tradition of Irenaeus. Origen’s conception of “contemplation” as participation in God’s Trinitarian life therefore differs from Plato’s idea of envisioning the Good. In both systems, moral purification is necessary. As Plato asserts that education and moral training are prerequisites to knowing the Good, so Origen asserts the need for true teachings and good habits if we are to contemplate God’s glory and converse with God in prayer. For Origen, however, purification takes place within a Christian community: in the Church, through sacraments and worship, and in service to our neighbors, for whom we must be the Good Samaritan as needed (*Songs*, Prol. 2. 29). Although the Word gives us innate rationality (*Princ.* 1. 3. 8), which makes us images of God the Son (*Logos*), capable of discovering the higher mysteries in the Scriptures, we actually find only the literal stories and laws in Scripture unless we become *like* God in charity through our loving service to each other. It is through our efforts to serve, that we become like God, sharing in God’s operations. Otherwise, we undermine ourselves, praising Jesus with our words, then allowing our deeds to shout, “Jesus, be cursed!” (*On Prayer*, 22. 3).

²⁹⁵For Irenaeus, the Incarnation is both “recapitulation” and a “fresh start,” the restitution of God’s original plan for humanity, which is ultimately full communion between God and human beings. See Smith, *Proof*, introduction, 30.

As we have seen, the older way of interpreting Genesis 1. 26 was to posit that the uncreated Son had a heavenly body which is the model of the human body. Thus, though made of cruder “stuff” than the Son’s heavenly body, the human body is the physical image of God.²⁹⁶ Our destiny is transformation from “the body of our humiliation” to “the body of his glory”(Phil 3. 21).²⁹⁷ Irenaeus sometimes shifts the image of God to the human mind or spirit, although he maintains the older model as well. We can see the older model in the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*:²⁹⁸

But man he fashioned with his own hands, taking of the purest and finest of earth, in measured wise mingling with the earth his own power; for he gave his frame the outline of his own form, that the visible appearance too should be godlike— for it was as an image of God that man was

²⁹⁶Golitzin, 293-294. Golitzin’s source is the Coptic *Life of Apa Aphou of Pemdje*. In *Four Desert Fathers*, Tim Vivian translates an excerpt, the debate between Apa Aphou and Archbishop Theophilus: 183-188.

²⁹⁷See Golitzin, 292.

²⁹⁸*St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith, *Ancient Christian Writers* 16 (New York: Newman, 1956). Citations are by chapter number.

fashioned and set on earth (*Proof*, 11).²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹See Smith, 148-149, n. 65: “Man” has the “form” (*plasma*) of Christ, the Son; he resembles the uncreated and invisible God spiritually. It is unclear just what this older theory of image and likeness did with women; therefore, I have left the wording of “man” unaltered.

Later in this work, referring to Genesis 2. 7, Irenaeus states that human beings were created “from God’s Will and Wisdom (associated with the Son and the Holy Spirit) and from virgin earth” (*Proof*, 32). Eve is virgin of earth, from Adam, and virgin of spirit from God’s Will and Wisdom. Eve disobeyed God, however; and she was the means by which Adam fell (33). The Incarnation both recapitulates and restores the original creation. The Son is born of Mary, the Virgin who obeyed God, and the Holy Spirit (32-33).³⁰⁰ Mary becomes the advocate of Eve, destroying “virginal disobedience by virginal obedience” (33). Christ was born of Mary so that Adam could be restored: “So *the Word was made flesh* in order that sin, destroyed by means of that same flesh through which it had gained the mastery . . . should no longer be in us” (31).³⁰¹ Thus, physically, human beings resemble Christ, both Son of Man and Son of God; and through Christ, human beings also have a spiritual likeness to God (the Father).

³⁰⁰Smith notes that “there can be no doubt that Irenaeus is here teaching man’s bodily resemblance to God.” The Father is invisible; but the bodily resemblance is to the Son, that is, to Christ. God formed (*eplase*) Adam out of earth (Gen 2. 7); yet breathed divine spirit into him, giving Adam his “likeness” to God. See Smith, nn. 65-67, 148-149. The Greek is conjectural, as the text, written originally in Greek, comes down to us mainly in Armenian. For the textual history, see Smith, 5-12.

³⁰¹Irenaeus suggests a parallel between Christ, who recapitulates and restores the creation of Adam, and Mary, whose obedience to God allows her to recapitulate and restore the creation of Eve.

In Book 4 of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus comments on Genesis 1. 26 directly, asserting that Adam was the image (*eikon*) of God, endowed with physical powers, reason, and choice. But he was created human and immature, not yet ready to assume God's likeness (*homoiosis*). This state of imperfection is a necessary consequence of being created "later," that is, in time. God, who was uncreated perfection, could have shown Adam the indescribable divine glory for which he was destined; but Adam, who represents the human race, was too new to receive it, being "unaccustomed to and unexercised in perfect discipline" (*Against Heresies*, 4. 38. 1).³⁰² Jesus's contemporaries were not ready to receive divine glory either. "When our Lord came . . . he did not come in the way he was able, but in the way we were able to see him."³⁰³ Adam was meant to grow into God's likeness through obedience in the context of an education (*paideia*) provided by the Old and New Testament. In sinning, however, Adam lost the image for all of us. We needed Christ to "become what we are to empower us to become what he is."³⁰⁴ We are destined to grow into the likeness of God through Christ. But first, we have to learn how to be human; and this means learning through the pain of disobedience the good of obedience to God. What Irenaeus says in *Against Heresies*, IV. 39 is intriguingly similar to Origen's discussion of the significance of human freedom in *On First Principles*, 3. 1. 1-2:

[Human beings have] received the knowledge of good and evil. . . . Since God gave such mental power, [human beings] knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of better things . . . for just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting, . . . so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both, the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation by acting in obedience to God (*Against Heresies* 4. 39. 1).

Recall that Origen too said that we have the power to see both good and evil, then to follow one or the other. Writing in Greek in the 180s and perhaps the 190s, Irenaeus also asserts the

³⁰² *Against Heresies*, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe. *ANF* 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

³⁰³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 38, trans. J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

³⁰⁴ This summary is based on Duffy, 47-48.

close connection of the intellect with the will; for both vision and choice are necessary to our regaining the image of God. Although I have not been able to find that Origen had definitely read Irenaeus, we know that Clement knew Irenaeus;³⁰⁵ hence, Origen well could have known his works also, whether directly or indirectly. In the passage from *Against Heresies* just quoted, there is a hint of God's pedagogical role, as God allows human beings to learn from experience the difference between good and evil. Origen develops this hint of God's teaching role into a full theology of temptation. Far from being an evil, temptation is God's means of revealing to us what we are really like. Although the evil deed, if committed, has outward consequences, these are important only to facilitate the learning of the mind and spirit, where the struggle takes place. For this reason, God sometimes allows sinners to escape punishment:

For God abandons most [people] by leaving them unpunished . . . in order that they may find the way of healing at a later time; for they would not have known the benefit unless they had condemned themselves. . . . [For it] will be to their advantage that they should not be helped quickly to salvation but should be brought to it more slowly after having experienced many ills (*Princ.* 3. 1. 12-13).

In accordance with his stress on spiritual education, Origen neither believes the image of God to reside in the physical body, nor, according to *On First Principles* (1. 1. 6), does he believe that God has any kind of body. Instead Origen follows Clement; and both follow Philo, for whom the locus of the image of God in humanity is most emphatically the mind:

³⁰⁵Smith, 39.

Let no one, however, represent the likeness through the characteristics of body; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body Godlike. The word *image* is used here with regard to the Mind, sovereign of the soul (*νο_ς_γεμῶν*); for it is after the pattern of that unique and universal Mind as an archetype that the mind in each individual was formed.³⁰⁶

Beginning with the Septuagint version of Genesis 1. 26, Clement distinguishes between creation in God's image (*κατ'ε_κόνα*) and creation in God's likeness (*καθ' _μοίωσιν*). For Clement, "conformity with the image and likeness is not meant of the body . . . but in mind and reason, on which fitly the Lord impresses the seal of likeness, both in respect of doing good and exercising rule" (*Strom.* 2. 19. 52). Thus, "image" means rationality, while "likeness" signifies a deeper resemblance to God.³⁰⁷ Rationality is an unmerited gift of creation. *Liikeness* to God, however, results from "doing good and exercising rule." Clement enlarges on this idea in the next chapter (*Strom.* 2. 20. 52): "Endurance also forces its way to the divine likeness, reaping as its fruit impassibility through patience (*δι'_ _πομον_ς_πάθειαν*)." "Impassibility through patience" conceivably means everything from enduring a bad meal to the strength to face martyrdom if necessary: "The world . . . is crucified to him, and he to the world.' He, bearing about the cross of the Savior, will follow the Lord's footsteps as God" (*Strom.* 2. 20. 55-56).

Origen develops Clement's distinction between image and likeness, making it the linchpin of

³⁰⁶ *De Opificio Mundi*, 69, from *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections*, trans. David Winston (Ramsey, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1981) 136. For the Greek phrase, see n. 220, Winston, 350.

³⁰⁷ Except where noted, my source for this paragraph is Duffy, 51-52. Duffy points out that Clement's use of these terms is not consistent; he at times makes no distinction between them.

his theology of prayer. He systematizes Clement's distinction between the image of God given in creation, and likeness to God, given by God in response to good works. First, in order to deal with scriptures such as Philippians 3. 21, Origen adopts Paul's distinction between the outer (physical) and the inner man (2 Cor 4. 16): "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." This distinction allows him to reject the physical interpretation of the image of God:

But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made 'according to the image of God.' . . . But if anyone suppose that this man who is made 'according to the image and likeness of God' is made of flesh, he will appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God (*Hom. in Gen. 1. 13*).

Of what, then, does the image of God in humanity consist? The image of God can only mean that humans have been created in the image of God the Son (*Logos*), who is himself the exact image of the Father; for "what other image of God is there except our Savior who is 'the firstborn of every creature' . . . and the express figure of God's substance" (*Hom. on Gen. 1. 13*). As the Son is the image of the Father, so are human beings images of the Image, that is, images of the Son. But the Son, as Origen says in *On First Principles*, 1. 2. 6, is not perceptible to the senses; for the Son is divine Wisdom and Word. Therefore, it is the mind in which the image consists. Thus, the primordial creation is intellectual.³⁰⁸

So too is Origen's vision of human destiny in *On First Principles*. In a passage which was probably the source of Evagrius's conception of the first and second natural contemplations, Origen conceives of the soul's progress of knowledge after death: from knowledge of the "reason" of souls

³⁰⁸Duffy notes that Philo too had distinguished two creations in Genesis, a creation of pure intellects followed by the creation of the physical world as a testing-place for fallen spirits. See 53-54. See also Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 346.

and the diversity of animals to the judgment of divine providence about each situation; “for now in this present life we seek, but there we shall see plainly” (1 Cor 13. 12; *Princ.*, 2. 11. 5). Through these “reasons,” we finally come to the contemplation of God:

For as in this bodily life of ours we grew first of all bodily . . . the increase being supplied in our early years merely by a sufficiency of food . . . so too I think that the mind . . . feeds on appropriate and suitable food . . . but in all respects this food must be understood to be the contemplation and understanding of God . . . through ‘purity of heart’ (2. 11).

Yet, the phrase “purity of heart” reveals that Origen, like Clement, stresses the need for exertion of will if we are to become “like” God. As Duffy points out, likeness to God “is not a static perfection, but a dynamic orientation . . . to God through imitation of God’s Logos.”³⁰⁹ Distinguishing between Genesis 1. 26, which says that creation was according to God’s image and likeness, and Genesis 1. 27, which mentions only the image, Origen argues that in the primordial creation we received “the image” along with the potential for likeness.³¹⁰ For him, the “likeness” is the “form” of the “image” (*Hom. on Gen.* 1. 13), the reality of resemblance to God of which all that we know of reason and virtue are shadows and types. By turning away from God, we act against our nature, thereby obscuring the image of God in ourselves and losing the natural potential for likeness, our fundamental orientation to God (*Hom. on Gen.*, 1. 13).³¹¹ Without this orientation, reason is

³⁰⁹Duffy, 53.

³¹⁰See *On First Principles*, 2. 6. 1: Genesis 1. 27 mentions only the image to indicate that humans acquire the likeness perfectly only at the consummation and by virtue of their own efforts to imitate God. Origen cites 1 John 3. 2 in support.

³¹¹Duffy, 53.

confused and the will weakened. Moreover, Origen holds, with Plato, that we come to resemble that which we contemplate.³¹² Sin is “contemplation of the devil”; thus, the inveterate sinner will finish in the image of the devil (*Hom. on Gen.* 1. 13). Yet, we retain enough of “the image” to turn back to God, helped by Christ:

“For if man, made according to the image of God, contrary to nature by beholding the image of the devil has been made like him by sin, much more by beholding the image of God, according to whose likeness he has been made by God, he will receive that form which was given to him by nature, through the Word and his power. And let no one, seeing his image to be more with the devil than with God, despair that he can again receive the form of the image of God because the Savior came not “to call the just, but sinners to repentance” (*Hom. on Gen.* 1. 13).

In *On First Principles*, Origen supplies the philosophical context as he explains the progress from image to likeness in Aristotelian terms. Whereas the uncreated goodness of God is essential to God’s being, creatures “possess [goodness] as an accident” (*Princ.* 1. 6. 2). Here, Origen follows Aristotle’s definition of “accident” in the *Metaphysics*: An accident is that which can be truly said of something, but does not belong to it necessarily (1025a, 14-16) or as part of its substance (1025a, 31-35). There are no accidents in God because God is eternal and “simple” in the sense of not being an aggregate of compounds. Therefore, God alone is good essentially:

³¹²See Plato’s *Republic*, VI. 500 c - 501 b. The philosopher, having become orderly and “divine” through contemplation of the Forms, is in a position to design the ideal city, giving it justice and beauty and making it “the divine form and image” realized among human beings.

