



The *Platonism* and *Neo-Platonism* influence on Origen's exegesis of the Bible
El *Platonisme* i el *Neoplatonisme* influeixen en l'exegesi de la Bíblia d'Origen
La influencia del *Platonismo* y el *Neoplatonismo* en la exégesis bíblica de
Orígenes
A influência do *Platonismo* e do *Neoplatonismo* na exegese da Bíblia de
Orígenes

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Abstract: Origen is a Christian writer who knows very well not only the Bible and the Christian tradition until his day, but he has studied Greek philosophy and probably Greek literature. His knowledge of Greek philosophy and literature gives him an absolute privilege to deepen and enrich the meanings of the biblical language and terminology. Origen doesn't adopt Greek philosophy without any critical thought. He accepts Platonism and Neo-Platonism ideas only if they were consistent with the church's rule of faith. For him, the study of philosophy is understood as an exercise involving moral purification as well as intellectual training, as a necessary preparation for the study of Scripture. In this essay, we will show that Origen was a Christian Platonist, who accepts many things of Platonic philosophy and criticizes many others which do not belong to Plato but were expressed by some other philosophers as false Platonism ideas. Plotinus and Proclus showed a disliked view against Origen's Christian writings, but they accepted his ideas concerning God and "the things", deeming them raised by Greek philosophy. In Origen's theological system, Neoplatonic features can be underlined. The knowledge of the Bible is for Origen the only truth, but Platonism and Neoplatonism provide a simpler and more natural explanation of the revelation of God.

Keywords: Origen – Platonism – Neo-Platonism – Greek Philosophy – Christian Platonist – Plato – Plotinus – Proclus.

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Resumen: Orígenes es un escritor cristiano que conoce muy bien no solo la Biblia y la tradición cristiana hasta su día, sino que ha estudiado filosofía griega y probablemente literatura griega. Su conocimiento de la filosofía y la literatura griegas le da un privilegio absoluto para profundizar y enriquecer los significados del lenguaje y la terminología bíblica. Orígenes no adopta la filosofía griega sin un pensamiento crítico. Acepta las ideas del platonismo y el neoplatonismo solo si son consistentes con la regla de fe de la iglesia. Para él, el estudio de la filosofía se entiende como un ejercicio de purificación moral y de formación intelectual, como preparación necesaria para el estudio de la Escritura. En este ensayo mostraremos que Orígenes fue un platónico cristiano, que acepta muchas cosas de la filosofía platónica y critica muchas otras que no pertenecen a Platón pero que fueron expresadas por otros filósofos como falsas ideas del platonismo. Plotino y Proclo mostraron una opinión desagradable contra los escritos cristianos de Orígenes, pero aceptaron sus ideas sobre Dios y “las cosas”, considerándolas planteadas por la filosofía griega. En el sistema teológico de Orígenes se pueden subrayar rasgos neoplatónicos. El conocimiento de la Biblia es para Orígenes la única verdad, pero el platonismo y el neoplatonismo aportan una explicación más sencilla y natural de la revelación de Dios.

Palabras-clave: Orígenes – Platonismo – Neoplatonismo – Filosofía griega – Cristianismo platónico – Platón – Plotino – Proclo.

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Introduction: The use of Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy in Christianity

In the first centuries of the spread of Christianity, the form of Christian teaching and doctrine was based on the explanation of biblical teaching. During that period, Greek philosophy had conquered the entire known world and influenced Christians' teaching, discussion, and understanding of biblical truth. Greek philosophy provided the early Christian Church with a set of discussion tools, as well as an opposing worldview with which to contrast the gospel.

This makes Greek philosophy a profound influence on the words, systems, and discussions by which Christians throughout history have sought to explain their faith.



