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**Paradise Lost and Adam's Lament
in the writings of Origen and Sophrony**

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Theological Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

PARADISE LOST AND ADAM'S LAMENT IN THE WRITINGS OF ORIGEN AND SOPHRONY

TOKI VROLYK

Separated by seventeen centuries, we find that Origen, a third century father, and Sophrony, a twentieth century Athonite monk, share a certain interest in the narrative of the fall (Genesis 2-4). Both authors express a profound sense of sorrow over the reality of paradise lost and are quick to remind us that we all share in the fate of Adam. Hoping to instill within us an awareness of this 'fate of Adam', Origen and Sophrony teach us that there is much to learn from our earliest ancestor and the reality of his life before the fall. We learn, from both thinkers, that the Garden of Eden can, in some sense, be understood as a symbolic representation of the highest Christian calling: to live the reality of Eden is, in effect, to live a life focused on God.

It is of no surprise, given the dissimilarity of their lives and the span of time that separates their respective worlds, that Origen and Sophrony should have certain differences of opinion regarding the nature of Adam's life before the fall. What is remarkable, is the fact that, after having considered these differences, we come to learn that what unites their thought is greater than what separates it. Having both lived as men of the Church, these two fathers give us a greater appreciation for the living tradition of faith.

Comparing the thoughts of Origen and Sophrony on the subject of the Garden of Eden, I will present the reader with a picture of Adam's loss and, ultimately, the reasons for his lament as it is presented in the works of these two writers.

In the first chapter I will take a brief look at the senses of Scripture as they are presented in Origenian thought, as well as entering into a discussion of some of the problems that come with the study of the sources of both Origen and Sophrony. This will be followed, in the remainder of the chapters, with a comparative analysis of the readings of these two great thinkers on the subject of the Garden of Eden as it is presented in Genesis 2:6-20.

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Last, but certainly not least, to my family, my dad Andre Vrolyk and my two brothers John and Robert, for always being there, endless encouragement and selfless love. I will never find the words to express my gratitude.

DEDICATION

to

**the memory of my mother, Haruko Vrolyk,
an extraordinary woman who taught me
about the nobility of the human spirit
through the example of her life.**

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Guide of wisdom, giver of prudence,
teacher of the foolish and defender of the poor,
establish, give understanding to my heart, Master;
give me a word, Word of the Father;
for see, I shall not restrain from crying to you:
O Merciful, have mercy on the fallen.

Then Adam sat and wept opposite the delight of Paradise,
beating his eyes with his hands
and he said: O Merciful, have mercy on the one who has fallen.

As Adam saw the Angel pushing and shutting
the door of God's garden he groaned aloud
and said: O Merciful, have mercy on the one who has fallen.

Share in the pain, O Paradise, of your beggared master
and with the sound of your leaves implore the Creator
not to shut you: O Merciful, have mercy on the one who has fallen.

Bend down your trees like living beings and fall before
Him who holds the key, that thus you may remain open
for one who cries: O Merciful, have mercy on the one who has fallen.

I breathe the fragrance of your beauty and I melt as I recall
how I delighted there from the sweet scent of the flowers:
O Merciful, have mercy on the one who has fallen.

(Triodon of the Orthodox Church)

INTRODUCTION

PARADISE LOST AND ADAM'S LAMENT

We are told, in the Orthodox tradition, that, on his first day out of Eden, Adam wept bitterly. Placed just outside of the gates of Paradise, Adam's earliest days after the fall were filled with a longing for what had been lost. Still within sight, the Garden became, for him, a sad reminder of a reality that had fallen out of reach.

Both Origen (c.185-250) and Sophrony (1896-1993) speak of this longing for 'Paradise lost' in their writings. Finding a parallel between the fate of Adam, weeping outside the gates of Eden, and that of the individual who longs for closeness with God and the restoration of his/her being, both Origen and Sophrony propose a reading of the fall that emphasizes the inner life of the individual. In fact, these two authors shared the belief that one's reading of these earliest words of the Bible can have a profound influence on many of the choices one makes. Succinctly stated in modern terms by the twentieth century Orthodox theologian Seraphim Rose:

There is a direct relation between how you behave and how you believe about man's origin... When we talk about the beginning of things, or the end of things, we find out what our whole life is about.¹

Calling us to consider first things, Origen presents us, in the *Peri Archon*, with a reading of Genesis that stresses his desire for what he understands to be a return to 'lost unity'. Seeing within the narrative of creation and the fall certain clues to the nature of

¹ Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Vision* (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), pg.68.

our ultimate destiny, he points to the importance of entering into a spiritual reading of these earliest words of the Old Testament:

The end is always like the beginning; as therefore there is one end of all things, so we must understand that there is one beginning of all things, and as there is one end of many things, so from one beginning arises many differences and varieties, which in their turn are restored, through God's goodness, through their subjection to Christ and their unity with the Holy Spirit, to one end which is like the beginning.²

Considering this idea of a return to unity closely, Origen leaves us with some rather creative ideas concerning his understanding of the nature of the fall. Among these, we find the *apokatastasis*, the pre-existence of souls, the idea of humans as fallen angels, and the possibility of a succession of alternate realities, to name a few. Although these and many other speculative thoughts became the source of much controversy, later generations, including some who had rejected some of these more daring ideas concerning first things, realized that they could not completely turn away from Origenian thought on the subject.

Between all of the controversial statements, there were elements of a spirituality that would exert a profound influence on later generations. Within Palladius' *Lausiac History*, written not long after Origen's death, we learn of some of the many scholars and supporters of this great father's work. Among the amazing feats reported by Palladius in these chronicles of life in the desert, we are told of a number of monks who had committed large chunks of Origen's work to memory. Among them we find the account of Sylvania, illustrating Palladius' profound respect for Origenian thought:

She was most erudite and fond of literature, and she turned every night into day going through every writing of the ancient commentators – three

² Origen, *On First Principles* 1,6,2. ed. Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), pg.53.

million lines of Origen and two and a half million of Gregory, Stephen, Pierus, Basil and other worthy men. And she did not read them once only and in an offhand way, but she worked on them, dredging through each work seven or eight times. Thus it was possible for her to be liberated from knowledge falsely so called (cf. 1.Tim:20) and to mount on wings, thanks to those books.³

Even after the anathemas, said to have been pronounced against Origen by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553⁴, were published, subtle hints of his language could be found in the writings of those within the Church. Far from being lost, elements of Origen's thought would find their way into the works of later generations of Christian scholars.

Being a man of the Alexandrian Church, Origen transmitted, within his reading of the Adamic narrative, a sense of his understanding of the importance of the contemplation of God. Seeing this as being the highest goal of the intellect, he writes in a manner that foreshadows much later thought on the subject:

There are the souls of men, some of whom, in consequence of their progress, we see taken up into the order of angels, those, namely, who have been made 'sons of God' or 'sons of the resurrection' (Luke 20:36 and Rom.8:14); or those who forsaking the darkness have loved the light...those who, after winning every fight and being changed into men of peace, become 'sons of peace' (Matt.5:9)...or those who, by mortifying their members which are upon the earth and rising superior not only to their bodily nature but even to the wavering and fragile movements of the soul itself, have 'joined themselves to the Lord' (1.Cor.6:17), being made wholly spiritual, so as to be always 'one spirit', with him, until they reach the point when they become perfect spiritual men and judges of all things,

³ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History in Ancient Christian Writers*, no.34. ed. Meyer, Robert T. (New York: Newman Press, 1964), pg.137.

⁴ Origen, *On First Principles* c.f. footnote 7. pg.125. These are mentioned in Jerome's *Ep. Ad Mennam* and cited here by Butterworth. Whether or not these Anathemas were in fact pronounced at the council has been subject to some debate (cf. Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, pg.199).

because their mind is illuminated in all holiness through the word and wisdom of God...⁵

This interest in the contemplative life as a return to the unity that was lost with the fall is shared by Sophrony. Although his understanding of the nature of this return, as it related to his eschatological vision, is quite different from that of Origen, being separated by seventeen centuries of history and Church tradition, there are some similarities between these two thinkers that are worth noting, particularly in their thoughts on contemplation and the life of prayer as it relates to this longing for Paradise lost. Far from being a dead topic in contemporary Orthodox thought, the study of the Adamic narrative and the spiritual significance of the Garden of Eden have continued to capture the interest of modern scholars. Sophrony, only recently deceased, was no exception to this rule. His writing echoes the sentiment of Heirotheos, a twentieth century commentator, who states:

If one wishes to be an Orthodox theologian one must begin from the state of Adam as it was before the fall, what happened with the fall and how we can be restored to our former state, even reach there where Adam did not. If a theology does not speak of man's fall, if it does not designate precisely what it is, and it does not speak of man's resurrection, then what kind of theology is it? Surely, it is not Orthodox.⁶

Particularly well known for his account of the life and writing of his spiritual father Silouan, Sophrony managed, within his works, to capture the tension that comes with living the reality of Adam's lament. The biography of Silouan (1866-1938), declared a saint by the Orthodox Church in 1987, reflects the desire, of both the author and the subject, for a return to Paradise lost. Using Clean Monday, the first day of Lent in the

⁵ Origen, *On First Principles* 2,8,4. ed. Butterworth. pg.72.

⁶ Hierotheos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, *The Illness and the Cure of the Soul in the Orthodox Tradition* trans. Mavromichali, Effie (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1993) pg.68-69.

Orthodox Church, as an opportunity to discuss the nature of this longing in Sophrony's work, Heirotheos, a personal acquaintance of Sophrony, made the following remark:

Yesterday we remembered man's exile from Paradise, through Adam, and then today, Clean Monday, the first day of Holy and Great Lent, is Adam's first day after leaving Paradise. It is precisely this Adamic dirge that Father Sophrony described so well in his books when he wrote about Saint Silouan the Athonite. St. Silouan, as well as Father Sophrony, lived this Adam dirge, which is nothing other than for man to feel that he has lost the Grace of God. When man loses God's Grace, he feels that all of creation is dead, because he is a microcosm of the great cosmos and the connecting link of all creation. Thus, he hurts, grieves, suffers, and lives in repentance until he again obtains the Grace of God. For this reason, this stage of repentance is very closely linked with Archimandrite Sophrony and Saint Silouan, who showed and lived repentance their entire lives.⁷

Understanding Adam's lament to be an underlying current in the works of both Origen and Sophrony, the desire for a comparison arises and, with it, there are many questions: how does each author understand Adam's lament? What significance does the Garden of Eden, as presented in Genesis 2:7-20, have for each author? What effect does their allegorical/spiritual reading of the lost Garden have on their understanding of, and practical counsels for, the spiritual life? In light of these readings, how do Origen and Sophrony conceive of the ultimate destiny of the individual and of humanity in general?

Seeking a clearer understanding of both the common thread and the many divergences that occur between the writings of Origen and Sophrony, I hope to present the reader with some of the highlights of paradise lost and the problem of Adam's lament as it occurs within the works of these two great thinkers.

⁷ *Divine Ascent: A Journal of Orthodox Faith (fifth issue)* (California: Holy Monastery of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco, 1999), pg.32.

Admitting that it would be impossible to provide the reader with a detailed and thorough discussion of first things within the confines of a brief study, particularly in regards to the Origenian vision which, alone, could occupy the scholar for many years of concentrated study, I have chosen to leave certain areas of the Adamic narrative untouched. In particular, Eve receives little mention. Relegating her role in the narrative of the fall to a passing comment, one that becomes secondary to the overriding concern of a paper focused on Adam would be unfair. Indeed, there is much to say about Eve. The study of this earliest lady, particularly as she appears in Origenian thought, could easily form the subject of a second paper of equal length. For now, instead of doing the question of Eve's role in Genesis a grave injustice by providing readers with a less than satisfying mention of her, I have chosen to remain silent on the topic.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the first chapter of this thesis, the reader will be given a brief survey of the various senses of Scripture as they have been understood by Origen and Sophrony. Part of this discussion will involve a look at the controversy that has arisen over the question of allegorical versus literal readings of the garden. As well, some of the other challenges greeting those who choose to embark upon a study of these two fathers will be brought to light: among these, the question of missing texts and inconsistent thought (particularly in the case of Origen). By presenting the reader with a discussion of both the many senses of Scripture, as well as the challenges that face those who would embark upon study of these two thinkers, I hope to provide a foreground for the interpretive work that will form the body of the following chapters.

Beginning in chapter two, the reader is presented with a ‘tour’ of the Garden of Eden and the life of our earliest ancestor Adam before the fall. This begins with a look at the account of the creation of man presented in Genesis 1:26-27. Looking at the question of self-knowledge, as it is understood by both authors, we come to learn that the first clues to our identity and the nature of our fulfillment and highest calling may be found in the study of what it means to have been made in the ‘image and likeness of God’.

Next, in chapter three, we move to the center of the garden. Looking at the two trees, we come face to face with some of the consequences of the fall on the inner life of the soul. Introducing the reader to the theme of ‘unity versus diversity’ which, in different forms, comes to color the words of both Origen and Sophrony, I will speak of the soul’s descent away from the single-hearted focus on the contemplation of God, to the multiplicity of thought, and resultant confusion, that has reigned since Adam’s fall.

The problem of division is further developed as we move on to consider Origen and Sophrony’s conception of the land and the body in chapter four. Moving away from the two trees at the center of the garden, we learn of Adam’s relationship with material creation (or lack thereof, in the case of Origen) before the fall, as well as entering into the question of the nature and significance of the pre-fall garden. Comparing and contrasting this to the reality of the post-fall world, transformed on account of Adam’s transgression, we are given a glimpse of the magnitude of Adam’s loss and the reason for his lament as it has been understood by these two thinkers.

Having spoken of the land, we move on to look at the animal world in chapter five. The nature of Adam’s relationship with the ‘beasts’ is explored here on both the

literal level and the allegorical level, where the creatures of the earth come to represent the nature of one's thoughts. We find that, in both authors, Adam's dominion over the 'inner beasts' is understood as being directly related to the nature of his relationship with the animals of the garden.

Our vision of the garden ends with a discussion of unity among souls in chapter six. Having earlier stressed the contemplative nature of the garden, the focus now shifts to the social dimension of the Christian call. Understanding all of humanity as united through our earliest descendant Adam and the reality of his fall, both Origen and Sophrony explore the idea of universal salvation. The arguments, presented by each writer, both for and against the idea of the "restoration of all things" will be explored.

CHAPTER 1

SENSES OF SCRIPTURE IN ORIGEN AND SOPHRONY

Before considering the question of Adam's lament and the reality of paradise lost, as it has been understood by Origen and Sophrony, the reader must come to terms with the many challenges that arise as one confronts the writings of these two thinkers. Firstly, we face the problem of Biblical interpretation and the 'senses of Scripture' in each writer's works. Secondly, we must consider their intentions and the ways in which these intentions come to color their words. Thirdly, there is the question of historical context. These will be briefly considered, setting the stage for our study of life before the fall.

ORIGEN AND THE MANY SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

From the very first chapter of the *Peri Archon*, Origen speaks of the many levels of Scripture. Shying away from a purely literalistic interpretation of the Bible, Origen states that such an approach is detrimental in that it limits one's understanding of faith. He calls us to move beyond such a narrow conception of the Word. Instead, we are to strive to attain a richer understanding of Scripture, one guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Origen:

The contents of Scripture are the outward forms of certain mysteries and the images of divine things... While the whole law is spiritual, the meaning is not recognized by all, but only by those who are gifted with the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Word of wisdom and knowledge.⁸

⁸ Origen, *On First Principles* 1,0,8. ed. Butterworth. pg.5.

Origen goes as far as telling us that God has intentionally ‘planned’ to include, within the Scripture, certain ‘snares and obstacles’ that would impede a purely literal reading of the text, in this way, making the task ‘impossible.’⁹ In Origen’s understanding, the Lord obliges us, by these means, to move beyond the obvious sense of the Word.

Origen asserts that there is no language that could possibly express the fullness of divinity. In engaging in literalism, the reader limits God to a mere material reality and demonstrates a narrow conception of faith. To quote:

God is incomprehensible... Whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God whether by perception or by reflection, we must of necessity believe that He is far and away better than our thoughts (and consequently our words) about Him...¹⁰

In effect, the individual who has, in their reading of the Word, kept to an exclusively literal interpretation cannot help but fall into gravely mistaken notions about God. This error, one that Origen asserts was common in his day, could only be understood as symptomatic of a certain blindness on the part of the reader. In this way, “...the simpler of those who boast of belonging to the Church, even as they take for granted that there is no god greater than the Creator, which is sound on their part, nonetheless take for granted things about God that they would not believe about the most savage and the most unjust of men.”¹¹

Origen provides his solution to this problem of interpretation. Stating that matters of faith are often veiled, Origen tells his readers to seek the ‘spiritual’ meaning, which is often disguised in simple language. The result was that, “Whenever the text of Scripture

⁹ cf. Ibid.4,2,9. pg.287 and Ware pg.194.

¹⁰ Ibid. 1,1,5. pg.9.

¹¹ Ibid. 4,2,1. pg.271.

seemed to be ‘concealed under a humble style’ or to declare something that (he felt) was not in accordance with Christian theology”, Origen would end up applying the allegorical method, and the text would be “completely transformed into what truly represented the splendor of its teachings.”¹²

This led him to develop a system of exegesis that acknowledged the three senses of Scripture, which he understood as corresponding to the trichotomy of body, soul and spirit: The body of Scripture being its literal sense; the soul, its moral sense; the spirit its spiritual and mystical sense. In this system, Greer points out, “not every passage has a bodily sense; and in point of fact, it is difficult to find Origen making any real distinction between the soul and the spirit of Scripture. Even though he claims that ‘the passages (in Scripture) which are historically true are far more numerous than those which are composed with purely spiritual meanings’, one can hardly help feeling that in almost every instance the literal meaning evaporates into the spiritual...”¹³

Part of the problem with such an exegetical method lies in determining which passages do not ‘lend’ themselves to a literal reading. There were those who claimed that Origen took too many liberties in this regard. Not everyone was happy with his strictly allegorical readings of certain passages. It has been said, time and again, that Origen falls into certain subjectivism in his desire for what he considered to be an ‘effective’ allegorical reading. The fear was that if this method were carried to an extreme (as many believed was the case in Origenian thought), it could only lead to the imposition of

¹² Greer, Rowan A. *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*. (Westminster: The Faith Press, 1961) pg.91.

¹³ Greer, Rowan A. *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*. (Westminster: The Faith Press, 1961) pg.92.

biases. All things, allegorically transformed, would be deprived of their original significance.