Essential goodness is found . . . solely in Christ and the Holy Spirit and of course in the Father also. For the nature of the Trinity has been shown to contain nothing that is compound, which might . . . allow [good qualities] to belong to it as accidental consequences. (*Princ.* 1. 5. 3).³¹³

Accidental goodness makes created being vulnerable; for what has been created has been given, and everything given can be “withdrawn and taken away” (*Princ.* 2. 9. 2). Thus, even before the Fall, creatures are subject to a built-in contingency by the very fact of being created by God.

However, as in his first homily on Genesis, Origen clearly states that God will never withdraw from any creature. Rather, God gives the intellects an additional gift that also constitutes their creation in “the image.” That gift is the freedom to move, which is really the intellects’ freedom to choose the object of their contemplation:

But the cause of the withdrawal will lie in this, that the movements of their minds are not rightly and worthily directed. For the Creator granted to the minds created by him the power of free and voluntary movement in order that the good that was in them might become their own, since it was preserved by their own free will; but sloth and weariness of taking trouble to preserve the good, coupled with disregard and neglect of better things, began the process of withdrawal from the good (*Princ.* 2. 9. 2).

With the freedom to move toward God comes the possibility of “making the good one’s own,” that is, of uniting with the goodness of God so completely that being good becomes a stable condition. In the *Commentary on John*, we saw that the Son shares the Father’s divinity both ontologically, by virtue of his eternal generation, and morally, through his continued will to participate in the Father’s divinity (2. 18): “By being “with *the* God,” he [the Son] always continues to be ‘God.’ But he would not . . . remain God if he did not continue in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father.” In *On First Principles*, Origen explains the Incarnation in an analogous way: The created soul

³¹³We have seen already how Basil and Evagrius use Origen’s view of the “simplicity” of the Trinity in their anti-Arian works.

(“intellect”) of Christ was the only one who did not wander away from God but remained with God (2.

6. 3) in contemplation:

The soul of which Jesus said, “No man takes from me my soul” (John 10. 18), clinging to God from the beginning of the creation and ever after in a union inseparable and indissoluble, as being the soul of the wisdom and word of God . . . was made with him in a pre-eminent degree one spirit, just as the apostle promises to them whose duty it is to imitate Jesus. that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6. 17; underlining mine).

Christ’s intellect is permanently united with God by his consistent will to be with the uncreated Son, just as the Son’s unchanging will to be “with God” (the Father) secures his being God.

Origen posits two stages of the Incarnation: first, this inseparable union of Christ’s created soul with the Son, then the union of the now divine and human soul of Christ with a body. For “it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body apart from some medium” (*Princ.* 2. 6. 3). In the need for the soul to serve as a medium between the Son and raw matter, a trace of the *Timaeus* remains.³¹⁴ But the union of Christ’s created soul and the Word of God becomes the guarantor of union of Christians with Christ. As Christ devoted himself to the Word of God in inseparable union, if Christians cling to (imitate) Jesus, they will be joined to the Lord “indissolubly” and in one spirit. Two sections later, Origen reiterates this point (*Princ.* 2. 6. 5): Christ’s soul “so chose to love righteousness as to cling to it unchangeably and inseparably in accordance with the immensity of his love,” adding, moreover, that by nature, Christ’s soul was the same as others. For all were equal in the primordial creation. They all had the same “power to move,” and all could have chosen to remain with God and grow into greater stability of union. For Origen, then, moral choice and ontological being are interrelated as he rejects the Gnostics’ hierarchical anthropology. Differences are not a function of creation itself—all the intellects were equal— but a function of the Fall, the choice to turn away from God. As we have seen, the degree of the intellects’ withdrawal determined the world and the body that each received, as well as its moral and ontological rank:

³¹⁴In his introduction to the *Timaeus*, John M. Cooper points out that the Forms do not themselves create. Although they provide the model for creation, they remain totally separate from matter. The demiurge is needed as a “medium.” See *Plato: Complete Works*, 1224.

whether angelic, human, or demonic. Origen also makes a connection between a creature's moral and ontological rank and its capacity to know, to contemplate the First Principles and God.

The return to God, however, means restoration to unity; for all souls will come into full likeness to God. Since one is either like God or not, there can be no ranks in the eschaton. Although Origen was undecided about the retention of the body, he was not in doubt that the soul's destiny is contemplation of God.³¹⁵ Because likeness to God means sharing God's wisdom, "contemplation" is a participation in God's divine life and God's purposes. Thus, the process of moving from image to likeness is a process of instruction which begins now and continues after death, where we will find, "so to speak, a lecture room for souls, in which they may be taught about all that they had seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future" (*Princ.* 2. 11. 6). One of the subjects of the eschatological school is the "judgment of divine providence about each individual thing; about things which happen . . . not by chance or accident, but by a reason" carefully thought out (*Princ.* 2. 11. 5). Origen considers such teachings beyond knowledge in this life because few, if any, have grown sufficiently into likeness to God to understand them. Origen imagines that the process will take "no small interval of time" (*Princ.* 2. 11. 6).³¹⁶ The result of growing likeness is transformation, as we grow into the reality of the humanity we now experience as a blurred shadow. For example, just as physical food has been a necessity of earthly life, contemplation of God becomes our food, a necessity of eternal life, (*Princ.* 2. 11. 7). Plato's *nous* has finally reached the pasture which has the right grass.³¹⁷

³¹⁵Origen is not consistent on the subject of the eschatological body. In *On First Principles*, 1. 2. 1, he argues that only the members of the Trinity can live apart from some kind of body; but he later finds that our attainment to the likeness of God requires that we no longer have bodies, for "wherever bodies are, corruption follows immediately" (*Princ.* 2. 6. 1). Within the same chapter, however, Origen asserts that with long purification, through many ages, we will finally attain to the glory of a spiritual body (*Princ.* 2. 6. 6). Evagrius for the most part follows Origen's speculation that bodies would keep us from attaining to the likeness of God.

³¹⁶We shall see that Evagrius disagrees with Origen on this point, believing that judgment and providence can be contemplated here on earth by the monastic *gnostikos* (knower).

³¹⁷Recall *Phaedrus*, 248b-c.

Although we cannot reach perfect likeness to God until the *apocatastasis*, we begin to receive it in this life as we turn to God, just as the apostles, who first came to Jesus looking more like the devil than like God, were transformed by following him (*Hom. in Gen.*, 1. 13). Thus, we are to “imitate” God in our lives so that we will be ready to have the perfection of God’s likeness conferred on us (*Princ.* 2l. 6. 1). But growth in holiness is also the work of the Holy Spirit:

that those beings who are not holy in essence may be made holy by participating in this grace . . . and such as have been deemed worthy of advancing to this degree through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit obtain . . . the gift of wisdom by the power of the working of God’s Spirit (*Princ.* l. 3. 8).

Thus, for Origen, the whole sweep of the creation, fall, and redemption reveals that as God possesses goodness essentially, human beings may possess it not merely as an accident, in Aristotle’s sense, but as “their own” by participation in God’s eternal grace. Participation signifies a created analogue to essential goodness, which belongs to God alone. That is, through Christ and the Spirit, we are “in Christ.” Although participation “in Christ” does not mean ontological identity with Christ, as the “isochrists” of the sixth century thought,³¹⁸ Origen does seem to conceive of participation as being an ontological advance over the original possession of good “by accident.” “Likeness to God” is a participatory union with God, wherein God recognizes our efforts to make the good our own.

To clarify the process by which we make the good our own, Origen must account for God’s providence for us in this world; he therefore turns to a Stoic anthropology. Like the Gnostics, Stoics began with the experience of a flawed, unjust world. But instead of explaining inequality as the result of three orders of creation, as the Gnostics did,³¹⁹ the Stoics believed that injustice and

³¹⁸ Although Evagrius posits in the *Letter to Melania* that through Christ, there will be unity between each created *nous* and the Trinity, he would not have agreed with the isochrists that everyone will be equal to Christ. The isochrists interpreted his stress on an eschatological unity of wills as a stress on equality of rank. In my opinion, their interpretation distorts his meaning.

³¹⁹ According to Rebecca Lyman, the rigid fatalism of the Gnostics was the result of their hierarchical anthropology; the Stoics, in contrast, emphasized the choices that each individual is able to make, no matter what circumstances he or she may have been born into and inherited. See *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

misfortune are only apparent evils because everything works out for the best through the Reason which pervades Nature. Whatever happens is therefore preordained, even “fated” to happen because in the long run, it is the most reasonable and natural turn of events. Therefore, unfortunate situations, such as poverty, are no bar to virtue, as Seneca wrote: “Virtue you will find in the temple, in the forum, in the senate house— standing in front of the city walls, dirty and stained and with calloused hands” (*De Otia*, 3. 5).³²⁰ Stoic ethics are kin to the AA Serenity Prayer: “God, grant me the wisdom to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” The realm of “the things I can” was known as $\tau__\varphi'_\mu_v$, what is “up to us.”

³²⁰Peter Root, “The Stoic Sage,” <http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Article/497576>.

“God,” for the Stoics is a spiritual, yet physical fire, the living “seminal principle” of the world, the *Logos Spermatikos*. The *Logos spermatikos* generates both the physical world and the microcosmic inner world of human beings.³²¹ The “seed,” or “*sperma*” of reason in human beings is truly a spark of *Logos*, with the result that humans can live in harmony with Providence if they so choose.³²² “As in the universe the *logos* permeates all things, so in the sperm, the *logos* permeates all [people].”³²³ Because Reason pervades the universe (materially) and exists within us as human reason, we have the duty to go with the flow and trust in Reason and Providence.³²⁴ We cannot change the course of events; for what happens, planned and foreseen by Providence, is not “up to us”; but we *can* decide on the best adjustment to each situation, thus cooperating with Providence. The Stoics would have agreed with Origen, *contra* the Gnostics, that we are responsible for all of our responses to the “realities” that surround us, whether to act on circumstances in some way or to

³²¹“Philosophical Background of the Hellenistic Age,” Classics Technology Center, <http://www.ablemedia.com/ctcweb/netshots/hellphil.htm>. Diogenes Allen points out that Heraclitus was the first to use “*logos*” in its philosophical sense; *logos* is for him the fiery principle of life. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985) 72.

³²²In the second century, on the basis of the denomination of Christ as *Logos* in John’s Gospel, Justin Martyr thought of Christ as the *logos spermatikos* and explained the partial truth of the philosophers’ systems as the result of their possession of reason, the *sperma* of the Word possessed by all people. However, Justin stipulates that human reason cannot know God by likeness alone, without acquaintance with Scripture. See Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 106-109.

³²³Shirts, 4.

³²⁴Providence and Reason are not transcendent beings but more like spiritual, yet physical energies within the world.

entrust them to Providence, as being beyond “what is up to us.”

Stoic ideas about Providence and Right Reason allowed Origen to explain the Christian’s situation in a fallen world. Yet, for Origen, providence is not an impersonal force or energy, as it is for the Stoics. Rather, “providence” is the term for all the ways in which God works with human beings to instruct them and assist their return. The purpose of providence is pedagogical. For example, in fallen life, the body and the physical world signify both God’s judgment and God’s mercy. “God . . . made the present world and bound the soul to the body as a punishment,” Origen pronounces in *On First Principles*, 1. 8. 1. We can recall Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which bodily concerns drag the soul down to earth when it tries to ascend to intelligible reality. On the other hand, “the world was made . . . to hold all those souls which were destined to undergo discipline in it and also those powers which were appointed to be at hand to serve and assist them” (*Princ.* 2. 5. 4). Thus, the punitive cause of the material creation is an aspect of its pedagogical purpose. The “penalty” of having a body which so often interferes with the mind’s intent tallies with God’s lesson-plan:

When the soul is found apart from that order . . . in which it was created by God for good action and useful experience and not at concord with itself in the connection of its rational movements, it must be supposed to bear the penalty and torture of its own want of cohesion and to experience the punishment due to its unstable and disordered condition (*Princ.* 2. 10. 5).

God’s intention is always education; for “when the soul, thus torn and rent asunder, has been tried by the application of fire, it is undoubtedly wrought into a condition of stronger inward connection and renewal” (*Princ.* 2. 10. 5).

In both *On First Principles* and *On Prayer*, Origen transforms Stoic concepts in order to shed light on the ways in which God “provides” education for us in order to prepare us for the move from “creation in the image” to “creation in the likeness.” In both contexts, Origen warns against the following deterministic argument against prayer:

Since God foreordains everything that happens (so that it has to happen) and foresees everything that happens, there is no sphere of human choice at all. Therefore, it is unjust for God to blame anyone for wrong actions, since God foreordained that such a person would do them; indeed,

Scripture even says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4. 21) and that God saves and destroys people at will (Rom 9. 18-19). For some, it will be useless even to attempt to improve because they are preordained to fail (*Princ.* 2. 1. 7). It is equally useless (by the same argument) to make requests of God; for either you have been ordained to receive your request from all eternity, or you have been ordained not to receive it from all eternity (*On Prayer*, 5. 2-6). In either case, God does not respond to prayer.

The logical conclusion of such an argument would make God responsible for the Fall.

