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ORIGEN'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

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Introduction

There is perhaps no figure in early church history, other than Jesus, that commands as much attention as Origen. Hans Urs von Balthasar says that, “it is all but impossible to overestimate Origen and his importance for the history of Christian thought.”¹ His writings and influence were felt by the early church for three hundred years after his death at the age of sixty-nine in 254 AD. Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom are just a few theologians that were greatly influenced by this bishop from Alexandria. History has judged, however, that Origen’s contributions to church orthodoxy are not all to be commended. In 553 AD, at the 5th Ecumenical Council in Constantinople called by Emperor Justinian, Origen was labeled a heretic and excommunicated from the church. There is a great deal of debate surrounding the legitimacy of this anathema. To be sure, Origen taught some things that would be considered today as unorthodox, such as the pre-existence of souls. However, in recent years, many scholars have defended Origen as being simply misunderstood, and as having certain heresies ascribed to him that were more the concoctions of his later followers than of Origen himself. One such heresy was that of subordinationism.

Subordinationism was the teaching that the Son and Holy Spirit were both subordinate to the Father in nature and being. Origen is thought to be the first theologian to insinuate, if not outright teach such an idea, and that subsequent heresies derived their authority from Origen’s initial teaching. In light of this accusation this paper will seek to accomplish three things: 1) to explain Origen’s Trinitarian theology; 2) to establish that he did not adhere to a heretical theology of subordinationism within the Trinity; and 3) that Arius interpreted Origen incorrectly in his later Christological heresy.

¹ Von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 1.

Origen's Trinitarian Theology

Origen was a brilliant intellect whose thinking was not confined by the orthodox doctrines of our day. In fact, Origen was one of the early fathers who was establishing for the church what would be considered orthodox. Anyone who studies him must keep this in mind. This does not insinuate, however, that Origen's theology was not orthodox or that he did not take his theology from Scripture. Origen had a high view of the word of God.² In his theological treatise *First Principles*, he writes that, "in our investigation of these important matters we do not rest satisfied with common opinion and the evidence of things that are seen, but we use in addition...testimonies drawn from the scriptures which we believe to be divine, both from what is called the Old Testament and also from the New, endeavoring to confirm our faith by reason." This statement reveals two things about Origen. First, he considered both the Old and New Testaments as having been given by God. This sets him in stark contrast to certain teachers in Origen's day, such as Marcion, who hacked the scripture into pieces in order to suit their own ideologies. Origen would have none of that, and viewed the Bible wholly as God's word. Secondly, he considered both the Old and New Testaments to be divine and authoritative. They were not the mere musings of men, but the "very words and teaching of Christ," and were "composed through the Spirit of God."³ Thus, Origen treated the word of God with a great deal of respect and integrity. His doctrine was drawn from a divine source of wisdom that was not to be handled lightly.

Furthermore, he affirmed that certain rules of faith and doctrine had been handed down to the church by the apostles with clarity. These were doctrines that Origen was convinced were

² Origen, *First Principles*, ed. G.W. Butterworth (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 256. From now on this will be cited as *FP 4.1.1 (Book. Chapter. Paragraph)*

³ *FP, P.1.1. and FP.P.1.8*

sure, true, and needed no changing. Where God's word was clear in what it taught, the Church was not to deviate. He writes:

“But the following fact should be understood. The holy apostles, when preaching the faith of Christ, took certain doctrines, those namely which they believed to be necessary ones, and delivered them in the plainest terms to all believers, even to such as appeared to be somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge.”⁴

Although there are some places in Origen's theology that today are to be clearly unorthodox (i.e. the pre-existence of souls), one must affirm that Origen was a man of the Word. He affirmed the authority of the scriptures and sought to build his theology from what he found within its pages. What got Origen into trouble with his critics was his musings about theology in places where he felt the apostles had not been clear. More of this will be discussed later.

Having established his commitment to the Scripture, Origen lays out very quickly in the opening of *First Principles* those things in which he believed had been handed to the church in “plain terms through the apostolic teaching.”⁵ He begins with his understanding of the Trinity.

