

**“EGO INDURABO COR EIUS”:  
Origen’s Reflection on the Problem of the  
Relationship between God and Human Freedom**

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“But what does the Scripture say? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart. By which he means that Christ is in the heart of all, in respect of His being the word or reason, by participating in which they are rational beings.”

(Origen, *De Principiis* I:3,6)

We have to declare at the outset that Origen did not write a specific treatise on “καρδία” (*cor* – heart). However, there is ample material regarding this matter that could be gathered from his works. I was tempted to review all the written works of Origen and get a global view of his understanding of “καρδία” but I decided to limit myself only to a particular work of Origen entitled the “First Principles” (Περὶ ἀρχῶν – *De Principiis*). The choice is rather arbitrary. A computer run down of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae CD – D published by the Department of Classics at the University of Irvine in California on the word “καρδία” gives a good number of instances beyond this book.<sup>1</sup> However, only a sampling is

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<sup>1</sup> A monumental collection of Greek authors from 800 B.C. to 1400 A.D. in their original language made into digital form published by the Department of Classics at the University of Irvine in California in 1996. The texts were taken from known critical editions of the authors listed. The present work consulted was series D.

required in order for us to know Origen's use of this term. I have also reasons to hold that such a sampling could be justified.

### Brief Biography

In modern times, there have been outstanding books dealing with the life, works, and writings of Origen (185-253 A.D.), also known as Adamantius.<sup>2</sup> It would be profitable for us to highlight a few things of his life in order to put him in proper epochal, cultural, and religious context.

Much of what we know of Origen came from the annals of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Cæsarea. A good six chapters of that monumental work were dedicated to him. There were probably other outstanding sources of his life and works, but these are no longer extant. Due to the Origenist controversies from the fourth to the sixth centuries, and the subsequent anathematization of Origen in 553 by the Council of Constantinople II, a good three centuries after his death, much of his works have been lost. A few fragments exists, some were intact but revised or corrected by subsequent redactors and translators in order to at least preserve his heritage, passing them on as somebody else's work, usually by an orthodox writer or Father to escape suspicion.

### *Education*

Origen was a Christian from infancy, which will be a very important factor in his formation as a theologian. It is his early

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<sup>2</sup> A classical english source still valid and unsurpassed would be that of Jean Danielou's, *Origen*, translated by Walter Mitchell, (Sheed and Ward: London), 1955.

A more recent general study of Origen are found in H. Croutzel's *Origen*, (Harper and Row: San Francisco), 1989 and C. Kannengiesser and W.L. Petersen's, *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, (Univ. of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame Indiana), 1988.

R. Cadiou, *La jeunesse d'Origène*, Paris 1935. P. Nautin, *Origène, sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris 1977 (some scholars consider that this work should be used with reserve until further verification on some points of his thesis have been made).

Christian upbringing that gave him a rather negative perspective of Greek philosophy. During his youth, he had contacts with Neoplatonism. It is known that he attended lectures of Ammonius Saccas, the renowned tutor of Plotinus<sup>3</sup>, but he nonetheless studied them as a *Christian*. Therefore, he had a utilitarian attitude towards pagan learning, considering it simply as introductory to his study of the Christian mysteries.<sup>4</sup> The effect on the formation of Origen's philosophy and theology by Neoplatonism would later be seen in his cosmology and psychology.

He died probably in 253 A.D. in Tyre, at the age of sixty-nine years old. He was a success in many respects but also suffered a lot both bodily and spiritually from those whom he helped in their pilgrimage of faith.

His legacy to the Universal Church is invaluable as he paved the way for doctrinal clarity. However, his influence among orthodox circles came to a grinding halt when disputed points of his theology which lent support to heretical positions were formally anathematized in the ecumenical council of Constantinople II in the year 553 A.D. He was condemned centuries after his death as the instigator of Nestorianism and Monophysitism.

### The "De Principiis - ΠΕΡΙ ΑΡΧΩΝ"

The *De Principiis* (Περὶ ἀρχῶν) written in Alexandria between 220 and 230 A.D. is considered the first manual of systematic dogmatic theology. It was one of the early works of Origen as a young theologian. The Greek text extant today is a reconstruction from fragments found in the *Philocalia* authored by Basil of Cæsarea and Gregory Nazianzen as well as the two decrees of Emperor

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<sup>3</sup> For a deeper presentation of the philosophical teachings of Origen and possible influences from Philo and Platonism, cf. R.M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1984); D.T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) and *Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Papers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995) of the same author.

<sup>4</sup> cf. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. II. (Christian Classics: Maryland, 1983), p. 37ff.

Justinian I against Origen. The Latin translation of Rufinus although significantly corrupted has survived in its entirety. Jerome strongly criticized Rufinus for altering the true text of Origen to give it the semblance of orthodoxy. In effect, Jerome wrote a new translation of the *First Principles* based on the original Greek. Unfortunately, this too is no longer extant.

In the *De Principiis*, καρδία occurs 28 times the main bulk of which is in book III, a few are in books I and IV. This section of *De Principiis* is devoted to the understanding of human freedom.<sup>5</sup> The title itself gives the theme: “*On the freedom of the will, with the explanation and interpretation of those statements of Scripture, which appear to nullify it.*”<sup>6</sup> The context in which καρδία is employed concerns the proverbial “hardening of the heart.”<sup>7</sup> The whole discussion is centered on the proper interpretation of that pericope in Exodus 4:21 where Pharaoh refuses to let the people of Israel go because God has hardened his heart: “ἐγὼ δὲ σκληρυνῶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ” (*Ego indurabo cor eius*). The phrase will again occur several times throughout the account that will eventually

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<sup>5</sup> The *De Principiis* is subdivided into four books: Book I – God and the supernatural world; Book II – The created and material world; Book III – The nature of Man and his free will; and Book IV – The Last Things including treatises on the Scriptures, its interpretation, and meaning.

<sup>6</sup> “Περὶ αὐτεξουσίου καὶ τῶν δοκούντων τοῦτο ἀναρκεῖν” (*De Princ.* 3.1,t) or in Rufinus’ translation: “*De arbitrii libertate*” (On the freedom of the will).

It is observed that Book III, in contrast to other parts of the *De Principiis* demonstrate itself to be a “literary unity well compact and clearly distinguishable whether in its internal articulations or its extensions.” This may be a proof of how Origen takes this issue very seriously such that there should be no doubt left in the mind of the reader since the presentation itself is clear. (Lorenzo Perrone, “La parrhêsia di Mosè: l’argomentazione di Origene nel *Trattato sul libero arbitrio* e il metodo delle “*quæstiones et responsiones*”, *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3 (Marrieti: Bologna, 1992), pp. 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Footnote 10 of the “La parrhêsia di Mosè: l’argomentazione di Origene nel *Trattato sul libero arbitrio* e il metodo delle “*quæstiones et responsiones*”, p. 10. It is cited that M. Simonetti in *I Principi di Origene*, (Torino, 1968), p. 364 n. 1 and Junod in *Origène, Philocalie 21-27*, see three parts in Origen’s treatment of Book III., to wit: (1) general view of the issue concerning “freedom of choice” (III: 1-6), (2) discussion on the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (III:7-4), (3) interpretation of those passages in the OT and NT that create difficulties in understanding the real nature of human freedom (III:15-23).

lead to the exodus from Egypt. Origen's interpretation is found beginning 3:1,7ff.<sup>8</sup>

This serves as the primary reason why I chose to limit myself to the *De Principiis*. Furthermore, in the reconstruction of the Greek text of the *De Principiis* from the Philocalia of Origen written by Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzen, Book III figures prominently since it dealt with a very important moral/dogmatic question the treatment of which they find satisfactory. In addition, the Latin translation of Rufinus on Book III will help us see what points he modified, extrapolated, or interpreted in order to better explain Origen; as well as what parts of Book III have not survived in the Greek text. Finally, modern studies made on the sources of the doctrine of human freedom in Christianity and in Origen particularly, amply peruse this part of the *De Principiis*.<sup>9</sup>

### The Human "ΚΑΡΔΙΑ"

The concept of the human "καρδία" is intimately incised in the anthropology of Origen. It is a concept of man fundamentally based on the affirmation made in Genesis that humankind was created in the image of God:

"Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves (εἶπεν ὁ θεός ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν)... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς)."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A similar study on the "hardening of the heart of Pharaoh" but based on Origen's Commentary on the Letter to the Romans was made by Francesca Cocchini, "La «quæstio» sul libero arbitrio e l'interpretazione origeniana di Rm 9 nel *Commentario alla Lettera ai Romani*", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3 (Marrietti: Bologna, 1992), pp. 105-118. (Henceforth, Cocchini, "La quæstio sul libero arbitrio").