Origen's use of Platonic thought in conceiving of creation in *On First Principles* allows him simply to state that God gave the created intellects the freedom to move; for Origen agrees with Plato that intelligent beings have freedom. For a Christian influenced by Stoicism or Gnosticism, freedom and moral responsibility would need to be established. Therefore, both in *On First Principles* and in *On Prayer*, Origen begins by describing how different kinds of created beings move. Inanimate objects must be moved from the outside. Animals, like humans, are sentient beings; therefore Origen uses the spider as a test case. The spider will move when its animating principle causes the image of a web to arise within it; that image, in turn, will generate the impulse to weave the web; and the spider will weave it. For Origen, that is all a spider can do: respond to one image and one impulse. This response is action, but not really choice. People, in contrast, are rational beings possessed of a much more complex imagination plus "reason, which judges the images," rejecting some, approving others (*Princ.* 2. 1. 3). We actually go through three stages of "movement": contemplation (or "seeing"), choice, and action:

The rational animal . . . has . . . reason, which judges the images. . . . So it happens that, since there are in the nature of reason possibilities of contemplating good and evil, by following out which and contemplating them both, we are led to choose good and avoid evil, we are worthy of praise when we devote ourselves to the practice of good and of blame when we act in the opposite way (*Princ.* 2. 1. 3).

Because we are rational (*λογικοί* or *ζα λογικά*), we see (*θεωρέω*) both the good and the evil. When we choose (*α_ρέω*) one or the other, then we act, giving ourselves (*πιδίδωμι*) to the practice (*πράξις*) of either good or evil. We must see both possibilities because it is the intellect's nature to see; we must also choose, then move toward one, because freedom equally belongs to our nature. Both dimensions are included in the word *h_gemonikon*, governing reason (from *γέομαι*, to lead). A spider

might be able to get away with saying that its movement was predetermined; but a rational being both by definition and by God's gift at creation has the freedom to choose (move) and the responsibility for choosing well (*Princ.* 2. 1. 24; *On Prayer*, 6. 2).

This essentially Stoic anthropology is incomplete, consisting of reason and will, with the body being only hinted at, inasmuch as in this world we need it in order to engage in *praxis*. As we have seen, Origen tends to allegorize Clement's analysis of the body's part in prayer. Physical gestures become the mind's attitudes. But Origen's connection between contemplation and action through the decision of the will means that one's actions in real life are interrelated with the contemplation of God in prayer and with all other "contemplative" activities. As a consequence of this connection, several conclusions follow: Struggling with a difficult passage of Scripture becomes an important aspect of the moral struggle against passions and demons; prayer necessarily flows into action and is itself an action; and our good actions in the outer world become a kind of prayer that moves mountains. The inner world and the outer world are necessarily interrelated.

What, then, is the answer to those who deny that God responds to prayer? For Origen, God's providence takes account of human freedom. As Clement implied when he conceived of prayer as "speeding" toward salvation, Origen thinks of salvation as an exchange between the participating *hypostaseis* of the Trinity and a human being in the image of God who wills as consistently as possible to become like God. Prayer is part of this exchange:

If, then, our freedom is preserved, however vast the number of inclinations it has to virtue or vice . . . it, along with everything else from creation and from the foundation of the world, will be known to God before it comes to be for what sort of freedom it will be. And among all the things God foreordains . . . there has been foreordained according to merit for each motion of our freedom what will meet it from providence and still cohere with the chain of future events (*On Prayer*, 6. 3).

Origen's distinction between foreknowledge and providence allows our prayers to be "useful for the ordering of the world"; for one aspect of "the ordering of the world" is God's response to the choices we make. Not that God has to wait for our decisions in order to decide how to order the world; in eternity, knowing and ordaining are one action, outside time. By distinguishing between God's

providence and God's foresight, however, Origen gives the created order its own integrity. We are created, hence in some sense "other" than God in both our contingency and our freedom. Yet, we are also created in God's image and destined, if we will it, to attain to God's likeness. Therefore, we can live in true relationship with God and God with us. Although we experience this relationship as unfolding in time, while God has eternally seen it, it is yet a true relationship.

When human beings pray, they turn their attention back toward God, thus reversing the direction of the Fall, conceived as wandering away. Prayer, then, is an action; and it has two results. First, and most important, prayer is a deepening understanding of God's wisdom, the very wisdom which is incarnate in Christ:

And who could say that it is possible for a human being to know the mind of the Lord? Nevertheless, even this is given by God through Christ . . . If no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God, it is impossible for a human being to know the thoughts of God. But now consider this— how it becomes possible . . . [For we] have received . . . the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God (1 Cor 2. 12: *On Prayer*, 1)

If prayer were merely the task of human reason, it would fail; instead, says Origen, we receive God's Spirit, that we might understand the gifts God has already given us. Thus, prayer is a great mystery which allows us to anticipate the eschatological Return.

Second, God, in response, sends ministering spirits to encourage the one who prays: "I will send this ministering angel, who will begin to work with [the one praying] from such and such a time and will stay with him until such and such time" (*On Prayer*, 6. 4). Those who keep their attention turned to God receive stronger, holier angels. Thus, Origen posits a direct proportion between grace and merit: the more one prays and acts in virtue, the more help God can send.³²⁵

³²⁵ Augustine argued against Pelagius that God's grace is given "not only where there are no good merits, but also where there are many previous merits that are evil" (*Grace and Free Will*, 6. 13: trans. Robert P. Russell, *FC 59* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1968)). For Origen, virtuous action increases one's capacity for receiving grace. If we are too set on

sinning to be open to God, then God has to help us by abandoning us to our own devices. Origen compares God's "abandonment" to the doctor who prescribes bitter medicine (*Princ.* 2. 10. 6). Thus, everyone must receive God's grace.

For Origen, then, prayer becomes part of the educational system of sanctification that God has designed. Anyone can enter the school, including the demons if they choose to. The point of entrance is the turning of one's attention toward God because this turning reverses the direction of the Fall and opens us to God's wisdom. Human beings have not entirely lost the image of God through sin; yet they do retain "the seeds of sin,"³²⁶ which the governing reason is not strong enough to get rid of. Therefore, we need to learn the discipline of fixing our attention on the Lord. In order to defeat this aim, the demons, or "the opposing powers," attack us through our natural appetites, like hunger and sexual desire; and they are forever trying to push us into excess.³²⁷ Often we are unaware of the line between nature and sin. Nor is Christian life lived only in despite of the devil and the demons. We ourselves are at times "the enemy." Origen does not buy the line of "the devil made me do it." We are always responsible for what we do:

What then? In regard to foods and drink it would be possible for us to go wrong even apart from the instigation of the devil if we happened to be caught at an intemperate or careless moment; and are we to suppose that in regard to the control of the sexual appetite . . . we should not be affected in a similar way? My own opinion is that the same process of reasoning can also be applied to . . . covetousness, anger, sorrow, or any others whatever which, by the fault of intemperance exceed the limits of their natural measure (*Princ.* 3. 2. 2).

Since evil thoughts can lead to evil actions, the Christian life demands ongoing vigilance: an awareness of our thoughts and temptations,³²⁸ plus the acceptance of responsibility for them. Origen points out that we cannot prevent evil impulses from arising or the demons from tempting us; but nothing bad will happen unless we assent. It is always possible, he says, "to cast away the wicked suggestions and . . . to do absolutely nothing worthy of blame" (*Princ.* 3. 2. 4).

What happens if we surrender to the demons' promptings? Origen gives two alternative answers to this question. In *On First Principles*, God hires even the demons as teachers (against

³²⁶Seeds of sin may have been suggested by the Stoic idea of seeds of reason.

³²⁷See Stewart's discussion in "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 9-11.

³²⁸Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 10.

their will); that is, if we really desire to sin, God will, for a time, allow us to do it so that we will learn for ourselves what the evil of sin really means.³²⁹ As the primordial intellects were satiated with goodness and wandered away, so hardened sinners will eventually be satiated with sin and disgusted by it. Then God can heal them (*Princ.* 3. 1. 13). Therefore, God does not convict us of sin too soon, lest we not appreciate the healing and fall once again. “For God deals with souls not in view of the fifty years, so to speak, of our life here, but in view of the endless world” (*Princ.* 3. 1. 13). Taking the long view in *On First Principles*, Origen holds that God uses even the demons’ hostile temptations for our discipline and education.

For Origen, Romans 1. 23 sums up the Fall: we freely chose to lose our likeness to God:

For though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks, but they became bankrupt in their thinking, and their foolish heart was darkened. For claiming to be wise, they became fools and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of the image of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles (Rom 1. 21-23).

The search for external images of God results from the deliberate loss of the internal image of God: “On this basis, . . . men become without excuse, since although they knew God . . . they have not . . . worshiped God or given thanks, but through their own futile way of thinking, while they seek after forms and images for God, they have destroyed the image of God within themselves” (*Comm. on Rom.* I. 17. 2). Therefore, God handed them over to the desire of their hearts, to impurity”— not forever, though, but with the intention that they would be satiated with sin and be converted.

This passage is key for Origen as he probes further into the conflict we experience between temptations to evil and the direction of God. For this purpose, Origen shifts to Paul’s tripartite anthropology of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5: 23). This passage Origen combines with

³²⁹Origen develops the assertion of Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, 4. 39, as we have seen.

Galatians 5. 17: “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.” In Greek, the same word, *pneuma*, denotes both the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Although the NRSV capitalizes “spirit,” thus placing the conflict between the flesh and the Holy Spirit, Origen places the conflict within the soul, caught between the flesh and the human spirit:

And when it is said [in the Scriptures], “The flesh desires contrary to the spirit and the spirit desires contrary to the flesh,” the soul is undoubtedly placed in the middle. Either it gives assent to the desires of the spirit or it is inclined toward the lusts of the flesh. If it joins itself to the flesh, it becomes one body with it in its lust and sinful desires; but if it should associate itself with the spirit it shall be one spirit with it (1. 18. 5).

Where we “set our minds” is the question; for “to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8. 6). One contemplates either “flesh” (sin) or spirit, death or life. In *On First Principles*, Origen thinks that the soul can be neutral, following its own will; and he associates this third possibility with the “lukewarm” rejected by Christ in Revelation 3. 15. He prefers an outright choice of “flesh,” for then enough evil would result that the soul would “be satiated” with it and voluntarily turn back to God (*Princ.* 3. 4. 3). In the *Commentary on Romans*, however, Origen denies the soul the possibility of refusing the choice. The soul *must* choose between flesh and spirit; and this (and every) choice determines whether that soul will turn toward the lusts of the flesh or toward the way of Christ. Although the good angels support the soul’s choice of the spirit’s vision and all the demons push the soul to choose the flesh, only the soul can actually make the choice. At the point of choice, we stand or fall on our own: “out of both sides’ support, the duty of choice is preserved” (*Comm. on Rom.* 1. 18. 7). We must face the choice ourselves because “the freedom of will is preserved in all things . . . the soul therefore makes its own decision whether it wants to choose life, that is, Christ, or to turn aside to death, the devil (*Comm. on Rom.* 1. 18. 7).

Thus, for Origen, the soul is effectively the will; and each time the soul has a choice, the original opportunity for the Fall (the wandering away) is recapitulated. The result of the choice is, on a small scale, ontological. If the soul chooses life, it becomes “one body” with spirit, and one spirit

with its own human spirit. Then, both soul and spirit are united with the Holy Spirit, as Origen suggests by quoting Romans 8. 9: “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.”³³⁰ The body itself becomes a true “temple of the Holy Spirit” and a “member of Christ” (*Comm. on Rom.* 1. 18. 10). The good choice integrates a person, unifying body, soul, and spirit in Christ. Evagrius develops this conception of transforming choice, as we shall see.

If, however, the soul chooses the option of “flesh,” it “becomes one body with it in its lust and sinful desires.” With this choice, “body” and “flesh” (sin-nature) come together; and when treating sin, Origen does not always separate the two terms. Origen implies that the result of choosing “flesh”(i.e., sin) is loss of identity and purpose, loss of one’s true humanity through the disappearance of soul into flesh. Whereas good choices restore a person to inner unity and to unity with Christ, the result of making the wrong choices is anthropological collapse, loss of the charity and reason which are the image of God in us. Origen quotes Galatians 3. 6: “My Spirit shall no longer abide in these people, for they are flesh.” We are cut off from God. Or, as Origen says in *On Prayer*, we cut ourselves off from the God who dwells in our midst and walks among us” (Dt 23. 14; 2 Cor 6. 16); for “everyone who sins hides himself from God, flees his coming, and is removed from boldness” (*Comm. on Rom.* 1. 23. 4).

Yet, even in the darker vision of Romans, Origen does not close out the possibility of repentance and return, saying in Book 2:

Let us suppose there is a soul in which dwells ungodliness . . . and the entire multitude of evils to which it has openly subjected itself as servant and slave. But suppose this soul comes back to itself and opens the door of its mind once again to piety and the virtues. Will not piety, when she has entered, immediately drive ungodliness out of there (*Comm. on Rom.* 2. 1. 3)?

³³⁰Scheck capitalizes “spirit” here to show that Origen now means the Holy Spirit.

For included in the package of the gifts of creation, rationality and freedom, is conscience, the “pedagogue of the soul” (*Comm. on Rom. 2. 9. 3*). Conscience is connected with self-knowledge; and it reveals the Holy Spirit’s guidance so that, provided that it is willing to undertake the hard work of vigilance, the soul can reverse direction before drowning in flesh.

Thus, Paul’s division of body, soul, and spirit is not a rigid template for Origen, since the soul can unite either with flesh or with spirit; and the body will take on the characteristics of either choice, flesh or spirit. We are headed for being spirit in union with the Holy Spirit; but we are not yet there. In analyzing the Lord’s Prayer in *On Prayer*, Origen sees “lead us not into temptation” as an impossible prayer because “the whole of [human] life on earth is a temptation” (29. 2 and 9). We are not delivered from temptation; “we are in temptation by the very fact that we are on earth, surrounded by flesh that wars against the Spirit, the mind of which is hostile to God” (*On Prayer*, 29. 2). Origen concludes that we cannot be delivered from temptation because temptation tells us who we are: either “those who have disciplined themselves” (if we resist) or those who need further discipline in order to grow (if we fall). For we are not yet spiritual, but we are being trained to be spiritual (*On Prayer*, 30. 3). This is why we cannot approach the Lord carelessly; there is always some vestige of evil suggestion to be rejected first. Thus, in speaking of the position of prayer, Origen uses his recommendation to comment on the inner position of the sinner who comes to God:

The person who is about to come to prayer should withdraw for a little and prepare . . . should cast away all temptation . . . and remind himself . . . of the Majesty whom he approaches . . . This is how he should come to prayer, stretching out his soul, as it were, instead of his hands, straining his mind toward God instead of his eyes, raising his governing reason from the ground and standing it before the Lord of all instead of standing (*On Prayer*, 31. 2).