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In this way, Greek Philosophy furnished Christianity with a fundamental intellectual framework or a necessary backdrop. The catalytic role for the conception and formulation of Christian dogmatic theology was affected by Platonism and its Neoplatonic version. Many Church Fathers and Writers such as Origen, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria adopted some terms from Greek philosophy.² They viewed Greek philosophy as a useful means for interpreting and sharing their faith.³ Mark Edwards repeated the Christian opinion that we cannot know anything about the nature of God except His existence.⁴

For example, Irenaeus of Lyon tried to explain the difference between God and God's creation. He used the Platonic distinction between Being - God as absolute non-contingent – and Becoming.⁵ The distinction between God and creation will always exist. Through Platonism, Irenaeus found “arguments for free will and arguments about God”.⁶ Additionally, through Platonism and mainly through Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* Church Fathers could explain the subject of “likeness to God” as

² ARTEMI, Eirini, “Embracing Greek philosophical thinking in the fathers of the 2nd - 5th centuries”, *Vox Patrum* 36 (2016) t. 65, 31-38 esp. p. 33.

³ *Ibid.* ARTEMI, Eirini, *The terms of formation of Gnosiology in the Byzantine George Pachymeris in his Paraphrases of the treatise On the Mystical Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite*, post-doc thesis, (in greek), Patras 2016, p. 99.

⁴ “We lack the means to say what God is we can say only what he is not: ‘timeless’, ‘changeless’, ‘infinite’, ‘ingenerate’, ‘inscrutable’, ‘ineffable’, ‘incorporeal’, ‘impassible’... Platonism rather than the Bible is the lexicon which supplies these words to the Christian tradition.” – EDWARDS, Mark Julian, *Origen against Plato*, Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2002, p. 47.

⁵ PLATO, *Timaeus* 28a. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 transl. by LAMB, Walter Rangeley Maitland, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, W. Heinemann Ltd. 1925: “And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent. Again, everything which becomes must of necessity become owing to some Cause; for without a cause nothing can attain becoming. But when the artificer of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity”.

⁶ OSBORN, Eric, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy*. Cambridge, 1981, p. 52. RANKIN, David, *From Clement to Origen. The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers*, Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006, p. 109.



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the ultimate end or purpose of human life. In the specific dialogue, Plato refers “...to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise. But, indeed, my good friend, it is not at all easy to persuade people that the reason generally advanced for the pursuit of virtue and the avoidance of vice -namely, so that a man may not seem bad and may seem good-is not the reason why the one should be practised and the other not”.⁷

Clement of Alexandria calls philosophy “a sort of preliminary discipline for those who lived before the coming of Christ,” and adds, “Perhaps we may say it was given to the Greeks with this special object; for philosophy was to the Greeks what the law was to the Jews, – a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ”.⁸ Another Church Father, Justin, Martyr, and Philosopher, writes that “The Platonic dogmas are not foreign to Christianity. If we Christians say that all things were created and ordered by God, we seem to enounce a doctrine of Plato; and, between our view of the being of God and his, the article appears to make the only difference”.⁹ Moreover, Augustine of Hippo was profoundly influenced by the work of Plato¹⁰ and the idealist Plotinus, the father of Neo-Platonism.¹¹

⁷ PLATO, *Theaetetus* 176b, Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 12 transl. by FOWLER, Harold North, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, W. Heinemann Ltd. 1921.

⁸ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromateis*, 1, 104A; *Ibid.* 7, 505, 526, CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromateis*, transl. by WILSON, William, From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. ed. by ROBERTS Alexander, DONALDSON James and CLEVELAND COXE A., Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. Revised and edited for New Advent by KNIGHT Kevin.

⁹ JUSTIN MARTYR AND PHILOSOPHER, *Apologies*, 2, 96D. transl. by M. DODS and G. REITH. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Ed. by ROBERTS Alexander, DONALDSON James and CLEVELAND COXE A., Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. Revised and edited for New Advent by KNIGHT Kevin.