This problem is particularly evident as one comes to consider Origen's interpretation of the fall and the significance of the garden in the second chapter of Genesis. Theodore, the bishop of Mopsuestia (392-428), complained that Origen's reading of the first four chapters of Genesis, with its seeming disregard for a literalistic interpretation,¹⁴ weakened the Gospel message by calling into question the whole idea of salvation history:

...The Alexandrines...deprive the whole Biblical history of its reality. Adam was not really Adam, paradise was not really paradise, the serpent was not a real serpent. In that case, Theodore asks, since there are no real events, since Adam was not really disobedient, how did death enter the world, and what meaning does our salvation have?¹⁵

Theodore was not alone. Factions arose between those who held to Origenian thinking, and those who agreed with Theodore in saying that the use of allegory had been carried too far. The extent of this debate was such that we even hear about it in the tradition of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Benedicta Ward's translation includes a short narrative that illustrates some of the strong negative sentiment that had developed

¹⁴ Although, historically, many scholars have understood Origen as rejecting a literal reading of the fall, it must be noted at this point, that there are others who contend that Origen had, in fact, maintained a 'bodily' as well as a 'spiritual' sense in his readings. "Many people make the mistake of assuming that because Origen taught the pre-existent fall of rational beings that he also denied the historicity of Adam as an individual. It is equally inaccurate to argue that he viewed Adam's fall as being merely symbolic of the fall of every man's soul. The story of Adam and Eve in Origen's thought represented a second fall. Eve was deceived (because of her inherent weakness resulting from her fall in pre-existence) by the serpent who envied Adam and deceived him by means of food. Although some scholars have argued strongly that Origen did not believe in the historicity of Adam it appears to me that as we do not have Origen's complete works it is better for us not to be too dogmatic; for in his surviving works Origen himself does not appear to have had just one view on the subject." Cf. Bradshaw, Robert I. *Origen's interpretation of Creation in Creationism and the Early Church* (Accessed January 8, 2002); available from <http://www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/Appendix1.htm#Appendix1.html>; internet.

¹⁵ Grant, Robert M., and David Tracy. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984) pg.64.

towards Origenian thought. In recounting the tale of a sick old man who, in his stay with a certain Abba Lot, started to quote the words of Origen to anyone who would listen, the author leaves us with some indication of popular opinion concerning the great Alexandrian's works not long after his death:

When anyone came to see Abba Lot, he made them visit the sick old man also. But the sick man began to quote the words of Origen to the visitors. This made Abba Lot anxious and he said to himself, 'the fathers must not think that we are like that too,' however, he was afraid to drive him away because of the commandment. So Abba Lot got up and went to Abba Arsenius and told him about the old man. Abba Arsenius said to him, 'do not drive him away, but say to him: look, eat that which comes from God and drink as much as you like, only do not make such remarks anymore. If he wants to, he will correct himself of his own accord. Thus his departure will not come from you.' Abba Lot went away and did this. When the old man heard these words he did not want to change, but he began to ask him, 'for the Lord's sake, send me away from here, for I can no longer bear the desert.' So he got up and left, accompanied to the door by charity.¹⁶

Objections against Origen's methods would be raised time and again through the centuries. There has been no shortage of hostile critics to Origenian allegorical readings of Scripture. We later find the complaints of Theodore of Mopsuestia echoed in Isho'dad's *Introduction to the Psalms*, written in the twelfth century:

People ask what the difference is between allegorical exegesis and historical exegesis. We reply that it is great and not small; just as the first leads to impiety, blasphemy and falsehood, so the other is conformed to truth and faith. It was the impious Origen...who invented this art of allegory... (Those who follow in Origen's example)...do not interpret paradise as it is, or Adam or Eve, or any existing thing.¹⁷

Stinging invectives voiced against Origen, for his liberal use of allegory and what is understood as the resultant loss, in many passages, of a literal reading, continues to be

¹⁶ Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. (Oxford: Mowbray, 1975) pg.121-122.

¹⁷ Grant, Robert M., and David Tracy. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. pg.64-65.

pronounced into the present day. A particularly forceful example of this can be found in a rather controversial comment made by Greer, the twentieth century patristic scholar, in his book, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*. To Quote:

The literal meaning of the text is, for Origen, really beside the point. It is helpful for the *sarkikoi*, but hardly worth considering beyond that. Further, Origen seems to have no idea of time at all. That is, the text of Scripture points to eternal truth; it has nothing to do with the history of wars, etc. Thus, the history of the descent into Egypt and the Exodus becomes, for Origen, the description of the fall and the salvation of the pre-existent souls... Origen was certainly a brilliant theologian and exegete. But, because he was unable to understand inspiration in any way but that which involved direct revelation in the Bible itself, and because he was unable to take seriously narrative, historical character of scripture, his method fails to interpret the Bible.¹⁸

...Fails to interpret the Bible? ... That seems somewhat harsh and, being as harsh as it is, it forces us to ask the following: While it is true that Origen places great importance on the allegorical sense, can we really believe that the father had a complete disregard for the literal and historical sense of God's Word? Perhaps Greer's evaluation is unfair. After all, it has been noted by Hanson, among others, that Origen's last major work, his *Commentary on Matthew*, "shows an unusual respect for the literal sense" and, as Hanson continues, "where allegory is introduced in this *Commentary*, we find it used with great caution."¹⁹

As well, there is another point that can be voiced in defense of Origen's respect of the 'letter' of Scripture: a number of examples of a purely literal reading do exist in this father's other works, pointing to his acknowledgement of the importance of this 'sense'. This is illustrated by Hanson, who cites a few examples of the practice:

¹⁸ Greer, Rowan A. *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*. (Westminster: The Faith Press, 1961) pg.92.

¹⁹ Hanson, R.P.C. *Allegory and Event*. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959) pg.283.

...Occasionally Origen will even refuse to desert the literal sense and allegorize. Discussing the command of our Lord given to the rich young man to sell all and follow Him (Matt.19:21), Origen refuses to be convinced by the argument that this should be allegorized because it is an impossible command. There are instances of it being fulfilled in the Greek history and in the Book of Acts. And similarly in handling the text, 'and every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold' etc. (Matt. 19:29) he is not prepared to allegorize 'houses' or 'lands', though he is willing to do this in the case of 'father' and 'mother'.²⁰

The great twentieth century Origenian scholar, De Lubac, rejects Greer's negative sentiments concerning Origen's use (or lack thereof, as Greer would assert) of the literal sense. He disagrees with an appraisal of the early father that sees him as ignoring the 'bodily' reading of the text. Instead, he tells us that Origen had great respect for the 'letter' of God's Word. In his estimation, any spiritual reading in Origenian thought can be understood as serving to enhance the literal text. Put in other words:

Where the mysterious character (i.e. spiritual sense) of the Scripture is not affirmed, it is to the detriment of its historical character. The 'spirit' of the word does not eliminate the importance of the letter of the word which remains essential to this early father... If the reality of the visible world is used by God to point to the invisible world, it is also true that the historical reality of the Bible that comes to figure in the question of salvation. Thus the flesh of the Word becomes the foundation for our understanding of the spiritual life.²¹

To De Lubac's positive understanding of Origen's use of the 'bodily' sense, we can add the views of Bigg and Cadiou:

Bigg...claimed that Origen saw that 'the real and natural sense of the Bible...is the foundation of everything.' Cadiou makes the same claim; 'the allegory is never without some relation to the literal sense; the allegorical was always based on the literal.'²²

²⁰ Ibid. pg.238.

²¹ De Lubac, Henri. *Histoire et Esprit: L'Intelligence de L'Ecriture D'après Origène*. (Paris: Editions Montagne, 1950) pg.93 (translation mine).

²² Hanson, *Allegory and Event*. pg.241.

In his use of the literal sense, Origen, as we have seen, managed to arouse a variety of sentiments in his readers. Perhaps the most interesting discussion on this subject, though, is one presented by Hanson in his book, *Allegory and Event*. While he does not go as far as Origen's detractors, in stating that Origen has completely disregarded the literal sense, neither does he endorse the attitude reflected by such scholars as De Lubac and Cadiou, who try to maintain the conviction that Origen never drops the literal:

De Lubac's contentions are clearly wrong; Origen could not have made it plainer that, in the passages which he mentions as examples of places where the literal meaning is not intended, the literal sense cannot have any force at all, with or without the allegorical sense. As for the suggestion that in Origen's exposition the allegorical sense was based or built on the literal sense, this argument seems to me either untrue or meaningless...In fact I cannot see that any defense of Origen's treatment of the literal sense can be based on the connection which he establishes between the original text and the spiritual interpretation of it, because it is obvious that in the vast majority of cases such a connection exists only in Origen's imagination..."²³

As Hanson points out, Origen is explicit about his use of a purely spiritual reading in certain carefully selected passages of Scripture. Hanson, referring us back to the *Peri Archon*, leaves us with a list which includes mention of several passages that come to form part of the subject of this study. Having considered the literal or bodily sense of Scripture, Hanson is careful to remind us that it is the allegorical sense that becomes of primary concern in Origen's reading of the narrative of the fall:

"In the *Peri Archon* Origen has a long passage giving...a list of texts which in his view cannot be taken literally. He begins with some incidents recorded in the Bible which he is confident nobody but a fool could ever imagine to have taken place literally: (these include, among others)... the

²³ Ibid, pg.241-242.

planting of the Garden of Eden; God 'walking in the garden at the cool of the day'; Adam and Eve eating the apple..."²⁴

JEWISH AND HELLENISTIC INFLUENCES ON ORIGENIAN THOUGHT

The complaints that arose against Origen did not stop with the question of the senses. They also included the objections of those who felt that Origen had fallen prey to the danger of compromising the Christian faith through his use of popular philosophical terms. Lossky, for example, tells us that "With Origen Hellenism attempts to creep into the Church...For this reason the Church has had to fight against 'Origenism' as she has always fought against doctrines which, in striking at divine incomprehensibility, replaced the unfathomable depths of God by philosophical concepts".²⁵

This concern over Origen's integration of Hellenistic thought into his theological vision has been voiced for as long as the great thinker's works have been read. To quote Lyman, "Origen's use of Platonic wineskins for Christian theology has troubled both admirers and critics since his first works in Alexandria."²⁶

Indeed, having received training within a Hellenistic milieu, Origen did not escape the influence of the popular philosophical schools of his day. Following in the footsteps of his mentor Clement (? – ca.215), Origen found himself borrowing elements of secular thought in his teachings. While he did not share Clement's "serene confidence

²⁴ Ibid, pg.239.

²⁵ Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (New York: Crestwood, 1976) pg.32-33.

²⁶ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius: Oxford Theological Monographs*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) pg.42.

in the compatibility of Christianity and Greco-Roman culture,”²⁷ as Joseph Trigg puts it in his study of Origen, we do find Origen employing some of the technical terms used by the Hellenistic writers in many of his own works.

Campenhausen states that this integration of current philosophical terms into Origen’s writings may have stemmed in part from his attendance at the lectures of Ammonius Saccas, the famed teacher of Plotinus. These classes, we are told, were to have a profound effect on his understanding of, and ability to share with a pagan audience, the Gospel message. Campenhausen points out that:

...the importance of (these)... years of philosophical study (under Ammonius Saccas)...can hardly be overestimated. Origen was the first Christian to join the intellectual elite of his age, drawing attention to the teachings of Christianity in a way that forced even his enemies to take notice. No less a man than Porphyry, the biographer of Plotinus, testified to this fact with mingled admiration and exasperation...²⁸

Even the question of the senses of scripture in Origen does not escape the influence of Hellenistic thought. It has been noted that the allegorical method, which had been at the root of so many of the complaints voiced against Origen, finds roots in pagan philosophy. According to the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, “Allegory originated in attempts by Greek thinkers to assimilate Homer and Hesiod to later scientific or religious outlooks. Thus Theagenes of Rhegium (ca. 525 B.C.) defended Homer by interpreting the battle of the Gods as a conflict between natural elements”²⁹

²⁷ Trigg, Joseph W. *Origen: Bible and Philosophy in the 3rd Century*. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983) pg.10.

²⁸ Von Campenhausen, Hans. *The Fathers of the Church*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998. Malherbe) pg.40.

²⁹ Ferguson, Everett; McHugh, Michael P. and Norris, Frederick W. ed. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990) pg.23.

Indeed, Origen was not alone in adopting an allegorical method made popular by Hellenistic philosophers. We also learn that Christian contemporaries of Origen, particularly those in Gnostic circles, found that they could present a reading of the Bible that would “justify aspects of scripture that seemed barbarous in an alien cultural context...”³⁰

Predating Origen’s use of allegory, the method had been adopted by the prominent Alexandrian Jewish scholar, Philo (ca. 20 B.C. – 42 A.D.), who felt the need to interpret Jewish Scriptures allegorically, “so as to find in them doctrines anticipating Greek philosophy.”

Philo, as well as sharing in the use of allegory that later came to mark Origen’s work, was said, through his writings, to have exerted great influence on the later thinker. Herman J Vogt tells us that Origen had close contact with the Jewish community of his day³¹. Entering into open discourse with certain rabbis, he came to a greater appreciation of the Jewish heritage and its contribution to the development of Biblical exegesis. Philo’s works, being relatively well-read in this community, found their way into Origen’s hands. Thus, as we study Origen’s vision of the Garden of Eden, we come to learn that elements of this father’s thought bear a striking similarity to those presented by Philo in such works as the *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, his *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* and his comments *On the Account of Creation Given by Moses*.

³⁰ *ibid.* pg.23.

³¹ Vogt, Hermann J. *Origen of Alexandria* in Kannengiesser, Charles. *The Bible and Ancient Christianity: A Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*. (Brill, forthcoming)

METHOD AND INTENT IN ORIGENIAN THOUGHT

One troubling fact that arises as we consider existing Origenian scholarship is the fact that no two readers seem to be able to agree as to what this father really said. We learn that this is, in part, due to the fact that Origen's works tend to be polemical in nature. Steenberg, in a lecture given at Oxford in 1999, was quick to point out that this stress in much of Origen's writing "tends to fill each work with its own particular point of emphasis - a point which is often tempered or downplayed in another of his writings. (Therefore)...no single work contains the whole of Origen's thought." This, he continues, has led H. Crouzel to remark that 'One of the main difficulties in studying Origen [is] the necessity of examining all the works that we possess before asserting anything at all about him'.³² In the end, the interpretation of Origenian thought that we choose to embrace depends, in great part, on which of the great father's works we stress in our study.

Another part of our problem in coming to Origenian texts may be linked with the method in which his books were written. Having at his disposal seven stenographers and a number of scribes who had been hired by a wealthy patron to take turns at the task of recording his words, Origen developed a knack for quick thinking, dictating thoughts as they came and, in this way, the father managed to produce a staggering number of works: according to Rufinus, more than two thousand books, most of which have been lost.³³ While there is no denying the fact that Origen was a very careful and thorough student of Scripture, having sat down to create the monumental *Hexapla*, a work in which he lined

³² Steenberg, Matthew W. *Origen and the Final Restoration: A Question of Heresy*. Oxford Lecture, November, 1999.

³³ Altaner, Berthold. *Patrology*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961) pg.225.

up four versions of the Word for the purpose of later scholarly work, there is a sense that we get of Origen as uncertainly treading through a forest of speculative thought. This is nowhere truer than in cases where he speaks of first and last things. To quote Steenberg:

It is often argued that Origen himself was not entirely sure of his own theological system, as many are the instances in which he presents multiple, contradictory views towards an issue, then leaves the discussion without choosing from among them. Needless to say, this makes an analysis of his theology rather difficult, for it becomes quite challenging, in places, to distinguish between his 'scholarly speculation' and the presentation of his actual beliefs.³⁴

If we add to all of this the sad fact that Origen's most comprehensive work on Genesis (the *Commentary on Genesis*) no longer exists, we are left with not a few problems in the task of coming to terms with his protology. While we do have access to Origen's *Homilies on Genesis*, we find that, in these, he has chosen to skip over the question of the fall, instead moving directly from an account of the first six days of creation to the story of Noah and the ark.

Thankfully, not all is lost. Despite the loss of the *monumental Commentary on Genesis*, Origen does not run short of words when discussing first things in his other works. In particular, we find some of his thoughts on the subject of the fall and his vision of the garden filling the pages of the *Peri Archon*, and, outside of this, hints of his reading of the Adamic narrative can be found in a variety of works ranging from the commentaries and homilies to his defense of the faith in such works as the *Contra Celsus* and his *Dialogue with Heraclides*.

³⁴ Steenberg, Matthew W. *Origen and the Final Restoration: A Question of Heresy*. Oxford Lecture, November, 1999.(???web site)

CHALLENGES IN READING SOPHRONY

Turning from the words of Origen to those of Sophrony, we come to face a whole new set of challenges. The first of these lies in the question of volume of written work. Earlier having learned that Origen was responsible for the production of an estimated two thousand works (and possibly more), we come to Sophrony only to find a handful of texts: several volumes, three³⁵ to be exact, devoted to his spiritual father Silouan (one of which, in fact, consists completely of a transcription of the Abba's words), a book on prayer, a semi-autobiographical account of the spiritual life (*We Shall See Him as He Is – Voir Dieu tel Qu'il Est*)³⁶ and several other shorter works. Add to this, the few brief accounts given by others on Sophrony's life and work, and we are left with what is, in fact, a rather small amount of writing to work from.

While Sophrony does present us with a discussion of Adam's lament, it must be stated from the outset that he is not a Biblical scholar. If we look to him for the kind of analysis that fills the pages of Origenian thought, we will be sorely disappointed. Unlike Origen, who makes a serious attempt at the task of Biblical hermeneutics, Sophrony falls short of providing his readers with a systematic treatment of the Word. Where he does comment on the fall, it is out of a lived spirituality, one that came to mark his life on the holy mountain Athos during his stay at the Monastery of St. Panteleimon.

³⁵ These three books: *The Undistorted Image, The Monk of Mount Athos and Wisdom of Mount Athos*, have recently been republished in a single volume which is cited here – see Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991.

³⁶ Quotes taken from this volume have been loosely translated from French since finding the English version of the original Russian text has proved impossible.

Sophrony and his spiritual father Saint Silouan speak with a very different sense of purpose from that of Origen. Where Origen finds himself engaged in polemics, intent on defending the faith in a climate of persecution and entering into a careful study of God's word, Sophrony is content to leave his readers with what amounts to little more than a collection of pithy insights on the life of holiness. In effect, Sophrony aims at presenting us with a picture of the interior world of the saint, discussing the joys, sorrows and difficulties of the contemplative life. It is within this context that we find Sophrony's words on Adam's lament, words that stem from an active desire to communicate to his readers some of the challenges that come to form part of the spirituality of the holy mountain.

Where Origen enters into a highly controversial reading of the fall, these two contemporary Athonite thinkers fall into a stream of thought that comes closer to that of modern Orthodoxy. Drawing, in their interpretation of the fall, upon the wisdom of a highly developed theology, Sophrony and Silouan do not involve themselves in the practice of daring speculations concerning first things. Unlike Origen, who leaves us with a detailed, albeit, in places, inconsistent protology, Sophrony's picture of first things can be described as less than complete – this later thinker's works are filled with open-ended questions and, where bold assertions are made, these often relate more closely to the question of the present state of humanity than with any desire, on Sophrony's part, for a careful discussion of first things.

While it may be admitted that Sophrony fails to enter into an academic study of Scripture, he nonetheless has much to say on the subject of Adam's lament and the reality

of the garden. The gaps that do occur in Sophrony's presentation of first things do not overshadow the importance of his reading of Genesis, a reading that reflects the ongoing influence of patristic thought on the holy mountain.