Yet, the literal position of eyes upraised and hands outstretched is the best because it allows the body to share in the attitude of the soul (*On Prayer*, 31. 2). The whole person should express reverence for God.

Thus, Origen’s theology of prayer incorporates the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit whose eternal will towards all created beings, from angels down to demons, is love. We know God

in his providential works, through Scripture, and from seeing with spiritual eyes God's action within ourselves. We ourselves have an "inner person" who is a "soul" with fallen intellect and will, yet our way of making the return to God. Origen formulates many models of "stages" of spiritual growth by which we can gauge our progress; for example, those based on the Israelites' journey across the desert in Homily 27 on Numbers and Homily 5 on Exodus. The one most relevant to prayer is probably the three-stage model given in Book Six of the *Commentary on Romans*: slaves of sin, slaves of righteousness, and slaves of God. Origen's biblical source is Romans 6. 16-22:

Do you not know that . . . you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God . . . that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness . . . so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. . . freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life (NRSV).

When we stop being slaves of sin, Origen says, we receive "the form" of teaching and become slaves of righteousness. "The form of teaching" is the image of the true teaching, the mystery of the Trinity, which we are not yet ready to receive; we have to start with the earthly Jesus. Similarly, we learn and practice "the form and shadow of the virtues" rather than the virtues themselves because we are still too involved with earthly goals to recognize a true virtue if we fell over it. For "at heart we are obedient to sin because the vices of the flesh are still exercising dominion over us" (6. 3. 6). Yet, we must "present our members" for the service of one another:

A little while ago your feet were running off to the temples of demons; now let them run off to the Church of God . . . Earlier your hands were stretched forth to plunder the property of others; now stretch them forth to lavish your own goods upon others. Previously your eyes were looking around for a woman or some property to lust after; now let them look around for the poor, the weak, the needy, in order to show them mercy (*Comm. on Rom.* 6. 4. 2).

For we "live by the law of God with the mind but are led to the law of sin by the flesh" (*Comm. on Rom.* 6. 11. 2). We cannot leap in one jump from being slaves of sin to being slaves of God "in Christ" because we all retain those "seeds of sin," that is an inner attraction to evil. Therefore, "in each person righteousness searches for its own portions and it tests to see if one has been reformed and corrected . . . [or] still found to be defiling his obedience to the truth . . . with lying"

(*Comm. on Rom.* 6. 11. 2).

Slavery to God is an eschatological stage which has only its beginnings here. In the *Commentary on Romans* (6. 5. 6), Origen quotes Romans 6. 22: “Now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves to God, you have your fruit leading to sanctification. But the end is eternal life.” As slaves of righteousness, we have been living and serving “in the shadow of righteousness,” struggling with passions and seeing God “as in a riddle” (Old Latin version) or “in a mirror dimly” (NRSV). At the Return, however, Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father, and God is all in all (1 Cor 15. 24-28). Then we know as we are known and see what virtue actually is. Origen does not say much about this stage in his *Commentary on Romans*; but in the *Commentary on John*, Origen indicates that slavery to God would be the “slavery” of Christ who empties himself, taking the form of a servant” in order to serve human beings (Phil 2. 6-11), then both as Word and servant, hands over the kingdom to the Father so that God is all in all (*Comm. on John*, 6. 294-296). It is the same Christ who does both, and this is a mystery which Origen doubts that we can truly understand: “And if we understand what it means to be subjected to Christ . . . we will understand the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world in a manner worthy of the goodness of the God of the universe.” Because for Origen no one reaches the stage where there are no temptations to passion or misunderstanding, we are all still slaves of righteousness and not yet ready to understand God “face to face.”

Prayer, however, gives a true foretaste of this eschatological intimacy and wisdom. Taking off from Clement’s description of conversation with God in *Stromateis*, 7, Origen thinks of prayer as the meeting-point of self-knowledge in the “inner person” and the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, who fills us with God’s own vision and God’s own words through the Son who is Word:

For souls that have become for the most part barren (*ἄγονοι*), when they perceive the sterility of their own governing reason (*ἄγεμονικόν*), and the barrenness of their own mind (*ἄγονίας τοῦ νοῦ αὐτοῦ*), through persistent prayer they conceive from the Holy Spirit saving words filled with visions of the truth; and they give birth to them (*γεγεννήκασιν*; *On Prayer*, 13. 3).

Origen’s use of the perfect tense for “they give birth” implies the Holy Spirit’s power to complete the

action of salvation through sanctification. The recipient of saving words is empowered to speak them against demons and to other people. We might also hear a far-off echo of Plato, whose character, Diotima, instructs Socrates in the importance of giving birth in the beautiful (*Symposium*, 206 c-e). Thus, Origen's thought is this: By ourselves, we are barren; but when, in self-knowledge, we discover our emptiness, then if we persist in prayer (the soul holding to the purpose of the spirit), then by the power of the Holy Spirit, we become pregnant with salvific words. Finally, we give birth to these words and speak out in praise of God. And the one who speaks in praise often cuts down "the chief captain of the Adversary, that deceptive and plausible word, who makes many . . . cower in fear" (*On Prayer*, 13. 3). Many are the words; but the Word is one (*Comm. on John*, 2. 21). For Origen, prayer signifies our participation in the Word that is Christ.

C. Self-Knowledge and Prayer: Evagrius

We return to Evagrius, whose preferred model of the human soul was Plato's schema of intellect (*nous*), the spirited element (*thumos*), and desire (*epithumia*). These terms acquire an intriguingly different range of meaning through Evagrius's explorations of the inner conflicts which confront the monastic who is learning to pray. Perhaps a better way of expressing the endeavor would be "learning the way of prayer"; for according to Evagrius, prayer is "the best and most uncontaminated activity and use of the mind . . . the prelude to immaterial and undiversified knowledge" (*De Orat.* 84; 86). Thus, the ultimate goal of prayer is entering the eschatological unity with God and with all other created beings. Yet, in Evagrius's hands, "prayer" also becomes a synecdoche for the entire monastic way of life, which begins and ends with the mind's desire for connection with God in purer and purer prayer. Such a desire is only natural because whatever stage we have reached, prayer is the mind's proper activity (*De Orat.* 83).

We have seen that Origen envisioned human destiny as moving from God's image to God's likeness through a lifetime spent in battling temptation and choosing the good, in cooperation with

God's grace. For Origen, sin is the result of wrong choice. As a result of the Fall, the human intellect is weakened. With human reason now goes a seed of evil which weakens the will. Both in intellect and will, the image of God has been obscured. Given Origen's Platonic understanding of "image" and "likeness," it is logical that he would understand Genesis 1. 26 as revealing God's promise of a noetic return to unity. However, Origen also uses Stoic and Pauline anthropologies to highlight the significance of moral choice. It is not enough to know that we are created in God's image. We must also obey the commandments, fight demonic temptation, do deeds of charity, and pray. These practices integrate soul and spirit, allow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and give the body its proper role as the "temple of the Holy Spirit." Prayer, in particular, is a turning to God which, each time, reverses the direction of the Fall for us. In prayer, we anticipate the return to God in the end times.

With Origen as his guide, Evagrius makes use of the same anthropological building blocks, but with somewhat different emphasis. With his acceptance of Origen's Platonic schema of the creation and fall goes a noetic eschatology: the return of the mind to God. This return proceeds along Plato's line of knowledge in a way that Plato (and some of the Stoics) would have cheered: from practical discipline to *apatheia*, to the contemplation of the visible creation, to the contemplation of the intelligible creation, to the contemplation of God. Contemplation begins with the visible world because its beauty is an easily accessible sign of God's wisdom and love: "De même que ceux qui apprennent les lettres aux enfants les tracent sur les tablettes, de même aussi le Christ, en enseignant sa sagesse aux *logikoi*, l'a tracée dans la nature corporelle" (KG, 1. 57). "In the same way that those who teach letters to children write them on tablets, so Christ, teaching his wisdom to the *logikoi*, has written it into corporeal nature." In the *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius compares the world to a letter from God "written" to those who are far off. The creation can be "read" only by those

who are free enough of the passions to perceive the love of God in it.³³¹

Evagrius's immediate source for the order of contemplation is Origen's exegesis of Philippians 1. 23 in *On Principles*, 2. 11. 5: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." Origen explains that Paul refers to the instruction he will receive with Christ concerning "the reasons for things," in a "school for souls" after death. In this "school," souls first learn the causes of all things on earth, then "the things which are not seen" (2 Cor 4. 18); and finally they advance to the contemplation of God (*Princ.* 2. 11. 7). Evagrius, however, locates this "school" on earth, within the monastic life, systematizing it into the stages of *praktik*, *theoria physik* (includes the contemplation of the visible creation and the contemplation of the intelligible creation, or the second and first natural contemplations), and *theoria theologik* (*theologia*), the contemplation of the Trinity. Each level functions as an image of the one above it until the contemplation of the Trinity, which, for Evagrius, has no analogue below it because, as we have seen in our study of the Arian Controversy, Evagrius holds with the Cappadocians that God transcends human knowledge. Therefore, there is an ontological gap between contemplation of the Trinity and all other levels of contemplation:

³³¹On this point, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 356.

To those who enter into the intelligible church and marvel at the contemplation of created things, the Logos says, “Do not think that this is the final end which is held in store for you by the gospel promises. All that is vanity of vanities before the knowledge of God himself. Just as after perfect health is restored, medicine is in vain, so also vain are the reasons of aeons and worlds after the knowledge of the Holy Trinity” (*In Eccl. I. 2*).³³²

Yet, disagreeing with Origen and Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius holds that a person can attain to knowledge of the Holy Trinity in this life. This knowledge is paradoxical because it is beyond human conception, stretching the limits of language. It is a formless knowledge which is “pure prayer.”

It is the *nous* that is capable of receiving the mysteries of God. In the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, Evagrius asserts the final dissolution of body and soul. Body and soul result from the Fall, the loss of unity with God. They are the measure of how “far” different intellects fell. When all wills are united with God in the *apocatastasis*, diversity is at an end. In this union of wills, ontological distinctions between created and uncreated being are all but gone. Since soul and body belong to the second creation, one of moral diversity, Evagrius reasons that they will no longer be needed: “L’intellect qui possède le vêtement dernier est celui qui connaît seulement la contemplation de tous les êtres seconds” (*KG*, 3. 8).³³³ Because God is not a body, the “clothing” of the body would only hinder the union between God and the *nous*. Clearly, Evagrius adheres closely to the Platonic hierarchy of being. As Gregory Nazianzen, his “wise teacher,” points out, “Ὁ τῶς κ θεο λόγος . . . π θε ν μ σ νήγαγεν κ τ ν ρωμένων”³³⁴: “Thus, the reason which is from God . . . leads up to God from visible

³³²Jeremy Driscoll’s translation, “Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius,” in *Steps to Spiritual Perfection* (New York: Newman Press, 2005) 15.

³³³Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 394.

³³⁴*Oration* 28. 16. *SC* 250, ed. Paul Gallay (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978).

things.”

In the *Letter to Melania*, however, Evagrius uses Paul’s model of body, soul, and spirit. Modifying Paul’s terminology to body, soul, and *nous*, he asserts the eschatological unity of the *nous* with God. There is a difference from his statements in the *Kephalaia Gnostika*. Body and soul do not merely disappear in the *apocatastasis*. Although the *nous* is no longer attached to a body, Evagrius posits that the soul and the body are taken up in some way by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the *Letter to Melania*, unity with God does involve the whole person, composed of the same three parts; but there is a shift to a higher anthropological key wherein body, soul, and *nous* are healed in order to take on a new significance and new roles. The raising of body, soul, and spirit to new levels suggests Origen’s “movement from image to likeness” of God. Also relevant to Evagrius’s analysis in the *Letter to Melania* is Origen’s idea in his *Commentary on Romans* that making the right choice integrates a person, uniting soul and spirit with the Son and the Spirit and making the body “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (I. 18-19). While the weight of conviction is with the final disappearance of body and soul, as it is for Origen also, Evagrius’s speculations in the *Letter to Melania* should remind us that no one of his statements contains the whole truth. Concerning the destiny of body and soul, Evagrius appears to have thought of more than one possibility.

With regard to spiritual progress, Evagrius begins a monastic’s spiritual formation³³⁵ on earth, with the *praktik_*, the stage which includes identifying and resisting the demons that attack the thoughts and inflame the passions in order to lead the soul away from God.³³⁶ Without an elder’s assistance, the monastic is vulnerable because demons capitalize on ignorance, attacking even the right-hearted in the dark (*Pr.* 50).³³⁷ For his analysis of demonic practices, Evagrius uses Plato’s

³³⁵ Driscoll argues convincingly that Evagrius’s system of spiritual progress applied as much to the virgins for whom he wrote as to the monks; his friendship with the learned Melania the Elder makes this claim probable. See *Steps to Perfection*, 49-50.

³³⁶ On the aims of the demons, derived from Origen, see Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 9-10.

³³⁷ See Ps 10 (11). 2: “For look, the wicked bend the bow . . . to shoot in the dark (*_ν σκοτομίην_*) the upright of heart.”

anthropology to suggest “a divided line of ignorance,” a degeneration into the convoluted and progressive depths of self-deception.