¹⁰ “The philosophy of Plato is eminently a theistic philosophy. “God,” he says, in his *Republic* (716 A), “is (literally, *holds*) the beginning, middle, and end of all things. He is the Supreme Mind or Reason, the efficient Cause of all things, eternal, unchangeable, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-pervading, and all-controlling, just, holy, wise, and good, the perfect, the beginning of all truth, the fountain of all law and justice, the source of all order and beauty, and especially the cause of all good” (see *Philebus*, *Phaedo*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Laws*, *passim*). God represents, he impersonates, he *is* the True, the Beautiful, but, above all, the Good”, TYLER, W.S., “Platonism and Christianity,” SCHAFF, Philip, ed., *A Religious Encyclopaedia or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical*



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To sum up, Greek philosophy is not a source of Christian belief or a meaningful influence on the spiritual beliefs of Christians. At the same time, the systems with which Christians teach, discuss, and understand biblical truth have been deeply affected by Greek philosophy. The latter has deeply, profoundly influenced the way Christianity develops theoretically its theology. It should be underlined that any part of Greek Philosophy has not been either the origin of Christian belief or a source of Christian religious ideas.

I. Origen as the exegete of the Bible puts into practice Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences

Origen's of Alexandria (c. 185-254 AD) personality, ideas and works have always been the source of passionate and enthusiastic controversies. Origen was one of the most important and distinguished early Christian theologians in the patristic tradition. He was not a sterile theologian, but a philosopher too. He was influenced by the beliefs of Greek philosophy and mainly by Plato's teaching.¹² In many of his works, he tried to reconcile Christian beliefs with Greek philosophy, leading him to develop doctrines which were eventually judged heretical by Christian authorities.

Theology, 3rd edition, Vol. 3. (Toronto, New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1894), 1850-1853, esp. 1851.

¹¹ "In Neoplatonic thought, the cosmos emanates from the Divine being, known as the One. The One is infinite and beyond all categories and descriptions, beyond all thought and all being, ineffable and incomprehensible. The One is the creator of the cosmos by a series of emanations; divine Intellect (Nous) comes from the One, and the Soul (psyché) comes from Nous. These three gradations within the "great chain of being," known as hypostases, are not separate entities, but rather are timelessly present in all things", COUCHMAN, Adam, "Always changing, always the same: holiness in Gregory of Nyssa", *Aldersgate Papers*, Vol. 7 (September 2009), 74-89, esp. p. 75.

¹² "Origen expresses deep respect for Plato, his style, and his philosophy's nobility and usefulness (CC 6.2 and elsewhere). Plato taught the same truths as Scripture, possibly because he knew the "Jewish philosophy" (*Contra Celsum* 4.39), more ancient than Plato (e.g., *Contra Celsum* 6.7) – likewise for Eusebius, Plato "followed the philosophy of the Hebrews," hearing/reading it or being inspired by God-Logos (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 11 prologue 2; 11.8.1). Origen ranks Plato as the best of all philosophers, the closest to scriptural doctrines (*Contra Celsum* 1.10). Origen explicitly agrees with Plato on the supreme Good's inexpressibility in the Seventh Letter, and praises him as inspired by God (*Contra Celsum* 6.3)", I.L.E. RAMELLI, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition", *Religions* (2017), 1-20, esp. p.4; doi:10.3390/rel8020021



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Because of this, he has left a mixed inheritance in the Orthodox Christian world.¹³ On one hand, he is undoubtedly the most highly accomplished apologist and exegete of the pre-Nicene period. His teaching was not merely theoretical but was also imbued with an intense ethical power.¹⁴

Origen had studied and taught Plato¹⁵ and Neoplatonism. Moreover, he commented on many Platonic texts such as *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*, using the allegorical method.¹⁶ He used ancient philosophy in the interpretation of the Bible, giving new meaning to terms of ancient philosophy. Thus, ancient Greek philosophy helped him to formulate his doctrines in a rational way, which was reproached by Porphyry the Neoplatonic philosopher.¹⁷ Origen tried to relate the philosophical discourse with the Word of God. The fact that Origen did not denounce philosophy, but he attempted to combine Greek philosophy with the Holy Bible provoked the reactions of his contemporaries, both Christians and Greek Philosophers. Some Christians charged him with heretic interpretations of the Bible and some Greek Philosophers as Porphyry¹⁸ and Christian Writers and Fathers, as Epiphany of Salamis imputed to him