Concerning the Father, Origen writes:

“First, that God is one, who created and set in order all things, and who, when nothing existed, caused the universe to be. He is God from the first creation and foundation of the world, the God of all righteous men, of Adam, Abel, Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, of the twelve patriarchs, of Moses and the prophets. This God, in these last days, according to the previous announcements made through his prophets, sent the Lord Jesus Christ, first for the purpose of calling Israel, and secondly, after the unbelief of the people of Israel, of calling the Gentiles also. This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, himself gave the law, the prophets and the gospels, and he is God both of the apostles and also of the Old and New Testaments.”⁶

⁴ *FPP.1.3*

⁵ *FPP.1.4*

⁶ *FPP.1.4*

Origen first establishes the fact that there is only one God. This God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and of all things. He called the universe into being and founded the world. This would establish Origen's claim against the Gnostic heresies of Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion who separated the Creator God of the Old Testament from the Father of Jesus in the New Testament. They could not reconcile the wrathful deity of the Old with the loving and forgiving deity of the New. Thus, they postulated a duality of deities. Origen, on the other hand, affirms that this one God is both the Creator of all things and the Father of Jesus. He denies a duality of deities and affirms what he sees in Deuteronomy 6:4 (cf. *FP 2.4.1*). Secondly, this also counters the influential Gnostic heresy that saw all created matter as evil, and only the spiritual as good. For according to the Gnostic doctrine, the creation of matter was done by a lesser evil being known as the Demiurge who was different from the Supreme unknowable Divine Being.⁷ In affirming that God is the author of creation, Origen denies any type of other god, created or uncreated, and confirms the goodness of both the creation and the Creator.

Origen also affirms certain concepts of God the Father that he held in common with Middle-Platonism. First, he addresses the incorporeal character of God.⁸ This character is also applied to both the Son and the Spirit, with the only exception being that of the Incarnation. The incorporeal nature is applied to the Trinity in several places of *First Principles* (c.f. *1.1.3; 1.6.4; 2.2.2; 4.3.15*), and Origen recognizes that only the Trinity is absolutely incorporeal. This attribute of God separates him from his creation. Although rational creatures, including angels and demons, have incorporeal souls, they are "always united to a body, terrestrial or ethereal."⁹ God is Spirit and is not bound by the constraints of time and space. Secondly, Origen establishes

⁷ <http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/patrology/schoolofalex2/chapter05.html>

⁸ Henri Crouzel, *Origen: The Life and Thoughts of the First Great Theologian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 183.

⁹ *Ibid*, 183.

the incomprehensibility of God, who may only be known through his works. He says that, “whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to attain about God, whether by perception or by reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him.”¹⁰ The body of man is wrapped in fallen, sinful flesh, that can no more grasp the knowledge of God than a man can look upon the sun itself (*FP. 1.1.6*). Thirdly, Origen taught that God is invisible and cannot be seen by the human eye. Since God is incorporeal, the five senses are of no avail in perceiving him because they require a substance to be connected with them and God is not a physical. This is in agreeance with Colossians 1:15 that speak of Jesus as the image of the “invisible” God, and John 1:18 where Jesus declares, “no one has seen God at any time.” This means that, “there is no existence to which God is visible...[for] he is in his nature impossible to be seen.”¹¹ Finally, he says that God is the source of all being, the “One who is.”¹² God’s being is not contingent upon anything outside of himself. He is ultimate reality. All other created things are dependent upon the Father for their existence (c.f. *CommJn 13.21.123; 19.6.37; CCels 7.38*).

Of all that has just been addressed, one would be hard pressed to find anything unorthodox about Origen’s teaching about God. God is. God is the Creator and sustainer of all things. God is Spirit. God is incomprehensible apart from his active role in revealing himself. These were all characteristics of God that Origen thought to be clearly handed down in the teaching of scripture and of the apostles.