Finally, from Stoic anthropology, as mediated through Clement, Evagrius sheds light on these powers of the soul and on the monastic’s goal of *apatheia*. For him, *apatheia* means the restoration of the will’s freedom, brought about by the practical discipline of monastic life (*praktik_*). *Apatheia* breaks the connection between the passionate faculties and the demons, who lose their power to seduce or goad a monastic into sin. *Apatheia* therefore allows true knowledge of beings, undistorted by demonic influence. The resulting freedom is part of what Evagrius understands by “the kingdom of heaven” (*Pr. 2*). Judging from the many warnings against anger in the *Gnostikos*, Evagrius’s manual for monastic instructors, *apatheia* is not acquired all at one time.³³⁸ But it can become a habitual response, thereby freeing the monastic for the higher contemplations. Evagrius, then, fully defines the kingdom of heaven as “passionlessness of the soul together with true knowledge of beings” (*Pr. 2*).

³³⁸See, for example, *Gnostikos*, 4, 5, 10, and 31.

Thus, the monastic turns from sin and progresses from concrete disciplines of body, soul, and mind to a freedom from passions which allows contemplation of the creation as it actually is, from the mind of God.³³⁹ From contemplation of visible creation, one moves to the invisible creation and is then in a position to receive the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. All these stages can and should be accompanied by prayer. The form of prayer, of course, changes as one grows in self-knowledge and in understanding of the ways of one's own particularly troublesome thoughts and demons. But at every stage, prayer remains the turning of the *nous* to God. For Evagrius, as for Clement and Origen, the importance of merely turning to God can hardly be exaggerated. In order to shed light on the full meaning of turning to God for Evagrius, I will consider the perspective on prayer that each of his chosen anthropological models offers. It will first be important to examine Evagrius's view of the opposite choice, that of wandering away from God.

Modifying Plato's anthropology in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, Evagrius arrives at the *nous*, *thumos*, and *epithumia*. The *nous* is as damaged by the Fall as are the *thumos* and the *epithumia*. Translated as "mind" or "intellect," the *nous* is supposed to function as the *ruling* mind, the *h_gemonikon*.³⁴⁰ The *nous* is the faculty which both sees and chooses, like Origen's *logos* in *On First Principles*, 3. 1. 3. Thus, Andrew Louth points out the error of equating the *nous* with the modern sense of "intellect," which, in common parlance, is the faculty which plans, calculates, and figures things out. Instead, the *nous* "is that in virtue of which we human beings are created in the image of God and [are] therefore capable of entering into communion with God" and of understanding God's creation.³⁴¹ Therefore, *nous* is closer to "spirit" (*pneuma*) or the biblical sense

³³⁹Evagrius insists, however, that one never "graduates" from the practical life; to neglect it is to risk a fall.

³⁴⁰The term, of course, was originally Stoic. Evagrius makes some use of *h_gemonikon*, which Stewart details in "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 22. He makes little use of *pneuma* as a term for the human spirit; for example, he substitutes *nous* for *pneuma* in the *Letter to Melania*.

³⁴¹"The Theology of the *Philokalia*," in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West*, ed. John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 2003) 358. See also Gabriel Bunge, *Èvagre le Pontique: Traité Pratique ou Le Moine*, trans. Paul Petronell (Abbaye de Bellefontaine: Maine & Loire, 1996) 28.

of “heart.”³⁴² than it is to the secular sense of “intellect”; for like Paul’s “spirit,” the *nous* was “created for knowledge of God.”³⁴³ Although the *nous* does reason and analyze, it is meant to do so as a spiritual faculty, in cooperation with the will of God. Thus, the *nous* has a moral dimension. For Evagrius, as for Origen, the *nous* is both morally and intellectually the locus of the image of God (Genesis 1. 26).

³⁴²O’Laughlin, 364.

³⁴³Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 22.

In its fallen state, however, the *nous* has only a weak orientation to God. Hence, it can easily be moved, talked out of what it knows is right, especially by the irrational faculties.³⁴⁴ It is through these lower parts of the soul: *epithumia* (desire) and *thumos* (aversion) that the demons first attack the *nous*. They attack in the form of “thoughts,” *logismoi*. These range from passion-filled images or depictions (*no_mata*) to passion-filled memories to intellectual rationalizations of evil choices (whether these have actually been carried out or not). Rationalizations are *logismoi* in the form of false reasonings, as, for example, in Evagrius’s *Antirrhetikos*: “For the thought that urges us to deny our brother, on the grounds that we have nothing to give— “Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.” (*Philargyria*, 40).³⁴⁵ Origen would recognize them as words below the ladder of knowledge, as “words which are altogether corrupt and godless, which do away with providence . . . and which approve some other goal than the good” (*Comm. on John*, 2. 31).

³⁴⁴Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 22, notes the negative associations with “movement” in Platonic thought.

³⁴⁵Michael O’Laughlin’s translation: “Evagrius Ponticus: *Antirrhetikos* (Selections) in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 243-262.

Evagrius thus develops Origen's tenet that spiritual warfare is not only against demons, but also against the disordered desires and the moral laziness of one's own fallen self. Yet, as Stewart points out, both the desiring and the irascible parts of the soul are "powers" (*dunameis*) to be used legitimately, according to nature: *epithumia* is meant to be desire for virtue, the *thumos* aversion to vice.³⁴⁶ Thus, choosing in accord with nature, "the contemplative mind— by moving the irascible part of the soul (*thumos*)— chases down, like a dog, all impassioned thoughts" (*Skemmata*, 9). The *thumos* should fight for virtue.³⁴⁷ Yet, the demons "drag us off towards worldly desires and try to force our rage *unnaturally* against [human beings]" (*Pr.* 24; underlining mine). The evil thought thus "rises up through the passionate part of the soul and darkens the mind" (*Pr.* 74). Passionate memories assist the demons, since "whatever things we welcomed with passion, we shall later remember with passion" (*Pr.* 34). For example, the mental image of a person at whom we have been angry, arising at prayer, makes us angry again, even though the actual conflict is over (*Pr.* 11). In *On the Thoughts*, Evagrius analyzes our use of the mental images of people to engage in all kinds of sinful interactions; we even have an image of ourselves (minus our own face): "The anchorite must therefore keep watch over his own mind . . . for he will seize the figure of his own body [at the instigation of a demon] and get involved interiorly in a fight with a brother or join with a woman" (*Thoughts*, 25).³⁴⁸ The demons instigate these interior dialogues and actions to subvert our "conversation with God," thereby converting prayer into sin.

The demons also directly attack the *nous*. When someone is reading, for example, they try to pervert the meaning of the scripture before him; failing that, they will "touch the eyelids and the entire head" with their cold bodies in order to make their victim sleepy (*Thoughts*, 33); in the

³⁴⁶ Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 23-24.

³⁴⁷ Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 23.

³⁴⁸ As Stewart says, the interior "movie" results from the rapid succession of impassioned *no_mata*. See "Imageless Prayer," 188-189.

Kephalaia Gnostika, they induce heavy sleep (VI. 25). Because the demons are icy cold, their effect is the opposite of that of the angels, who help us reach the fiery prayer. They also attack the mind by urging it toward vainglory and pride and by distracting it with false visions of God during prayer (*De Orat.* 68). Since God is without quality or shape (*De Orat.* 68), one can neither locate nor visualize the divine; following Basil in his conflict with Eunomius, Evagrius insists that no human word, concept, or mental depiction reveals the essence of God.

The “divided line of ignorance” is now visible through the dynamics of demonic temptation. False visions of God during prayer, for example, mislead the *nous*, leaving it vulnerable to evil thoughts and active sin. When the evil thought has done its work, the mind’s resulting darkness signifies its move away from true knowledge. Here, Evagrius builds on Origen’s *Commentary on John*:

This light . . . “shines in the darkness” of our souls. It has come to stay where the world rulers of this darkness live (who by wrestling with the human race struggle to subject those who do not stand firm in every manner to darkness), that, when they have been enlightened, they may be called sons of light. And this light shines in the darkness and is . . . not overcome. (2. 167).

The demons’ “words” approve some other goal than the good. The light of Christ is never overcome; but in order to stand in light, the *nous* must do two things: refute the false words with the truth of Scripture, the word of Christ, and refuse all visions that give God a form or a particular shape. A particular form or shape would at once prove the vision false because “the divine is without quantity or shape” (*De Orat.* 68).

We need to recall that the demons themselves are other fallen intellects, those that fell the most deeply when they turned away from God. Thus, they are motivated (“moved”) by jealousy and hatred of human beings, who are “higher” than they are, at the mid-point of fallen nature. Evagrius envisions a created hierarchy of being for which the elements of fire, earth, and air are symbols: “There is a predominance of mind (*nous*) and fire in angels, but among persons desire (*epithumia*)

and earth, but among demons passion (*thymos*) and [cold] air” (*KG*, 1. 68).³⁴⁹ In Stoic thought, which took inspiration from Heraclitus, the eternal *Logos* was thought to be an intelligent, designing fire, structuring matter according to its plan.³⁵⁰ Scripture would have included the purifying fire of Luke 3. 16: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” For Evagrius “fire” signifies a holy energy, the holy concentration of the angels on God. Human beings can reach “fiery prayer” through intense concentration of their whole being on God.³⁵¹ In the *Praktikos*, Evagrius tells the story of the solitary with whom the demons played ball for two weeks. Yet, “they were entirely unable to drag his mind down from its fiery prayer even for a moment” (111). “Fiery prayer” is, then, the opposite of the carelessness of “wandering away.”

³⁴⁹David Bundy’s translation: “Evagrius Ponticus: *The Kephalalaia Gnostica*,” Book I in Wimbush, 175-185.

³⁵⁰Baltzly, Section 3.

³⁵¹Recall Clement’s portrayal of intense prayer in *Stromateis*, 7. 7. 44.

In his ninth conference, Cassian also associates the ecstasy of fiery prayer with intense concentration upon God. For him, fiery prayer is a sharing in the intense prayer that Jesus offered to the Father during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; and its purpose becomes redemptive. Fiery prayer, therefore, can take place in the midst of intense pain and stress; what matters is the readiness of the whole soul to turn to God. For Cassian, Jesus “represented this condition [of intense concentration] . . . in the form of these prayers that he . . . poured out alone on the mountain . . . he even shed drops of blood as an inimitable example of his intense purpose” (*Conf.* 9. 25. 1).³⁵² In their different ways, Evagrius and Cassian both develop Origen’s insight that prayer reverses the direction of the Fall. By using Christ as his example, Cassian stresses even more strongly that prayer shares in God’s redemptive purpose.

“Earth,” in contrast, symbolizes the second creation, which itself means physicality, time, and above all, mortality. The second creation will pass away: “Temporel est le mouvement des corps, mais intemporelle la transformation des incorporels”: “The movement of the body is temporal, but the transformation of the incorporeal [creation] is eternal” (*KG*, 2. 87).³⁵³ The human problem is intensely desiring ephemeral goods while being careless about God. Demons have gone beyond carelessness into opposition. With cold air and *thumos* go rage, hatred, and virtual ubiquity. They swarm like gnats around the person trying to pray, suggesting irrelevant memories (*De Orat.* 10) or thoughts of greed (*Thoughts*, 8); instilling anxiety, which is a denial of God’s providence (*Thoughts*, 6); distracting the mind and moving it aimlessly from one thought to another (*Thoughts*, 9). Finally, they even manipulate the veins in the brain to bring on false visions (*De Orat.* 73). They cannot be

³⁵² John Cassian: *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, *ACR*, 57 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

³⁵³ Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 393.

seen, but they are in the spiritual and perhaps even the physical air. As in the *Life of Antony*, they do not have real power; and they make up for their weakness by swarming and making an unholy racket. As seen by Athanasius, Antony is the man of God empowered to expose this truth:

[Antony said] "If there were some power among you, it would have been enough for only one of you to come. But since the Lord has broken your strength, you attempt to terrify me by any means with the mob . . . If you are able, and you did receive authority over me, don't hold back, but attack. But if you are unable, why, when it is vain, do you disturb me? For faith in our Lord is for us a seal and a wall of protection" (#9: p. 39).³⁵⁴

For Athanasius, the demons lack power because they have already been defeated by Christ.³⁵⁵ With some qualification, Evagrius seconds this conviction: "If it is God you are waiting on in prayer, God the Almighty, the creator of the universe, [the one foreknowing] everything,³⁵⁶ why do you wait on him so irrationally as to bypass the unsurpassable fear of him and tremble at gnats and beetles?" (*De Orat.* 100).

The weakness of the demons results from their sin of opposition to God and to other created

³⁵⁴Robert Gregg's translation: *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellus* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980).

³⁵⁵The correspondences between Antony's *Life* and *Letters*, Origen's works, and Evagrius's demonology are discussed by Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 12-16.

³⁵⁶Stewart's correction of Tugwell's translation is in square brackets.

beings. Hostility to God means a lack of capacity to be nourished by contemplation. In their present state, the demons cannot ascend the ladder of contemplation from visible to intelligible being and truth, thereby preparing themselves for the direct vision of God: “C’est le propre des anges de se nourrir en tout temps de la contemplation des êtres, celui des hommes de ne pas (s’en nourrir) en tout temps, et celui des démons de ne (s’en nourrir) ni à temps ni à contretemps” (*KG*, 3. 4). “It is proper to the angels to nourish themselves all the time on the contemplation of beings; it is proper to humans not to nourish themselves all the time, and it is proper to demons not to nourish themselves [on contemplation] either at one time or another.” In the spiritual world, eating is knowing. Demons have no knowledge outside their rage and jealousy to “eat” for sustenance, no direction other than opposition. Because they too have freedom of will, they could conceivably choose the good and begin their return to God. The return would be extremely difficult; for demons live in a state of hostility to God and to the creation. They therefore lack enough integrity of *nous* to be able to help (nourish) themselves by contemplating the creation. In this regard, Evagrius probably follows Origen’s conviction that demons are the hardened souls whom God leaves in their sins until they are satiated, sick, and ready to turn back to God. The turn needs to be their own choice (*Princ.* 2. 1. 13). By opposing the higher intellects in the creation, however, the demons only drive themselves lower, from air to water to the abyss, which they fear the most. “Persons fear Sheol, but demons fear the abyss. But there are among the evil ones serpents for which there is no word” (*KG*, 1. 57). In contrast, angels can contemplate both the visible and the intelligible creation all the time, and human beings, though unable to prevent demons from trying to bully them, can nevertheless contemplate both creations some of the time (*KG*, 1. 64).