<sup>9</sup> A good presentation of the sources of Origen's doctrine of human freedom can be found in, Festsch Hanson, "Origen on Free Will", *Scripture, Tradition, Reason*, eds. R. Bauckham and B. Drewery, (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 239-265. See also, B.D. Jackson, "Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Freedom", *Church History* 35 (1966), pp. 13-23.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 1:26a, 27a.

The tragedy of human existence however, betrays the reality of this "icon" of the divinity present in every human being. The inhumanity of man towards his fellow man does not in anyway reflect the presence of the image. Therefore, redemption is actually the rediscovery of the presence of this "image" after which he was fashioned.<sup>11</sup> This inner image is something spiritual since the one who fashioned him is spiritual in Himself:

"The man who was made in God's image is the inner man (*interior homo*), the incorporeal, incorruptible, immortal one."<sup>12</sup>

The sensible man meanwhile is he who is immersed in the world of the senses, of matter, which is alien to God's being. He becomes less reflective of the image after which he was fashioned the more intimately he participates in the world of the sensible. The interplay of Judeo-Christian and Platonic-Philonian concepts on man's being is clearly seen in this regard. The spiritual life therefore must consist in the process of being able to distance oneself from what is alien from the beginning. To the degree therefore that he is able to persevere and succeed in erasing even the minutest traces of the sensible-animal life, the nearer he is to the goal of being truly reflective of his inner being. In the end, he will see his goal of seeing God. The convergence of these two ideas of "image and imitation" would be fundamental in the Christian doctrine of spiritual life. The relation of God as spirit and man being made in that image, would mean therefore that the true nature of man is his inner being, that which is invisible to the senses, that which is spirit, hence man is fundamentally spiritual in nature.

What is this "heart" actually? What is the role of the "heart" in this movement of fallen man towards the real, interior man, also understood as "conversion"?

Origen does not give an outright definition. He uses it liberally as it occurs in the Scriptural texts he cites or alludes to. However, we could find a pattern on the meaning of the "καρδία"

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<sup>11</sup> This idea is found also in Plato and Philo. Plato viewed salvation as the return through imitation of the prototype, while Philo would interpret this as a return to God. cf. Willms, *Eikón*, (Münster, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13. Parallel ideas are also found in *Hom. Gen.*, 13:3; *Hom. Lev.*, 4:3; 4:7.

as used in a particular instance through the context in which it was used. Thus, we would see that its meaning shifts here and there.

"ΚΑΡΔΙΑ" AS «ΑΥΤΕΞΟΥΣΙΟΤΗΣ» (ARBITRIUM)

Although "καρδία" will have its first appearance in book 3:6,1 yet it could be safely assumed that "καρδία" would be employed in the context of "free-will" or "free-choice" (*arbitrium* – αὐτεξουσιότης). In fact, in many instances, they are interchangeable. The substantive form "αὐτεξουσιότης" does not appear in this text of Origen. What appears often would be its adjectival form. The part of speech, which was used, is in itself worth noting. For adjectives are used to imply characteristics, properties of being. In this case, it refers to a characteristic of a living being. The substantive form of the word first appeared among the Fathers with Clement of Alexandria and was then taken up by Origen and from him to the rest of the Fathers.<sup>13</sup>

How is "αὐτεξουσιότης" to be understood? In general, it could be taken as the 'freedom to propose to do something without an external force inciting it to the contrary':

"For if we were to ask such a one what was free-will, he would say that it consisted in this, that when purposing to do something, no external cause came inciting to the reverse."<sup>14</sup>

The gist of the problem is whether human beings possess "freedom to choose". According to Origen, there are those<sup>15</sup> who say human beings do not have the volitive faculty. The solution to

<sup>13</sup> cf. The various sources of the term as found among the Fathers is listed at *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1961.

<sup>14</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,5 (ANF IV:304,2):

"εἰ γὰρ πυθοίμεθα αὐτοῦ, τί ἦν τὸ αὐτεξούσιον, λέγοι ἂν ὅτι εἰ μὴδὲν τῶν ἔξωθεν ἀπῆντα, ἐμοῦ τότε τι προθεμένου, τὸ ἐπὶ τὸ ἐναντίον προκαλούμενον."

Rufinus' version meanwhile: "...constare posse arbitrii libertatem, si nihil sit quod nos extrinsecus incidens ad bona provocet aut ad mala. ("...The freedom of the will consists in this, that nothing which happens to us from without can incite us to do good or evil." (3:1,5.200.19)

<sup>15</sup> Gnostics and other Christians who have stoic, esoteric, and astral fatalism tendencies. cf. Cocchini, "La quæstio sul libero arbitrio", p. 105.

the problem as to whether human “ἀντεξουσιότης” and in this case “καρδία” is actually free or not, Origen considered of utmost importance.<sup>16</sup> It tells us whether man, in doing good or evil, is responsible for his actions. If he is responsible then salvation and damnation is a matter of choice,<sup>17</sup> if the contrary is true, then God who is thought to be good and just is in reality arbitrary and unjust, for He saves and destroys whom He wills.<sup>18</sup> He proceeds to clarify the issue by considering the nature of ἀντεξουσιότης.

### The Evidence of its Existence

#### *From Reason*

Origen begins by presenting that “things that move, some have the cause of their motion within themselves, others again, are moved only from without.”<sup>19</sup> Inanimate objects are drawn to motion by an external force applied to them. On the other hand, animate objects are propelled to movement towards something by its own according to the order dictated by its nature. Origen calls this natural orderly tendency towards something as *phantasy* (φαντασίας – phantasia).<sup>20</sup> All animate objects possess this, although in varying degrees, totally depending on their natural makeup. It is fundamental instincts which spurs from the very nature of being animate and includes the instinct to live, propagate, and experience pleasure. In addition to this common nature, animate objects are further classified into those considered rational and irrational.

Irrational objects have only their *phantasia* to guide them while those that are rational (λογικὸν ζῶον) possess besides the

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A good analysis of the Marcionite and Gnostic conception of “ἀντεξουσίον” and Origen’s polemics against them is found in Enrico Norelli, “Marcione e gli gnostici sul libero arbitrio, e la polemica di Origene”, *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3, (Marietti: Bologna, 1992), pp. 1-30.

<sup>16</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,1 (ANF IV:302,2).

<sup>17</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,3 (ANF IV:303,2).

<sup>18</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,7 (ANF IV:307,2) alluding to Mk. 4:12 and Lk. 8:10.

<sup>19</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,2 (ANF IV:302,1).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



*basic instinct* also a capacity, a faculty called *reason* (λόγος) to judge and determine the course of action to take in order to realize a goal.<sup>21</sup> It can accept or reject the movements of the *phantasies*. This choice of action then could be discerned as either worthy of praise or rebuke, considered good or evil, leading to virtue or vice. Origen concedes that the *phantasial nature* in itself being instinct cannot but be drawn to its proper object. It does not have control over the stimulus that puts the *phantasies* into action: "Now, to fall under some one of those external causes which stir up within us this phantasy or that, is confessedly not one of those things that are dependent upon ourselves".<sup>22</sup> He is quick to point out that rational beings have domination as to whether to satisfy the tendency of the *phantasies*.

"To determine that we shall use the occurrence in this way or differently, is the prerogative of nothing else than of the reason within us, which, as occasion offers, arouses us towards efforts inciting to what is virtuous and becoming, or turns us aside to what is the reverse".<sup>23</sup>

If there would be those who will deny that the fulfillment of the instincts are not under the control of reason, a simple test will prove the contrary. Appealing to common everyday experience, he cites that an identical stimulus, even if it excites the instinct of which it is the object, creates the possibility of a different outcome between two persons. In the case of sensual desires one may succumb to the allure of worldly passion, and another may not, notwithstanding that both may at the beginning have the goodwill to remain modest and chaste.

It is also observable that people do change in their comportment and conduct. One who is uncultured, savage, and unrefined by proper education and discipline will enter the ranks of the cultured, well-mannered, and morally upright people. In the same way, people who are considered educated and moral will, through the laxity of their ways, soon find themselves even worse than the state in which the former savage was before his conversion.