The value of his words lies in this appropriation of early Christian thought. Demonstrating a profound respect for the fathers of the faith, Sophrony teaches us that their words continue to have relevance into the present day. Referring constantly to the works of the earliest thinkers of the faith, Sophrony's texts manage to convey a sense of the lively tradition of spirituality that has marked the Orthodox faith.

While, as we will learn, he openly rejects certain Origenian ideas concerning the pre-existence of souls and the restoration of all things (*apokatastasis*), Sophrony does maintain elements of this early father's spirituality in his own thought. There is, in places, a remarkable affinity between these two thinkers, an affinity that, despite Sophrony's lack of a detailed examination of Scripture, comes through in his counsels on the spiritual life.

Though the challenges greeting those who would embark on the task of comparing Origen's thoughts on the subject of 'paradise lost' and Adam's lament to those of Sophrony may seem endless, we learn also that the task is not without reward.

On the one hand, we have before us the words of one of the early Church's greatest thinkers, a master of Biblical exegesis, who presents us with one of the first instances of a developed theological system. To quote Campenhausen:

Compared with the achievements of Origen, the work of the earlier fathers of the Church seems a mere prelude... Nowhere (do these earlier fathers) establish a systematic body of theological thought (comparable with that of Origen), and with the exception of Clement, their use of philosophy and

learning is somewhat amateurish and determined by their own particular apologetic and polemical interests.³⁷

On the other hand, we have the words of Sophrony and, relatedly, those of his spiritual father Silouan. Representing the Athonite tradition, these two twentieth century monks leave us with a contemporary appropriation of an ancient spirituality. The words of the earliest fathers live on through these two 'simple' men living on the Holy Mountain. We learn, as well, that Sophrony's works have been well read in the short time that they have been in print. His influence has reached far beyond the confines of the Orthodox monastic community. Admired by Christians, east and west, Sophrony's works have been translated into numerous languages.³⁸

³⁷ Von Campenhausen, Hans. *The Fathers of the Church*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998. Malherbe) pg.37.

³⁸ These include French, Spanish, Italian, Korean, Japanese, German, Russian, Greek, Norwegian, Romanian, Serbian, and, of course, English, to name a few. For a complete bibliography see *Buisson Ardent*, volume one and four.

CHAPTER 2

IMAGE AND LIKENESS

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them... (Gen.1:26-27)

Our tour of the garden begins with the question of human identity and the subject of humanity made “in the image and likeness of God”. After considering the importance of self-knowledge, we will take a look at Adam’s earliest state, as it is described in Genesis 1:26-27 and understood by Origen and Sophrony. Taking into account the practical relevance of such an understanding of the pre-fall man, the universality of the Christian call as well as the issues of freedom, grace, human nature and the passions will be discussed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen stresses the importance of self-knowledge. Being an essential element in the Christian walk, the believer who fails to grow in it can quickly become a victim of deception. The great father tells us that, “Unless (the soul)...comes to know itself...and becomes proficient in the Word of God and the divine law, it will suffer the fate of taking in various of these opinions and of

following men who have said nothing of note, nothing from the Holy Spirit... It is a terribly great danger for the soul to neglect the study of itself and its self-knowledge.”³⁹

Not being alone in this opinion, Origen’s desire for self-knowledge echoes a sentiment voiced over and over again in the letters of the great hermit and founder of monasticism, St. Anthony⁴⁰:

Truly, my beloved, I write to you as reasonable men, who have been able to know yourselves. For he who knows himself, knows God: and he who knows God, is worthy to worship Him as is right. My beloved in the Lord, Know yourselves. For they who know themselves, know their time: and they who know their time, are able to stand firm, and not be moved about by diverse tongues.⁴¹

Part of this task of growing in self-knowledge, Origen tells us, involves coming to a greater understanding of first things and the true significance of the fall. Having spent much time in the study of the first three chapters of Genesis, Origen had some interesting ideas to forward concerning the true nature of humanity. Most importantly, is the idea that a greater understanding of our end, our final destiny, our highest calling, can be gained from a careful study of our beginnings in Adam: “Look for the fall of the world, so that in finding its fall you might come to see its setting aright... In Adam all die. Thus the whole world has fallen and needs setting aright, so that in Christ all might be made alive (1 Cor.11:22)...”⁴²

³⁹ Origen *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (2) in Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Origen: Spirit and Fire*. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pg.39.

⁴⁰ The similarities do not stop with the question of self-knowledge. Some have questioned whether Anthony might, in fact, have been familiar with Origen’s works. Derwas Chitty, in his preface to the letters of Anthony, points to elements of Origenian language in this great hermits words, c.f. Chitty, Derwas J. *The Letters of St. Anthony the Great*. Oxford: SLG Press, 1995.

⁴¹ Chitty, Derwas J. *The Letters of St. Anthony the Great*. (Oxford: SLG Press, 1995) pg.12.

⁴² Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8,1. in Von Balthasar. *Origen: Spirit and Fire - A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pg.64.

In *Contra Celsus*, Origen shares his opinion that the story of the fall is one that speaks of the human condition. In keeping with his penchant for allegorical reading, Origen's Adam becomes a symbolic figure representing both humanity, in general, and the individual struggling towards holiness:

In the Hebrew language 'Adam' signifies man; and...in those parts of the narrative which appear to refer to Adam as an individual, Moses is discoursing upon the nature of man in general. For 'in Adam' (as the Scripture says) 'all die' and were condemned in the likeness of Adam's transgression, the words of God asserting this not so much of one particular individual as of the whole human race. For in the connected series of statements which appear to apply as to one particular individual, the curse pronounced upon Adam is regarded as common to all...⁴³

In telling us that we are all Adam, Origen is far from alone. Robin Amis, a twentieth century scholar of patristic thought, points to this as a common theme in the writings of the early fathers. In looking at Adam's choice, we are taught a lesson about the nature of our own choices. Amis points to what he refers to as the 'psychological' significance of these first three chapters of Genesis as it has been understood in the early church. To quote:

How did the early Fathers of the church interpret this story of the Fall of man told in Genesis? Normally they write of it not as a historical event but as a 'psychological event,' and then, generally, as an event applying to each individual. In this drama, each one of us is Adam, and each one of us possesses the possibility of ceasing to make the mistake that Adam made.⁴⁴

Sophrony did not fail to pick up on this tradition of thought concerning the psychological and spiritual significance of the narrative of the fall and, like Origen, conceives of humanity as sharing in the struggle of Adam. He reminds us that "we (have)

⁴³ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 4,40. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4. ed. Roberts, Alexander. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) pg.516.

⁴⁴ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) pg.48.

inherited Adam's nature. It is even possible to live the fallen state, which is a terrible deviation from the Father's love, as if it were the only reality for a human being. In the world today we are plunged into the atmosphere and culture of the fall."⁴⁵

Like Origen, Sophrony calls us to consider our beginnings. In his view, it is part of our life's task to seek that which has been lost with the fall. A study of the Adamic narrative, in providing us with some valuable insights into the nature of this loss, can also point us in the direction of restoration. In effect, the Adamic narrative teaches us much about the 'native homeland' of our soul, which is found in the life of faith, and it can, at the same time, teach us a few lessons about human nature. In the words of Sophrony: "Who will seek that which he had not lost? How can you look for something that you do not know at all? But the soul knows the Lord and therefore seeks Him."⁴⁶

Genesis, we are told, by both Origen and Sophrony, leaves us with many revealing clues concerning our true identity. The first of these clues lies in the study of what it means to be made in the "image and likeness of God".

IMAGE OF GOD

Early in the history of the Church, the interpretation of the word 'image' became the source of some concern. There were those, both during and after Origen's lifetime, who were nervous about entering into studies or discussions on the subject of Genesis 1:26-27. Their concerns over the possibility of a false interpretation of this term, 'image,' led many to avoid such exercises as unwise.

⁴⁵ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Words of Life*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1998) pg.15

⁴⁶ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991) pg.100.

This attitude is reflected in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, where we learn of a certain Abba Sopatrus, who advised his disciples “(not to) speculate on the image.” Spidlik, a twentieth century Orthodox thinker, adds that even the great theologian Epiphanes (ca. 315-403) was said to have written that ‘one should categorically not seek to define where the image is actualized’.⁴⁷

The challenges inherent in reading and studying such a verse have been acknowledged even into the present century. Vladimir Lossky, a contemporary theologian of the Eastern Church, pointed to two difficulties that will be encountered in the interpretation of Gen.1:26-27.

Firstly, there is the fact that ‘the Biblical narrative gives no precise account of the nature of the image.’⁴⁸ Sophrony does not fail to note this first point, speculating on the reasons for this lack of a detailed account in Scripture:

The Scriptures in their delicate reserve prefer to be silent (on the nature of the image)... Why? ...maybe because our imagination might be stirred and we might dream of heights beyond the clouds, and forget, or not recognize that Christ calls upon us to be humble.⁴⁹

Secondly, in referring back to God and, in this way, pointing us towards the mystery of divinity, a full understanding of such a verse lies in the realm of the unknowable. To quote Lossky, “The image of God in man, in so far as it is perfect, is necessarily unknowable... for as it reflects the fullness of its archetype, it must also

⁴⁷ Spidlik, Tomas. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*. (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1986) pg.59.

⁴⁸ Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (New York: Crestwood, 1976) pg.116.

⁴⁹ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991) pg.99.

possess the unknowable character of the divine Being. This is the reason why it is impossible to define what constitutes the divine image in man.”⁵⁰

Despite these difficulties, there have been no shortage of opinions concerning the possible interpretation of this verse. When we read of the image and likeness of God in Orthodox and patristic literature, we are left with a seemingly endless variety of views. We find Lossky enumerating just a few of these:

If we try to find in the fathers a clear definition of what it is in man which corresponds to the divine image, we run the risk of losing ourselves amidst varying assertions, which though not contradictory, cannot be applied to any one part of human nature. Sometimes the image of God is sought in the sovereign dignity of man, in his lordship over the terrestrial world; sometimes it is sought in his spiritual nature, in the soul, or in the principle, ruling (*hegemonikon*) part of his being, in the mind (*nous*), in the higher faculties such as the intellect, the reason (*logos*), or in the freedom proper to man, the faculty of inner determination (*autexousia*), by virtue of which man is the true author of his actions... The number of these definitions and their variety show us that the fathers refrain from confining the image of God to any one part of man.⁵¹

The many difficulties inherent in a discussion of the image and likeness of God did not stop Origen from the task of studying Gen.1:26. He could not back off the challenge that such a verse represented, since it tied in so closely with the question of self-knowledge. Put in other words, Origen acknowledged the fact that, “If man is the image of God, then the question about the place of the image would become an examination of the true nature of man.”⁵² While never denying the mystery of divinity in man, Origen leaves us with a few comments for consideration.

⁵⁰ Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (New York: Crestwood, 1976) pg.118.

⁵¹ Ibid. pg.115-116.

⁵² Spidlik, Tomas. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*. (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1986) pg.59. These are Spidlik's words...

According to Origen, we, by nature, are endowed with two images: that which was made according to the 'image and likeness of God'; and that which has pulled the spiritual being away from divine contemplation and the high calling of Christ. The second, he tells us, is a direct result of the fall. This understanding is outlined in his *Fifteenth homily on Luke*:

There are two images in the human being: the one which he received when made by God in the beginning as written in Genesis: 'according to the image and likeness of God' (Gen.1:27), and the other which he received later when, because of disobedience and sin, he was expelled from paradise after yielding to the allurements of the 'ruler of this world' (John 12:31).⁵³

Elaborating in his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen speaks of the first image, created by God at the start, as being obscured by this new second image "of the world". He likens the divine image to a painting that has been stained. God's image, he continues, cannot be seen in us as long as our "house is dirty with filth and filled with rubbish". He goes on to say that the "spring of (God-given) knowledge was lying within you, but it could not flow because the Philistines had filled it with earth and had made in it 'the image of the earthly'." In the end, Origen calls us to seek the restoration of God's image:

This then, is the image about which the Father said to the son: Let us make man according to our image and likeness.' The Son of God is the painter of this image. And because he is such a great painter his image can be obscured by negligence; it cannot be destroyed by malice. For the image of God always remains, even if you yourself draw 'the image of the earthly' over it yourself.⁵⁴

⁵³ Origen, *Homily on Luke* 39. in Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Origen: Spirit and Fire*. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pg.55.

⁵⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*. 13,4. in *The Fathers of the Church*. Trans. Heine, Ronald E. pg.193.

To this, Origen adds his view that the hope of the saint should fall into line with this desire for restoration. His vision is one in which the soul returns to God with this divine image intact and in its original state. In his *Homilies on Leviticus*, we read:

God entrusted 'His own image and likeness' to your own soul. This deposit, therefore, must be restored by you just as intact as it was received by you. For if you are merciful, 'as your father in heaven is merciful' (Luke 6:36), the image of God is in you and you preserve the deposit intact. If you are perfect, 'as your father in heaven is perfect' (Matt.5:48) the deposit of God's image remains in you...⁵⁵

Interestingly, this view comes to color Origen's reading of the first words of the *Magnificat*, "My soul magnifies the Lord," in the Gospel of St. Luke. His understanding of Mary's words speaks of the image as God's masterpiece, once again, drawing on the analogy of a painting:

We ask how a soul can magnify the Lord. The Lord can undergo neither increase nor loss. He is what He is. Thus, why does Mary now say, 'My soul magnifies the Lord'? I need to consider that the Lord and Savior is the 'image of the invisible God,' and realize that my soul is made in the image of the Image. My soul is not directly an image of God; it was created as the image of an Image that already existed. Then I shall understand. Take an example. Those who paint pictures take the one exemplar - for instance, the face of a king - and then use all their diligence and skill to copy the original likeness. So too each one of us shapes his soul into the image of Christ and makes either a larger or a smaller image of him. The image is either dingy and dirty, or it is as clean and bright and corresponds to the form of the original...⁵⁶

While never directly referring to the exact nature of this, God's image, which he acknowledges to be a mystery, it is clear that Origen understands this verse as having a

⁵⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*. 1,16. in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol.83 trans. Barclay, Gary Wayne. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990) pg.72.

⁵⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Luke*. 8,2. in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol.94. trans. Lienhard, Joseph T. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) pg.33-34.

significance that cannot be overstated. The restoration of this image represents, for him, the center of the spiritual life.

Sophrony shares this concern over the image. Like Origen, Sophrony understands the image as being obscured by the reality of sin and the fall. This twentieth century Athonite speaks of the image as being found in one's mode of being and, once again acknowledging the mystery that surrounds this verse, he tells us that the fulfillment of this image can only be found in the act of divinization. In his own words:

Man is made in the image of God. What is it that constitutes this image in him? Is it his body? His threefold psychological structure? The answer is extremely complex. Some sort of refraction and reflection of God's image cannot be excluded from these aspects but the most essential is to be found in the mode of being. The created being, by the gift of God's good pleasure, is made a partaker of uncreated, unoriginate Life. How is this possible? It is inexplicable and unfathomable as the mystery of the world created *ex nihilo*, and yet so it seems good in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Created in the image and likeness of God, man is endowed with the capacity to apprehend deification – to receive the divine form of being.⁵⁷

Sophrony's desire for a return both to Eden and to the original state of the soul made in the 'image and likeness' comes across in his description of St. Silouan. After presenting us with a vision of his spiritual father that is meant to remind us of the pre-fall being, radiant with life, at peace with all of creation, filled with the light and wisdom of God, and living out of divine love, he sums up his belief in the possibility of the soul's restoration, as he perceived it in the life of Silouan: "The world is beautiful – the creation of a mighty God. But there is nothing more beautiful than man, a true man – a son of

⁵⁷ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991) pg.174.

God... Father Silouan was a man in the original sense of the word made in the image and likeness of God.”⁵⁸

THE DIVINE LIKENESS

While the image of God is understood as often badly obscured but always remaining, the likeness, in both Origen and Sophrony, is seen as having been lost with Adam’s fall. The hope is that, through the act of becoming, the movement toward God, one can find this lost treasure. This divine likeness, rooted in the practice of the presence of Christ, becomes the object of the saint’s highest aspiration. Origen expresses this longing in his *First Homily on Genesis*:

Let us therefore always fix our gaze in the image of God so that we might be able to be reformed in its likeness. For if the human who has been made in the image of God, by contemplating against his nature the image of the devil, becomes like him through him, so much more will he, by contemplating the divine image in whose likeness God has made him, receive through the Word and his power that form which had been given him by nature.⁵⁹

This aspiration towards the divine likeness finds its way into contemporary Orthodox thought. George Kapsanis’ discussion on the subject of the divinization of man reflects a modern attitude to this tradition. Leaving us with an understanding of the restoration of image and likeness that falls in line with that of Sophrony, Kapsanis’ provides the reader with a few points to ponder. In summary, he states that:

- Man is made in the image of God, but in fallen man, ‘infected by sin,’ this image is obscured.
- As a result, the inmost man, made ‘according to the image,’ is incapable of fulfilling itself by becoming a likeness of God...of becoming Godlike.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pg.54.

⁵⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*. 1,13. in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 71. trans. Heine, Ronald E.. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981) pg.66.

- Christ, as an unchanged, uncorrupted icon of God, restored the image fallen in Adam to reveal the original beauty within us, at the same time teaching us and guiding us towards our divine archetype.
- Transfigured, Christ restores the radiance of a creation made dark by the fall.
- Thus, when we become 'conformed to the image of Christ' (Romans 8:29), we regain our inmost nature.⁶⁰

We learn, from Russia's Saint Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), that man is 'good by nature,' but that, with the fall, "his natural goodness had been overlaid by something artificial that must be in some way changed before his natural goodness...(can become) apparent. Among other things, this distorting overlay or artificiality limits what we can take in (or contain), and makes us slow to understand"⁶¹

Following in this tradition, Sophrony speaks of the divine likeness as acquired through God's grace by the gift of free will. Realizing that he had not yet attained the restoration of the 'original state,' he describes himself as a 'man infected by sin,' sharing in Adam's sorrow: "In sin was I conceived, I was shapen in iniquity. I inherited the terrible fall of Adam, the fall made worse by his sons down the ages; the fall which I aggravate every day of my life. And I weep and lament to see myself thus."⁶²

Having introduced himself as this fallen man, he calls his readers to consider the hope that we have in Christ and speaks much of the 'transformed man' in his writings. Sophrony tells us that:

"He who is made in the image of God is made for life 'after his likeness', also. The man who has found salvation in God receives life in the likeness

⁶⁰ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) pg.53.

⁶¹ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) pg.51.