Yet, in the second creation, the demons retain some power, if only through their ability to deceive. Therefore, Evagrius sees them as dangerous to the unwary. He says, for example, in *On the Thoughts*, quoting 2 Timothy 6. 9: “All the impure thoughts that linger within us on account of the passions bring the mind down to ‘ruin and destruction’” (22). The power of the demons is threefold.

First, they have insight into human souls even though they cannot read the *nous* directly, because our bodily movements reveal the state of our souls (*Pr.* 47). Second, demons are persistent, approaching again and again, always seeking to distract and deceive and sometimes even seeking to do bodily harm (*De Orat.*, 91). “Stand on your guard,” says Evagrius, possibly referring to 1 Corinthians 16. 13³⁵⁷, “protect your mind from thoughts (*no_mata*) at the time of prayer, and take your stand on your own desolation,³⁵⁸ so that he who has compassion on the ignorant will . . . visit you too”(De Orat. 70). To the extent that we are still caught up in passions (*De Orat.* 72) and material things (*De Orat.* 71), the demons can attack, preventing prayer and putting us in danger of giving assent to evil. Although Evagrius insists (with Origen) that the human will is always responsible (*De Orat.* 81), the struggle is relentless.

Third, to the extent that the demons can persuade or provoke us to assent to their suggestions, they succeed in making us like them, darkened in mind and hostile toward God and toward each other. They provoke anger, either during prayer or afterwards; they can also incite us to illicit and irrational pleasures (*De Orat.* 46-48). In all, their aim is to make our minds more like theirs:

“Of what interest is it to the demons to produce gluttony, fornication, love of money, anger and resentment and all the other passions in us, except that they weaken the mind so that it cannot pray as it should? . . . They do not permit [the mind] to operate rationally and to seek the Word of God” (*De Orat.* 51).

Therefore, since even in their state of defeat by Christ, the demons can confuse us and prevent our “exodus to God” (*De Orat.* 47), it is always necessary to stand guard by maintaining our focus on God: “A monk becomes the equal of the angels through true prayer, desiring to see the face of the Father who is in heaven” (*De Orat.* 113). To become instead the equal of the demons by

³⁵⁷“Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong.”

³⁵⁸There are variant readings here: *_remia*, quiet, and *er_mia*, desolation. The latter makes more sense.

descending the ladder of ignorance is not good.³⁵⁹ Always, Evagrius emphasizes the importance of choosing to pay attention to God. In return, God helps, sending angels to support us and sometimes directly intervening:

The Holy Spirit, sympathizing with our weakness (Rom 8. 26), comes upon us even while we are unclean, and if he finds the mind just praying to him in a truth-loving way, he mounts it and disperses the whole array of schemes (*logismoi*) and thoughts (*no_mata*) that is circling around it, urging it on to the love of spiritual prayer (*De Orat.* 63).

As Evagrius reiterates in the next section, God sometimes communicates directly. The first effect of divine knowledge is to banish the demons and “calm the imbalance that there is in the body,” which could have brought on the attack or perhaps resulted from it (*De Orat.* 64). The Holy Spirit is known by his fruits of banishing demons and inspiring love of God (*De Orat.* 63).

For Evagrius, as for Origen, another effect of sin is inner conflict and fragmentation. The inheritance of Plato’s tripartite anthropology allows Evagrius to explore the conflict between one part of the soul and another and thus present an analysis of the way in which sin is experienced by the monastic trying to navigate the way to God. The *nous* embarks on the monastic life, having decided to pursue virtue alone only to find that vainglory has taken over, causing the *nous* to pursue virtue in order to get the praise of other people (*Pr.* Prologue, 3). Having puffed up the *nous* with the expectation of glory, even the honor of becoming a priest, the demon hands its victim over to the demon of fornication and leaves (*Pr.* 13). Under attack by gluttony, the monastic consults others more experienced in self-control— but only to complain about the ascetical training (*Pr.* 7); for the *nous* is now operating against its own nature (of leading by rational decision) and is following the

³⁵⁹Plotinus is also concerned with the fate of the soul that becomes entangled in the order below it in the hierarchy of being. See *Enneads*, IV. 8. 4.

dictates of *epithumia*. One part of the person fights against another; and the *nous* does not lead in a consistent direction, but goes first one way, then another. In current rituals for entrance into monastic life, the candidate has to respond to an initial question: “What do you seek?” Although the *nous* may seek the way of God, under demonic attack it will make choices that lead in the opposite direction.

In answer, Evagrius uses the Stoic emphasis on “what is up to us,” inherited from Origen, to hold firmly that resisting the demons and their illusions is, in fact, “up to us.” For Origen, temptation was designed by God both to reveal to us what we are really like and to strengthen the will by giving it practice in choosing the good. What is up to us? In the first place, Evagrius says that we can guard our hearts, doing what we can to be self-aware. Because we can entertain only one idea or depiction at a time, we can drive a thought out by the simple expedient of thinking something else, “use a nail to drive out a nail (*Pr.* 58).” An application of this principle is driving out vainglory with a thought of fornication (since that thought would tend to humble the Holiest Monk of the Desert).³⁶⁰ However, as Evagrius indicates in *Praktikos*, 58, driving out one demon with the thought of another is for the strong. A number of other, presumably safer, tactics were well known in desert tradition; and Evagrius asserts them:

A wandering mind is stabilized by reading and vigil and prayer.

Inflamed desire is quenched by hunger and toil and withdrawal.

Seething fury is abated by psalmody and endurance and mercy.

And all of this only at appropriate times and in the appropriate measure (*Pr.* 15).

Note that “work” is part of the remedy against thoughts. In *Gnostikos*, 7, Evagrius states that the true “gnostic” works for others as a way of giving alms to others; in fact, a knower who does not give of self and time generously is like the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25. 1-13.

³⁶⁰ Thinking voluntarily about fornication in order to drive out vainglory is not dangerous to Evagrius, although he discourages beginners from this course (*Pr.* 58). But being handed over *involuntarily* to the demon of fornication by the demon of vainglory once you are in his grip is dangerous for anyone. The intention seems to make the difference. For Evagrius, fornication and vainglory are opposites, even though they work together.

It is also possible to use our inner divisions to our favor instead of letting them be used against us by the demons. Against the demon of *ak_dia* (listlessness), Evagrius recommends that we divide our soul in two, making one part encourage the other, in David's words: "Why are you depressed, my soul? Why do you disturb me? Hope in God because I will praise him, the Savior . . . and my God (Ps 41. 6: *Pr.* 27). This passage is an example of antirrhetic prayer, the technique of using the word of Scripture against the chaos of our inner rationalizing words.

All of these measures are steps that we can take toward *apatheia*, that state of freedom from the rule of the passions and stability in the face of demonic pressure. Evagrius says that *apatheia* is the flower of the practical life and the parent of charity (*Pr.* 81). Thus, it is the gateway of "true knowledge of beings," assuming that beings created by God in love can only be known in love. Evagrius also inherits the definition of Clement of Alexandria, who Christianized the Stoic virtue of *apatheia* by associating it with faith. According to Clement, the Law ordained that the sinner must be destroyed that he might change from death to life, to the life of impassibility born of faith: " _κ θανάτου ε_ς ζωήν, τ_ν_κ πίστεως _πάθειαν"; *Stromateis*, 7. 3. 14. 3).³⁶¹ God, in turn, appears to the one who, practicing *apatheia*, keeps a steady direction, not betraying justice, either through fear (*φόβος*) or through the promise of better gifts (*δώρων _ποσχέσειμειζόνων*; *Stromateis*, 7. 3. 15. 1). For Clement, those who remain just under pressure are like God, who cannot be bribed by sacrifices or votive gifts to swerve from justice.

Evagrius's use of *apatheia* keeps the connotation of steadiness of purpose. There is need for steadiness because the passions and the demons do not disappear the minute one wins the first victory over them. Evagrius cautions those who teach others to guard against their own anger (for

³⁶¹ *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates 7*, trans Alain Le Boulluec, SC 428 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997).

example, in *Gnostikos*, 5, 31, and 32). Those judged to have the spiritual maturity to engage in the contemplations and to teach others can still be led into error by passion: “Le péché du gnostique est la science fausse des objets eux-mêmes ou de leur contemplation, qui est engendrée par une passion quelconque, ou parce que ce n’est pas en vue du bien qu’est faite la recherche” (*Gnostikos*, 43). “The sign of the knower is false knowledge of objects themselves or false contemplation of them which is caused by some passion or because it was not with the view of the Good in mind that the search was made.” To sum up, self-knowledge is a task that is “up to us.” Practical “work” against the passions and false thoughts must be maintained throughout life as needed. Someone who has mastered the *praktik_* will have the right orientation to the world: “A νο_ς πρακτικός always receives the thoughts of this world _παθ_ς” (*Skemmata*, 16). The *praktikos* mind does not waste time on passions or imaginary sinful scenarios (*Skemmata*, 36). Yet, one risks losing this state of harmony if one neglects the practices of charity and loses touch with what is going on inside. Because the demons are persistent and deceptive, true conversation with God takes life-long willingness to work with the mind in order to make sure that its energies are concentrated toward God in “undistracted prayer.”

I have been reflecting on prayer as paying attention to God, an act which requires self-awareness as well because of the temptations of the opposing powers. We have to “work and keep guard” at all times (*De Orat.* 48). Yet, Evagrius envisions a “pure prayer” which is beyond passion and even beyond thoughts. This is the height of prayer, the spiritual goal for human beings: “The whole war between us and the unclean demons is about nothing else except spiritual prayer because spiritual prayer is particularly offensive and intolerable to them and particularly beneficial and propitious for us” (*De Orat.* 50). What is spiritual prayer, and why should it be particularly offensive to the demons? The answer lies, I think, in Evagrius’s faith that human beings are destined for a union with the Holy Trinity that is, in a paradoxical way, ontological. The “place of God” to which pure prayer leads anticipates this unity.

Stewart’s study of “imageless prayer” furnishes a solid foundation for any further

consideration of Evagrius's conception of spiritual prayer. Stewart brings out Evagrius's awareness of need for theological care, his concern to ground his teaching in Scripture, in particular in the theophanies of Exodus (24. 10-11: LXX) and Ezekiel (1. 26 and 10. 1).³⁶² In the Greek version of the passage from Exodus, Moses and the seventy elders ascended Mt. Sinai and "saw the place where stood the God of Israel . . . and what was under his feet was like a work of sapphire brick/tile, and in its transparency it had the appearance of the firmament of heaven." Ezekiel's theophanies place God upon a throne but keep the same sapphire blue pavement. Stewart points out that Evagrius shifts "the place of God" to the human *nous*, where the sapphire blue light suffuses it in a way that one who prays can "see," even though all normal activities of the mind have been transcended. What one "sees," in a way that is free of imagery and thought, is the mind as "the place of God."³⁶³ As Stewart says, "the place of God" is "a place of visitation rather than a location of essence," since, as we have seen, Evagrius held with the Cappadocians that God is not knowable essentially. Finally, referring to Isaiah's vision of the Lord "seated on a high and exalted throne" (Isa 6. 1), Evagrius interprets this to mean that Isaiah saw "his own truest self (i.e., his 'rational nature') become the throne of God as he received the knowledge of God . . . anticipating the eschatological journey from diversified knowledge to essential knowledge of the Trinity."³⁶⁴ This vision of the "truest self," one's own rational nature as the throne of God, suggests the reason for the demons' loathing of spiritual prayer: their will to deny their own true nature, their creation in the image of God. Because they are of the same primordial creation as human beings, they cannot oppose human beings or God without opposing themselves. Thus, Evagrius is careful to say that as we honor the angels for their virtue, not their nature, we should hate the demons for their malice, but not for their nature: "Nous honorons les anges non pas à cause de leur nature, mais à cause de leur vertu et

³⁶² My discussion follows Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 196-201. For the biblical theophanies, see 196-197.

³⁶³ Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 197.

³⁶⁴ Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 200-201.

nous insultons les démons à cause de la malice qui est en eux” (*KG*, 5. 47): “We honor the angels not because of their nature, but because of their virtue; we insult the demons because of the malice which is in them (not because of their nature).” For the nature of both angels and demons is the same as our own.

Without the imagery from the Old Testament theophanies, the *Letter to Melania* develops the same theme: how human beings can be so intimately related to God that the human *nous* is to be seen as God’s throne. In this letter, Evagrius presents an extended interpretation of Genesis 1. 26: creation in God’s image and likeness. For Evagrius, it is not enough to understand demonic tactics. It is also vital that we come to know ourselves in God’s image, so that we can know who we are, then progress to life in God’s likeness. Comparing his own letter to Melania to the visible creation, Evagrius explains that the world around us is a “letter from God (the Father) to those who are far off.” The creation is “written” by the Son, who is the Father’s hand, and by the Holy Spirit, the “finger of God” (*LM*, 2. 43 ff.). This “letter” is necessary because of the Movement³⁶⁵; and the created intellects are entirely responsible both for moving away and for the loathsome works that result:

For those who are far from God have made a separation between themselves and their Creator by their loathsome works. But God, out of his love, has provided creation as a mediator; it is like letters. He did this through his power and wisdom, that is, by the Son and the Spirit, in order that [all people] might come to know and draw closer to his love for them (*LM*, 36-41).