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<sup>21</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,3 (ANF IV:303,2).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

“For the disciplinary reason, taking hold of those who are most intemperate and savage (if they will follow her exhortation), effects a transformation, so that the alteration and change for the better is most extensive, – the most licentious men frequently becoming better than those who formerly did not seem to be such by nature; and the most savage men passing into such a state of mildness, that those persons who never at any time were so savage as they were, appear savage in comparison, so great a degree of gentleness having been produced within them. And we see other men, most steady and respectable, driven from their state of respectability and steadiness by intercourse with evil customs, so as to fall into habits of licentiousness, often beginning their wickedness in middle age, and plunging into disorder after the period of youth has passed, which, so far as its nature is concerned, is unstable.”<sup>24</sup>

Only a person who wishes outright to destroy the existence of “free-will”, Origen adds, will deny the obviousness of this experience. For *reason* “demonstrates that external events do not depend on us, but that it is our own business to use them in this way or the opposite, having received reason as judge and investigator of the manner in which we ought to meet those events that come from without.”<sup>25</sup>

Besides the declaration that human reason testifies to the existence of free will, Origen introduces a principle, which would be accepted by later spiritual masters in their teaching concerning the road to spiritual perfection or “asceticism”. This principle is the use of “disciplinary reason” (λόγου παιδευτικοῦ); it consists of “the word of teaching and instruction”<sup>26</sup> which, when applied diligently to one’s own life can effect a “great change” (*tantam extitisse commutationem*) or a transformation (μεταβάλλοντος). That in so doing “the alteration and change for the better is most extensive”, from a state of savagery and intemperance into a life of uprightness and good conduct and if the subject is already an upright man he progresses even further.

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<sup>24</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,5. (ANF IV:304-305,2).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Rufinus would render “λόγου παιδευτικοῦ” as “verbo doctrinae atque eruditionis”.

*From Sacred Scripture*

After demonstrating the existence of "free will" based on the ordinary human experience and reasoning, Origen proceeds to cite scriptural texts to prove its reality. He begins by stating a maxim: "It is our business to live virtuously (τὸ βιωσαί καλῶς), and that God asks this of us, as not being dependent on Him nor on any other, nor, as some think, upon fate (ἐμαρμένης), but as being our own doing".<sup>27</sup> From this dictum, he then commences to prove its veracity by citing pertinent biblical texts beginning with the prophet Micah<sup>28</sup>, then to Moses<sup>29</sup>, Isaiah<sup>30</sup>, from the books of Psalms<sup>31</sup>, the words of the "Savior"<sup>32</sup>, and finally St. Paul<sup>33</sup>. The list that Origen employed is not exhaustive in itself as he himself said<sup>34</sup> but is sufficient to demonstrate the truthfulness of the postulate. All these citations can be summarized in the following manner:

- That God asks man to walk in justice, love, mercy and live humbly;
- That God after showing man the effects of sin leading to death and goodness leading to life eternal, asks him to choose and walk in uprightness;
- That if only His people would walk in righteousness then salvation would be rightfully theirs;
- If ever a curse and eventual damnation has fallen upon those who professed to follow him it was because they chose to walk in an evil path;
- This applies to everyone Jew first and then Greek.

Two things could be deduced from the Scriptures that Origen used:

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<sup>27</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,6 (ANF IV: 305,2).

<sup>28</sup> Mic. 6:8.

<sup>29</sup> Deut. 30:15ff.

<sup>30</sup> Isa. 1:19-20.

<sup>31</sup> Ps. 81:13-14 (LXX).

<sup>32</sup> Mt. 5:22ff.

<sup>33</sup> Rom. 2:4-10.

<sup>34</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,6 (ANF IV:306,2).

- God asks man to seek carefully (ἐκζητεῖ – quærat)<sup>35</sup>, to listen attentively (εἰσακούσητε – audieritis)<sup>36</sup>, and to choose (ἐκλεξαί – elige)<sup>37</sup>. In all three instances, the idea conveyed is that of freedom. He can “seek” or remain “blind” in his ignorance; he can “listen” or continue to be “deaf” in his own pride; he can “choose” between blessing and life or curse leading to death. In all cases, it is in man’s power “to hear and to walk in the ways of God”. There is simply no coercion on the part of God as man is free.
- In every decision, however there is always a corresponding effect. If it is right and holy then it bears fruit leading to eternal life but if it is wicked then it reaps wickedness and eventually eternal death. The punishment is not imposed as if external to the wicked deed but is in itself attached to it such that what is sown is reaped.<sup>38</sup>

It is therefore in the “willing” that spells whether man will have eternal life or eternal death because it “lies within ourselves to keep what is enjoined, and that we shall be reasonably (εὐλόγως) be liable to condemnation if we transgress”. The employment of “reasonably liable” instead of “absolutely responsible” opens a door that would be very crucial and important in the Christian theology of sin and grace. It signals that sin did not originate in man but from somebody else which in Judeo-Christian belief would be called the Devil, Satan.<sup>39</sup> He is the father of sin, lies, and of death. Man is only a victim, but nonetheless he is responsible in the degree that he allows himself to be deceived by the father of lies and succumbs to his allurements. Man is not completely without blame if he sins because it is within his power to decide albeit his decision be blurred by an already weakened human nature and still further debilitated

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<sup>35</sup> cf. Mic. 6:8. The Hebrew would use *darash*, both signifying “diligent search”, “careful search”.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Isa. 1:19. The Hebrew uses *shama*, which gives the idea of urgency, as “hearken” or “obey”, “follow”.

<sup>37</sup> cf. Deut. 30:19. The Hebrew uses “bachar” which corresponds to the English “choose”, “elect”, “decide”.

<sup>38</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,6 (ANF IV:306,2) alluding to Mt. 5:28; 7:26; 25:34, 41.

<sup>39</sup> *De Princ.* 3:2,1ff [ANF IV: 328,1ff]. Origen will discuss this further in Book III, Chapter II of the *De Principiis*.

by previous sin and ignorance.<sup>40</sup> It is for this "relative culpability" that enters the possibility of redemption, absolution, forgiveness, and of conversion.<sup>41</sup>

It is the persistence of sinning that leads to perdition, of choosing to continue in sin that merits being cursed into the everlasting fire.<sup>42</sup> The more man waddles in wickedness, the farther he is from God, the blurrier the image of God in him. In the stubbornness to iniquity, he becomes closer to the image of the devil, which in his very being has vowed to live in enmity with God.<sup>43</sup> The "persistence" or "stubbornness" itself is a sign of choice, of freedom. Origen, in citing St. Paul deduces on the existence of "freedom of will", and "being ourselves the cause of ruin or salvation".<sup>44</sup>

It is interesting here to note that in citing Romans 2:4-10, the interchangeable meaning of "ἀντεξουσιότης" and "καρδία" becomes very evident. It is in the "willing" to persist in sin that leads to damnation; it is because of the "hardness and impenitent heart" that stores up for itself the wrath on the Day of Judgment:

"By your stubbornness (σκληρότης) and impenitent (ἀμετανόητος) heart (καρδίαν), you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance (ὑπομονή) in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and distress will come upon every human being who does evil, Jew first and then Greek. But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, Jew first and then Greek."<sup>45</sup>

There is also the insistence on consistency, steadfastness, and perseverance (ὑπομονή) of either doing good, which will lead to salvation or to evil the wages of which is death. The ontological foun-

<sup>40</sup> *De Princ.* 3:2,3-4 [ANF IV:330,2-332,2].

<sup>41</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,6 [ANF IV:306,1 and 306,2] citing at length Rom. 2:4-10.

<sup>42</sup> Mt. 25:41.

<sup>43</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13.

<sup>44</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,6 (ANF IV:306,2).

<sup>45</sup> Rom. 2:5-7.

dation is clear, man although a being capable of decision is conditioned by the limitations imposed on him by his very nature – matter and spirit. This very limitation becomes a vital key to change, to transformation in every step of the way. Man as long as he lives on earth is potentially able of change forward or backward, good to evil or vice versa. The “consistency”, the propensity to live in determinate manner signals a fundamental choice to which man will mold himself. If his fundamental choice is towards wickedness, then he models himself to the Evil One. If he opts to live uprightly in fear of God, he then is fashioning himself to the image of the One who created him.

“If man, made in the image of God, by looking towards the image of the devil, which is contrary to his nature, through sin becomes like him, will all the more when gazing the image of God, to whose likeness he was made by God, through the Word and through his power, will receive from his form, that which was his by nature.”<sup>46</sup>

However, the degree of his likeness to the image of God is very dependent on the amount of force he applies or his constancy to pattern himself to Him.

“Those therefore who come to him, and labor to become partakers of the spiritual image, through their progress, have the interior man renewed day by day<sup>47</sup>, through the image of the one who made them; in order to become conformed to his glorious body<sup>48</sup>, but each one according to his own power.”<sup>49</sup>

### **The Problem of the “σκληρότης καὶ ἀμετανόητος καρδία”<sup>50</sup>**

Granted that both natural human reasoning and Sacred Scripture attest that man possesses free will or the heart is free

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<sup>46</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13 (PG 12:157,1).

<sup>47</sup> 2 *Cor.* 4:16.

<sup>48</sup> *Phils.* 3:21.

<sup>49</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13 (PG 12:157,1).