Concerning the Son, Origen writes:

“Then again: Christ Jesus, he who came to earth, was begotten of the Father before every created thing. And after he had ministered to the Father in the foundation of all things,

¹⁰ *FP. 1.1.5.*

¹¹ *FP. 1.1.8.*

¹² Quote from Exodus 3:13. C.f. Crouzel, 183 and www.copticchurch.net.

for ‘all things were made through him,’ in these last times he emptied himself and was made man, was made flesh, although he was God; and being made man, he still remained what he was, namely, God. He took himself a body like our body, differing in this alone, that it was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. And this Jesus Christ was born and suffered in truth and not merely in appearance, and truly died our common death. Moreover he truly rose from the dead, and after the resurrection companied with his disciples and was then taken up into heaven.”

Origen here affirms several things about the Son. First, that Christ is the only-begotten Son of God. This coincides with what we read in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. Jesus was in fact the only Son of God. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Son, or to be begotten? Did this mean that Jesus had a beginning or that there was a time when he was not? Even during Origen’s day such a concept as “begotten,” was dangerous because of the association with a material sonship. If this were the case, then Jesus would have been the only-begotten Son by nature of his being created by the Father. Indeed, this appeal was made on the grounds of several scripture, such as Colossians 1:15, which says that Christ was the “firstborn of creation.”

Origen, by way of contrast, denied the notion of Jesus as a created being of God. In speaking of Jesus as the begotten Son of God, Origen affirms an eternal generation. He spoke of the Son as “begotten by the Father as the reflection is by the light, as the will proceeds from the intellect, or as the word is emitted by the intellect.”¹³ As the sun produces light so the Father produces the Son. In this sense the generation of the Son was not a type of physical creation but an eternal generation. When applying the title of Wisdom to Jesus, Origen says, “can anyone who has learned to regard God with feelings of reverence suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a single moment, without begetting his Wisdom?” It is inconceivable to think that the Father would ever exist without his Son. This was a defense against Valentinian terminology that associated divine “begotten-ness” with that of human or animal generation. In

¹³ Crouzel, 186.

this sense, the begotten would seem to come “out of” the begetter. By way of contrast, Origen writes, “Now the son does not come out of the Father: he dwells in the Father and the Father in the Son, even in the Incarnation when the Son is at the same time on earth with this human soul.”¹⁴ The Father and the Son should not be thought of as two different beings for the Son is the image of God, the radiance of his glory. The Father and Son are a single and identical almightiness.¹⁵ Furthermore, Origen shows that there was not a time when God began to be the Father, as though he had not been previously. Origen finds it incomprehensible that there was some kind of change in the existence of the Father. Not only is the generation of the son eternal, but continual. Origen also says that, “the Son is constantly ‘fed’ by the Father who communicated to Him at every instant his own divinity.”¹⁶ This means that there is never a time when the Son is outside of the Father.

Secondly, Origen affirms the Incarnation of Christ. Jesus was a physical man who walked upon the earth and took upon himself the infirmities of man. He took upon a body like ours made of flesh and bone. The incorporeal God became “coarse earthly corporeality, taking flesh in the womb of Mary.”¹⁷ He affirms that Jesus truly suffered and died. In all of these things Origen acknowledges the true humanity of Christ. Again, this flies in the face of Gnostic teaching that would not assign deity to anything fleshly. In contrast, Origen confirms the notion that God took upon himself flesh. In order to redeem creation, God entered into creation through Jesus, who was more than a man. In his Incarnation, Jesus remained God. “And being made

¹⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1933) 20.18.153-159. (From now on will be referred to as *CommJn 20.18.153-159*). Crouzel, 187.

¹⁵ *FP. 1.2.10.*

¹⁶ *CommJn 13.34.219.*

¹⁷ Crouzel, 193.

man, he still remained what he was, namely, God.”¹⁸ “His kenosis did not put an end to his divine character.”¹⁹

Concerning the Spirit, Origen writes:

“Then again, the apostles delivered this doctrine, that the Holy Spirit is united in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son. In regard to him 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; but these are matters which we must investigate to the best of our power from holy scripture, inquiring with wisdom and diligence. It is, however, certainly taught with the utmost clearness in the Church, that the Spirit inspired each of the saints, both the prophets and the apostles, and that there was not one Spirit in the men of old and another in those who were inspired at the coming of Christ.”