¹³ POPE BENEDICT XVI, “[Origen of Alexandria: life and work](#)”. In: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

¹⁴ ARTEMI, Eirini, “The influence of Origen on John Scottus Eriugena Concerning *The Return of all things to God*”, in Origenian Undecima. *Origen and Origenism in the history of the western thought*, ed. JACOBSEN, Anders – Christian, papers of the 11th International Origen Congress, Aarhus University 26-31 August 2013, Louvain – Paris – Bristol 2016, pp.597-611, esp. p. 597.

¹⁵ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, [Church History](#), VI.19.8. transl. by McGIFFERT, Arthur Cushman *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1. Ed. by SCHAFF Philip and WACE Henry, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Revised and edited for New Advent by KNIGHT Kevin.

¹⁶ RAMELLI Ilaria, “Plato in Origen’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s Conception of the ἀρχή and the τέλος.” In *Plato in the Third Sophistic*. Ed. by FOWLER Ryan, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 211–35, esp. p. 215.

¹⁷ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Church History*, VI.19.7: “Origen having been educated as a Greek in Greek literature, went over to the barbarian recklessness. And carrying over the learning which he had obtained, he hawked it about, in his life conducting himself as a Christian and contrary to the laws but in his opinions of material things and of the Deity being like a Greek, and mingling Grecian teachings with foreign fables”.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* MARTENS, Peter, *Origen and Scripture The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 2012, p. 38.



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that he was a bad mouthpiece who tried to compromise two incompatible traditions Christianity and Greco-Roman learning.¹⁹

Origen believed that the interpreter's duty "to penetrate the depths of the Gospel and to seek the bare truth of the patterns contained in it".²⁰ Although he adopted the allegorical interpretation of the Scripture as Philo had done many years before, he did not use only the allegory in the exegesis of the Bible. Origen argued that, just as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so the Scriptures have a "literal" (historical) interpretation, an "ethical" interpretation and a "spiritual" (mystical or allegorical) interpretation.²¹ He expressed this opinion in his exegesis of *1 Thessalonians* 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".²²

He used Plato's definition of man's deification in his interpretation of the biblical text of Genesis. Employing the passage of his dialogue *Theaetetus*, 176b, he tried to explain Genesis 1:26 and wrote: "The highest good, towards which all rational nature is progressing, and which is also called the end of all things, is defined by very many even among philosophers in the following way, namely, that the highest good is to become as far as possible like God.²³ But this definition is not so much, I think, a discovery of their own, as something taken by them out of the divine books. For Moses, before all others, points to it when in recording the first creation of man he says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image and likeness".²⁴

¹⁹ EPIPHANY OF SALAMIS, *Panarion* 64.72, trans. By MARTENS, Peter, *Origen and Scripture*, p. 38: "And you too, Origen, blinded in your mind by the aforementioned Greek education [ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας], have vomited venom for your followers, and have become poisonous food for them, harming the multitude with the poison by which you have been harmed".

²⁰ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *In John commentary*, I, 8.

²¹ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *On First Principles*, IV.2.5. PAPANIKOLAOU Aristotle, "[The allegorical method of Origen](#)", *Theology* 45.2, Athens, 1974, pp. 347-359, esp. p. 348.

²² ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *On First Principles*, IV.11.8-12.

²³ PLATO, *Theaetetus*, 176b.

²⁴ Gen. 1,26. ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *On First Principles*, III.6.1, trans. by MARTENS Peter, *Origen and Scripture*, p. 76.