<sup>50</sup> The problem of the “hardening of the heart” in the discussion of this topic is centered on the event in the OT where Pharoah’s heart was said to be hardened by God. The issue remains to be thorny in the context of human freedom in the Christian milieu. The explanation of Origen in *De Principiis* was intended prima-

in its decisions, how can one then justify or explain the existence of Scriptural texts that prove the contrary. "Certain declarations of the Old Testament and the New lead to the opposite conclusion – namely, that it does not depend on ourselves to keep the commandments to be saved, or to transgress them to be lost."<sup>51</sup>

A classical example would be Exodus 4:21: "See that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in your hand: I will harden his heart that he shall not let the people go". And Romans 9:1: "If God wants to show mercy on someone, he does so, and if he wants to harden someone's heart, he does so".

The immediate impression one receives is of a God who corners man (in this case the Pharaoh), conditioning him to resist and in so doing merit punishment.

Origen recognized the seriousness of the problem since there are as many places in Scriptures that seem to imply that it is God who is the cause of man's perdition or salvation.<sup>52</sup> This would then liken Christianity to pagan mythology where mortals are but pawns in the grand arena where the gods control the destiny of man. His direct presupposition that only those who wish to deny the presence of free will in man would unscrupulously use those texts:

"Let us begin, then, with what is said about Pharaoh – that he was hardened by God, that he might not send away the people; along with which will be examined also the statement of the apostle, 'Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will

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rily to definitively resolve the issue. However, this did not actually achieved completely its tasks (cf. Cocchini, "La quæstio sul libero arbitrio", p. 105-106). This can be verified by the other works, especially his *Commentary to the Romans*, where he discussed again at length this problem, however no longer basing himself directly with Exod. 4:21ff. but with Rom. 9 and its allusion to the event in Exodus.

For a global view of Origen's understanding of the "hardening of Pharaoh's heart", taken from the *De Princ.* and from other works, as well as the strength and weaknesses of his arguments, the novelties and borrowed ideas, clear and unclear areas can be found in: *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3: testi e studi CISEC, (Marietti, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,7 (ANF IV:306,2).

<sup>52</sup> cf. Exo. 7:3; Ezek. 11:19-20; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 9:16ff.; Phil. 2:13.

have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.<sup>53</sup> And certain of those who hold different opinions misuse these passages, themselves also almost destroying free-will (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον ἀναιρουῦντες) by introducing ruined natures (φύσεις ἀπολλυμένας) incapable of salvation (ἀνεπιδέκτους τοῦ σώζεσθαι),<sup>54</sup> and others saved which it is impossible can be lost; and Pharaoh, they say, as being of a ruined nature, is therefore hardened by God (σκληρύνεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ), who has mercy upon the spiritual (ἐλεοῦντος μὲν τοὺς πνευματικοῦς), but hardens the earthly (σκληρύνοντος δὲ τοὺς χοϊκοῦς).<sup>55</sup>

The resolution of the problem is of utmost value. If it was God's own doing that Pharaoh's heart has been hardened, thereby attributing to God man's ability or inability to respond to Him, then it was unjust of God to condemn Pharaoh and consequently the people of Egypt for their leader was in no position to do otherwise. If this would be true of Pharaoh then certainly this would also be true to all those men who would find themselves in opposition to God. If man is pre-conditioned or predestined to either salvation or to damnation then, there exists no moral responsibility in man. "For if he is hardened by God, and commits sin in consequence of being hardened, he is not the cause of sin to himself."<sup>56</sup> If he is not responsible for his actions, ergo, "then neither does Pharaoh" or any other mortal for that matter "have free-will."<sup>57</sup>

The same could be deduced upon reading Ezekiel 11:19-20:

"I will give them a new heart (καρδίαν ἑτέραν) and put a new spirit (πνεῦμα καινὸν) within them; I will remove the stony heart (ἐκσπάσω τὴν καρδίαν τὴν λιθίνην) from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart (καρδίαν σαρκίνην), so that they will live according to my statutes, and observe and carry out my ordinances; thus they shall be my people and I will be their God."

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<sup>53</sup> cf. Rom. 9:18.

<sup>54</sup> Rufinus translation has a different wording: "For it is on these passages chiefly that the heretics rely, asserting that salvation is not in our own power (*non esse in nostra potestate ut salvemur*).

<sup>55</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,8 (ANF IV:308,2).

<sup>56</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,7 (ANF IV:307,2).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



It is consequently not man who determines the time and place of his conversion, of his desire to live by the statutes laid down by God, but rather, it is dependent on whether God wills it so or not.

"The declaration... in Ezekiel... might lead one to think that it was God who gave the power to walk in His commandments, and to keep His precepts, by withdrawing the hindrance – the stony heart, and implanting a better – a heart of flesh."<sup>58</sup>

In the same line and interpretation can be glimpsed from the words of the Gospels:

"That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them,"<sup>59</sup>

And St. Paul:

"So it is not a matter of what any person wants or what any person does, but only of God having mercy"<sup>60</sup> or "It is God who, for his own generous purpose, gives you the intention and the powers to act."<sup>61</sup>

Origen saw that to the untrained in the proper interpretation of the Word of God, it is easy to fall into erroneous conclusions.

"Now these passages are sufficient of themselves to trouble the multitude (πολλοὺς)<sup>62</sup>, as if man were not possessed of

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<sup>58</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,7 (ANF IV:307,2).

<sup>59</sup> Mk. 4:12. Adele Monaci Castagno wrote an excellent analysis of Origen's interpretation of this pericope – Mk. 4:10-12. cf. "L'interpretazione origeniana di Mc. 4:10-12: aspetti e problemi della difesa del libero arbitrio", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3, (Marrietti: Bologna, 1992), pp. 85-104.

<sup>60</sup> Rom. 9:16.

<sup>61</sup> Phil. 2:13.

<sup>62</sup> We are to remember that in the various degrees of believers; Origen considers the majority to belong simply to the *simpliciores*, who being new or uninitiated to the study of Scriptures are the most gullible to error of opinion. (cf. *De Princ.* 3:2,1 [ANF IV:329,2]. See also Cocchini, "La quæstio sul libero arbitrio", pp. 110-111.)

free-will, but as if it were God who saves and destroys whom He wills."<sup>63</sup>

Here again we are in the ambit of the danger, Origen already presented in Book I–II, on interpreting Scripture solely based on the literal sense. Origen's explanation, we could deduce, would naturally follow the hermeneutical method of looking for the spiritual sense – which is the real sense of the text.<sup>64</sup>

The believer is admonished to seek the spiritual sense if he is to come into a deeper understanding of the Christian mystery, especially if the biblical text does not present the meaning out rightly:

"It is necessary to explain this point also, viz., how certain persons, not reading them correctly, have given themselves over to erroneous opinions, in as much as the procedure to be followed, in order to attain an understanding of the holy writings, is unknown to many."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,7 (ANF IV:308,2).

<sup>64</sup> Origen has been clear as to the finality of his exegesis of Scriptures; he has presented it in all his works without exception, that is, to find its spiritual sense. However, the principles and rules, which he employed in arriving at such, he outlined in the fourth book of the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* where he dealt extensively to the proper method of interpreting Scripture. Origen explained that the necessity of insisting that there is a spiritual sense in Scripture comes from the exigency of resolving the problem posed by (1) the Jews concerning the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the OT, (2) the Gnostics who denied the intimate link between the two Testaments. Therefore, in order to understand Scriptures in the way the Divine Author intended it to be, the true manner of interpreting sacred writ must be explained. Accordingly, it is this methodological failure of interpretation, which is the mother of all errors. (cf. *De Prin.* 4 :1,9 [ANF IV:357,1] [4 :2 :1]).

<sup>65</sup> *De Princ.* 4:1,8 (ANF IV:355,1) [4:2,2].

Origen laid forth a three-tiered level of scriptural understanding which would impose a great effect in the way he does exegesis and theology: (1) literal interpretation, (2) moral sense, and (3) spiritual sense. (cf. *De Princ.* 4:2,4 ; 4:3,5. See also, K.J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986); M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, trans. John A. Hughes, Eds. Anders Bergquist and M. Bockmuehl, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 39-48.

Taking the cue from Jewish and Christian fundamental faith that God is not only just but also good,<sup>66</sup> Origen found the literal interpretation of this verse as an absurdity; God cannot be the cause of evil in man.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, a figurative meaning must be intended if it is to be understood correctly.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, there is still a need to resolve the matter of understanding correctly, what it meant for God hardening the heart of the king.

### "ΚΑΡΔΙΑ" is Free and Not Pre-determined

Origen's position on the matter is clear, i.e. God cannot be the cause of man's refusal to respond to His invitation. Man is not predetermined in his decisions. He explained further, that man, in this case the Pharaoh, if he were deeply immersed in matter – of earthly nature (*terrenæ naturæ* – χοϊκῆς φύσεως)<sup>69</sup>, and therefore in effect naturally far from God, there would be no need for God to harden his heart.