It may surprise some that Origen addresses the Holy Spirit at all. Many assume that developed thoughts on the Spirit were not produced until the 360’s in response to the Pneumatomachoi (those who fight against the Spirit) who denied the divinity of the third person of the Trinity. This denial caused men such as Basil, Athanasius, and Diymus the Blind to write blistering works against such men, and to defend the dignity of the Spirit inside of a Trinitarian framework. Although not as developed as later doctrine, we do find several things affirmed in Origen’s writings about the Holy Spirit.

Origen declares that the Holy Spirit is “united in honor and dignity with the Father and Son,” affirming that Origen considered the Holy Spirit to be divine. To have the same honor and dignity meant that the Spirit was like them in person and that He was God.²⁰ This would be why Origen ascribes to the Holy Spirit the characteristics of incorporeality and invisibility, which belong to the Trinity alone in his writings. This also affirms that the Spirit is not a creature, just as the Father and Son have no creator or beginning. Although Origen did have questions

¹⁸ *FP. I. I.*

¹⁹ Crouzel, 186.

²⁰ Crouzel, 199.

regarding whether the Spirit was “begotten” or not, or whether he was to be called a “Son” or not, he was clear that the Spirit was to be ascribed divinity with that of the Father and Son. He does this in several ways.

First, Origen argues for the authority of the Spirit in the role of baptism alongside the Father and Son. In the baptism of Jesus, the Father, Son, and Spirit were all present and active. The baptism of believers is not legitimate unless one is baptized with the Spirit. Origen notes that from the scripture, “we learn that the person of the Holy Spirit is of so great authority and dignity that saving baptism is not complete except when performed with the authority of the whole most excellent Trinity, that is, by the naming of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”²¹

Secondly, Origen cites the role of the Spirit in man’s salvation along with the Father and Son, saying that we only know the Father as the Son reveals Him. The Spirit is given this role of revealing the Father alongside the Son.²² This was done in part through the Spirit-inspired writings of the apostles and prophets in the Old and New Testaments. Thirdly, Origen ascribes to the Spirit knowledge of the Father that is only found within the Trinity. Man only knows the Father through the Son. In contrast, the knowledge the Holy Spirit has of the Father does not come from the Son, for there was never a time when the Spirit did not know the Father. It was not as though the Spirit was ignorant, and after attaining knowledge of God became the Holy Spirit. Origen writes, “This could not be, for 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.”²³ Origen securely places the Holy Spirit alongside the

²¹ *FP. 1.3.2*

²² *FP. 1.3. 4.* Origen cites Matthew 11:27 and 1 Corinthians 2:10 to show that the Holy Spirit reveals the Father. John 16:12 and 14:26 to show that he is the great teacher that reveals to them the will of God.

²³ *FP.1.3.4.*

Father and the Son as being divine, eternal, authoritative, and the third member of the holy Trinity.

Subordinationism in Origen's Theology

In light of historical anathemas and councils we find in Origen a more developed concept of the Trinity than what may be initially thought. He affirms that there is only one God. He affirms that divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He denies outright that the Son ever had a beginning. Although we speak of the Son as being begotten by the Father, this is not to be thought of in human terminology. The Son is the eternal Wisdom of God, and there was never a time when the Son did not exist. Although Origen questioned whether or not the Spirit was begotten, he never found anywhere in scripture that would make the claim that the Spirit was created. He does, however, find several places in Scripture where the authority and divinity of the Spirit are affirmed with that of the Father and Son. With all of this being said, how is it that Origen is accused of subordinationism? Subordinationism is the belief that the Father was the Supreme Being, from which all other things derived their existence, including the Son and the Spirit. It proposed that the Son and Spirit were subordinate to the Father in nature and being.