Here, Evagrius identifies the Son with the powerful “right hand” of the Lord in Psalm 118. 15 and Exodus 15. 6; for the Spirit, he points out that Matthew’s Jesus says that he casts out demons by the Spirit of God, while Luke’s Jesus says that he casts them out by “the finger of God” (Matt 12. 28 and Lk 11. 20). Both word and spirit (or power and wisdom) are needed to create the world; and the visible world carries out their eternal will to reveal the Father’s love to all who live in it.

Whereas angels and other higher rational beings can receive from the Son and the Spirit directly and can share their knowledge of true prayer with us (*De Orat.* 75-76)—recall Origen’s tenet

³⁶⁵“Movement” is Evagrius’s term for the Fall.

that the “other gods” of Scripture get their divinity from the Son, who has it by virtue of will and eternal generation— we need mediators to know God’s love: the visible creation, angels, and other, wiser people. In addition, Evagrius assumes that we will at least be able to hear the scriptures, if not read them for ourselves. All of these mediators teach us not only God’s love, but also our own capacity for union with God which is ultimately participation in the essential knowledge and the will of the Father through Christ. With their assistance, we learn and we begin to proclaim the wisdom of God inasmuch as it is discernible in the visible and intelligible creations:

For just as the contents of letters remain hidden to those who cannot read, even so [they] who fail to understand the visible creation equally fail to perceive the intelligible creation which is hidden in it, however much [they] observe it. [They]. . . who have probed the visible creation in diligence and purity know what it tells about the invisible creation. Once [they] have come to perceive this, [they] shall also have insight in[to] the power and the wisdom of God’s steadfastness and unceasingly proclaim the intention of his incomprehensible love which is realized in creation in power and wisdom (*LM*, 3. 104-112).

Thus, instructed human disciples have the wisdom and the power to begin to share with others and to lead them, not all at once, but gradually into deeper understanding that God’s wisdom and power pervade all things.³⁶⁶ As “a precise image and true reflection of the Father’s essence” (*LM*, 4. 140), the Son, the Spirit are “direct signs” of the Father and his love. The members of the rational creation are “true images of the Image”,³⁶⁷ hence, the Son and the Spirit communicate directly with human minds that are ready to receive.³⁶⁸ Human minds are to become signs of the Son and the Spirit and so, of the unity of the Trinity:

And as the Power and the Wisdom which are the Son and the Spirit are glorious signs in which the love of the Father is recognized, just so rational beings are signs . . . by which the power and wisdom of the Father are recognized. The Son and the Spirit are signs of the Father, who is

³⁶⁶In the *Gnostikos*, Evagrius stresses two points: the teacher must model the love and patience of Christ, i.e., be approachable, not haughty or grouchy; the teacher must also refrain from teaching all the theory until the student has worked with the passions sufficiently to receive it. If questioned by an unready student, the teacher must even evade or lie. See *Gnostikos* 10; 22; 23. As to lying, no one knows the truth for certain, since all are bound to their bodies here on earth (#23).

³⁶⁷Origen reserves the term “images of the image” for the “other gods” in his *Commentary on John*, designating human beings as “according to the image” (2. 20). Evagrius has his analysis in mind anyway, I think.

³⁶⁸Evagrius focuses on the human creation here, rather than on the whole range of rational creatures, probably because Genesis 1. 26 concerns the creation of human beings.

recognized in them, and rational creatures are signs by which the Son and the Spirit are recognized because of the “in our image” (Genesis 1. 26; *LM*, 92-98).

For Evagrius, moving into God’s image and likeness means moving into the eschatological unity with God. This unity involves changes of rank and being from what we are now to the mystery of the new creation: the *nous* becomes the body of the Father; the soul is raised to the level of *nous*; and the body is taken up by the soul. According to Evagrius, each one of these changes has been established to nourish the *logikoi*. Those to whom these changes are nourishing will be all set to change for the better; while those who oppose them will change for the worse (*KG*, 7). This schema is suggestive of Origen’s analysis of moral choice in the *Commentary on Romans*.

According to Origen’s analysis of choice in his *Commentary on Romans*, the soul is the faculty of choice, poised, theoretically, between the body and the spirit. In practice, the soul chooses between flesh (sin) and spirit (Gal 5. 17). Perhaps because sinful pleasure has a strong physical component, “body” and “flesh” become hard to distinguish once the soul makes a wrong decision. Although the soul receives encouragement from angels to make its choice in favor of the spirit, the demons entice the soul to choose in favor of the flesh. If the soul chooses the way of the flesh, it degenerates, becoming assimilated to flesh: “it becomes *one body* with it in its lust and sinful desires” (I. 18. 5). But whenever the soul chooses the way of spirit, it is assimilated to the spirit and to the Holy Spirit as well, while the body itself becomes less fleshly, assuming its dignity as “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6. 19). Origen envisions an anthropological transformation; for as the soul chooses the good, the whole person becomes “a habitation of the Holy Spirit and a dwelling place of the Father and the Son, who said of the one who abides in his commands, ‘I and the Father will come and make a dwelling place with him’” (John 14. 23; *Comm. in Rom.* 1. 18. 10).

In order to present this vision of the movement from image to likeness, Evagrius begins with Paul’s anthropology of body, soul, and *nous/spirit*.³⁶⁹ Evagrius too envisions a unity of being with the

³⁶⁹ In section 8, Evagrius condenses Paul’s model to body and soul/*nous/spirit*. Since Evagrius conceived of the soul as the diminished rank of the fallen primordial intellect, it is possible for him in the latter part of this work to use “soul” as a loose

hypostaseis of the Trinity both in the eschaton and now, proleptically, in spiritual prayer. The unity of the rational creation with God is an ontological configuration which depends on a union of wills (as it does for Origen) and a unity of “essential knowledge.” Thus, “prayer is the activity which befits the dignity of the mind” (*De Orat.* 84) because “prayer is the prelude to immaterial and undiversified knowledge” (*De Orat.* 85). This undiversified knowledge is the knowledge of the Holy Trinity made possible through the Holy Spirit and by Christ’s choice to open the way for us to participate in his knowledge of the Father. Hence, the soul is raised to the level of *nous* because of a change in its will. The same is true for the body: “In time, the body, the soul, and the mind, because of changes in their wills, will become one entity [and] . . . the mind will stand again in its first creation” (*LM*, 6. 196-198). The entryway to this transformation is always the same: the concentration of one’s attention and, as much as possible, one’s whole being upon God.

In preparation for his analysis and in order to show the full significance of Christ’s transforming grace, Evagrius first makes careful definitions of the nature of body and soul. It is the soul’s nature to rule the body and the body’s nature to be subject to the soul. Note that in the second creation, in which the simplicity of the original intellects has been lost, there is still, for humans, an order to be followed which points in the direction of unity. If human beings consistently worked on their *praktik* and sought the gift of pure prayer, the soul would already tend toward the *nous*; and both would rule the body. The soul would then be strong enough to lift the body to its own level, effectively raising it above some of the evil conditions to which it is subject, like sickness and anger (*LM*, 354-359). However, the soul “ceased to be the image of God and voluntarily became the image of animals” (Rom 1. 23)³⁷⁰; as a result, the soul and the *nous* lost their power to rule the body. Indeed, Evagrius remarks, not only does the soul fail to free the body from evil conditions, but it

synonym of “*nous*” (mind).”

³⁷⁰ Like Origen, Evagrius identifies the exchange of the worship of the glory of God for idol-worship in Rom 1. 23 with the internal loss of the image of God as the result of the Fall. See Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*, I. 17. 2.

“even confers on the body things which do not belong to it, for pride, vainglory, and avarice do not belong to the body” (*LM*, 9. 364-368). The Movement, then, is ongoing, for the most part, with the result that disorder prevails. Both soul and body are “outside their nature”; that is, it is easiest for them to act unnaturally. For the soul to rise to its true nature (of virtue) is such a feat that it seems supernatural; but it is only a natural necessity to the soul, in the same way as breathing is to the body (*LM*, 402-403). It is an ongoing struggle even to act according to nature; we *cannot* rise above our nature, that is, perform supernatural acts.

This state of living outside or below one’s true nature is, for Evagrius, “the curse” which could only be reversed by Christ, God and man, who in coming down to us and bearing “everything which we have earned because we have left our nature,” acted both naturally and unnaturally. Christ acted naturally in extending divine love to fallen humanity (*LM*, 11. 437), and unnaturally in descending from a higher level of being to a lower (*LM*, 12. 442 ff.). For example:

What was unnatural was that God was born of a woman. But God, because of his love for us, and because his nature is not bound by or subjected to any law, was born of a woman because he wanted it so . . . He, while remaining what he is, in his grace took upon him at birth all the things . . . which are not only unnatural to him but also, I would say, unnatural to us. For we have fallen into these things because of the sin we have committed of our own free will (*LM*, 12. 442-453).

The Incarnation is supernatural to us, but only natural to Christ, whose love makes a natural gesture when he descends to sinful humanity. Yet, his descent is “unnatural” because he makes it for no sin of his own, whereas the intellects’ original descent to humanity was a consequence of the Fall (*LM*, 458-459). Borrowing from a similar discussion in Gregory Nazianzen’s fourth theological oration,³⁷¹ Evagrius explores the mystery of the Incarnation, concluding that God remained God and raised human nature, separating it from its original cause, the Movement, and restoring it to the image and likeness of God: “That which is natural to man, is that man is created in the image of God. What is supernatural is that we come to be in [God’s] likeness, according to the word, “I have come that they

³⁷¹Gregory expands on the paradox of the Incarnation at length. For example, “He was baptized as man—but he remitted sins as God . . . He is called a Samaritan and a demoniac— but he saves him that came down from Jerusalem and fell among thieves” (*Oration* 30, 20).

may have life and that they may have it in abundance” (John 10. 10; *LM*, 484-487).

Although the Incarnation is discussed later in the letter than the *apocatastasis*, it undergirds Evagrius’s conception of the final unity of body, soul, and *nous* with the Trinity. Origen had shown how the soul was assimilated to the spirit through making a right choice. For Evagrius, the assimilation to the Trinity is made possible by Christ because we were not even able to live consistently according to nature, let alone rise above it to join ourselves to God. It is Christ’s choice to descend in love that is the cause of the final unity.

Some questions remain. What happens to the body in the final restoration? Evagrius distinguishes between the physical body and the intelligible body, a kind of Platonic “form” of the visible body (*LM*, 9. 316). During mortal life, the physical body is fit to move about the world, expressing the will of the mind and soul. The deeds and the movements of the body serve to reveal what the soul is like, just as the “movements” of the soul toward good or evil reveal what the *nous* is like (*LM*, 4. 113-115). As to the fate of the physical body, Evagrius conceives of the *apocatastasis* in two stages. In the first, the heavy physical body will be replaced by a lighter, more spiritual body; in the second stage, diversity and number give way to unity.³⁷² The “intelligible body,” however, is a different story. It has a will of its own, as the soul does, but in the eschaton, both soul and intelligible body become one in will and being with the *nous*: “In time, the body, soul, and mind, because of changes in their wills, will become one entity” (*LM*, 195-196).³⁷³ Thus, body and soul do disappear, but in the special sense that they are ontologically configured, first, the body to the soul, then both to the human mind and to the Trinity.

This ontological configuration of humanity (and all the rational creation) to the Trinity means that the same anthropological terms apply to both God and humanity. God the Father is the *Nous*.

³⁷²For Evagrius’s two-stage eschaton, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe*, 384-395.

³⁷³Currently, we may experience an “intelligible body” in the “gut reactions” we have to physical danger or in other apparently instinctive reactions we have to situations and people.

Evagrius conceives that the Son and the Spirit, God's power and wisdom, are the Soul. Finally, the human *nous*, having assimilated the human soul and intelligible body and accepted its destiny of contemplating God, takes on its new role as the Father's body. The language of "body" in relation to the Father could be interpreted anthropomorphically; but Evagrius intends it to express both unity and community between the Trinity and rational creatures:

Therefore, if letters, serving those who are far off, can communicate what has happened and what is about to happen, how much more do the Word and Spirit who understand everything, communicate this to the human mind which is their body! . . . But the Word and the Spirit are direct signs of the Father . . . Therefore, every human mind has understanding because the Word and the Spirit make everything known to it, as it is itself their true image and their likeness is communicated to it (*LM*, 4. 126-143).

In the end, for Evagrius, diversity disappears. Only the names of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are eternal; and the numbers disappear. The wills, however, remain, but in unanimity, so that God can be all in all. Evagrius compares the *apocatastasis* to many different rivers flowing into the sea. The sea changes their natures into its own nature. "How much more then is this not the case with the intelligible sea, which is infinite and unchangeable, namely, God the Father (*LM*, 6. 204-209)? The rational beings retain their created nature; thus they are not absorbed wholly into the Trinity (*LM*, 6. 231-236). Yet once the barrier of sin has been removed, they fully become "the place of prayer."

For Evagrius, then, to converse with God in prayer requires an alignment of will with God as well as a turning toward God which anticipates the final unity and sometimes also reveals it, through the experience of spiritual prayer. Although the present world abounds with signs of the Fall, they do not overshadow the "letter of God," the signs of God's love in the world. Evagrius is convinced that an underlying order grounds its chaos. That order, which is the letter to us from God, is the sign of God's love which embraces all creatures, however far they may have wandered. As a result of choosing to read God's letters, we become full of God's spirit and therefore able to teach others. But we can never afford to forget to engage in the *praktik*. If we become careless, we will lose the ability to "read" God's love.