⁶² Sophrony, Archimandrite *On Prayer*. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998) pg.19.

of God's own life. God is omnipresent and omniscient, and the saints in the Holy Spirit receive a likeness of that omnipresence and omniscience. God is light, and the saints in the Holy Spirit become light. God is love encompassing all that exists, and the saints in the Holy Spirit embrace the universe with their love..."⁶³

In speaking of the saint endowed with the likeness of Christ, he seems to follow in the same tradition as Konzevitch, who leaves us with the vision of the spiritual being as radiant and filled with life. Pointing us back to the pre-fall world, Konzevitch describes the state of Adam in paradise. He states that the first man "was wholly filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and emanated light... The elements of the world were unable to harm man and he was immortal, sin, this sting of death, introduced the poison of disintegration and corruption into the nature of man."⁶⁴

A return to this pre-fall state, and the hope in the restoration of God's image – both important themes in Sophrony's writings – mark the words of the Orthodox *Vespers of the Transfiguration*. To quote: "Transfigured, thou hast made the nature which was darkened in Adam become radiant again, O Christ, transforming it into the glory and brilliance of the Godhead."⁶⁵

We find hints of this transformation in Sophrony's accounts of St. Silouan, who is said to have, for moments, shone with a glowing countenance. Sophrony's visions of the saint teach us that one's entire being, physical, spiritual and intellectual, can be transformed by the action of God's grace. What small glimpse we get of this

⁶³ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991) pg. 147.

⁶⁴ Kontzevitch, I. M. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988) pg.31-32.

⁶⁵ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*. pg.53.

transformation in the life of another can serve to point us towards our ultimate destiny, the fulfillment of what it means to have been created in the image and likeness of God. This glorious end is one that, we are told, finds its completion only after death, as the saint comes into the presence of Christ to “see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2)⁶⁶:

There were occasions...when the Staretz was transformed out of all recognition, when his pale, fair countenance was lit by an expression so striking that one could not look at him. One’s eyes fell and one found oneself thinking of the Old Testament account of the glory of the face of Moses, Which so shone that the Israelites were afraid to look upon it.⁶⁷

Not only does Sophrony speak of the saint as one filled with light but he, himself, has been described by others as becoming, on occasion, ‘radiant’. One such account is narrated by an anonymous pilgrim in the Orthodox journal, *Divine Ascent*:

...I want to relate something that once occurred at a meal in the dining hall. There was a celebration for one of the older fathers in the monastery. Fr. Sophrony was making several gestures while praising him. At one point he stretched out his hand, and one guest, looking at Fr. Sophrony’s outstretched arm, saw that it was enveloped in a bluish glow. And as the guest slowly look towards Fr. Sophrony’s face he saw that it was enveloped in light, a beautiful whitish light. It encircled his head like a halo on an icon, and his face was bright as though it was reflecting the light of a powerful spotlight shining upon it. Simultaneously, peace was radiating from him and pouring into the heart of the guest who witnessed this. Into the guest’s mind came the thought: ‘He is in such a deep state of peace that it is like a force field around him which nothing can penetrate’.⁶⁸

Both Origen and Sophrony are quick to tell us that the journey towards the restoration of the image is one that greets all of us, both male and female. While this point may be taken for granted today, such was not the case in the third century. In proclaiming the universality of the divine image, Origen managed to set a trend that later

⁶⁶ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.98.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pg.52

⁶⁸ *Divine Ascent: A Journal of Orthodox Faith (fifth issue)*. pg.46.

came to be accepted as doctrine in the Orthodox Church. To quote Thomas Spidlik, “In itself, the soul is undifferentiated, neither male nor female; it is incorporeal, and the image of God is therefore equal in men and women, this Alexandrian teaching (of which Origen was chief) prevailed over the Antiochenes, who considered man alone to be the true image of God.”⁶⁹

In the first chapter of Genesis, it is written, “God saw everything that He made and, behold, it was altogether good and beautiful.” (Gen.1:31 LXX) Since all of God’s creation is good, it stands to reason that humans are also good. But, on this point, Origen is careful to make a distinction: any goodness that resides within us is not essential to our nature. Essential goodness resides in God alone from whom we receive it as a gift. By pointing to God as the sole source of goodness, Rebecca Lyman points out that Origen avoids falling into pantheism and the loss of the distinction between the Creator and that which is created:

Creatures as products of eternal will, are not homoousios or eternal, as a Gnostic or a Platonist might teach. Origen denies that creatures are immutable or essentially good; instead he defines them as existing in a contingent relation to the Father through the Logos. He explicitly denies that creatures are eternal or share God’s essence in any literal sense.⁷⁰

In his *Homilies on Leviticus*, Origen speaks of the nobility of the soul that has been created by God. Pointing us towards the rich inner life that awaits our attention, Origen speaks of the wealth that has been given to us:

You must understand that you are another world in miniature, and that there is in you sun and moon and also stars. If this were not so, the Lord would never have said to Abraham: ‘look toward heaven and number the

⁶⁹ Spidlik, Tomas. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*. pg.112

⁷⁰ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius: Oxford Theological Monographs*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) pg.59.

stars, if you are able to number them; so shall your descendants be' (Gen.15:5)... Hear something else that the Lord says to his disciples: 'You are the light of the world' (Mt.5:14). Do you still doubt that there are sun and moon in you, you to whom is said that you are the 'light of the world'? Do you want to hear still more about yourself, lest perchance by thinking small and humbly of yourself you might neglect your life as of little worth? ...⁷¹

FREEWILL AND GRACE

At the center of this rich inner life, and the study of humanity made in the image and likeness of God, lies the problem of free-will and grace. Origen points to the two extremes in opinion held by his contemporaries: On the one hand, there were those who would argue that all things are predetermined from the beginning by God. In the minds of those who espoused this belief, it has been decided in advance whether or not we will endure universal torment, live destructive lives of sin and fall victim to hard-heartedness. In this scheme of things our salvation is understood as being out of our hands, since human free-will plays no role in the turn of events governing our ultimate end.

On the other hand, some would assert that there is no need for God, that man is autonomous and functions on free-will alone, independent of Divine assistance. Those who held to this view understood themselves to be the 'masters of their own destiny.'

Origen follows neither position. Rather, the good life, in his opinion, is a co-operation between the individual, endowed with free-will, and God who aids us towards the blessed life:

...What we received from God is the power of movement in general and it is we who use this power for the worse or the better, so we have received from God the power of working, by virtue of our being living creatures,

⁷¹ Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*. 5,2. in Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Origen: Spirit and Fire*. pg.40.

and from the creator the power of willing, but it is we who use the power of willing either for the noblest purposes or for the opposite ones, and likewise the power of working...⁷²

This view is shared by Sophrony, who speaks of the Christian spiritual life as involving both the freedom of the individual and the action of Divine grace. "In His love God seeks man in order to give him, not only life but life more abundantly. But this more abundant life is not bestowed on free man without his consent. Thus the measure of God's gift to men is subject to man's freedom...when God foreknows that man will relate to His gift as he should, then this gift is bestowed without stint."⁷³

Sophrony adds that many have misconceptions concerning the true nature of the soul's freedom, which finds its fulfillment only in the Christian walk. Mistaking the choice that we have to sin as true freedom, many get caught in bondage. To quote, "Men seek their own freedom...outside God, outside true life, in 'outer darkness' where there is, and can be, no freedom, for freedom can only exist where there is no death, where there is authentic eternal being – in God, that is'."⁷⁴

The challenge, according to Sophrony, lies in finding this true freedom. This is the substance of the life of the contemplative:

Everyone (wants freedom)...but few know what it consists of, and how to attain it... People generally seek freedom to do what they like. But that is not freedom but the power of sin over you. Freedom to fornicate, overeat, get drunk, or be spiteful, use violence and kill, and so on, is certainly not freedom but, as the Lord said, 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin' (John.8:34). One must pray hard to be delivered from such bondage.⁷⁵

⁷² Origen, *On First Principles* 3,1,20.. ed. Butterworth. pg.201.

⁷³ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.29.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pg.107.

⁷⁵ Ibid. pg.65.

The power of free-choice and the ability to reason was given to us that we might use it in our search for truth, abandoning that which does not profit our souls. In Origenian terms, "Reason in man includes a faculty of distinguishing between good and evil. And when man has done this, he possesses the power of choosing that which he has approved of. He is rightly deemed worthy of praise when he chooses what is good and of blame when he follows what is base and evil."⁷⁶

Origen urges us to use this gift, telling us that, "our perfection is not effected while we rest and do nothing, nor on the other hand is its completion to be attributed to us but, rather, to God who performs the greater part of it."⁷⁷

HUMAN NATURE AND THE PASSIONS

Origen states that the co-operation between human free will and the grace of God involves the redirection of our natural impulses. In his view, our human nature is part of the gift of having been made in the image and likeness of God. The problem, in Origenian understanding, lies in the misuse of what has been given to us as part of God's good creation. Against those who would speak poorly of God's creation, Origen tells us that "We must not calumniate human nature, which has been formed for virtue, even if it should sin through ignorance, nor liken it to animals of the kind described (by Celsus)..."⁷⁸ With this in mind, he adds, in his *Homilies on Joshua*, that "We are not commended to tear out or destroy the natural impulses of the soul, but to purify them, that

⁷⁶ Origen, *On First Principles* 3,1,3. ed. Butterworth. pg.160.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 3,1,19. pg.199.

⁷⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsus*. 4,25. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.4. ed. Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) pg.507.

is, to purge and drive out the dirty and impure things which have come to them by negligence so that the natural vitality of its own innate power might shine forth.”⁷⁹

This understanding later finds its way into the writings of Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who, in speaking of human nature, urges us towards the right use of the gift of our God-given nature. He shares, in a letter *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, his view that, “The passions belong to us by nature, and natural things are not indictable; for they were created by God who is good, so that through them we can act in ways that are also good. Hence, in themselves, they do not indicate sickness of soul, but they become guidance of such sickness when we misuse them.”⁸⁰

Instead of adopting Palamas’ rendering of the term ‘passions’ which equates them with our human nature, Sophrony turns, for his definition, to the works of St. Makarios and St. Isaac the Syrian. This alternate understanding of the word comes across in his biography of Silouan:

When he succumbs to satanic influence, man suffers the loss of his godlike freedom and falls away from Divine life. The ascetic label for this state is ‘passion’. The term implies, on the one hand the idea of passiveness and servitude, and, on the other, that of suffering in the sense of disintegration and death. ‘Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin...’ (John 8:34)⁸¹

Through the words of St. Makarios and St Isaac the Syrian, as quoted in the biography of St. Silouan, we learn that “the passions are not inherent in the nature of the soul,” that they have become part of the life of the soul “on account of her

⁷⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*. 22,4. in Von Balthasar. *Origen: Spirit and Fire - A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*. pg.55-56

⁸⁰ Palmer, G.E.H., Phillip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware. *The Philokalia: The Complete Texts. Volume 4*. London: Faber and Faber, 1979) pg.309.

⁸¹ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.149.

transgression.”⁸² While his definition of the word ‘passions’ may be different from that of Palamas, Sophrony nonetheless speaks of a similar redirection of our God-given nature.

Ultimately, as we consider Origen and Sophrony’s understanding of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, we learn that both of these fathers stress the role of contemplation and the redirection of our God-given nature. In their reading of the life of our earliest ancestor, both Origen and Sophrony speak of the co-operative work between the individual, endowed with free-will, and God, who empowers us to spiritual growth through the gift of his grace. The spiritual life is one that involves the redirection of our senses and natural impulses.

Having started our tour of Eden with a study of the creation of the human soul and the question of self-knowledge, we will now move on to explore the nature of the garden, starting, in the next chapter, with a look at the two trees.

⁸² Ibid. pg.144-145.

CHAPTER 3

THE TWO TREES

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil... And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Gen.2:9 and 16-17)

In Genesis we are given the account of the two trees that stood at the center of the Garden of Eden. The question is: how are we to understand the choice of Adam and Eve in the face of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil? We are given a sense, in the works of many commentators, that the choice made in Eden extended beyond the mere action of eating some fruit.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL – A PRELUDE

Robin Amis, in his book, *A Different Christianity*, states that if we are to come to a greater understanding of the two trees and their significance in the Adamic narrative, we must consider the consequences of Adam's transgression in the garden carefully.

One of these consequences, he tells us, is that "the invisible world...was visible before the fall, either figuratively or actually". Humanity has, since Adam's transgression, lost its spiritual vision and gropes around in the dark for understanding. For us this mysterious world, which could be seen in Eden, is "in an ordinary sense invisible, although it can be glimpsed in part within us, 'through a glass darkly,' as Saint

Paul put it. With the fall, the inner reality became for us a hidden or secret inner world.”⁸³

This loss of vision, Amis understands as related to the fragmentation of knowledge that came with eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Originally, we are told that the soul spent its time in the perpetual contemplation of God. Being single-minded in his desire for holiness, Adam’s life in the garden was not marked by the state of confusion and sin that later came to be part of his existence outside of Paradise. Konzevitch tells us that:

... Before his fall, Adam was inwardly collected by the divine grace inherent in him and he was creatively aspiring to reach God through perfect love for him and conformance of his divine will. He was wholly immersed in contemplation of God and in communion with God. All manifestations of the triune nature of man (i.e., the spirit, the soul and the body) harmoniously unified in him, hierarchically submitted to the highest principle within man – to his spirit. The spirit ruled over all aspects of human nature, directing them towards the single highest purpose.⁸⁴

Having eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam finds himself confronting a new inner reality. According to Amis, Adam loses the focus in God that once dominated his life and, increasingly, he and his descendants become susceptible to a string of distractions that pull humanity further and further away from the divine life. Seeking answers apart from the work of contemplation, the fallen being loses sight of the source of all understanding - God. To quote:

Knowledge became fragmented after the fall; it becomes fragmented today as long as we continue to feed from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Such knowledge is fragmented by the way we take it in: we regard single views or simple descriptions of some thing or object – taken from one point of view or based on a single idea – as being incomplete. Such knowledge has few connections with other objects, treating a single

⁸³ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*.pg.72.

⁸⁴ Kontzevitch, I. M. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988) pg.31.

idea too narrowly and without its proper existential or contextual connections – a fragmentation that results when this kind of knowledge is incomplete but people yet consider that they have of something presents a ‘complete’ picture. This means that people who genuinely know part of something tend to see that part as being the whole, and draw misleading conclusions as a result...⁸⁵

Kontzevitch, speaking from a contemporary Orthodox perspective, follows in the same line of thought, pointing to the sorrow that comes with Adams transgression. The once single-minded spiritual being now finds himself struggling with a multitude of problems: "Theocentrism gave way to egocentrism. Left to his own resources, fallen man was now unable to arise through his own natural strength and to free himself of contradictions, passions, sin and suffering, to leave this vicious circle of death and the feeling of being abandoned by God."⁸⁶

An awareness of these consequences comes to mark the understanding of both Sophrony and Origen.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL IN SOPHRONY

Sophrony states that, "Cast out of paradise by the delicious poison of Luciferian auto-deification, man loses the Spirit and becomes the slave of hell. Focusing on himself as the center of all, he sooner or later experiences a despairing emptiness..."⁸⁷

In an effort to fill this void, Sophrony's man finds himself searching in material creation for something to satisfy the deep inner longing that persists within his heart.

⁸⁵ Amis, Robin. *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*. pg.75.

⁸⁶ Kontzevitch, I. M. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. pg.32.

⁸⁷ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Voir Dieu Tel Qu'il Est*. (Genève: Editions Labor et Fides, 1984) pg.37 (translation mine).

Having lost the communion that he once had with God in the garden, man ends up moving further and further away from the creator. The more he attempts to fill the void on his own, the worse his state of separation from God becomes. "Seeking, outside of himself, for some compensation, in the world that surrounds him, he falls into a certain delusion and can become capable of committing any crime."⁸⁸

In his pride, Adam's vision begins to fade. Left to his own devices, he loses sight of Christ, the true source of joy. Eventually, even the memory of the garden begins to fade and all he is left with is a seemingly endless variety of options, many of which lead nowhere. The very pride that caused Adam to fall now becomes the cause of his blindness:

Pride is the abyss of darkness into which man has fallen on account of the fall. Having voluntarily given in to the attraction that pride has exercised on him, man has become spiritually blind and incapable of discerning its presence in the movements of the heart and intellect.⁸⁹

In this state, many have lost all awareness of the reality of the fall and its consequences on human history: "The visible world, from kings to beggars, is in tumult, disorder and war, and no one understands the cause, that suffering was introduced by the disobedience of Adam..."⁹⁰

Ultimately, the fragmentation that has marked the life of post-fall humanity has, in some cases, led to mental illness. As Sophrony informs us, no one is completely

⁸⁸ Ibid. pg.37.

⁸⁹ Ibid. pg.36.

⁹⁰ Deseilles, Placide *La Spiritualité Orthodoxe et la Philokalie*. (Paris: Bayard Editions, 1997) pg.105. Here, the author quotes the *Spiritual Homilies* of Macarius (translation mine).

immune to this danger. Standing amidst so many challenges, facing struggle from every side, the soul that would seek to overcome such fragmentation has much to overcome:

Of course, almost all the holy ascetics knew...combat with demons, and so to encounter them is a normal phenomenon of the path to spiritual perfection; but how many of them suffered from them, how many of them continued mentally ill to the end of their days – went mad; how many people fell into despair and perished; how many suicides, how many crimes have happened in the world as a consequence of demonic spirituality.⁹¹

CONSEQUENCE OF THE FALL IN ORIGEN

Origen also speaks of Adam's transgression as giving rise to a division of thought. The fragmentation that had been the subject of Robin Amis' reading of the fall finds a precedent in the words of this early father. In the *Peri Archon*, Origen describes the pre-fall Garden as a place where the present distinction between good and evil did not exist. Restating an affirmation that is everywhere present in the first chapter of Genesis, Origen tells us that God's creation is 'good'. In the beginning, we learn, there was unity; all of God's creatures participated fully in His goodness, truth and beauty.⁹²

Evil, in his view, is the fall away from this initial state into that of non-being. In Origen's *Commentary on John*, we read that evil belongs to what he would refer to as the category of 'nothing' or 'non-entity' since it was not created by God:

'Without Him was not anything made'. For if everything whatsoever was made through the Logos, then nothing was made without Him. We must, therefore, make ourselves sure in what sense the "all things" is to be understood, and in what sense the "nothing." For, without a clear preliminary definition of these terms, it might be maintained that, if all things were made through the Logos, and evil is a part of all things, then the whole matter of sin, and everything that is wicked, that these also were

⁹¹ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.39.

⁹² Ware, Kallistos. *The inner kingdom*. pg.195.

made through the Logos. But this we must regard as false...Now some have held that since evil is not based in the constitution of things--for it did not exist at the beginning and at the end it will have ceased--that, therefore, the evils of which we spoke are the Nothing; and as some of the Greeks say that genera and forms, such as the (general) animal and the man, belong to the category of Nothings, so it has been supposed that all that is not of God is Nothing, and has not even obtained through the Word the subsistence it appears to have...⁹³

This view of evil as a non-entity does not fall far from that of Sophrony, who describes it as a 'parasite' in his biography of St. Silouan. "God alone is absolute. Evil, which has no original essence but is merely the resistance of the free creature to Him that is before all ages – to God – cannot be absolute. Therefore evil in the literal sense does not, and cannot, exist. All evil effected by free beings must live like a parasite on the body of the good..."⁹⁴ This is not to say that our world is free of the reality of evil, but rather, that this 'presence' of evil in fact consists of an 'absence' or loss of the good, the loss of true life found in Christ. Evil is, in effect, understood as the fall away from the source of being, God.