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Origen, as Plato did in his dialogues, spoke about the hidden interpretation in the texts of the Bible and might be indicated by a narrative of events that could not have happened.²⁵ A characteristic passage with hidden interpretation comes from the book of Genesis, which is included in the book of Origen, *On First Principles*:

“For whom that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? And that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? And who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? And again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree? And if it is said that God walks in paradise in the evening, and Adam hides under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and “literally.” Cain also, when going forth from the presence of God, certainly appears to thoughtful men as likely to lead the reader to inquire what the presence of God is, and what the meaning of going out from Him is. And what need is there to say more, since those who are not altogether blind can collect countless instances of a similar kind recorded as having occurred, but which did not “literally” take place.²⁶

In his Homilies on Exodus and mainly in his Homily II *On the midwives and the birth of Moses*, Origen explained why the Pharaoh of Egypt wanted women and girls to survive instead of men. The flesh and the passions of the flesh are designated by the females, but the man is the rational sense and the intellectual spirit. He wanted all the people to live a fleshly life and not to try to find their origin from the heaven.²⁷ Also in this passage, as he did in his work *On First Principles*²⁸, Origen presented indirectly his beliefs about the pre-existence of souls originally as pure souls in the presence of God before their existence in bodies in this earthly life. The influence of Plato²⁹ about the pre-existence of souls is obvious in Origen’s reference in this text with Pharaoh.

²⁵ MOBERLY Walter, *The theology of the book of Genesis*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 22.

²⁶ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *On First Principles*, IV.1.16. trans. by CROMBIE F. in *The Writings of Origen*, vol. 1, Ante-Nicene Christian Library 10, Edinburgh, UK: T.&T. Clark, 1869, pp. 315–17.

²⁷ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Homilies on Exodus*, PG 12, 305B-306A.

²⁸ *Idem*. *On First Principles*, I.4.1-3, II.8.3-4, II.9.1-2,6.

²⁹ PLATO, *Phaedrus*. 246 b-d.



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Another text of Origen which presented the pre-existence of the soul as Plato accepted is from his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, in the second book. Origen referred to John's Baptist soul and underlined that "For if that general doctrine of the soul is to be received, namely, that it is not sown at the same time with the body, but is before it, and is then, for various causes, clothed with flesh and blood"³⁰, so that he assumed that "John's soul was older than his body".³¹

As far as the etymology of the names in Genesis and Exodus, Origen partially followed Plato's opinion about the significance of names. For Origen, the names of persons and places in the Bible, mainly in Genesis and Exodus, showed their spiritual significance from the meaning by connecting the names to words from which they are derived, or they have the same etymological root. Plato in his dialogue *Cratylus* expressed two opinions. One of them is expressed by *Cratylus* and the other by Hermogenes.

The first of them supported that names and words possessed "natural correctness", thereby declaring the connection that existed between the name and the thing denoted by that name, with the result that the nature of the thing was attributed to the word. On the other hand, Hermogenes supported the "conventional" view, that was, the giving of names to things constituted a kind of "convention", an agreement between people so that the names are an echo of human will, which is often arbitrary.³²

Moreover, Origen discovered in Biblical texts many (Middle) Platonic tenets. The theoretical pillars of apokatastasis can be found in Scripture and Plato according to Origen's beliefs. Also, as Ilaria Ramelli underlines the Christian Philosopher analyzed "his concept of the Logos one-and-many, One as God but many as Logos, subsuming all multiplicity into unity, is grounded by him in Scripture, but must be considered within Middle Platonism, in which Plato's Ideas had become thoughts of God, located in God's Mind-Logos. In God's Logos is Christ; therefore, Christ / Logos is the place of all Ideas and unifies them – the notion of God's Logos being "all things

³⁰ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, II.24.29-30.

³¹ *Ibid.* II.24.27-28.