"...If Pharaoh was an earthly nature; ...we shall say that he who is of an earthly nature is altogether disobedient to God; but if disobedient, what need is there of his heart being hardened and that not once, but frequently?"<sup>70</sup>

The mere fact that Pharaoh had vacillations in his treatment of Moses, Aaron, and the people of Israel in the face of the various miracles and ominous signs performed in their midst, Pharaoh could not have a ruined nature. He is not completely corrupt, and therefore there is a possibility for him to do what is right, i.e. to let the Hebrews go. There were signs of this change, an opening as evi-

<sup>66</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,10 (ANF IV:310,2).

<sup>67</sup> cf. *Jas.* 1:13.

*De Princ.* 3:1,8ff. (ANF IV:308-309,2).

<sup>68</sup> "There is no absurdity in explaining the tropical or figurative nature of that language employed in speaking of 'hardening', according to common usage." (*De Princ.* 3:1,11 [ANF IV:311,1])

<sup>69</sup> The expression is of St. Paul's, cf. 1 Cor. 15:47-49. When referring to the first man – Adam as earthly, he refers already to the state of man after the fall as evidenced by Rom. 5:12 and 1 Cor. 15:22.

<sup>70</sup> *De Princ.* 1:3,8 (ANF IV:308,2).

denced by the account where Pharaoh was bent on letting the people go after the devastating experience of the plague of hail stones. He repented for a while only to harden his heart again.<sup>71</sup> The same sign of repentance was exhibited after the locusts' plague. After the counsel made by his ministers, he agreed to let the people go on the condition that only the men would leave. Moses did not agree and Pharaoh decided to forbid them altogether from going. Then came the plague of darkness; Pharaoh, wearied by the devastation wrought by the plagues permitted Moses to take all the men including their women and children excepting the livestock. Moses did not accede to it for God wanted the entire Hebrew people and their properties free. Upon hearing Moses' refusal, Pharaoh altogether forbade their exodus. The final blow came upon the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. Pharaoh finally allowed the people with their properties to go. The next day he reversed his decision and pursued the Israelites, this time he was bent in destroying them as he sent his army to run after them.<sup>72</sup>

These series of events where Pharaoh had shown a change of heart from willing good and then evil and back, Origen, saw as a sufficient proof for man's liberty to choose and his possible conversion. Those moments where Pharaoh exhibited a softening of heart were brought about by the great things that God has done. Nonetheless, he stood stubborn and each time calcified his heart even more. The manifestation of this conversion albeit partial and filled with conditions, would not even be possible had Pharaoh's heart hard by nature. "For if the hardening were of such a nature, he [Pharaoh] would not indeed have given way even in a few instances."<sup>73</sup>

### **Hardening of the Heart Comes from Neglect and Indifference**

In any event, due to the instances of the oscillating nature of Pharaoh's heart, Origen saw the phrase that God "hardened the heart of Pharaoh" as something figurative and hence must be interpreted spiritually. He begins with the premise that God is good

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<sup>71</sup> cf. Exo. 9:27,34.

<sup>72</sup> cf. Exo. 10:16-19; 24-27; 11; 14:5-8.

<sup>73</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,11 (ANF IV:311,1).

and likens him to benevolent a master who ignores the defects of his servants. Being by nature patient and kind he does not immediately discipline or punish his servants; instead, he gives them time to see the errors themselves and thereby auto correct. Yet, in their desire to sin, they misinterpret their master's benevolence as toleration or approval of their crooked ways. Pursuing their malevolence, they in time sink into perversity by attuning their hearts to wickedness. When the master decided then to act and intervene, he finds the servants deep into viciousness. Having pity on them, he considers himself partly to blame because he allowed the wicked servants to be free instead of punishing them outright at the onslaught of their wrongdoing. "For good masters often say to their slaves, when spoiled by their kindness and forbearance, "I have made you bad, and I am to blame for offences of such enormity."<sup>74</sup>

The purpose of God's "silence" or forbearance is intended not to spoil man into doing evil but to lead him into repentance. Even if it seems that he remained unpunished for the evil deeds committed, it will not remain for long. Surely, it will not go unnoticed on the Day of Judgment.<sup>75</sup>

This line of thought applied to Pharaoh, meant that he considered himself supreme above everything else; basing perhaps on the premise that under his leadership Egypt among the nations of the world, is a prosperous and mighty empire. All the nations feared his might and no one could smite him. His heart filled with pride, he began to harden his heart. Levying even further workloads upon the Israelites and plunged them into the yoke of slavery. With the Israelites as his slaves, he considered himself too above this people's God.<sup>76</sup> The full manifestation of this hardness of heart came about by the series of miracles performed by Moses and Aaron. A drama between a growing callousness brought about by the realization that there is another power greater than he is. Beginning with the transformation of Aaron's staff into a serpent potent enough to battle against the Egyptian sorcerers' magic on to the first plague that struck the land, Pharaoh considered these simply as a challenge of the god of the Hebrews to the gods of the

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<sup>74</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,11 (ANF IV:311,2).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* with a citation from *Rom.* 2:4,5.

<sup>76</sup> cf. *Exo.* 5:1-19.

Egyptians. The succeeding pestilences however proved the contrary; it demonstrated a power even superior than the Egyptian deities that even their magicians had to concede as the true "finger of God".<sup>77</sup> These unfortunate events soon affected the sovereign, leading him to a partial softening of heart. However, it was to be rigidified even further upon perceiving that they were able to survive the destruction brought forth by the plagues.

The penultimate blow came with the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians. Their gods have proven themselves inferior if not impotent before the Hebrew God and in consequence, the king allowed the people to leave the land. This penitence was not to last for long, for soon Pharaoh marched his army to run after the fleeing people in order to smite them. This soon proved to be the final blow, the day of wrath and judgment for Pharaoh and his army, for as they were crossing the sea; it closed upon them ending the glory of Pharaoh and his mighty army.

Origen inquired as to whether this movement from hardening of heart to repentance and back to hardening again is brought about by God's action or by something else. His presupposition was God could not himself be directly responsible for the evil since He is good and benevolent. There could be no evil coming from that, which is inherently good. At most, God figures only indirectly in the hardening of the heart only in so far as his actions (energies) solicit or provoke a corresponding reaction on the part of man. The type of response – good or bad, in turn is dependent on the disposition of the person himself based on his formation, mindset, and convictions.

"By one operation (ἐνέργεια) God has mercy upon one man while he hardens another, although not intending to harden; but, (although) having a good purpose, hardening follows as a result of the *inherent principle of wickedness*<sup>78</sup> in such persons, and so He is said to harden him who is hardened."<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, Rufinus' translation of the same text would already be an explanation of how the hardening comes about:

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<sup>77</sup> Exod. 8:19.

<sup>78</sup> διὰ τὸ τῆς κακίας ὑποκείμενον τῷ παρέαυτοῖς κακοῦ

<sup>79</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,10 (ANF IV:310,2).

"By one and the same act God has pity upon one individual, but hardens another; not purposing or desiring that he who is hardened should be so, but because, in the manifestation of His goodness and patience, the heart of those who treat His kindness and forbearance with contempt and insolence is hardened by the punishment of their crimes being delayed (*ad contemptum adque insolentiam ducunt, induratur cor, dum criminum pœna differtur*); while those, on the other hand, who make His goodness and patience the occasion of their repentance and reformation, obtain compassion."<sup>80</sup>

For Rufinus it is actually the delay in the punishment that induces the heart to calcify.<sup>81</sup> Although the parallel Greek text does not indicate this at face value, however there is substantial reason to agree with Rufinus' view. Actually, he just pre-empted what is to be said in the succeeding paragraphs of the Greek text where the Master sees himself partly to blame because his own kindness and forbearance had a contrary effect on the slaves who mistook the lack of immediate reprisal as a toleration instead of as an act of mercy.<sup>82</sup>

Origen also used the image of the rain falling on two types of soil, one cultivated and the other neglected, the first after drinking from the blessings of the rain yielded abundant fruit while with the same water the inferior soil brought forth worthless thistles and thorns. The former will be treasured and cared for even more while the barren will remain uncultured. This was actually borrowed from Hebrews 6:7-8. He used this to illustrate how the heart responds to a stimulus from outside of him, in this case from God. It is a necessity that in order for man to respond to the call for holiness, he on his part must cultivate and cure for his soul; he must train himself to act positively and formed from the outset into doing well.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,10 (ANF IV:310,1).