There are several reasons why those of the early church, and some scholars today, do see the doctrine of subordinationism taught in Origen. First, Origen did not define what he said as precisely as one would have liked. Henry Crouzel writes, "One deficiency of Origen's had grave consequences and caused him to be accused of multiple heresies, often for the matter mutually contradictory: he never took enough trouble to define what he had to say..."²⁴ When commenting on a text, Origen depended very heavily on that specific text and would not take the time to comment on complimentary passages. Therefore, one is unable to read holistically what

²⁴ Crouzel, 167.

Origen thought about a specific topic if his reading is confined to comments recorded in one specific place. To get the extent of Origen's thoughts and opinions on a topic his writings must be read broadly. Many who accuse Origen of subordinationism do not balance what they read in one location with what Origen has said in other writings that better define his meaning.

Secondly, the accusation of subordinationism was being made almost a century after his death with the rise of Arianism. At that time there had been a development in vocabulary that had not taken place during Origen's time. Due to this, detractors would unfairly read into his vocabulary definitions of their own day and not of his. "Origen cannot express himself in the very terms of Nicaea, for *ousia* and *hypostasis* have not sufficiently precise meaning for him..."²⁵ Thus, "he is constantly accused, for reasons on vocabulary...of making the Son and the Holy Spirit creatures of the Father," and thus subordinate to Him.²⁶ This is seen in the use of the term *genetos*. The use of a double "n" indicated "generation," while a single "n" indicated "creation." By the third century the double "n" was no longer being pronounced so it was not uncommon to write with a single "n" and denote "generation." In his *Contra Celsum*,²⁷ Origen used the word "*genesis*" with a single "n" to speak of the *generation* of Jesus by Mary. However, the later century brought back the use of the single "n" to denote "creation" and the double to denote "generation." Origen was not privilege to this change, but nonetheless, Jerome and others translated terminology in *First Principles* with the connotation of "born" or "made" instead of "generated." They failed to consider other places where Origen spoke of the

²⁵ Crouzel, 188.

²⁶ Crouzel, 188.

²⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed Henry Chadwick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 2.34.

generation of the Son, and simply stamped on Origen's terminology the insinuation that the Son was a lesser being than the Father.²⁸

Third, theologians read back into Origen's theology questions about heresies that Origen himself never considered. During his life, Origen refuted Gnostic heresies that wanted to demonize all created matter and make a distinction between the god of the Old Testament and that of the New. He fought against the Anthropomorphites who insisted that God had a body. In Origen's defense of the incorporeal nature of God, he wrote that the Son can not see the Father,²⁹ making the point that the Father was invisible and had no fleshly body that could be looked upon. This was not a statement intended to explain the relation of the Son with the Father. However, it was taken by Epiphanius, and echoed by Jerome, to point to a relational subordinationism between the Father and Son.³⁰ They concluded from what Origen said that the Son doesn't know the Father, something Origen never claimed. It is imperative to read Origen in light of his own historical setting, and not project backwards upon his writing the historical setting of a later century.

Lastly, certain statements made by Origen have been taken out of context. One of the most prolific passages quoted by Origen to indicate a doctrine of subordinationism is the following, found in *First Principles* 1.3.5:

“The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one 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. So that in this way the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit, and in turn the power of the Holy Spirit exceeds that of every other being.”

²⁸ Crouzel, 174-175.

²⁹ *FP.1.1.8*.

³⁰ Crouzel, 173.

As was noted earlier, in order to fully grasp Origen's theology, one must read extensively and take a panoramic view of his writings because different sections help bring clarification. Surely, if this was the only statement that one had of Origen's Trinitarian thought, the case for subordinationism would be difficult to dismiss. This, however, is not the case, for there are other places in *First Principles* where Origen speaks of the members of the Trinity with equal importance and divinity. For example, he says two chapters later, "But more, nothing in the Trinity can be called greater or less, for there is but one fount of deity, who upholds the universe by his word and reason, and sanctifies by the Word of his mouth..." and, "Here we are most clearly shown that there is no separation in the Trinity..." and, "This then, is the testimony we bear to the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."³¹ Here Origen made it clear that there is no "separation in the Trinity." One cannot parcel out three different gods because of the "unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." It cannot be said that one is greater or less than the other in virtue of their nature because there is one, and only one, "fount of deity."