³² PLATO, *Cratylus*, 383a, 435d, 391e-392a



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as One”.³³ This connection of God’s Logos with Christ became obvious in the gospel of John. Christ is one, having many names.³⁴ The reference between one and many showed the influence of Neo-Platonism on Origen. Plotinus spoke about the one and many in his work *Enneads*.³⁵

Although Origen has been influenced in his works by Platonism and Neoplatonism, he clarified that for Plato, “it is a hard matter to find out the Maker and Father of this universe; and after having found Him, it is impossible to make Him known to all... You perceive, then, how divine men seek after the way of truth, and how well Plato knew that all men could not walk in it”.³⁶ On the antipode of this teaching of Plato, Origen explained that “Christ comes down to the weaker capacities of ignorant men, of simple women, of slaves, and, in short of all those who from Jesus alone could have received that help for the better regulation of their lives which is supplied by his instructions concerning the Divine Being, adapted to their wants and capacities...”.³⁷

For all of them, “Christ was made flesh (total man and remained total God), so that He might reveal to all men truths which, according to Plato, it would be impossible to make known to all men,”³⁸ ... “He has chosen the foolish things of this world – the simplest of Christians, who lead, however, a life of greater moderation and purity than many philosophers – to confound the wise”.³⁹ In these passages Origen analyzed the

³³ I.L.E. RAMELLI, “Origen and the Platonic Tradition”, (n. 11), p. 8, doi:10.3390/rel8020021

³⁴ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, I.22-23.

³⁵ PLOTINUS, *Enneads* 5.9.6.1-12, “the Intellectual-Principle is the authentic existences and contains them all- not as in a place but as possessing itself and being one thing with this its content. All are one there and yet are distinct: similarly, the mind holds many branches and items of knowledge simultaneously, yet none of them merged into any other, each acting its part at call quite independently, every conception coming out from the inner total and working singly. It is after this way, though in a closer unity, that the Intellectual-Principle is all Being in one total- and yet not in one, since each of these beings is a distinct power which, however, the total Intellectual-Principle includes as the species in a genus, as the parts in a whole”. *Ibid.* 6.4.4.25; 6.9.5.16

³⁶ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Against Celsus*, 7.42.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 7.41.

³⁸ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Against Celsus*, 7.42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.44.



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knowledge of God through his Epiphanies, and the most important Epiphany of God is the Incarnation of Logos.

Only with his divine Economy, man can learn about the theology of God.⁴⁰ On this point, we should refer to the opinion of Mark Edwards who underlined that “Origen’s Son of God –created, palpable, unique– may have some epithets in common with the cosmos of the *Timaeus*, but he is not the god of any Platonist”.⁴¹ So that Edwards clarified that Origen’s theology for the Son of God did not have any relation with Platonism’s and Neoplatonism’s idea for Logos. According to our opinion, Edwards is right, and we can add to his arguments that Origen’s works were condemned almost three centuries after his death.

The triadological teaching of Origen included the Platonic terminology only. As far as its context, it was the clarification of Paul’s anthropology.⁴² Origen did not either use Philosophy as Christian Theology or created Christian theology as a part of Greek Philosophy. He only employed the terminology of secular philosophical teaching to express theological truths. He used only the words and changed their meaning.⁴³ Moreover, if Origen wanted to confute Plato’s ideas which many Christians tried to compromise with Christian theology, he had to carefully study Plato’s works, to create antibodies for the “virus” of Greek philosophy which was presented as theology.⁴⁴

From this point of view, we will disagree with the opinion of Eugene de Faye who presented Origen as not an important exegete and theologian of the Bible, who used

⁴⁰ “The Fathers of the Church distinguish between theology (theologia) and economy (oikonomia). “Theology” refers to the mystery of God’s inmost life within the Blessed Trinity and “economy” to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the oikonomia the theologia is revealed to us; but conversely, the theologia illuminates the whole oikonomia. God’s works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightened our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions”, “The Profession of the Christian Faith.” – [CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH](#).