Origen states that, since Adam had earlier participated fully in the presence of God, who admits no evil, the distinction between good and evil was previously unknown to him: "for those who are established in the good, which is the initial and final condition, the desire to learn of this distinction...is already bad". It is this desire that lies at the root of Origen's understanding of Adam's transgression and the true significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

⁹³ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John. 2,7. in The Fathers of the Church, vol.89.* trans. Heine, Ronald E. (Washington:The Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

⁹⁴ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite.* pg.117.

Origen's interpretation of Adam's transgression as giving fruit to division echoes the earlier works of Philo. In his *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, this great Jewish scholar leaves us with an understanding of the two trees that bears a remarkable similarity to that of Origen:

Why does (God) say, when he commands (Adam) to eat of every tree which is in paradise, 'eat' in the singular number; but, when he forbids eating of the tree which gives knowledge of good and evil, says, in the plural number, 'do not eat, for on the day when ye shall eat, ye shall die'?

First, because though it extends over many things, the good is one, and not less for this reason, namely that He who gave the benefit is one, and is also the one who received the benefit. This 'one' I speak of, not with reference to the number which precedes the number two, but with reference to the unitary power, in accordance with which many things are harmonized and agree by their concord imitate the one, such as a flock, a herd, a drove, a chorus, an army, a nation... For all these, extending over many, are one community and embrace lovingly; but when they are unmixed and have nothing in common, they fall into a duality and into a multitude and are divided...⁹⁵

Moving back to Origen's vision of the pre-fall garden as being beyond the distinction between good and evil, we learn of this father's thoughts concerning the universality of charity. In the words of Crouzel:

He who follows the reasoning of the serpent and loves some men as good and hates others as evil, transgresses the commandment of the one who sustains him. This is, in effect, what is meant by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which those who eat must die; Origen tells us that it is not God who created death, but man in hating his neighbor. In the desire to eat from this tree, Origen understands Adam's sin as a violation of the universality of charity...⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (1, 15) in *The Loeb Classical Library – Philo: vol. I.* Cambridge University Press, 1971) pg.10.

⁹⁶ Crouzel, Henri. *Origène et la Philosophie.* (Lyon: Aubier, 1962) pg.133 (translation mine).

This vision of paradise as being a place in which a state of 'pure good' reigns, once again finds voice as Origen discusses his eschatological hopes. He leaves us, in the *Peri Archon*, with a vision of the eventual restoration of all things, pointing us, once again, to a realm beyond such categories. "...For there will no longer be any contrast of good and evil, since (in God) evil nowhere exists; for God, whom evil never approaches, is then all things to ...(the soul); nor will one who is always in the good and to whom God is all things desire any longer to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."⁹⁷

In a manner that is, at moments, similar to that of Sophrony, Origen speaks of the confusion that has resulted with Adam's new-found awareness. In his mind, a turn away from unity in Christ, in whom only goodness exists, can only lead to further division of thought. This is in evidence in Origen's text *On Prayer*:

In his love of pleasure...the man who follows the wide and broad way that leadeth to destruction [Heb. 3:3]...finds himself not in one street but in many. In these streets others, who are "dying like men" (cf. Matt. 5:17 and Rom. 10:4) because they have separated themselves from what is divine, are to be found to glorify and exalt them that in their eyes practice in the streets ...⁹⁸

ADAM'S TORMENTING CONFLICT

What is most troubling about Adam's fall and the question of the two trees is the tormenting conflict that arises with this earliest man's fall. Having transgressed, Adam finds that he can no longer bear the sight of God. On the one hand, he is filled with an intense longing for a return to the paradise of contemplation. On the other, he is filled with fear and shame. In the words of Konzevitch:

⁹⁷ Origen, *On First Principles* 3,6,3. ed. Butterworth. pg.248.

⁹⁸ Origen, *On Prayer*. 19,3. in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 19. trans, O'Meara, John J. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1954) pg.69.

The story from the book of Genesis gives us an idea about the intimate relationship between Adam, Eve and God, which was interrupted by the fall. When passing through Paradise God calls Adam, and Adam hides himself (Gen. 3:8). From that moment on, man can no longer bear the sight of God. However, man is drawn to the vision of which he has now become unworthy. From that time on, in the entire course of biblical history, this tormenting conflict between man's most profound aspirations and his awareness of his own unworthiness is evident, even in the greatest friends of God. God both attracts and frightens them.⁹⁹

The awareness of this conflict in the heart of Adam, and as a continuing reality in the spiritual world of the saint, comes to color the words of Sophrony. He is forever speaking of the sadness of the soul that has known a falling away from the experience of the uncreated light of God. In the fall from such illumination, the soul is said to learn of the nature of Adam's lament at having been cast out of the Garden of Eden. Now a homeless wanderer, the soul longs for rest in the King's garden:

...When God departs, he leaves a sort of blank space in the core of my being, and I do not know whether he will ever come again. He is other - different from me. He has withdrawn and I am left empty; and I feel my emptiness like a death. His coming has brought something dear to my heart that exceeded my most audacious imagining. And lo, I find myself once more in my old state which used to seem normal and satisfactory but which now appalls me. I had been introduced into the house of the great king - I was his kindred - but now again I am no more than a homeless beggar.¹⁰⁰

Sophrony tells us that there is no greater sadness than that of the soul standing outside the gates of paradise. The one who has become aware of just how much has been lost, who has been given insight into the joy of Eden, cannot help but weep. Filled with a profound sense of loss over the distance that has been created between humanity and

⁹⁹ Kontzevitch, I. M. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. pg.57.

¹⁰⁰ Sophrony, Archimandrite *On Prayer*. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998) pg.13.

God, the soul thirsts for a return, sorrowing over a sense of its unworthiness. This longing is expressed in the biography of St. Silouan:

The soul that has known God, that has been raised to contemplation of the world of eternal light, and then has lost grace, finds herself in a state unimaginable to anyone ignorant of all this to the same extent. There are no words to express the suffering and the sorrow. The soul experiences a peculiar metaphysical pain. This world contains nothing that could captivate one who has seen the light of unoriginate being, who has experienced the fullness, the joy, the inexpressible sweetness of Divine life. Somehow earthly life becomes burdensome, joyless, and, weeping, he seeks again the life that was given to him to touch upon. The husband who has lost his beloved wife, or the mother her precious son, can but partially understand the grief of one who has lost grace, since its incomparable beauty and might vastly transcend every sort of human love. This is why St. John Climacus¹⁰¹ says that the suffering of those who have lost grace exceeds the suffering of men condemned to death or of them that weep over their dead.¹⁰²

Not only does Sophrony express an awareness over such mourning but he also speaks of it as being a state essential to the spiritual growth of the saint. Making the distinction between two forms of sorrow – that which is material or fleshly, and that which comes from an awareness of the fall and the desire for God – Sophrony shares his belief that the latter is a blessing:

From my own experience I can testify that there are two types of despair: the one, purely negative, destroys man, first spiritually than physically. The other is a blessed despair. It is about this second form that I never stop talking. Through despair of this kind I was reborn into light. It is not at all easy for me to confess to the world the goodwill towards me of the Most-High. I could never understand why this should be so with the likes of me. To begin with, a Light invisible to me showed me, first, my inner hell, and then the whole created world in its transitory existence, ever subject to the process of dying...¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Author of the celebrated spiritual text *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Climacus lived much of his life in the desert of Sinai. His dates are uncertain but Kallistos Ware speculates that he was born shortly before 579 and died around 649. cf. Climacus, John. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Trans. Luibheid, Colm and Russell, Norman (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) Introduction, pg.2.

¹⁰² Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.41.

¹⁰³ Sophrony, Archimandrite *On Prayer*. pg.50.

This sorrow also finds expression in the works of Origen. The *Peri Archon* speaks much of the hell of the soul that has become aware of its fall. In effect, the conscience, which has been made aware of the gravity of its sins, finds itself tormented by a sense of its unworthiness and the distance that it has created between itself and God, by the nature of its choices. The soul becomes its own accuser and witness. This hell, as well as being a distinct possibility in the after-life, is one that can become a reality on earth for those who have been given insight into their own fall:

As for the fire of Gehenna and the torments, with which Holy Scripture threatens sinners, Origen does not make them consist in punishments, but in the conscience of sinners, when by the goodness and power of God the whole memory of our offences is placed before our eyes. The entire crop of our sins springs up as it were from seeds which have remained hidden in the soul, and every shameful and impious act we have done is represented in an image before our eyes, so that the mind, beholding its former acts of self-indulgence is punished by the burning conscience and stung by the pricks of remorse.¹⁰⁴

Origen tells us, in the *Contra Celsus*, that it is through the experience of such torment that one comes to be purified. Far from being eternal, any experience of hell is meant to bring about restoration. The torment of the conscience passing through such awareness of the fall, being a gift of grace, eventually leads the soul back to the work of faith, thus, in the end, according to Origenian understanding, the soul will eventually find restoration¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ Origen, *On First Principles* (footnote 3) ed. Butterworth. pg.142.

¹⁰⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 6,26. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol.4.* ed. Roberts, Alexander. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) pg.584.

THE TWO WAYS

Before Adam's fall, we are told that he saw things differently. Being in the presence of God, meant having priorities in a different order from the state in which they fell after Adam's transgression. Finding all of his pleasure in the work of contemplation, the earliest man had no need to satisfy himself elsewhere. Provided with all that he could possibly desire, Adam's life was not marked with the obsession for wealth and notoriety that marks modern man. Since death and disintegration were foreign to his existence in the garden, the question of personal comfort, which had been taken for granted as part of Adam's reality, did not even arise in the mind of this earliest being. The realm of paradise was one that invited the total of the focus of the soul on the mystery of Divinity. This work of contemplation was one that, according to many of the fathers, brought Adam beyond the realm of sensory perception.

This vision of the contemplative work of Adam, as beyond sensory perception, comes to mark the wisdom of Christian commentators who point us back to this state in their spiritual counsels. The desire for a return to lost unity later becomes the basis of the tradition of negative theology that finds a voice in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius:

...My advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with Him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Luibhied, Colm. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) pg.135. the quote is taken from the *Mystical Theology*.

Demonstrating an understanding of this tradition of negative theology, Sophrony speaks of contemplation, the entering into this 'darkness of unknowing', as the means by which fragmentation of knowledge can be overcome.

This road to finding lost unity finds its way into one of his discourses on the subject of knowledge and understanding. Leaving us, in his biography of St. Silouan, with a definition of the two 'ways' of gaining greater knowledge, Sophrony begins by speaking of the first and usual way which 'consists in directing the cognitive faculty outwards, where it meets with phenomena, sights, forms, all in innumerable variety'. This path, the most commonly used one, we are told, leaves us with a grossly incomplete and fragmented picture of reality: "... The knowledge thus attained is never complete and has no real unity. Insistently seeking unity, the mind is forced to have recourse of synthesis, which cannot help being artificial. The unity thus arrived at does not really and objectively exist. It is merely a form of abstract thinking natural to the mind."¹⁰⁷

The second way, that of contemplation, becomes the road by which the saint finds unity of knowledge. Leaving the realm of the sensible for that of unknowing darkness and the contemplation of the Divine, the soul finds its vision of reality redefined. To quote Sophrony:

The other way to acquire knowledge of being is to direct the spirit in and toward itself and then to God. Here the process is somewhat the reverse. The mind turns away from the endless plurality and fragmentariness of world phenomena, and with all its strength addresses itself to God, and, dwelling in God, begins to see both itself and the whole world.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.103.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. pg.103.

At moments, in embracing the divine darkness and the realm of apophaticism or negative theology, Sophrony may appear to be bordering on anti-intellectual. Indeed, he is not afraid of abandoning insights gained through the use of human reason, in favor of those gained through a form of prayer that strives to ‘move beyond the limits of mere intellectual concepts’. He tells us that true wisdom is found in the act of abandonment to Divine providence: “In practice the process is as follows: every Christian...when faced with the necessity of finding a solution consonant with the will of God, makes an inner rejection of all his own knowledge, his preconceived ideas, desires, plans. Freed of everything ‘of his own’, he then turns his heart to God in prayer and attention, and the first thought born in his soul after such prayer he accepts as a sign from on high.”

He is clear, though, that this is not a ‘mindless’ process. The gift of discernment is essential. In his opinion, the necessary discernment can only be gained as one comes to the end of oneself. It would, indeed, be unwise to think that every thought comes from God. Put in his own words, the ability to discern God’s voice comes as the “soul casts off its own will and is prepared for every sacrifice.” He is quick to tell us that, “if we fail (to gain discernment), we shall never find the way.”¹⁰⁹

Those who have not died to the self find themselves unable to hear aright. Dominated by the passions, the soul finds it difficult to enter into the stillness in which God speaks:

Man is created in God’s image and likeness, and is called to direct communing with God. All men, therefore, without exception, should be treading this way but in fact experience shows us that such is by no means a path for every one. This is because most people neither hear nor

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. pg.78.

understand God speaking in their hearts; they listen to the urging of passion, which inhabits the soul and with its clamor drowns the still small voice of God.¹¹⁰

While Origen can be understood as sharing Sophrony's stress on the importance of the contemplative life and the essential role of discernment on the path towards restoration, he cannot be classified as a negative or apophatic theologian - At least not according to Vladimir Lossky, who, in his book, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, states that Origen's works fall short on this point. In backing his view, he quotes the great father's words in the *Peri Archon*: "(For Origen...God is) ...a simple, intellectual nature admitting of no complexity whatever in itself... He is monad and unity and spirit; the source and origin of all intellectual and spiritual nature."¹¹¹

Lossky states that, by using terms borrowed from Plotinus to speak of God, Origen has fallen out of the realm of negative theology, and into a different stream of thought from that forwarded by Pseudo-Dionysius and Sophrony:

If (God) is incomprehensible it is not because of a simplicity which cannot come to terms with the multiplicity with which all knowledge relating to creatures is tainted. It is, so to say, an incomprehensibility which is more radical, more absolute. Indeed, God would no longer be incomprehensible by nature if this incomprehensibility were (as in the case of Origen) rooted in the simplicity of the One...¹¹²

Lossky concludes by stating that, since Origen falls short of acknowledging the incomprehensibility of God, he cannot be understood as a 'mystical theologian' in the Orthodox sense of the term.' God, Lossky points out, transcends Neo-Platonic terms. Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, we are left with an Orthodox tradition which views the

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pg.79.

¹¹¹ Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (New York: Crestwood, 1976) pg.32.

¹¹² Ibid. pg.31.

Creator as “neither One, nor Unity.” He is beyond definition, “being unknowable in what He is.”¹¹³

ADAM’S NEW EYES

There is a certain paradox in the Adamic narrative: after having learned, from the writings of both Origen and Sophrony, of the loss of spiritual vision that came with the fall, we are told in Genesis 3:7 that the eyes of Adam were opened: “For God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil.” Seraphim Rose tells us that, according to many of the fathers, these eyes were understood as having “already (been) opened before the fall – but closed to the consequences of sin – now they...are said to be opened to the ‘lower things of the earth’. No longer are souls dispassionate.”¹¹⁴

This, indeed, is the reading of Genesis 3:7 that is forwarded by Origen in *Contra Celsus* (7,39). Here, he contrasts the eyes of the senses to those of the soul:

‘Their eyes were opened’ (Gen.3:7). Opened were those eyes of the senses, which had been properly closed in order not to be hindered by distraction from seeing with the eyes of the soul. These eyes which, until then, had been seeing and enjoying God and his paradise, were now, I think, closed by sin.¹¹⁵

Adam can be, in some sense, understood as exchanging one set of eyes for another. In his Seventeenth Homily on Numbers, Origen states that “In the same order in which some eyes are closed and others are opened, are also some ears to be closed and others to be opened...” Relatedly, in discussing the process of overcoming fragmentation,

¹¹³ Ibid. pg.32.

¹¹⁴ Rose, Seraphim. *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision*. pg.198.

¹¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsus* 7, 39.

Origen calls us back to a similar exchange in reverse, one in which we give up the delights of the physical seeing for those of spiritual vision. To quote “Unless the sight of evil things is first shut off, the view of good things will not be opened up.”¹¹⁶

Having exchanged spiritual vision for that of the flesh, the soul ends up embracing false values. Acknowledging this fact as part of the condition of fallen humanity, Origen calls us to redirect our vision on the true source of fulfillment: “(Let us) ... not waste words over such an insignificant thing as a shadow. They can in no way stand comparison with the saving and holy gifts of the God of all. What comparison can there be between material wealth and wealth in all utterance and in all knowledge? And who but a madman would compare soul, and balanced reasoning?”¹¹⁷

Silouan follows Origen’s sentiment with a lament over the blindness of those who have embraced false values, “O unhappy erring people! They cannot know what true joy is. They make merry and laugh but the laughter with which they laugh, and their mirth when they make merry will be turned to weeping and affliction.”¹¹⁸

Turning our attention away from the many ‘illusions’ or false values that have come to dominate our reality, both Origen and Sophrony leave us with a vision of the two trees that relates them to life in Christ. True knowledge and understanding, in their view, cannot be gained apart from God’s grace. It is through divine illumination that the post-

¹¹⁶ Origen, Homilies on Numbers. 7,13. in Von Balthasar. *Origen: Spirit and Fire - A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, pg.236.

¹¹⁷ Origen, *On Prayer*, 17,1. in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol.19. trans. O’Meara, John J. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1954) - taken from *On Prayer*, pg.63.

¹¹⁸ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.289.

fall being can seek to overcome the fragmentation and confusion arising from Adam's transgression.

We also learn that this question of the two trees takes us beyond the confines of being merely a religious concern. As well as relating to the spiritual life, the two trees speak to our intellectual and emotional concerns, and, as we shall learn in our study of the land, Adam's choices in front of the two trees also comes to color the nature of our bodily concerns, physical health and that of the world that surrounds us.

CHAPTER 4

THE LAND

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed... And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. (Gen.2:8 and 10-15)

Leaving the center of the garden and the problem of the two trees, we are given an image of the garden as the land of plenty, rich in precious stones, gold, fresh water, abundant in fresh vegetation and teeming with life, animals of every kind gracing the landscape. This image leads us to the next question in our survey of the garden: how did Sophrony and Origen understand the Biblical description of the land and how did this understanding color their vision of post-fall reality and the present state of material creation?

In attempting to answer these questions we are forced to once again confront the issue of the many senses of scripture as they have appeared in chapter one. This becomes particularly true as we consider the words of Origen, who, as we shall see, asks us to consider a reading of the pre-fall world in which materiality has no place.