Therefore, we must ask what Origen meant when he wrote that the "Son is less than the Father," and "the Spirit still less" than the Father and Son? It would appear that the subordination that Origen had in mind when he wrote had nothing to do with the nature of their divinity or the equality of their power. There is only One God, not three, and thus to speak of one member of the Trinity is to speak of the others with regard to dignity. However, the Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit to the Son and Father in their divine mission to man. "The Father gives the orders, the Son and the Spirit receive them and are the envoys, the agents *ad extra* of the Trinity, each for his own part. If the Father is the center of decision, the Son and the Spirit are not mere executants of the paternal will, for while the Father's initiative is often

³¹ *FP* 1.3.7-8

emphasized, so is the unity of will and of action on the part of the Three Persons.”³² Thus, “relational subordinationism” is not found within this text, but rather, an “economic subordinationism.” The first is heresy, the latter is perfectly orthodox and was affirmed by later theologians such as Athanasius and Basil.

With so many ways to misunderstand Origen, it is no surprise that he has been the “whipping boy” for heresy hunters in church history. Specifically, since the First Council of Nicaea, when Arius was excommunicated for his Christological heresy, many have sought to connect the seeds of Arianism to the theological framework of Origen.

Arius and Origen’s Theology

Arius was a presbyter in Alexandria, the same city in which Origen had lived for so many years before his move to Caesarea. He was mostly likely trained at the exegetical school in Antioch under Saint Lucian. Although Arius was four years old when Origen died, he would have been greatly influenced by Origen who was considered by many to be the greatest Christian theologian of that time period. His writings had become famous, especially in the Alexandrian territory and were being used by schools to train Christians. As Arius rose to power in Alexandria, he began to teach a Christological doctrine that came to be known as Arianism. Arianism taught that there was a time when the Son did not exist, and that the Logos was a divine created being of the Father, which had a beginning, and was inferior to the Father in nature. Although Arians affirmed some divine-salvific aspect to Christ’s life and death, Jesus was ultimately relegated to the realm of creation. With the help of Athanasius, the early church recognized this as heresy and Arius was eventually excommunicated as a heretic during the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

³² Crouzel, 188.

With the excommunication of Arius came speculations on the writings of Origen. Arius had appealed to Origen to defend a type of relational subordinationism within the Trinity. However, Athanasius, and other theologians such as Pamphilus³³ and Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus³⁴, had made similar appeals to Origen to refute Arianism. Using the definition of Arianism given above, there are two primary objections that Origen would have made to Arius' Christological teachings.

First, Arius argued that there was a time when the Son did not exist, and that the Logos had a beginning. By way of contrast, Origen taught that the relation of the Son to the Father had no beginning. "Twice in the *Treatise on First Principles*³⁵ and once in the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*³⁶ we find the famous sentence... 'ouk en hoti ouk en – There was not when He (he Son) was not.'"³⁷ There was never, has never, nor will there ever be a time when the Son and Father do not exist. Origen clearly taught that Jesus had no beginning, just as the Father had no beginning. As was stated earlier, Origen ascribes to the generation of Jesus the title of Wisdom in the Proverbs. He speaks of Jesus as "a breath of the power of God, a very pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, the radiance of his eternal light, the stainless mirror of the activity of God and the image of his goodness."³⁸ Although a mystery to Origen of how the Son could be eternally generated from the Father, as Crouzel states, "the eternity of this generation is clearly affirmed, for it is inconceivable that the Father ever existed without his

³³ Pamphilus wrote the *Apology for Origen*. He was a disciple of Eusebius of Caesarea who was also favorable towards Origen. The book is a defense of Origen's orthodox theology handed down by the apostles, as well as his defense of his teachings on the Trinity and the Incarnation. The historian Rufinus translated it and only extant versions in Latin remain.