⁴¹ EDWARDS Mark, *Origen against Plato* (n.3), p. 74.

⁴² ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *On First Principles*, I.3.8.

⁴³ EDWARDS Mark, *Origen against Plato* (n.3), p. 109.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 161.



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the Bible to make his theories. Especially, Eugene de Faye underlined that: “Origen discovers in the Holy Book his teaching on God and providence, his Christological doctrine, his doctrine on the origin and end of the Cosmos, on sin and redemption; in short, an entire system of "dogmas" of which the sacred author never dreamt”.⁴⁵ Eugène de Faye was entirely negatively biased against Origen, “for him, Origen's exegesis is self-serving and, thus, dangerously subjective because it distorts the text”.⁴⁶

An opposite opinion to the one of Eugène de Faye was expressed by Henri de Lubac. In his 1950 work *Histoire et Esprit*, he supported defends Origen's exegetical exercises as insightful, profound, and beneficial to the believer.⁴⁷ Moreover, nobody disagrees that Origen from the early period of his life until today was a powerful and important theologian who divided his scholars and became a controversial point like Christ whom he loved so much. For this reason, Origen did not have only scholar supporters of his works but “enemies” too.⁴⁸

To sum up, according to our research, Origen could not be thought of as a real Platonist. This is a characteristic which is based on superficial arguments about Origen and his connection to Platonism and Neoplatonism. For the Neo-Platonist philosophers, like Proclus, Origen was never an authentic Platonist, unlike Christian scholars and writers who consider Platonic Origen's philosophical basis. We can underline that he continued the work of Clement the Alexandria, and he was the one who established the correct Christian Philosophy. Father John McGuckin⁴⁹ characterizes Origen as a Christian Middle Platonist, who was influenced by Numenius, Plato and others.

⁴⁵EUGÈNE DE FAYE, *Origen and His work*, trans. ROTHWEL F., London, Allen & Unwin, 1926, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁶ LAURO, E.A.D., *The soul and spirit of Scripture within Origen's exegesis*, Boston, Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2005, p. 16

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 15-36.

⁴⁹ MCGUCKIN John Anthony, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, Louisville, Ky., Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 5



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This opinion could be accepted by many scholars and could be declined by many others. In his biblical exegesis, God of Origen is not impersonal, entrenched in him by extrapolation of the lower hypostases from his essence without will. He is personal and has a will. The God Logos in Origen's teaching had significant Christological and soteriological significance.⁵⁰

Conclusions

“Origen read his textual authority, Scripture, in light of Platonism, mirroring contemporary Platonists’ exegetical method”.⁵¹ Origen did not adopt Platonic ideas without criticism, but only when they were consistent with the church’s rule of faith.⁵² In his teaching, Greek philosophy served Christianity. For this reason, Origen explained in his *Letter to St. Gregory Thaumaturgus* that Christians should extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or preparation for Christianity. Origen spoke of despoiling the Egyptians, carefully extracting from Hellenistic philosophy, that which is true and helpful to the service of the Gospel.⁵³

Origen used only some methods of the interpretation of the Bible from Plato, Middle Platonism, and Neoplatonism but he never replaced Christian theology with these theories of ancient Greek Philosophy.

For us, Origen has been condemned as Platonic Philosopher but, in his teaching, he tried hard to present the correct Christian dogmatic theology, dealing with the theoretical truths of faith concerning God and God's works and at the same time interpreting Bible. His goal was for Christians to conceive the real meaning of the biblical texts.

⁵⁰ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, II.1-12.

⁵¹ RAMELLI Ilaria, “Origen and the Platonic Tradition”, (n.11), p. 11

⁵² CROUZEL Henry, *Origene et Plotin: Comparaisons doctrinales*, Paris, Pierre Tequi, 1991, pp. 15, 26-30.

⁵³ ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA, [Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus](#) 1-2, PG 11, 88A-D, transl. CROMBIE F., ANF, vol. 4.



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