ORIGEN'S VISION OF THE LAND

Origen's theology is not one divorced from the problems of the world. When he speaks of an 'intellectual' return to unity, one that lies beyond the realm of material/sensory perception and the distinctions between good and evil, he does not do so with an escapist attitude. He is not trying to avoid the necessary task of honestly confronting evil and injustice but, rather, he seeks to understand what lies at the root of our present condition, one in which suffering and death seem to reign. He was all too aware of the reality of evil and the oppression faced by many in a society where the distance between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the influential and the voiceless, was so great:

Among men there are no small differences, for some are barbarians, others Greeks, and of the barbarians some are wilder and fiercer, whereas others are more gentle... Some men are from the very moment of their birth in a humble position, brought up in subjection and slavery, placed under lords and princes and tyrants; whereas others are brought up with more freedom and under more rational influences. Some have healthy bodies, others from their earliest years are invalids...¹¹⁹

Troubled by the suffering and the seeming injustice that surrounds the reality of those who have an unequal burden to carry, Origen once again points us in the direction of unity, affirming the Creator as the 'oneness from which all things proceed':

God...must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence, admitting in himself of no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or a less, but is unity, or if I may so say, Oneness throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind...¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Origen, *On First Principles* 2,9,3. ed. Butterworth. pg.131.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 1,1,6. pg.10.

Proceeding from this affirmation of the oneness of the creator he calls us, once again, to consider the possibility of humans as having fallen away from the unity that comes with being in his presence. Origen's vision of life before the fall is one that includes some speculation on the possible pre-existence of souls. He reasons that our lot in this life is in part determined by the extent of our fall in a past life. Assigning greater suffering to those who strayed furthest from the Creator, Origen's view leaves us with a hierarchy of spiritual being in which humans are placed somewhere midway between the demons and the angels. This is demonstrated in the book one of *Peri Archon*:

...Before the ages minds were all pure, both daemons and souls and angels, offering service to God and keeping his commandments. But the devil, who was one of them, since he possessed free will, desired to resist God, and God drove him away. With him revolted all the other powers. Some sinned deeply and became daemons, others less and became angels; others still less and became archangels; and thus each in turn received the reward for his individual sin. But there remained some souls who had not sinned so greatly as to become daemons, nor on the other hand so very lightly as to become angels. God therefore made the present world and bound the soul to the body as a punishment.¹²¹

In this theory, Origen could find a creative explanation to the problem of suffering that he felt would justify the seemingly unequal burden shouldered by some, who are born into more trying circumstances. Feeling the need to fit his vision of first things with his understanding of God as just and merciful, Origen came up with a protology that would explain some of the problems that come with diversity in creation:

...It is clear that God made one a daemon, one a soul and one an angel as a means of punishing each in proportion to its sin. For if this were not so, and souls had no pre-existence, why do we find some new born babes to be blind, when they have committed no sin, while others are born with no defect at all?¹²²

¹²¹ Ibid, 1,8,1. pg.67.

¹²² Ibid. 1,8,1. pg.67.

In Origen's vision of Paradise, all were created equal, only later falling into a state of disunity and confusion. Having descended from the state of "pure spiritual being", Origen tells us that humanity, before the fall, was blessed with an existence in which suffering and inequality were nonexistent. We learn, in effect, that the pre-fall Adam was caught up in a celestial universe, blessed with continual contemplation, standing ever in the presence of God's glory.

This vision of unity as an ideal, which, as we have seen, keeps recurring in Origenian thought, finds some precedent. Far from being new, Origen had inherited it, in great part, from secular philosophy. Crouzel informs us that:

...the opposition between the 'one' and the 'many' (diversity -vs- unity) was commonly held in the Hellenistic philosophy of the day. The connection made between unity and perfection, on the one hand, and multiplicity and imperfection on the other, underlined what was understood as the superiority of the unique wisdom of God versus the many wisdoms of 'the world' and of 'the princes of this world'.¹²³

BODY AND SOUL

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Gen.2:7)

Part of Origen's conception of the ultimate return to unity lies in his understanding of the creation of the body. Once again asking the reader to consider the question of man made in the image and likeness of God, Origen speaks of our earliest identity as being one divorced from the reality of material existence. Having spoken of

¹²³ Crouzel, Henri and Manlio Simonotti. *Origène: Traité des Principes*. (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1980) tome iv, pg.71 (translation mine).

the Creator as incorporeal, he argues that the 'being' said to have been made in the 'image of God' cannot possibly have possessed a fleshly covering. In the words of Origen:

But it is our inner man, invincible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made 'according to the image of God'. For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood. But if anyone supposes that this man who is made 'according to the image and likeness of God' is made of flesh, he will appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God ...¹²⁴

By considering Gen.1:26-27 and Gen.2:7 separately, he reasons that the earliest spiritual beings, referred to in their pre-fall state as *logikos*¹²⁵ or rational intellects, must have existed before the creation of the body¹²⁶. This view finds its way into his *Dialogue with Heraclides*:

In creation, therefore, the human being first created was the one in the image (Gen.1:26) in whom is nothing material. For what is made 'in the image' is not made from matter. And God said let us make man in our image after our likeness; and let them have dominion and so forth...and God made man not by taking dust from the ground as He did the second time (Gen.2:7), but made him in the image of God (Gen.1:27). That Moses

¹²⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*. 1,13. Ed. Heine, Ronald E. pg.63.

¹²⁵ Kallistos Ware tells us that in Origenian thought the *logikoi* can be understood as rational intellects (*noes*) "...existing prior to the creation of the material world as minds without a body" (Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, pg.200). Michael O'Laughlin, in his essay, *The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources*, adds the following: "...the anthropology of Origen is centered around the *nous* which becomes a soul as it distances itself from God and cools. The soul is then the ground of the human person, the center of the personality and of free will. The *nous* remains a distinguishable element within the soul and forms the higher part of it. As such it can be called the *logos* or *hegemonikon*." Cf. Kannengiesser, Charles and Petersen, William L. *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) pg.359.

¹²⁶ At this point, it must be noted that Origen was far from definitive on this matter. Scholars have pointed to a certain ambiguity in Origenian texts concerning the body. While most seem to point to this reading of the body as a post-fall phenomenon, not everyone would agree. Dupuis contends that earlier scholars have misread Origen's words and have failed to consider, with sufficient seriousness, the Rufinus translations of the *Peri Archon*. He calls students of Origenian thought to put more weight on Rufinus' rendering, telling us that this father does not, contrary to popular belief, stress a bodiless pre-fall state. To quote: "Without the body, the 'nous' (intellect) cannot exist; the two go together. But the pre-existent body is not that of the world: instead it is of superior quality, a spiritual body, ethereal and glowing with light, to be distinguished from the cosmic and earthly body, which is grosser in form." (c.f. Dupuis, pg.34). I would tend to disagree with Dupuis reading here and maintain an understanding the pre-fall *logikos* as being the bodiless.

was not the only one to know that his being the image of God is nonmaterial, superior to every bodily substance, but that the Apostle also knew this, is shown in the text which says: 'Seeing that you have put off the old human nature with its practices and have put on the new which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.'¹²⁷

This distinction, between the being mentioned in Gen1:26 and that introduced in Gen.2:7, also finds its way into Origen's Commentary on the Song of Songs.

Emphatically restating his point, Origen leaves us with the following:

In the beginning of the words of Moses, where the creation of the world is described, we find reference to the making of two men, the first in the 'image and likeness of God' (Gen.1:26), and the second 'formed of the slime of the earth' (Gen.2:7)... I think...that no one ought any longer to doubt what Moses wrote in the beginning of Genesis about the making and fashioning of two men...¹²⁸

His *Homilies on Jeremiah* run consonant with this view. Here, his listeners are made aware of the distinction between 'to make', which he understands as referring to the act of spiritual creation (predating the body), and 'to form'¹²⁹, which, for him, signifies the creation of 'bodily' Adam or humanity in its present state. A subtle change in terminology becomes significant in Origen's conception of the body:

'But, before I formed you in the womb, I knew you'... You will find, after you read Genesis and observe what is said about the creation of the world, that Scripture, in a way exceedingly dialectic, did not say, 'Before I made you in the womb, I knew you.' For when he is created according to the image, God said: 'Let us make man according to our image and likeness'; He did not say: 'Let us form.' But when he took 'clay of the earth', He did not make man, but he formed man and He 'placed the man whom he

¹²⁷ Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides* 15,30-16,14 in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 54. trans. Daly, Robert J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) pg.69-70.

¹²⁸ Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary* prologue 2. in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 26. trans. Lawson, R. P. (London: Longmans, Green and Co.,1957) pg.25.

¹²⁹ This distinction bears a close resemblance to that of Philo in his *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* I (16) where he speaks of the being who was made (*epoiese*) and that which was molded (*gegonos*) cf. pg.181.

formed in paradise so that he would work and protect it'. If you can, note the difference between 'making' and 'forming' ...¹³⁰

The idea of the two 'Adams', one created in the image and likeness (Gen.1:26-27) and the other mentioned in connection with Genesis 2:7, seems to have been borrowed from Philo's writings. This early Jewish thinker shares Origen's understanding of both (1) God as incorporeal and (2) the being mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis as bodiless. This view is presented in his *Account of Creation Given by Moses*:

Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word 'image' is used; for after the pattern of a single Mind, even the Mind of the Universe as an archetype, the mind in each of those who successively came into being was molded.¹³¹

Philo speaks of his two 'Adams,' in the first book of his *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis*, making a separation that he develops through the rest of the work:

"And God formed the man by taking clay from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life, and the man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7) There are two types of men; the one a heavenly man, the other an earthly. The heavenly man, being made after the image of God, is altogether without part or lot in corruptible and terrestrial substance; but the earthly one was compacted out of the matter scattered here and there, which Moses calls 'clay'."¹³²

Returning to Origen, we learn that his view of the body, as having been created after the cooling of the 'spirit, from its glorious pre-fall state into its present state as a

¹³⁰ Origen: *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1,2. in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol.97. trans. Smith, John Clark (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) pg.13.

¹³¹ Philo *On the Account of Creation Given by Moses* (23) in *The Loeb Classical Library – Philo: vol.1.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) pg.55.

¹³² Philo *On the Account of Creation Given by Moses* (1, 12) pg.167

‘soul’, places it in a subordinate position in his understanding of the development of the spiritual being. According to Origen the locus of our individuality resides in the soul:

Essentially, in Origen, the soul is the center of the person, our individuality. The body has a secondary role. In his view, man is a soul placed in a body – the body being at the service of the soul – in much the manner that the beast of burden serves the farmer. The body, dead on its own, lives only by means of the soul. In other words, the body, in and of itself, is not capable of life – this attitude, that places the center of the being in the soul, was shared by pagans and Christians (of his time) alike.¹³³

This position, he seems to have adopted from the teaching of Clement, who shares his view in the *Stromateis*: “The soul of man is confessedly the better part of man and the body, the inferior. But neither is the soul good by nature, nor on the other hand, is the body bad by nature.”¹³⁴

Not all were happy with Origenian ideas concerning the pre-existence of souls. St. John Damascene, the eighth century father, spoke out strongly against Origen, instead presenting us with a reading of Genesis that emphasizes the simultaneous creation of the body and the soul:

From the earth He formed his body and by His own inbreathing gave him a rational and understanding soul, which last we say is the divine image... The body and soul were formed at the same time – not one before and the other afterwards, as the ravings of Origen would have it.¹³⁵

Even St. Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth century father and great admirer of Origen’s work, felt it necessary to make a clarification on this point. Refuting those who

¹³³ Crouzel, Henri. *Origen*. trans. A.S. Worrall, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) pg.86-87.

¹³⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis, Book one to three*. In *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 85. trans. Ferguson, John (Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 1991) pg.439.

¹³⁵ St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*. 2,12. quoted in Rose, Seraphim. *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision*. (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000) pg.162.

held the opposite opinion to Origen (i.e. that the body was created before the soul), St Gregory echoes the words of St. John Damascene, making certain not to fall into the Origenian realm of pre-existing souls:

Others, on the contrary, marking the order of the making of man as stated by Moses, say that the soul is second to the body in order of time since God first took dust from the earth and formed man, and then animated the being thus formed by his breath: and by this argument they prove that the flesh is more noble than the soul, that which was previously formed (more noble) than that which was afterwards infused into it... As our nature is conceived as twofold, according to the apostolic teaching, made up of the visible man and the hidden man, if the one came first and the other supervened, the power of Him that made us will be shown to be in some way imperfect, as not being sufficient for the whole task at once, but dividing the work, and busying itself with each of the halves in turn.¹³⁶

LITERAL READINGS OF EDEN

In the minds of many, the pre-existence of souls denied the fundamental identity of the human as an integrated whole, thereby devaluing the material universe and the human body. The idea of the garden as merely a spiritual state separate from the “fetters of materiality” bothered those who felt Origen had distorted Adam’s story beyond recognition. St. John Chrysostom, for example, is quick to tell us that paradise, as well as representing a spiritual reality, must also be understood as ‘a part of the history of the earth’. To quote: “Blessed Moses registered even the name of this place (Eden), so that those who love to speak empty words could not deceive simple listeners and say that paradise was not on earth but in heaven, and rave with similar mythologies...”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid. pg.162-163.

¹³⁷ Ibid. pg.166.

In an attempt to dissuade those who would hold on to a purely celestial vision of Eden, Chrysostom made a point of describing the nature of vegetation in the Garden. As well as being a narrative device pointing us towards the unceasing contemplation of God and the joy that comes from being in His presence, Chrysostom speaks of Paradise as a physical reality:

Perhaps those who love to speak from their own wisdom here also will not allow that rivers are actually rivers or the waters precisely waters, but will instill in those who decide to listen to them that they (under the name of rivers and waters) represented something else. But I beg you, let us not pay attention to these people, let us close our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture.¹³⁸

Such descriptions of the physical reality of the Garden can also be found in the writings of the fourteenth century spiritual writer, St. Gregory the Sinaite. Although he is quick to acknowledge that the true nature of paradise is a mystery, he is not willing to drop the idea of Eden as a literal description of a place on earth. Along with Chrysostom, he counters any reading of the Garden of Eden that would devalue material creation:

Eden is a place in which there was planted by God every kind of fragrant plant. It is neither completely incorruptible, nor entirely corruptible. Placed between corruption and incorruption, it is always both abundant in fruits and blossoming with flowers, both mature and immature. The mature trees and fruits are converted into fragrant earth which does not give off any odor of corruption, as do the trees of this world. This is from the abundance of the grace of sanctification which is constantly poured forth there.¹³⁹

SOPHRONY'S VISION OF THE LAND

Nowhere is Sophrony's lack of careful Biblical scholarship more problematic than in his study of the land. Unlike Origen, who enters into a detailed discussion of the pre-

¹³⁸ Ibid. pg.168.

¹³⁹ Ibid. pg.166.

fall land, Sophrony remains relatively quiet on the question. He does not follow the lead of this early father, who strives to leave his reader with a creative explanation to the problem of suffering. Instead, Sophrony admits that he is short of any answers to the age-old questions of injustice and sorrow. Failing to enter into an analysis of the garden that would provide an explanation for the present state of division, Sophrony's texts are filled with open-ended questions and he is quick to state that there are some things that will remain a mystery:

Why are the consequences of Adam's disobedience so disastrous? Why does spiritual life in Christ take, in this world, the tragic form of a hand-to-hand battle against death? Why is God's creation linked to this negation, to death, to the struggle full of pain? Why does His act of creation not lead harmoniously to the fulfillment of humankind in the image of God? Why must I struggle against things which kill me without having the strength for it? I do not understand. To the degree that Christ and the Holy Spirit are, for me, the solution to all the problems which are beyond me, I can live in ignorance of many things. Christ is the foundation of my life. His way of acting attracts me. I do not understand what He said, but what He said is enough for me. I will understand when I pass from this world to the beyond.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Sophrony's works speak little about the question of material creation before Adam's transgression. Where we do find any comments on the pre-fall land they are few and far between and, for the most part, they consist mainly of quotes taken directly from the works of the fathers of the faith.

What is clear is the fact that, while he is hesitant to leave us with a detailed reading of the land, Sophrony can be found openly rejecting any Origenian ideas concerning the possible pre-existence of souls. For this twentieth century Athonite, there is no celestial garden.

¹⁴⁰ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Words of Life*. pg.28

Like Chrysostom, he affirms the garden as a material reality. Rather than viewing the body as a later addition resulting from Adam's transgression, we find Sophrony speaking of the physical world as somehow transformed by the actions of Adam. Sophrony understands the body as having lost its original splendor. The present flesh is, in his view, a corrupted version of the glorious state in which we once lived, the original body having been free from the reality of decay and death. In his vision, Adam's material reality, the whole of creation surrounding him, comes to bear the mark of his transgression. To quote, we learn that "...the question of the fall and salvation does not only have human import: it also touches the rest of created order. When Adam fell, all of creation fell with him; in the same manner, the salvation of humanity inaugurates the salvation of the entire cosmos."¹⁴¹

There is, nonetheless, the expression of a desire, on Sophrony's part, for an escape from the "grossness of the earthly body". He tells us that, "So long as he (i.e. the spiritual being) is tied to the flesh, his knowledge will not attain perfection." Continuing, we learn that, for Sophrony, the saint is one who has desires to move on to the next life with an 'unburdened' soul, freed of the passions of the flesh, in this way 'entering into the veil.'¹⁴²

THE SOUL AND ETERNITY IN ORIGENIAN THOUGHT

Moving back to Origen, we learn that part of his views concerning both human nature and the question of Divinity lies in his understanding of our place in eternity.

¹⁴¹ Symeon, Archimandrite. *Buisson Ardent: Cahiers Saint-Silouane L'Athonite*, vol.2, pg.40. (translation mine)

¹⁴² Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.146.

Surrounded by a Hellenistic culture that understood God to be unchanging, Origen made an attempt to deal with the problem of creation as an event in time. If God is unchanging, some would ask, what was God doing before He created this world? In answer to this dilemma, Origen proposes the solution of a 'succession of ages'. To quote Trigg: "If we were to ask, 'What was God doing before he created this world?' Origen would not contend the question meaningless but would affirm that God was creating the worlds that preceded ours. This world is only one moment in a cycle of worlds that is, he implies, as eternal as any Platonist could wish..."¹⁴³

Origen supported his belief in the possibility of an eternal succession of ages, or worlds, predating our own, by turning his reader's attention back to the first verse of Genesis: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." By accepting Philo's interpretation, which separated this verse from the rest of the chapter, and reading it as applying to the creation of the spiritual world (the rest of the chapter being a description of the creation of the material world), he could justify his claims.¹⁴⁴

Providing us with a brief summary of Origen's creative answer to the problem of eternity and the question of God as creator before the existence of the present reality, Crouzel outlines his understanding of this early father's vision of the various 'ages' as they occur in the *Peri Archon*. Origen, he states, speaks of at least two worlds preceding this one and a further age following our own:

1. There is the intelligible world of ideas, reason and mystery contained in the wisdom the Word and created by God in an eternal generation of His Son who is co-eternal to God.

¹⁴³ Trigg, Joseph W. *Origen: Bible and Philosophy in the 3rd Century*. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983) pg. 110.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pg. 104.