³⁴ These men wrote the an anthology of the writings of Origen known as the *Philocalia*. They defended several aspects of Origen's theology including the eternal divinity of the Son.

³⁵ *FP*. 1.2.9. and 4.4.1.

³⁶ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2002) 1.5.

³⁷ Crouzel, 187.

³⁸ *FP*. 1.2.6-8. *Proverbs* 7:25-26

Wisdom, his Reason, his Word, all expressions which...denote the Son.”³⁹ Origen’s teaching that the Father never existed without the Son is a direct contradiction to the Arian teaching that Christ had a beginning.

Secondly, Arius appealed to several scriptures such as Colossians 1:15, which speak of Jesus as the firstborn of all creation, and John 14:28, where Jesus is quoted as saying that “the Father is greater than I,” to prove his point. If Jesus was God, then how could he speak of the Father being greater than him? Arius also found in Origen, expressions that favored his contention that the Logos was of a different substance than the Father, and thus a created being. He suggested a distinction between the Father and Son in Origen’s commentary on the gospel of John. Here, Origen remarks that the article in, “*Ho Theos*,” is always used in conjunction with the Father, while the Son is simply referred to as, “*Theos*.” In an article by Philip Schaff, he writes that, “In his zeal for the personal distinctions in the Godhead, [Origen] taught with equal emphasis a separate essence and the subordination of the Son to the Father, calling him a ‘secondary God,’ without the article, while the Father is ‘the God.’ He taught the eternal generation of the Son from the will of the Father, but represented it as the communication of a secondary divine substance.”⁴⁰ Is Origen speaking out of both sides of his mouth? Two things may be said in response.

First, Origen is clear in several places that the Son is not of a different substance than the Father. Gregory of Thaumaturgus, in his *Address of Thanks* to Origen, reproduces clearly Origen’s teaching on this matter by saying, the Father “made the Son one with Him” and “so to speak wraps Himself up in Him by the power of his Son *which is quite equal to his own*.” (Italics

³⁹ Crouzel, 186-187.

⁴⁰ Philip Schaff, "Arianism," in *A Religious Encyclopaedia or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology*, ed. Philip Schaff, 3rd ed., Vol. 1. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1894), 134-137.

added) As was noted earlier, Origen also declares that there is only “one fount of deity.” In this sense, Crouzel sees Origen as espousing a Nicæan theology of Jesus as consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father.⁴¹ This would explain why Athanasius and others were able to defend against the Arian controversy using the theology of Origen. Secondly, Origen is equally as clear that since there was never a time when the Son was not, that Jesus is not a creation of the Father. He warns against associating the way in which Jesus is “begotten” by the Father to the way in which humanity is begotten. For Origen, the Son is begotten like a reflection is from light, or the will is from the intellect. Jesus is God and part of the one “fount of deity.” Therefore, in speaking of Jesus as “begotten” from the Father, Origen sees no division of substance or nature.

Conclusion

Man is judged by history, meaning that the impact of a man, or lack of, is not always immediately perceived until time has had the chance to sift away the dross from the gold. Origen was a man that history judged twice. In the sixth century he was judged for being a heretic. In later centuries it would seem that he is being affirmed as a great Christian thinker that defended the orthodoxy of his day, and gave to the early church a more solid foundation upon which to stand. The study of his Trinitarian theology reveals that the church almost 1800 years later affirms much of what Origen taught. There is only one God. Jesus is the co-eternal and consubstantial only begotten Son of God who had no beginning. The Holy Spirit is to be given the same authority and dignity of the Father and the Son. Inside of the Trinity is a subordination of roles that in no way infers a lesser status of one to another. If this is what is considered orthodox today, then Origen may be read in such light. This would also affirm that the heresy of subordinationism that is ascribed to Origen is a misrepresentation of his teaching based more

⁴¹ Crouzel, 196.

upon a misunderstanding of what Origen wrote, or the later affirmations of those who twisted what Origen initially said. In any case, this author sees that he is free from any accusation of Trinitarian or Christological heresy.

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