<sup>81</sup> A helpful reference for understanding Origen's view as the salutary effects of God's chastisement can be found in: Roselli Amneris, "Ο τεχνίτης θεός: la pratica terapeutica come paradigma dell'operare di Dio in Phil. 27 e PA III 1", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Origini 3, (Marietti: Bologna, 1992), pp. 65-83.

<sup>82</sup> cf. *De Princ.* 3:1,11 (ANF IV:311,2).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

Rufinus' text clearly an addendum since it has no parallel in the Greek, nonetheless supports this view concerning the source of the negative reaction of man in the face of miracles and prodigies from above:

"Every one's will (*propositum*), if untrained (*incultum*), and fierce (*ferum*), and barbarous (*barbarum*) is either hardened by the miracles and wonders of God, growing more savage and thorny than ever, or it becomes more pliant, and yields itself up with the whole mind to obedience, if it be cleared from vice and subjected to training (*mitescat amplius ac tota mente se in obœdientiam tradat, si purgatum a vitiis fuerit et excultum*)."<sup>84</sup>

It is neglect of one's spiritual life therefore that leads man to reject God. Notwithstanding the many graces and benefits that he may receive, he fails to see them as gifts but considers them as fruits of his own labor. It is only from recognizing the gratuity of everything that he has in life, and the consideration that everything is from God, does the possibility of conversion takes place. It remains a possibility only as far as the whole mind and will is subjected to training and spiritual discipline, but the danger of lapsing and backsliding into one's former ways lurks behind.

### Conversion of the Heart as an Arduous Task

Whether it is in the Greek or in the Latin text, the necessity of consistency is clearly emphasized, without which it is not possible to reach one's destination. This duty can only be brought about by perseverance in training to do what is good all the time. Even then, it is always difficult to be consistent, lacking perhaps the motive and the force to act in a just manner. It is precisely in the desire to do good that the heart is continuously exhorted to labor to be transformed. Conversion of the heart and its coherence in the way to perfection is not achieved overnight, it starts with the desire but must persist to reach its goal. The hidden value for such a labor is to see the value of any treasure is measured in how difficult it is to procure it. In the case of reaching God, who is the

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<sup>84</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,10 (ANF IV:311,2).



highest good that can ever be desired by man, it is arduous to be in communion with him for the simple reason that he is perfect and man is not. If man is to enter into communion with him, he is then required to be perfect as God is. This is not altogether impossible since man is already made in the image of his creator. Nonetheless, because of his disobedience and sin, this image has been veiled and blurred such that to reach God means to fashion oneself more and more to Him, in this case detached from matter and from all that separates man from God. This detachment however must be deliberately done every time, for being of incarnate nature, man has the propensity to cling to what is material and sensible and that which is spiritual and immaterial he perceives but vaguely.

There is a pedagogical reason too for the difficult task of this conversion, – i.e. what is achieved may be truly treasured and the fear of losing it again and starting from the beginning to achieve what was lost. It discourages those who are on the way to conversion from taking it lightly.

"Sometimes a rapid cure is not for the advantage of those who are healed, if, after being seized by troublesome diseases, they should easily get rid of those which they had been entangled. For, despising the evil as one that is easy to cure, and not being on their guard a second time against falling into, they will be involved in it again."<sup>85</sup>

Rufinus' translation gives an explanation as to why a quick cure is not advisable concerning conversion:

"Sometimes it does not lead to good results for a man to be cured too quickly, especially if the disease, being shut up within the inner parts of the body, rage with greater fierceness."<sup>86</sup>

It is therefore the possibility of a whiplash, a reverse reaction, a falling back, worse than what one was formerly; were the sinful ways return with a vengeance and the penitent finds himself further submerged into the filth of sin, that a quickie conversion is of no value.

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<sup>85</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318,2].

<sup>86</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318,1].

The imagery used by Origen of a physician teaching his patient to be long suffering during the treatment period is very illustrative of this principle as it guarantees a more permanent cure because the efficacy is not only based on the external cure applied, i.e. the medicine, but also the internal medication – patience and consistency.<sup>87</sup> If the patient comes to sense that the cure for his malady is obtained easily, he will also think that the cause of his illness is something banal and curable without effort. There is therefore an eminent danger that having a false notion of the gravity of his illness he will abandon simply the cure when he feels it is convenient, and when the sickness strikes back it is even more powerful and virulent, of which the physician may then find almost incurable.<sup>88</sup>

“Wherefore, in the case of such persons, the everlasting God, the Knower of secrets (ὁ τῶν κρυπτῶν γνώστης), knows all things before they exist, in conformity with His goodness, delays sending them more rapid assistance, and so to speak, in helping them does not help, the latter course being to their advantage.”<sup>89</sup>

In Rufinus’ version:

“Whence God, who is acquainted with secret things, and knows all things before they happen, in His great goodness delays the cure of such, and postpones their recovery to a remoter period, and, so to speak, cures them by not curing them, lest a too favorable state of health (*præproprera sanitas*) should render them incurable (*insanabiles*).”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> cf. Footnote 3 of Amneris Roselli, “La pratica terapeutica come paradigma”, *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 65. Here Roselli points to various studies made on Origen’s understanding of therapeutic medicine as well as its relationship to his theology. See also: “Medical Theory and Theology in Origen”, *Origeniana Tertia*, (Rome, 1985), pp. 191-199.

<sup>88</sup> Since the time of the Greek physician Hippocrates (*Epid.* I:11), the treatment of a disease is seen not only as the role of the physician but by the patient as well. The patient fights the disease as well as the physician. An effective healing requires (1) a good physician, (2) a cooperating patient, (3) proper diagnosis of the sickness, (4) and the appropriate cure. (cf. Roselli, “La pratica terapeutica come paradigma”, *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 70).

<sup>89</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318,2].

<sup>90</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318,1].

Since God is the creator of all, He knows the very constitution of man (διαθέσεις) and is therefore the only one capable of really curing him. He is the only physician who can really diagnose the cause of the sickness (sin) and propose or apply (προσάγειν) the appropriate cure, which if followed diligently will certainly obtain the desired result.<sup>91</sup> However, the measure that must be applied by God will bring pain and initial suffering (πόνους καὶ βασάνους ἐμποιοῦσαι).<sup>92</sup> The purpose primarily is to see who is serious in following God and desires to be converted, as well as have a view of the gravity of his sinful ways to solicit genuine compunction for sins committed and the earnestness to make amends.

"It is probable, then, that those 'without,' having been foreseen by our Savior, according to our supposition, as not (likely) to prove steady in their conversion (ἑωραμένους οὐ βεβαίους ἐσεσθαι ἐν τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ), if they should hear more clearly the words that were spoken, were so treated by the Savior as not to hear distinctly the deeper things of His teaching, lest, after a rapid conversion, and after being healed by obtaining remission of sins, they should despise the wounds of their wickedness, as being slight and easy of healing, and should easily relapse into them. And perhaps also, suffering punishment for their former transgressions against virtue, which they had committed when they had forsaken her, they had not yet filled up the full time; in order that, being abandoned by the divine superintendence, and being filled to a greater degree by their own evils which they had sown, they may afterwards be called to a more stable repentance; so as not to be quickly entangled again in those evils in which they had formerly been involved when they treated with insolence

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<sup>91</sup> Roselli, "La pratica terapeutica come paradigma", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 71.

<sup>92</sup> cf. *Philoc.* 27:4.6.

Roselli, "La pratica terapeutica come paradigma", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 69. The application of medicine or procedure that may produce pain and initial suffering to the patient but which is necessary for an effective cure is already present since the time of Homer. The application of a tedious procedure also produces a psychological effect: (1) the sickness is grave; (2) it must be effective. This is the reason why Origen is able to justify the use of a drastic measure in healing a hardened heart.

the requirements of virtue, and devoted themselves to worst things."<sup>93</sup>

In this way of allowing pain and suffering to be experienced by sinful man, God is able to bring to the surface, making it clear and manifest the evil that is hidden in the recesses of the human heart in the hope that it will bring man to repentance and seek the healing mercy of God.<sup>94</sup> The medical-theological principle is clear. Unless the patient becomes fully aware that there is something in him that is not functioning well, he will never ask help from a doctor. However, once he goes to the doctor for consultation, then that in itself is a starting point for therapy. By force, what is hidden in the human heart must be made manifest, more often by external means, so that the subject upon seeing the evilness of his heart, may be led to repentance.

In Rufinus' view those who take lightly the seriousness of their sinfulness and the immensity of the mercy of God, are deserving of heavier penalty because:

- (1) They mock the physician who seeks to heal them;
- (2) Belittle the grandeur of the one whom they despise;
- (3) They trample upon the virtue by which they are called to live by their own wickedness.