2. This, in Origenian thought, is followed by the world of pre-existent souls, some of whom were sent to this world, in specially created bodies, after the fall. The hope is that this world will be a sort of school for the soul, materiality and the flesh acting as a method for correction.
3. He then speaks of this present reality (and possibly other realities like it that have preceded our own age).
4. After this world, Origen speaks of the age of the resurrection, in which all souls will be reunited to God.¹⁴⁵

In the end, what we are left with is what Lyman has referred to as Origen's "doctrine of eternal creation". In this view, creation and, in particular, rational beings, have always existed in some form. While maintaining the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, Lyman points to a reading of Origen that stresses the idea of divine "foreknowledge" in an "eternally prefigured creation" (i.e. we were conceived as an idea but not yet born). She makes it clear that Origen was "not intending to deny a distinction between Creator and creation." Rather, he "helps to establish God as living up to the Platonic ideal of an eternally unchanging divinity, forever acting as supreme creator". To back her point, she quotes the first book of the *Peri Archon*:

For it is at once senseless and impious to think that at any point or time God's powers were at rest...and therefore if no precise point can be supposed when this power was not doing good, there were always things for which He did good, namely His creatures, and doing good appropriately and justly in these things, He distributed his favors with the aid of providence...so we may say neither that God's works are unbegotten and co-eternal with God, nor that He was transformed to doing good having done nothing good before.¹⁴⁶

The question is: where does all of this ultimately bring us? How do Origen's visions of paradise point us to our final destiny? Kallistos Ware in his essay, *Dare We*

¹⁴⁵ Crouzel, Henri. *Origen*. trans. A.S. Worrall, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) pg.106.

¹⁴⁶ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*. pg.55.

Hope for the Salvation of All?, reminds us that Origen's protology cannot be divorced from his eschatology. In painting a picture of the beginnings of humanity that speaks of the loss of what he understands to be the original unity of creation, Origen points us towards a destiny that includes the final restoration of all things to God.:

At the end, so Origen maintained, the process of fragmentation will be reversed. All alike, whether angels, human beings, or demons, will be restored to unity with the Logos; the primal harmony of the total creation will be reinstated, and once more 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor.15:28). Origen's view is in this way circular in character: the end will be as the beginning.¹⁴⁷

Where does Origen stand on the issue of materiality in his vision of end times? The *Peri Archon* seems to leave the question open-ended. Entertaining three possible answers, Origen, according to Rufinus's translation, seems to suggest that the question require further reflection.¹⁴⁸ Briefly stated, Origen's three possibilities run as follows:

- 1 – There is a ninth heaven above the stars, a physical universe far better than our own, that will become the new home of the blessed.
- 2 – Our bodies will be transformed into an ethereal substance whose fineness and splendor, marvelous in any event, will vary according to the merits of the individual.
- 3 – materiality will cease to be and all things will return to the divine unity from which they proceeded.¹⁴⁹

Trigg speculates that, since Origen maintained a belief in an "end that is like the beginning", he must have adopted the third view, positing an end to materiality:

We may conjecture that, given his belief in the end of the world will be like the beginning, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* appealed to him as a position more consistent with the ultimate disappearance of all corporality in the divine unity at the end of time than the creation of the world of an already existing matter. If so, his doctrine of creation out of nothing

¹⁴⁷ Ware, Kallistos. *Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All* in *The inner kingdom*. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000) pg.200.

¹⁴⁸ Trigg, Joseph W. *Origen: Bible and Philosophy in the 3rd Century*. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983) pg.112.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pg.112

ultimately provides for an eschatology more consistent with Platonism than the heaven and new earth of the Bible.¹⁵⁰

THE SOUL AND ETERNITY IN THE WORKS OF SOPHRONY

Sophrony also speaks of the saint as 'eternal and beginningless', but here he is not referring to an Origenian conception of the soul as pre-existent or of an 'eternally prefigured creation'. Instead, the soul that partakes of the Divine life, finds itself contemplating God in a realm that lies beyond the confines of time and space, where beginnings and ends cease to be:

Eternity is not an abstraction, an entity existing separately (from the reality of time, created by God) but is God Himself in His own Being. When it is God's good pleasure to give man grace and make him a partaker in Divine life, man becomes, not only immortal in the sense of having his life endlessly prolonged, but beginningless, too, for the sphere of Divine life into which he is lifted has neither beginning nor end. By 'beginningless', I do not mean to imply a pre-existence of the soul or a transmutation of our created nature into unoriginate Divine nature – I mean a sharing in God's unoriginate life consequent on the deification of the creature by an act of grace.¹⁵¹

In his book *On Prayer*, Sophrony speaks of the role of 'time,' which he speaks of as part of God's creative work. While 'eternity' becomes the hope of the Saint, 'time' plays an essential role in the work of salvation:

Our earthly existence is conditioned by time and space. But what is time? There are various definitions. Time is the 'place' of our meeting with the Creator. Time is the process of the actualization of God's purpose for his creature: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work' (John 5:17)... Each of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pg. 110

¹⁵¹ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg. 146.

us has his allotted time – brief but enough to find salvation. The creative idea of God is realized in His creation...¹⁵²

In Sophrony's view, the soul, having been created out of nothingness, is granted the gift of eternal life. This is true whether or not the soul chooses to participate in the divine life. While the journey into eternity is joy and complete fulfillment for those who have followed Christ, it becomes endless sorrow for those who have created their own darkness, who have chosen, of their free-will, a walk away from the fullness of being that comes with life in God:

To say that man who was called into life out of nothingness by a creative act of God does not possess eternal life within himself does not mean that in dying he returns to nothingness, to non-existence. Gifted with freedom, when he turns away from God he leaves Light and Life for perpetual death and outer darkness; but this darkness and death do not correspond to that nothingness, that non-existence, out of which the creature was called into being. It is the 'state' of the 'reasonable being' indestructible in his nature. Turning away from God, the creature, however cannot find any realm inaccessible to him. Even in hell Divine love will embrace all men, but, while this love is joy and life for them that love God, it is torment for those that hate Him.¹⁵³

Sophrony cannot agree with Origen's belief in the restoration of all things. Allowing for the possibility that there are some who, even in the next life, will continue to refuse the divine life, Sophrony reminds the reader that one can never be forced to act against his own free-will:

The Lord said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth' (that is 'crucified on the cross') 'will draw all men unto me' (cf. John 12:32). Thus Christ's love hopes to draw all men to Him, and so reaches out to the last hell. There may be some – whether they be many or few, we do not know – who will meet even this perfect love, this perfect sacrifice, with rejection even on the eternal plane, and declare, 'I want no part in it'. (It was their recognition of this abyss of freedom which prompted the Fathers of the

¹⁵² Sophrony, Archimandrite *On Prayer*. pg.16.

¹⁵³ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*..148.

Church to repudiate the determinist theories of the Origenists. Belief in *apokatastasis*, understood as universal salvation predestined in the divine purpose, would certainly rule out the sort of prayer that we see in the Staretz Silouan.)¹⁵⁴

THE ROLE OF MATERIAL CREATION IN ORIGEN

Although, as we have noted earlier, Origen, in contrast to Sophrony, sees the body and material creation to be a strictly post-fall phenomenon, he makes an important clarification: Our physical reality is not to be viewed as evil. On the one hand he shares, with his Gnostic opponents, a feeling of horror over a fallen world and does not contradict the words of Heraclitus who “sees the human body as mere cinders.”¹⁵⁵ On the other, Origen could not embrace a radical dualism that condemned the material reality of creation as evil. In the words of Lyman:

Against the Gnostics, Origen tried to refute the idea that the body was a sign of punishment or was at enmity with God...Thus, the variety of the material world is not as such a sign of imperfection or a prison, but a reflection of the various means whereby God redeems individual creatures.¹⁵⁶

Danielou, in his study of the *Peri Archon*, reminds us that Origen’s view of the body, as well as speaking against those of the Gnostics, also ran counter to popular Hellenistic notions concerning the flesh:

Originally, all spirits were incorporeal. On account of the fall, they were clothed with bodies. But he makes a clarification: the fall did not, as Plato or Plotinus understood it, mean a descent to the sensible. Our corporeal

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. pg.109.

¹⁵⁵ Cornélis Les Fondements Cosmologiques de L’Eschatologie D’Origène,(Paris La Table Ronde, 1948) pg.20. (translation mine)

¹⁵⁶ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* pg.62.

being is not evil. There is not, in Origen, the condemnation of the body that is found in many streams of Hellenistic culture...¹⁵⁷

Far from evil, material creation, in Origenian thought, becomes the means by which God educates our soul. Pointing us to a higher reality, physical beauty and ugliness become a reflection of moral beauty and ugliness.¹⁵⁸ The challenges of living in the world act as a form of preparatory training for the next life, a necessary point of departure leading us towards knowledge of the invisible. In the words of Trigg:

Our embodiment in grossly material bodies is a punishment for sin, but it is also a means whereby we can be disciplined and trained for our return to God; the devils (who are possessed with aerial bodies) do not merit this concession. Because they are conscious of the enormity of their punishment and despair of returning to God, the devils take a malign pleasure in hindering, by temptation to sin, the ascent of other rational spirits to God.¹⁵⁹

In other words, material creation points to God as a loving father who desires the best for his children:

Origen's description may be distinguished from those of the Platonists and the Gnostics by his insistence on God's intention and power to enact his goodness and desire in material creation... As God's power is unlimited, His actual good intention is expressed in the very nature of existence. Matter is not in opposition to the nature of God; nor does it limit divine power. Hence any separation or limit in material existence is a result of moral imperfection.¹⁶⁰

Once again, we find a parallel between the words of Origen and those of his predecessor Clement. Origen's understanding runs consonant with that of this earlier father, who states, in his *Stromata*, that "Those then who run down created existence and

¹⁵⁷ Danielou, Jean *Origene: Le Genie du Christianisme*. (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948) pg.215. (translation mine)

¹⁵⁸ Cornelis, H. *Les Fondements Cosmologiques de L'eschatologie D'origène*. pg.2. (translation mine)

¹⁵⁹ Trigg, Joseph W. *Origen: Bible and Philosophy in the 3rd Century*. pg.106.

¹⁶⁰ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology* pg.55.

vilify the body are wrong; not considering that the frame of man was formed erect for the contemplation of heaven, and that the organization of the senses tends towards knowledge; and that the members and parts are arranged for good, not for pleasure”¹⁶¹

Much like Origen, Clement understands the body and material reality as being educational, serving as an aid to the soul in its journey towards God. On this point, he shares in Origen’s rejection of a dualism that predominated in Gnostic thought (or false-Gnosticism, as he referred to it – true Gnostic thought he defines as being the teachings of the Church): “But since these falsely named (Gnostics) calumniate the body, let them learn the harmonious mechanism of the body contributes to the understanding which leads to goodness of nature.”¹⁶²

THE ROLE OF MATERIAL CREATION IN SOPHRONY

This view of material creation as both instructive and inspiring is shared by Sophrony. Although, as we learnt earlier, the saint, in Sophrony’s works, is understood as called to a contemplation that rises above the material, this is not to say that the soul cannot learn from all that surrounds it. It was indeed this form of education, gained from the appreciation of nature and the interaction of the human soul with the created world, that led Sophrony to the remark that “...where divine grace dwells, every manifestation in the world strikes the soul by its searchless wonderfulness, and the soul, from

¹⁶¹ Clement, *Stromata* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.2. ed. Roberts, Alexander and James Donaldson (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956) pg.439.

¹⁶² Ibid. pg.412.

contemplation of visible beauty passes to a sense of God, loving and wondrous in all things.”¹⁶³

St. Silouan is described by Sophrony as one who was filled with such wonder over the beauty of all of God’s creation. This sense of awe only served to further enrich his prayer life and fuel his desire for the contemplation of that which lies beyond the material. To quote:

Ever concentrated on the inner man, he (Silouan) did not pay much attention to the outside world but when his eye fell upon the manifest beauty of the world, it was a fresh inducement to contemplate Divine glory and direct his heart back to God... In this respect he was like a child – marveling at everything. He is entirely right when he notes in his journal that whoever has lost grace fails to perceive, as one should, the beauty of the world, and loses all wonder. The inexpressible splendor of Divine creation leaves him unmoved.¹⁶⁴

For the soul transformed by the grace of God, all things take on a new significance. This is particularly true where the problem of suffering is involved. What was once considered ‘bad,’ loses its sting. In the end, all things (poverty, illness, suffering and death, included) can be used by God for the benefit of those who love Him. This view comes to color Silouan’s words:

The soul who has surrendered herself to the will of God bears every affliction, every ill, with ease, in times of sickness she prays and contemplates God, saying, ‘O Lord, Thou seest my frailty, Thou knowest how weak and sinful I am. Help me to endure my sufferings. I thank thee for Thy goodness...’

If some misfortune befalls you, reflect in this wise: the Lord sees my heart and if he so wills, all will be well both for me and others, and then your soul will always be at peace.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*. pg.96-97.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. pg.96.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. pg.312.

Elsewhere, Silouan adds that suffering can teach us some valuable lessons. In his own words: “The Lord loves mankind but he sends affliction that we may perceive our weakness and humble ourselves, and for this humility receive the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all things are good, all things are joyful, all things are well.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the one who truly has faith, though he might suffer, never gets distressed, knowing that in the end, “all things work together for good” (Rom.8:28):

...If you are distressed over anything, it means that you have not fully surrendered to God’s will...The soul that is given over to the will of God fears nothing...Come what may, ‘such is God’s pleasure’ she says. If she falls sick, she thinks, ‘this means that I need sickness, or God would not have sent it...’¹⁶⁷

He recalls the early father John Cassian’s words in his Conference with Abbot Theodore. Here, we find that the only true good is God, and the “bad” is that which tears us away from the true life in God – i.e. sin. Everything else is indifferent, whether it be wealth, poverty, health, injury. In this altered system of values, both “fortune” and “misfortune” can be used to bring us closer to God or, conversely, can become a source of distraction in the life of those who choose to walk away from the Creator.¹⁶⁸

TILLING THE FIELDS

As we conclude our study of the land of Eden, we face one more question. This question relates to the interpretation of Genesis 2:15, where it is said that God left Adam in the Garden “to dress it and to keep it.” If Origen did not understand the pre-fall land in

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pg.305

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. pg.335.

¹⁶⁸ Cassian, *Conference with Abbot Theodore in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. II.* ed. Schaff, Philip and Henry Wace. (Includes *The Institutes and The Conferences of Cassian*) (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) pg.352-353.

a literal sense, one that could relate it to the actual existence of a material reality, how did he see Adam's task in the Garden?

Origen tells us that the 'plentiful fields' of Eden can be related to the interior life. The tilling of the fields, in Origenian thought, points us towards a spiritual goal – in his reading, Adam's work consisted in living for God.¹⁶⁹ This understanding of the land comes across in Origen's comments on Genesis 1:10-11 - "Let the Earth bring forth vegetation producing seed according to its kind & likeness, and the fruit tree bearing fruit whose seed is within it according to its likeness on the earth. And it was so done". To quote:

Let us relate the meaning (or this passage) to ourselves ... Let us offer copious and diverse fruit to God, that we also may be blessed by the Father who says: 'behold the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field which the Lord has blessed' (Gen. 27:27). And, that which the apostle said might be fulfilled in us: 'for the earth that receives the rain which comes frequently upon it and brings forth vegetation fit for those by whom it is cultivated will receive blessings from God, but that which brings forth the thorns and briars is reprobate and very near a curse, whose end is to be burned' (Heb. 6:7-8).¹⁷⁰

In looking at the readings of both Origen and Sophrony on the subject of the garden, we learn that their greatest point of divergence lies in their vision of the pre-fall land.

On the one hand, Origen leaves us with a detailed vision of Eden that includes speculation on the possibility of a celestial paradise in which pre-existent souls stand before God unburdened by the concerns of the flesh. Included in this picture of the

¹⁶⁹ This view can be compared to that of Philo, who relates the tilling of the fields to the practice of the virtues - cf. Philo, *The Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* 2,1,6. trans. Colson. Pg.181.

¹⁷⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1,3 ed. Heine. Pg.52.

garden, we find some creative ideas, including the succession of ages, a cosmology that places humans midway between demons and angels, and the idea of an 'eternally prefigured creation.'

On the other, we find Sophrony, who leaves us with a less developed protology, one that does not fall into the form of speculative thinking that marks Origen's vision of first things. Coming closer to the literal readings of the garden that mark the words of such thinkers as St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Sinaite, Sophrony is found rejecting the idea of pre-existent souls.

Nonetheless, Origen and Sophrony can be found agreeing in one fundamental area: they both view material creation and the body in a positive light, one that acknowledges the instructive role that these have in the life of the soul. Understanding the physical reality as a work of God, both of these thinkers are quick to reject dualistic notions that view the body as evil.

CHAPTER 5

THE ANIMALS

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field... (Gen.1:26 and 2:19-20)

As we continue our tour of Eden, we are faced with a vision of creatures of the garden. In looking at the many animals that came to inhabit paradise, there are two questions to consider: how are these animals understood and what does it mean to name and have dominion over these creatures?

ORIGEN AND THE BEASTS

If the pre-fall land, in Origenian thought, cannot be read as referring literally to a material reality, it would follow that any study of Eden in this father's work would have to include a discussion of his understanding of the true significance of the creatures of paradise. As was the case with 'the land,' these 'beasts' must also be considered in something other than the obvious or 'bodily' sense.

In his first homily on Genesis, Origen gives his listener certain insights into his interpretation of the true nature of the beasts described in Gen.1:20 – "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth creeping creatures having life and birds flying over the earth in the

firmament of Heaven.' And it was done." - He tells us that, fish, birds, animals and creeping things are to be understood as "the things which proceed from the inclination of the soul and the thought of the heart, or those which are brought forth from bodily desires and the impulses of the flesh."¹⁷¹

When Origen speaks of Adam's relationship with the animals in the Garden of Eden, it is usually in connection with the idea of finding order in one's thought life. In his understanding, having dominion over the animals finds a direct parallel with the idea of having dominion over one's interior universe. The idea of *nepsis*, or the guarding of one's thoughts, finds its way into Origen's reading of the Garden, by way of his interpretation of the significance of the creatures of Eden:

... In accordance with those things which we have explained above, God wishes such a man as we have described to have dominion over the previously mentioned beasts, birds, creeping creatures, four footed creatures, and all the rest, we explained how these ought to be understood allegorically when we said this and the water that is man's mind, is ordered to bring forth the spiritual sense and the earth to bring forth the carnal sense, that the mind might rule them and not they rule the mind.¹⁷²

The task of guarding one's heart from the influence of 'evil suggestions,' likened to the creeping creatures, becomes the full time task of our earliest ancestor. Gifted with discrimination, the ability to 'name the creatures,' (i.e. the capacity to discern between those thoughts that are good and those which are evil that can only lead us away from God), the mind 'enlightened by Christ,' is called to the task of differentiation. Continuing in his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen speaks of this task:

I think that if our mind has been enlightened by Christ, our sun, it is ordered afterwards to bring forth from these waters which are in it

¹⁷¹ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1,16. ed. Heine. pg.69.