IV. Conclusion: Review and Further Study

The theology of prayer emerges from the intersection of the doctrine of God and the understanding of the self. Reflection on God and the self do not take place in a vacuum, however. Origen's effort to refute the teachings of Marcion and the Gnostics helped shape his teaching; for Evagrius, the campaign against Enoonian Arianism was crucial. To these tasks they brought their considerable education in the Hellenic philosophies. Their knowledge of Platonism and Stoicism was of a different order from classroom memorization; they had deeply absorbed Hellenic teachings. For both Origen and Evagrius, then, these philosophies become an interpretive framework for the understanding of Scripture, and it was natural for them to assume the appropriateness of classical stages of education when they thought of the journey of the soul. Nevertheless, in their view, Scripture provides the ultimate *paideia*. It is through turning to God, receiving right teachings, and engaging in spiritual warfare that one gains access to higher wisdom and to the knowledge of God. In the process of becoming free of the passions, we face many temptations, thereby following the human figure of Jesus, who is our pedagogue. Christian life is

increasingly contemplative as, through making the right choices, we become free enough to see the reality of God's love. The coming together of the philosophies and Scripture gave Origen, whose mind was speculative, many doors to the higher wisdom; and it gave Evagrius, who was a systematizer, a large-enough system to accommodate both his psychology and his stages of spiritual progress.

In both Platonism and Stoicism, anthropology, ontology, and epistemology are interrelated; it is impossible to consider one branch without considering the other two. As we have seen, for Plato, human beings are born to learn. The *nous* (or sometimes *logistikon*) reaches its full potential only as it finds more reliable objects of knowledge than the sensible world provides. It must discover the intelligible forms, or principles of reality, and finally the Good, in which all other forms participate. The Good is the ultimate fulfillment of the human mind. In order to refute the elitist anthropology of the Gnostics, then, Origen borrowed Plato's cosmology from the *Timaeus*, as well as his "divided line" of knowledge from Book Six of the *Republic*. Origen's purpose was twofold: to uphold God's involvement in all of creation and the contemplative destiny of all created intellects and to argue their responsibility for the Fall, which resulted from their careless and lawless choice to "wander away" from God.

To meet the challenge of fatalism in all its forms and to analyze the significance of freedom, Origen needed the Stoic anthropology, which concerns itself specifically with human choice and responsibility. For the Stoics, understanding of Providence is impossible. Yet, though inscrutable, Providence is not hostile because it is not even personal. The workings of Providence are the best and most rational arrangement for the whole of creation. It is not "up to us" to understand those workings; indeed, we cannot. What is "up to us" is to make decisions that will put us into harmony with Providence. This task is not beyond us because we have reason, that small seed of *logos* implanted by the *Logos*, the overarching Right Reason. Origen developed the Stoic insistence on individual responsibility; but he did this in connection with a Providence that is personal and loving;

for God is the source of “Providence.” The events that confront us do so in order to teach us who we really are and prod us to turn more completely to God. With time to form good habits, we come to trust God.

Thus, when Origen used Platonic and Stoic thought as a framework for interpreting the Scriptures, he could show that as Trinity, God is an ontological and moral “community” of love. The Son and the Spirit “are” with the Father because they *will* to be with the Father, sharing and contemplating the Father’s divinity. As One, the Three choose to reach out to all fallen creatures and assist them to return to God. Each *hypostasis* of the Trinity has its special operation in the economy. Origen’s Platonic lens led him to see “being with God” as a chosen contemplative union, whether for the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity or for rational creatures. Because prayer is always a choice to be with God, it is always a form of contemplation.

Origen’s knowledge of Stoic thought underlies his answer to the perennial question of how it can make sense to address petitions to a God who knows all and has ordained everything from all eternity. He inverts the Stoic precept that we choose to act in harmony with God to show that God’s providence works in harmony with our choices. Thus, God takes our choices into account when he orders the world— all of our choices, including the choice to pray for our needs at any given time (*On Prayer*, 6. 3). Stoic concepts also undergird his exploration of the dynamics of choice, hence his understanding of the moral preparation required for prayer. In order to explore the spiritual significance of human freedom, however, Origen uses Paul’s anthropology of body, soul, and spirit, as expressed in 1 Thessalonians 5. 23: “May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, the body is to be sanctified along with the soul and the spirit. However, in his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen conflates this tripartite schema with the model in Galatians 5. 17: “For flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.” Here, “flesh” means the sin-nature, the “old man.” In analyzing the dynamics of choice, Origen does not clearly separate “body” (*soma*) from “flesh” (*sarx*) because for him, bodily desires easily

tend toward sin.³⁷⁴ The soul must therefore choose between the desires of the flesh and those of the spirit.

Origen shows that the effects of sin are a debilitation of the whole person, as the soul, habitually choosing according to the mind of the flesh, becomes one with the flesh and its desires, hence progressively more enslaved to sin. In contrast, if the soul habitually chooses according to the guidance of its spirit, it will become one with the mind of the (Holy) Spirit. Becoming then a “slave of righteousness,” soul and spirit will then enter the school of the Holy Spirit and be on their way, through many temptations and some set-backs, to holiness and a higher degree of wisdom and being. For by right decisions, the soul “makes the good its own” and increasingly belongs to God. Prayer, then, is part of the process of learning to orient oneself to God through paying attention to God. In turning to God, one reverses the direction of the Fall; for the intellects fell by refusing to pay attention to their Creator and Source. God, in turn, fills the mind with saving words and wisdom. The one praying can then share these with others who are in need.

Participating in the Arian Controversy with Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius followed their lead by addressing the question of how human beings can know God. Eunomius’s insistence that theological language reveals the essence of God as ingenerate pushed those who wanted to refute him into reflecting on just how we do know God. For Basil and Gregory, God is not knowable essentially. We know God only through the revelation of God’s operations in the

³⁷⁴Some sin arises from the needs of the body which can easily move us to excess even without the instigation of the devil: (*Princ.* 3. 2. 2). The hostile powers involve themselves in pushing their victims into further excess. Thus the needs of the body easily become the lusts of the flesh against the spirit (*Princ.* 3. 2. 3).

economy: the saving deeds recorded in Scripture which manifest God's love for us. From these deeds we derive God's "characteristics" and form our theological reflections. All God-talk is analogical; and it can be better to honor God in silence. Another term used by Basil is "energy"; we know God's energies which reach out from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. We know them as we pray in the Spirit, through the Son, who as Word, reveals the Father to us. But we never reach knowledge of the infinite and mysterious essence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Thus, the conflict with Eunomius led Evagrius in an apophatic direction. Over and over, he counsels against forming an image of God, for all images of God are false. Some may even be produced by demons (*De Orat.*, 57, 68, 94). Moreover, he counsels against trying to "define" God because God is illimitable; and definitions impose limit (*De Orat.* 116). He agreed with Basil that the categories of number and quality, automatic features of the way we think and operate in the created world, are useless in the effort to define the Trinity because God is beyond number and quality. Categories divide and distinguish, but God is simply One. Thus, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Evagrius arrived at "the New Math" of the First Council of Constantinople: One plus One plus One does *not* equal Three, but One— "by nature, not by number." It remained for Gregory of Nyssa to clarify this teaching in *Not Three Gods*, by showing that the Three participate in all actions without division of essence or will.

Yet, it would be a mistake to see Evagrius as merely "apophatic," if, indeed, there has ever been anyone who was "merely apophatic."³⁷⁵ For God has written "letters" to those who are far off, having separated themselves from God by their "loathsome works." In the *Letter to Melania*, all the visible creation is "letters," telling all of us who can "read" about God's love. Thus, for Evagrius,

³⁷⁵On previous efforts to categorize Evagrius as apophatic or cataphatic, see Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 184, both text and n. 48.

human friendship, preserved by letters, becomes a viable metaphor for the love of the transcendent God, as does the beauty and order of the visible world. For those who can “see,” both friendship and the creation are sacraments of God’s redemptive purpose.

As for the philosophies, Evagrius used Plato’s tripartite soul to good advantage to expose the attacks of the demons against the warring urges within us. Because the demons work in teams, they can even bounce their victims back and forth between a temptation to the *nous*, like vainglory, and a temptation to *epithumia*, like fornication. The remedies for demonic injury involve directing the attention: guarding one’s attention to God or shifting the attention away from the obsessing thought, even if we have to shift attention to another thought, “driving out a nail with a nail.” Evagrius’s example of driving out a nail with a nail is driving out vainglory with the thought of fornication (*Pr.* 58).³⁷⁶ Psalmody is a calming shift of attention; alms-giving means shifting attention to someone else who is in need. As is evident in Evagrius’s *Antirrhethikos*, Scripture provides an arsenal for us to talk back to negative thoughts because the words of Scripture carry the power of Christ.³⁷⁷ Although “movement” is a generally negative term for Evagrius³⁷⁸, we can use movement for our advantage as long as we shift attention away from the passion or thought to something else, preferably to God, but to anything that leads in the opposite direction to the demon’s pull. The use of reason (*nous*) to analyze our own train of thought will also remove us from the immediacy of the thought and expose

³⁷⁶ See Stewart’s discussion of Evagrius’s teaching that the mind processes thoughts one at a time in “Imageless Prayer,” 188-189.

³⁷⁷ The belief that the power of Christ works through Scripture, as well as through his own name, was part of the monastic tradition, as Stewart has shown in his analysis of the *Life of Antony* in “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 15.

its illusory nature. The goal of this struggle is a Stoic one: *apatheia*. But *apatheia* is the gateway to charity and to contemplation, both of which are dimensions of Christianity.

³⁷⁸Stewart, "Eight Generic *Logismoi*," 22.

Finally, in the *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius moves from God's friendship, shown in the "letters" God has written to us, to God's plan for our reunification in the *apocatastasis*. His notion of the human *nous* as the Father's body (through the Son and the Spirit, who are the Father's soul) seems to me understandable in the light of Origen's analysis of choice in his *Commentary on Romans*. As the human soul becomes aligned with its spirit, it becomes one with it and with the Holy Spirit. In the *Letter to Melania*, Evagrius envisions the human *nous* as having become ready to be completely filled with "essential knowledge" of the Trinity. As for Plato, the Good corresponds to the *nous* and completely fills it, leaving room for no further questions,³⁷⁹ for Evagrius, God brings the *nous* into the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and this unity is essential knowledge. In this unity, the soul becomes *nous*, and the physical body is left behind. The *nous*, in turn, becomes the body of the Father. What results is an ontological reconfiguration of the human being to God— not a merging, because the distinction between created being and uncreated being remains, but a reconfiguration, so that "they may be one in us" (John 17. 22) and "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15. 28).³⁸⁰ The reason for this unity, in Evagrius's view, is the unity of wills between creatures and God when all have returned and the Son has handed over the Kingdom to the Father:

Just as the nature of the human mind will be united to the nature of the Father, as it is his body, thus the names 'soul' and 'body' will be absorbed in the persons of the Son and the Spirit and remain continually one nature and three persons of God and his image, as it was before the Incarnation and as it will be again . . . after the Incarnation, because of the unanimity of wills (*LM*, 5. 169-174).

In the meantime, we have the *praktik_*, the two stages of *physik_*, and *theologia*, the height of prayer, in which we are given a foretaste of the unity which is essential knowledge. "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; if you truly pray, you will be a theologian" (*De Orat.* 61).

What, finally, do Origen and Evagrius teach us? Their carefully worked-out pedagogy for

³⁷⁹See Cushman on Plato's conception of knowledge of the Good: "The Good is the *ne plus ultra* of intelligibility because with it alone is there a complete and exhaustive mutuality between the Known and the human knower" (180).

³⁸⁰*Letter to Melania*, 5. 158-165.

body, mind, and spirit teaches us patience; their awareness of the need for spiritual warfare teaches us vigilance to our own inner conflicts. Our psychological schemas differ from theirs; but the need to get in touch with what is going on inside us does not. Many today could receive Evagrius's idea that the visible world reveals the glory and providence of God; however, the findings of Darwin in the 19th century have appeared to explode that belief, and the pain of the explosion has split the Christian world into "evolutionists" and "creationists," with those who opt for "intelligent design" in the middle. Acquaintance with the accompanying teachings of Origen and Evagrius that the world is God's "damage control" for the Fall might challenge an overly-facile belief that God's providence is manifest *only* in order and beauty. For them, God's purpose is always pedagogical. Can we say as much? They challenge us to reflect on providence for ourselves.

Issues remain for further study. We found a similarity between Origen's analysis of choice as "seeing both good and evil," then deciding, in *On First Principles*, 3. 1 and Irenaeus's account of moving from the image to the likeness of God in *Against Heresies*, 4. Is it merely a coincidental relationship, Irenaeus having written in the West, forty to fifty years earlier? Since Irenaeus wrote in Greek, and since Clement knew his work, it is certainly possible that Origen knew it as well. One could explore the question of whether their apparent relationship is connected with the fact that both were fighting the Gnostics.

Another issue is the use of the different anthropological models by later writers, such as Cassian, Diodochus, and John Climacus. How do they work with the anthropological and epistemological heritage of Origen and Evagrius? Some work has already been done on this issue, but there is more room for reflection. Finally, it would be a rewarding study to trace the concept of self-knowledge as it develops in later writers. There is an intriguing similarity, for example, between Antony, Evagrius, Cassian and the Carmelite reformers of the sixteenth century, Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. John presents a list and an analysis of "spiritual faults" which appear in their psychological acuteness, to derive from much earlier writers. Actually, one does not need new

topics of study for “further study”; deeper understanding of such figures as Plato, Aristotle, Stoic writers, and Clement of Alexandria would probably yield new insights and would have resulted in a different thesis from the one I have written. I end with Origen’s precept that one gains the knowledge and understanding for which one is ready. As Evagrius says in the *Letter to Melania*, “Truly, many ‘doors’ full of all kinds of distinctions [and much wisdom] have presented themselves to me here” (4. 129-130).