"Being rapidly converted and healed, i.e., having quickly obtained the remission of their sins, they should again easily slide back into the same disease (*facile iterum eundem peccatorum reciderent morbum*) which they had found could be healed without difficulty. For if this be the case, no one can doubt that the punishment is doubled (*duplicari pœnam*), and the amount of wickedness increased (*mali augmenta cumulari*); since not only are the sins which had appeared to be forgiven repeated, but the court of virtue also is desecrated when trodden by deceitful and polluted beings, filled within with hidden wickedness. And what remedy can there ever be

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<sup>93</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318-319,2].

<sup>94</sup> cf. Roselli, "La pratica terapeutica come paradigma", *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 20.

*Philoc.* 27:9. Deut. 8:2-3; Job 40:3.

for those who, after eating the impure and filthy food of wickedness, have tasted the pleasantness of virtue, and received its sweetness into their mouths, and yet have again betaken themselves to the deadly and poisonous provision of sins?"<sup>95</sup>

This explains why Pharaoh had vacillations in his decision to let Israel go. For every repentance, Egypt was saved from the plague but thinking that all was past, he backslid once more and his heart became further calcified and fierce. He manifested his growing severity by punishing the Israelites to work harder without the aid of the Egyptians, thereby plunging them into further slavery and subjugation. In turn, the plagues or punishments that visited the Egyptians also were characterized by severity leading to eventual death. It was the sudden demise of his own son that brought Pharaoh to his knees. Yet, that was not the sign of his surrender to God. He may have lost an heir but he could have another one, furthermore, he has his army intact, the very sign of his power and sovereignty. It was only their annihilation on the waters of the Red Sea, he saw that he fought in vain because the God of the Hebrews is many times more powerful than his own deities himself included.

This is how Origen answered why the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and how the problematic phrase: "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh" is to be understood.

The only way to grow forward in overcoming the stubbornness of heart is to continually form it to follow that which is true and just. This is achieved only by consistent discipline, allowing one's "καρδία" to fashion itself to the one who created him by imitating his qualities. This is where the spiritual comes in.

### *The Spiritual Life*

The spiritual life begins with a true understanding of Scriptures without which it would be impossible to grow further. The strong correlation between Scriptures and the Spiritual Life is

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<sup>95</sup> *De Princ.* 3:1,17 [ANF IV:318-319,1].

evident in Origen. This is the reason we said earlier that the exegetical method he employed had a profound effect on his understanding of the spiritual life. *De facto* Origen considered Scripture as the very basis of the spiritual life; no other book could equal its value in the life of the Church. Dogmatic theology must always be founded in Scripture, and Spirituality, which is the application of Christian doctrine to the life of the Christian, must be nourished and rooted on it. Thus, man in his spiritual nature is directly linked to the word of God, which is the manifestation of the Divine Word. The difference between Origen and Philo's understanding of the spiritual meaning of Scripture is centered on the correlation of dogma and spirituality. Philo saw the priority of the spiritual meaning only, Origen meanwhile while affirming the priority of the spiritual meaning, posited also the existence of the dogmatic side of Scriptures.

As was elucidated, the various grades of Scriptural meaning have a direct relationship on the types of believers. The man who is contented with knowing simply the basic meaning of the text of Scriptures, i.e. *literal meaning*, enjoy only the natural light and are unable to see further. The man who is bathed in the light of the Holy Spirit, is the spiritual man, and seeks only the true meaning of Scripture, which is the spiritual one.

In effect, the various grades of meaning of Scriptures were also seen as symbolic of the various types of men and the various stages of man's journey towards God.<sup>96</sup>

| <i>Kinds of Christians</i> | <i>Sense of Scripture</i>  | <i>Nature of Man</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| simpliciores (incipientes) | literal sense              | body – σῶμα          |
| progredientes              | moral sense                | soul – ψυχὴ          |
| perfecti                   | spiritual (mystical) sense | spirit – πνεῦμα      |

<sup>96</sup> *De Princ.* 4:2,4 with allusions from Prov. 22:20 and 1 Thess. 5:23. Here we encounter again the tripartite distinction in man of St. Paul. As we correlate it with Origen, we see that he adapted the division in order to convey the types of believers in their spiritual journey.

The purpose of knowing the true meaning of Scripture is to know Him whom they should imitate in order to escape from the clutches of a hardened heart, i.e. Christ;<sup>97</sup> who in effect is the image of God from which humanity was fashioned.

### *Christ, The Divine Logos Who is the Image of God*

The image from which man was modeled has an identity in itself, as Origen would point out. The image of God would refer to the Logos who when he became incarnate is Christ the Savior. What was the image of God that man was modeled after? It could only have been our Savior.<sup>98</sup> He is the firstborn of every creature.<sup>99</sup> He said of himself: "To see me is to see him who sent me".<sup>100</sup> "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father".<sup>101</sup> In effect, the meaning of the text would be "God created man through his Logos".<sup>102</sup> This man therefore does not refer to the corporeal man but rather to the inner man. The corporeal man was not created in the image of God but rather "ἐπλασεν (*plasmavit, formavit*) ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς"<sup>103</sup>, formed from the dust of the earth. The difference between "created" (ἐποίησεν – *creavit*) and "formed" (ἐπλασεν – *plasmavit*) is a substantial one and would have a deep bearing on the understanding of the contrast between the spiritual

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<sup>97</sup> Rom. 13:14.

For Origen the key to understanding Scripture is Jesus Christ. Everywhere he saw the prefiguration of Christ, in every event and word. As the various Christian writers and thinkers before him, Origen saw the Old Testament as a preparation for the New, basically a propedeutic character that could only be understood in the light of Christ. This position was used both to refute the errors of the Jews in their literal hermeneutics of Scriptures and the denial by the Gnostics of admitting the divine source of the Old Testament. (cf. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, pp. 39-44.

<sup>98</sup> *Comm. on Jn.* 1:19 (4) [ANF IX:307,1].

<sup>99</sup> Col. 1:15.

<sup>100</sup> Jn. 12:45.

<sup>101</sup> Jn. 14:9.

<sup>102</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13 [PG 12:155]

<sup>103</sup> Gen. 2:7.

man and the corporeal one. Although both accounts of the coming into being of man involved God in a direct way, the modes of coming into being were different. Whereas in the first account, God employed a model, a spiritual model – i.e. the Logos for “creating” man, the second account there was no archetype used but simply an existing material substance – i.e. dust of the earth. The logical effect of this distinction an understanding of man’s real nature and destiny is clear enough. The more he immerses himself into matter, the farther he is from the model after which he was made. The contrary is also true, the farther he is from matter, which is without form or shape, the nearer he is from the model he was created after. The immersion into corporeality is brought about by man’s sin. Thus, he lost his likeness to God when he sinned and became unto the likeness of the devil. “Sin made him like the devil, because he went against his nature and looked at the devil’s image (*intuens imaginem diaboli*).”<sup>104</sup> The affinity to the image of the devil is not akin to a transformation of the interior man as if he became completely corrupted; but rather like the devil himself, who by revolting against God separated from Him, man too rebelling against his creator went into the same lot as the devil. Sin blocked man’s view of the image of God, rendering him incapable of seeing Him. In effect, man has the power to go against his nature but in choosing to go against his true self, he loses the ability to return from where he came. It was therefore necessary that in order for man to return to his original state, he must be guided by the archetype himself – the Logos. In fact in the context of man being “sick of heart” and therefore in need of a healing from an expert physician, it is the Word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) who is the doctor of the soul.<sup>105</sup>

This is the reason why man’s corruption was not a complete one, for if it were so, there would have been no possibility for redemption since there is not even a slight likeness to the divine. Since the corruption brought about by sin was not complete, there

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<sup>104</sup> *Hom. Gen.* 1:13 [PG 12:157]

<sup>105</sup> *Philoc.* 4:2. cf. Roselli, “La pratica terapeutica come paradigma”, *Il cuore indurito del Faraone*, p. 68.



is always the possibility of a return.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, fallen man *in se* could not accomplish the return to the original image because his vision of reality has been clouded, his corporeal senses has taken over him instead of the spiritual senses. There must be someone who would show him the way to recover his clouded identity. This is the reason for the Incarnation.

"When our Savior saw that man, who had been modeled after him, had shaken off his likeness to him and acquired a resemblance to the devil, he was filled with pity and made himself like man and came down to man.' Ever since then, it has been possible for men to recover their likeness to the Word if they will but consent to turn to him. 'All who come to him and strive to be like him are inwardly renewed, day by day, according to the progress they make, in the image of him who made them.'"<sup>107</sup>

The spiritual journey of a sinful man begins when he recognizes that he had strayed from his true self – made in the image of God, and became a slave to the devil. It is the interior man that realizes this, seeing that he belongs to God and is made in his image. He begins to understand that the real him, the real world is the spiritual one, the interior one. The very instance that signals the beginning of the movement from the world of illusion – corporality, world of the devil to the real world, world of the spirit is aptly called "conversion" signaled by the act of "repentance" (*pœnitentia*)<sup>108</sup>.

### *Christ Who Satisfies Every Longing of the Human Heart*

The NT is rich in texts that explicitly point to the reality of God's merciful and loving "καρδία" which is the sole reason why "He sent His only begotten Son"<sup>109</sup>. For Origen, the reality of the

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<sup>106</sup> "Semper ergo intueamur istam imaginem Dei, ut possimus ad ejus similitudinem reformari." [PG 12:157].

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> "Sed nemo desperet videns similitudinem suam magis esse cum diabolo quam cum Deo, posse se iterum recuperare formam imaginis Dei, quia non venit salvator vocare justos, sed peccatores in pœnitentiam." [PL 12:157].

<sup>109</sup> Jn. 3:16.

divine heart<sup>110</sup> is not something to be taken in its literal sense, as if God has a material heart, but rather, must understood in its deeper meaning<sup>111</sup> – i.e. His rational powers:

“Suppose it is God the Father who speaks thus; what is His heart that the good word should appear in accordance with His heart? If, as these writers suppose, the Word (Logos) needs no interpretation, then the heart is to be taken in the natural sense too. But it is quite absurd to suppose God’s heart to be a part of Him as ours is of our body. We must remind such writers that as when the hand of God is spoken of, and His arm and His finger, we do not read the words literally but enquire in what sound sense we may take them so as to be worthy of God, so His heart is to be understood of His rational power, by which He disposes all things, and His word of that which announces what is in this heart of His.”<sup>112</sup>

The Father sent His Son (the Logos) to proclaim to men what is in the Father’s heart – “God is love”<sup>113</sup> and because He loves the world “God wants all men to return to Him and be saved”.<sup>114</sup> How are men induced to return to God? Origen points to the nature of man being made in “God’s image” – the Logos. The Logos Incarnate then teaches man how to return to God in a manner natural for him. That is to show mankind the beauty and the everlasting joy or fulfillment one has in God who is eternal rather than with creatures that are mortal. The image of Bread and Wine coming from heaven used by the gospel according to John, magnificently presents, according to Origen, the mission of the Logos Incarnate:

“To what we have said must be added how the Son is the true vine. Those will have no difficulty in apprehending this who understands, in a manner worthy of the prophetic grace, the saying: “Wine maketh glad the heart of man.” For if the heart be the intellectual part, and what rejoices it is the

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<sup>110</sup> Ps. 45:1. cf. *Comm. on Jn.* 1:23 [ANF IX:310,2].

<sup>111</sup> *Comm. on Jn.* 1:23 [ANF IX:310,2].

<sup>112</sup> *Comm. on Jn.* 1:42 [ANF IX:321,1].

<sup>113</sup> 1 Jn. 4:8.

<sup>114</sup> Jn. 3:17.

Word most pleasant of all to drink which takes us off human things, makes us feel ourselves inspired, and intoxicates us with an intoxication which is not irrational but divine, that, I conceive, with which Joseph made his brethren merry, then it is very clear how He who brings wine thus to rejoice the heart of man is the *true* vine. He is the true vine, because the grapes He bears are the truth, the disciples are His branches, and they, also, bring forth the truth as their fruit. It is somewhat difficult to show the difference between the vine and bread, for He says, not only that He is the vine, but that He is the bread of life. May it be that as bread nourishes and makes strong, and is said to strengthen the heart of man, but wine, on the contrary, pleases and rejoices and melts him, so ethical studies, bringing life to him who learns them and reduces them to practice, are the bread of life, but cannot properly be called the fruit of the vine, while secret and mystical speculations, rejoicing the heart and causing those to feel inspired who take them in, delighting in the Lord, and who desire not only to be nourished but to be made happy, are called the juice of the true vine, because they flow from it."<sup>115</sup>

The "human καρδιά" being part of the higher faculty of man is attracted by the truth and beauty presented by Logos. The Word from which man was fashioned acts like wine that inebriates whoever drinks it. Having tasted this wine, he partakes of it even more, and judges it as the best wine among those he has tasted. In so doing, he does not return to the old stale wine of sin but rather prefers to remain with the wine that cheers his heart – Christ the Lord.

Therefore, we see in Origen a conception of the "heart" as a volitive faculty able to choose between what is right and wrong. Many things like experiences, people, events, and beings both spiritual and material could affect the decisions of the heart. However, its choice as to which road to traverse is always personal. The option taken will either lead him to destruction or to life. In the plan of God who created him, Man is not destined to perish because the image from which he was made is eternal. Therefore, he needs to be saved, to return to life. However, Man must choose to live.

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<sup>115</sup> *Comm. on Jn.* 1:33 [ANF IX:314,2].

That is its natural tendency but unless he is shown the way, he could not discover on his own the path of righteousness and will continue to drift into darkness. Therefore, God in the economy of salvation chose to send the archetype of interior Man – the Logos to show him the way, so that whoever will follow the Word made flesh – Jesus Christ, may not experience death but may have everlasting life.<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

Although, in the *De Principiis*, Origen did not add anything new to the Judeo-Christian understanding of the heart as the “seat of moral decisions”, the method in which he used to explain its nature and the problems attached to it led to further elaboration of the “spirituality of the heart” among later Christian spiritual writers and mystics. His view on the reason for the sclerosis of the heart is verifiable in everyday life. The premises from which the “hardening” is founded, namely: (1) although God exists, (2) yet He is benevolent and full of love, (3) and knowing that we are of clay He will not punish immediately or is very tolerant of human error and sin, gives the presumption that it is all right to continue in his “normally” wicked ways. However, though the first two premises are truthful the last one is not, for God’s holiness is absolute and therefore requires a certain degree of reciprocity on the part of his creatures, thus the injunction: “Be holy as I am holy”.<sup>117</sup> If the desire to be holy or to change seriously in order to approximate the image of God in him is not innate because of the veil of sin enveloping his nature from birth,<sup>118</sup> it is God who takes the initiative to call him<sup>119</sup> to mend his ways lest by his own sin he be destroyed.<sup>120</sup> The call to repentance may be subtle and gentle admonitions or it may be drastic. To a sensitive soul on the way

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<sup>116</sup> Jn. 3:18.

<sup>117</sup> Lev. 11:44.

<sup>118</sup> Rom. 3:10-11.

<sup>119</sup> Rom. 5:12.

<sup>120</sup> Jn. 8:24.

to salvation, he is able to perceive it through certain events in daily life especially in those moments where his very being is involved, e.g. infirmity, death in the family, invalidity, accidents, calamities, failure. He then takes it as a sign from God to mend his ways and cling to the one true source of life. For the Christian this is the return to Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The sensitive soul sees it as a chastisement, a disciplining intended for the purpose of perfection.<sup>121</sup> To the wicked (πονηρός) it is seen as a challenge as to who is more powerful,<sup>122</sup> as was the case of the Pharaoh. However, in the end, God the Almighty always triumphs, and He judges each man according to his deeds. If man persists in his "hardened heart" he will die<sup>123</sup> and be judged as one damned,<sup>124</sup> but if he gets converted he will live.<sup>125</sup>

Origen also declares the conversion is not an easy task, and it takes a lifetime effort, in conjunction (synergy) with grace, to achieve this. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on asceticism, discipline and increase in wisdom and knowledge in order to run the course of salvation. The idea is nothing new in the Christian context; it is already present both in the Old Testament and the New.<sup>126</sup> However, Origen's contribution is his emphasis on the life-long process of purification so that the "heart" may habitually walk in righteousness, virtue and truth. Being of earthly nature he is always easily tempted to walk in a carnal manner. It is only through dedication and resoluteness to take the road towards God that perfection will be finally achieved.

The road back to God is achieved not only through a disciplined life but most of all through a profound spiritual life based on a true understanding of Sacred Scripture founded on an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh after

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<sup>121</sup> Heb. 12:7.

<sup>122</sup> Psa. 50:17.

<sup>123</sup> Ezk. 3:18.

<sup>124</sup> Mt. 25:41.

<sup>125</sup> Ezk. 3:18, Jn. 3:16-21.

<sup>126</sup> Prov. 3:11, 1 Cor. 9:27, Phil. 2:12, Heb. 12:11.

whom Man is fashioned. For Origen, then, the road back to God is not a do-it-yourself endeavor, not knowing where to begin or what to do, but rather through a one-to-one relationship with Jesus Christ who shows the only true way to God. The imitation of Christ, the spiritual life has its beginning and end in Jesus Christ – the Alpha and the Omega. □