¹⁷² Ibid. 1,12. pg.62.

'creeping creatures' and 'birds which fly', that is, to bring out into the open good or evil thoughts that there might be a distinction of the good thoughts from the evil, which certainly both proceed from the heart. ... By the word and precept of God, let us offer both to God's view and judgment that with His enlightenment we may be able to distinguish what is evil from what is good, that is, that we may separate from ourselves those things which creep upon the earth and bear earthly cares.¹⁷³

This leads us to Lyman's statement that, in Origenian writing, the discrimination of thoughts precedes and accompanies the work of contemplation. To quote, "The exercise of will (in the works of Origen) consists in the selection of proper impressions from which to make a judgment. Impressions induce instability and can be misleading, but it is the unwillingness to judge thoughts and the willingness to nurture false or harmful thoughts which result in error or sin..."¹⁷⁴

As well, we learn that, for Origen, the animals can also be said to represent the nature of one's actions. In his *Dialogue with Heraclides*, he tells us that one becomes 'like an animal' when one choose to act upon impulses that are misdirected:

Resolve to learn that you can be transformed and put aside the form of swine, which describes the impure soul, and the form of dog which describes the person who barks and howls and speaks abusively. It is possible to be transformed (even) from serpents...If then we are willing to hear that it is in our power to be transformed...let us learn from the Apostle the transformation that depends on us. This is how he puts it: 'we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed in his likeness (2 Cor.3:18)..."¹⁷⁵

Origen is far from being alone in presenting us with a reading of the beasts that relates them to our thought life. Seraphim Rose in his commentary on Genesis, points to

¹⁷³ Ibid. 1,8. pg.57.

¹⁷⁴ Lyman, Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology* pg.64.

¹⁷⁵ Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides*. 13,23-14,10. ed. Daly, pg.67-68.

the writings of St. Basil (bishop of Caesarea, born ca. 330) who echoes an Origenian allegorical understanding of the animals:

You have dominion over every kind of savage beast. But, you will say, do I have savage beasts within me? Yes many of them. It is even an immense crowd of savage beasts that you carry within yourself. Do not take this as an insult. Is not anger a small wild beast when it barks in your heart? Is it not more savage that the first dog that comes? And is not the trickery that crouches in a treacherous soul more ferocious than the bear of the caverns? ... What kind of savage beast do we not have within us? ... you were created to have dominion; you are the master of the passions, the master of the savage beasts, the master of serpents, the master of birds... Be master of the thoughts within you in order to become master of all beings. Thus, the power which has been given us through living beings prepares us to exercise dominion over ourselves.¹⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, the stories presented in the *Lives and Sayings of the Desert Fathers* are filled with tales involving the harmonious relationship of the saints with the animal kingdom, calling us back to the reality of paradise lost. Origen, in this regard, is simply part of a tradition that recognizes the saint as one who possesses an unusual relationship both with his own thoughts and, on the exterior, with all of creation. This tradition is pointed out in Benedicta Ward's insightful preface to the *Lives*:

The question was, where is Divine power to be found? How does one come across it? And then how will it work? So there are stories of the locus of the holy being so powerful that it extends to animals, in a restoration of man to the state of paradise, to the situation of the first Adam, restored in Christ the second Adam, once more purified by obedience and therefore at home with the whole of creation. There is the story of Bes talking gently to a hippopotamus and then to a crocodile, and urging them to be at peace and not to ravage the lands of men. Theon was said to go out at night into the desert in order to give water to the gazelles, the antelopes and the wild asses. Amoun asked two serpents to keep guard at his cell; and Helle made a crocodile serve as his ferry over the Nile... The emphasis, however, in these stories is not a sentimental attachment to animals but upon the true control and obedience of man and the beasts...

¹⁷⁶ St. Basil, *On the Origin of Man* 1,19. quoted in Rose, Seraphim. *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision*. pg.154.

The holy man is at one again with restored creation, but in the right order, in which man is in control and is the crown.¹⁷⁷

SOPHRONY AND THE BEASTS

Sophrony continues in this tradition. Understanding the fall to have a significance that moves beyond mere human reality, Sophrony speaks of the saint as one who has compassion not just for men but for all living creatures. Here, again, having an ordered inner life leads one to a harmonious relationship with all of creation, the birds, beasts and otherwise:

(The compassionate heart)...is one that burns for all of creation, for humanity, birds, beasts, demons...for all creatures. When she thinks of them, when she sees them, her eyes are filled with tears. So strong is her compassion, so great and constant, that her heart breaks and she cannot bear the least harm or the smallest sadness to befall creation. It is for this reason that she unceasingly prays in tears for animals lacking reason, for enemies of the truth and those deceived by them, that they would be forgiven and cared for...¹⁷⁸

In his thoughtful analysis of Silouan's understanding of Adam's lament, Kallistos Ware speaks of the saint's relationship with the 'beasts'. He tells us that, according to Silouan and his biographer Sophrony, the sin of Adam "was cosmic in its effects, destroying the harmony that existed between humans and the rest of creation". It is for this reason that Adam proclaims, in Silouan's lamentations "In Paradise was I joyful and glad: the Spirit of God rejoiced me, and suffering was a stranger to me. But when I was driven forth from Paradise cold and hunger began to torment me. The beasts and the birds

¹⁷⁷ Ward, Benedicta. The Lives of the Desert Fathers. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984) pg.43.

¹⁷⁸ Symeon, Archimandrite. *Buisson Ardent: Cahiers Saint-Silouane L'Athonite*. vol.3, pg.32. (translation mine)

that were gentle and had loved me turned into wild things, and were afraid and ran from me.”¹⁷⁹

This understanding of Adam’s sorrow, as one that was shared with all of creation, is reflected in the saint’s prayers. At one point, we find Silouan calling all of God’s creatures to share in his sadness over the fall: “What has befallen me? How came I to lose joy, and shall I attain to that joy again? Weep with me, all ye wild beasts and birds, weep with me, forest and desert. Weep with me, every creature created by God, and comfort me in my grief and sorrow.”¹⁸⁰

While Sophrony is not as quick to present us with an allegorical reading of the animals that relates them with the problem of intrusive thoughts, it is clear that he shares Origen’s stress on the importance of the ‘guarding of the heart.’ In this contemporary Athonite’s opinion, one must strive to keep outside impressions to a minimum. To quote:

Stationed within the heart, the mind observes the images and thoughts that appear, that come from the sphere of cosmic being and strive to take possession of a man’s heart and mind. The energy of this or that spirit assumes the form of an intrusive thought – that is, a thought linked with this or that image. The pressure exerted by intrusive thoughts is extraordinarily strong, and to subdue it the monk must all day long force himself to avoid every single ‘interested’ look, not allowing himself to become attached to anything. His constant battle is to reduce outside impression to a strict minimum. Otherwise, when the hour comes for interior mental prayer everything that has made an impression will descend on the heart, causing great confusion.¹⁸¹

In speaking of the guarding of the heart and the role of discernment in this task, Sophrony goes as far as providing his reader with a discussion of the development of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. vol.3, pg.39.

¹⁸⁰ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite* pg.365.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. pg.139

intrusive thoughts. Reminding us that all of our choices, both good and evil, begin within the heart, he leaves us with an outline of the stages of thought that lead to sin:

1 – The idea, what he terms a ‘spiritual influence’ or ‘intrusive thought’ approaches from without. This idea may or may not take the form of an image. This initial thought does not become the subject of sin as long as the soul does not consent to its presence.

2 – The mind takes an interest in the approaching idea and finds itself attracted to the notion that is suggested. Unless it tears itself away, it will eventually acquiesce.

3 – Having acquiesced, the soul may find itself possessed by the idea. The thought takes captive the mind and will.

4 – Eventually, held captive, the soul falls into the actualization of the suggestion.

5 – If the process of actualization is repeated often enough it becomes second nature, passion dominates our life and the work of contemplation becomes difficult if not impossible.¹⁸²

In an effort to stop short of the next stage in the development of an intrusive thought, the contemplative “shutting the doors of his heart, ...(stations) his mind on guard like a sentinel... Unfettered by imagination and cogitation but armed with prayer and the name of Jesus Christ, the Ascetic striver embarks on the struggle against all external influence, all thoughts from without.”¹⁸³

Though this act of guarding the heart is not directly linked with the question of the beasts in the works of Sophrony, we nonetheless find, in the life of St Silouan, the recurring idea of the spiritual being as one who is at peace both with the inner thought-life and all of the creatures of the earth. Describing the Silouan’s ordered relationship

¹⁸² Ibid. pg.133-134.

¹⁸³ Ibid. pg.135.

with the beasts, Sophrony tells us that, “on the one hand, there was compassion (unusual among virile men like him) for all living creatures carried to extremes that might suggest a pathological sensibility, while at the same time another side of his life showed that it was not a pathological but genuine supra-natural greatness and the grace-given kindness.”¹⁸⁴

From Origen and Sophrony’s accounts of the animals of Eden, we learn that, as long as the soul is dominated by intrusive thoughts, it will not find peace, either with itself or with the creatures that surround it. In striving to live in harmony with the rest of creation, one must start with the question of the inner life. The creatures of paradise become, for both Origen and Sophrony, reminders of a higher calling, one that leads us to our next and last stop on the journey through paradise, to the question of the communal dimension of Eden found in the body of Christ.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pg.94.

CHAPTER 6

THE BODY OF CHRIST

One more question remains as we conclude our tour of the garden: what implication does our vision of Eden have on our understanding of the communal dimension of Christianity? While the emphasis, in earlier chapters, had been placed on the inner life of the individual, it would be a mistake to think that an understanding of the state of Adam can be divorced from the question of community, of the 'body of Christ'. Both Origen and Sophrony tell us that salvation and the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual being cannot be found by the individual in isolation. In effect, we learn that 'no man is an island.'

Seeing humanity as united in the reality of Adam's lament, Silouan speaks of a shared struggle. Put in other words, "my personal salvation is linked to the salvation of the entire human race, and even of all creation". To quote Sophrony, "How can perfect peace exist on earth as long as there remains even a single man with evil intentions?"¹⁸⁵

This awareness, of both our common roots in Adam and the shared nature of the fall, becomes a leitmotif in the prayers of Sophrony and his Spiritual father, Silouan. Silouan tells us that, "He who has the Holy Spirit in him, to however slight a degree, sorrows day and night for all mankind. His heart is filled with pity for all of God's creatures, more especially for those who do not know God, or who resist him and

¹⁸⁵ *Buisson Ardent* vol.2, pg.43. (translation mine)

therefore are bound for the fire of torment. For them, more than for himself, he prays day and night, that all may repent and the know the Lord.”¹⁸⁶

Those endowed with the gift of self-knowledge cannot, in Sophrony’s view, help but participate in mourning over the present state of affairs. Such sorrowful prayer for all of humanity comes to mark the life of the contemplative:

We see in others that which our own spiritual experience has shown us about ourselves, and so man’s attitude to his fellow is a sure sign of the degree of self-knowledge to which he has attained. Whoever has experienced how deep and intense the suffering of the human spirit can be when excluded from the light of true being, and, on the other hand, knows what man is when he dwells in God, has no doubt that every human being is a permanent eternal value, more precious than all the rest of the world put together. He is conscious of man’s worth, conscious that ‘the least of these my brethren’ (Matt.25:40) is dear in God’s sight, and so he will never think of destroying, harming or even giving offence to his neighbor.¹⁸⁷

In sum, For Saint Silouan, Adam is ‘our father...the father of all of humanity’.

”Following Saint Paul (1 Cor.15:22-45), the Starets Silouan saw Adam, the first created man, as the head of the human race, containing and recapitulating within himself the whole of the human race...this solidarity in Adam brings all humans together as ontologically one, consubstantial.”¹⁸⁸

We are told that Silouan’s understanding of the Lord’s commandment to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ follows in such an awareness. If we are all united in ‘Adam, our father’, our neighbor is, in some sense, our self.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. pg.352.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pg.100.

¹⁸⁸ Symeon, Archimandrite. *Buisson Ardent: Cahiers Saint-Silouane L'Athonite*. vol.3, pg.38.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. pg.40.

In light of all of this, we find Sophrony speaking of the individual as part of a 'cosmic tree.' Meditating on the Divine command that calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, Sophrony speaks of the place of the individual in the body of Christ. In his book, *On Prayer*, he leaves us with the following:

It was given to me to understand this commandment in the form of a gigantic tree, of cosmic dimensions, whose root is Adam. Myself, I am only a little leaf on a branch of this tree. But this tree is not foreign to me; it is the basis of my being. I belong to it. To pray for the whole world is to pray for this tree in its totality, with its milliards of leaves.¹⁹⁰

A sense of the unity that we have as descendants of Adam is also expressed by Origen. His vision of the 'body of Christ' is colored by his understanding of our shared experience. Reading his Homilies on Ezekiel, we learn that:

Every multitude of things which are alike are one, and the many who are alike are not many bodies but one body, as has been written: 'You are the body of Christ and individually members of it' (1 Cor.12:27). And in the 'sacrament' of the ninety-nine sheep who were not lost and the one that was lost, our Savior came 'to seek what was lost' (cf. Lk 15:4-7; Mt.18:12-14)... 'One body' are the many bodies, and one sheep are the many sheep which have gone astray.¹⁹¹

Calling to mind the question of the image, studied in chapter two, as being rooted in Christ, Origen speaks of the totality of creation as united in the Lord. In his second Homily on Psalm 36, he writes: "Thus Christ has the whole human race, and perhaps even the totality of all creation, as his body, and each of us is individually a member of it (cf.1 Cor.12:27)."¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Words of Life*. pg.21

¹⁹¹ Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4, 6. in Von Balthasar, *Origen: Spirit and Fire - A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*. pg.282-283.

¹⁹² Ibid. pg.283.

It is with this in mind that both Origen and Sophrony speak of our actions as having a “communal significance.” Just as our salvation cannot be found in isolation, neither can our choices be made without coloring the existence of all of creation. Thus, we are told, in Origen’s homilies on Joshua (5,6), that, “...He who acts impurely ‘sins against his own body’ (cf. 1 Cor.6:18), not just the body which has been made the ‘temple of God,’ but also that body of which it is said that the whole church is the body of Christ (cf. Col 1:24); for he who defiles his own body seems to sin against the whole church, because the stain is spread through one member to the whole body.”¹⁹³

The sorrow that comes with sin is one that, in the end, comes to affect all of humanity and, conversely, it may be said that our struggle towards the likeness of Christ brings a shared joy to all souls. In the words of St. Paul, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Cor.12:27-28)

This shared struggle is one that, according to Origen, exists beyond the present life. Borrowing the words of St. Paul, he tells us that the saint cannot truly find fulfillment without seeing all of humanity restored. Even one lost soul, for the individual who is filled with Christ-like love, becomes the source of great sorrow. To quote *On Prayer* (11), “It is...fitting, for the love which exists beyond the present life, to speak of the anxiety of all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Cor.11:28-29)”¹⁹⁴

An awareness of this ongoing struggle, one that remains with us as long as there are ‘lost souls’ in need of restoration, comes to form part of Silouan’s definition of love.

¹⁹³ Ibid. pg.306.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. pg.287.

Sophrony, in sharing with us the substance of one of this great spiritual father's conversations with an anonymous hermit, recounts the following:

It was particularly characteristic of Staretz Silouan to pray for the dead suffering in the hell of separation from God... He could not bear to think that anyone would languish in 'outer darkness.' I remember a conversation between him and a certain hermit, who declared with evident satisfaction, 'God will punish all atheists. They will burn in everlasting fire.'

Obviously upset, the Starets said, 'tell me, supposing you went to paradise, and there looked down and saw somebody burning in hell-fire – would you feel happy?'

'It cannot be helped. It would be their own fault,' said the hermit.

The Starets answered him with a sorrowful countenance. 'Love could not bear that,' he said. 'We must pray for all'.¹⁹⁵

Silouan, in appealing to a Divine compassion that desires the salvation of all, has left us with a problem: "If God is love and this love of his is generous, inexhaustible, infinitely patient, ... how can He ever stop loving any of those rational creatures whom he has made?" Surely, if God is love, he will watch over his creatures in his tender mercy "until eventually, perhaps after countless ages (as Origen would suggest), all of them might freely and willingly turn back to Him."¹⁹⁶

If we reject even the possibility of the eventual restoration of all things and affirm the existence of a hell in which some remain apart, we have a dilemma: to hold on to such a belief, according to Origen, would mean maintaining a vision in which the opposition between good and evil, joy and torment, remains forever unresolved. In this scheme, Origen tells us, God's work would never be complete. To quote Ware:

¹⁹⁵ Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite* pg.48.

¹⁹⁶ Ware, Kallistos. *The inner kingdom*. pg.194.

If we start by affirming that God created a world which was wholly good and if we maintain that a significant part of his rational creation will end up in intolerable anguish, separated from Him for all eternity, surely this implies that God has failed in his creative work and has been defeated by the force of evil. Are we to rest satisfied with such a conclusion?¹⁹⁷

Relatedly, on the human level, we are asked to consider the following: If the saint is tortured by the thought of even one fallen soul, how can he or she ever find true peace outside of the possible restoration of all things? Is it conceivable that such a being, filled with God's love, would ever be able to fully live the joyful reality of paradise as long as there remains even one soul in hell, one being separated from the fullness of life in Christ?

On the other side of the issue, as Kallistos Ware adds, there are certain questions concerning the tension between free-will and grace. Namely, how would we be able to reconcile Origen's vision of the restoration of all, his *apokatastasis*, with the principle of human beings as free? "If the triumph of Divine love is inevitable, what place is there for liberty of choice? How can we be genuinely free if in the last resort there is nothing for us to choose from?"¹⁹⁸

Denying what they understood to be 'the lack of acknowledged freedom' in the Origenian vision of universal salvation, both Sophrony and Silouan maintained a belief in the possibility of 'eternal damnation.'¹⁹⁹ Sophrony's reasoning in this regard makes sense but it begs us to ask yet another question: Does Origen's eschatological hope really stand against the idea of the human as endowed with the freedom of choice?

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, pg.195.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. pg.194

¹⁹⁹ cf. Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Saint Silouan the Athonite* pg.109.

Origen did not think so. In his view God's love will eventually come to be freely chosen by all beings. Ware is quick to remind us that Origen's hope in the possibility of universal restoration does not, in this early father's understanding, negate the reality of humans as endowed with free-will. He quotes the *Peri Archon*, where Origen tells us that the eventual subjection of all souls to God "will be accomplished in accordance with various assured methods and disciplines and times; yet it should not be thought that there is some necessity which compels all things into subjection, or that the whole world will be subdued by force to God."²⁰⁰

At the very least, even if Origen's views concerning our ultimate end do not agree with those of the Orthodox faith, he must be commended for his desire for the salvation of all, reflected in his vision of the eventual restoration of all things. Through this vision, he teaches us that, if we are all part of the body of Christ, we ought also to view one another as, in some sense, part of our own being. We are called to struggle, as one body, in the spiritual war that greets us. In his own words, taken from his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, "I think we should have such an attitude towards our neighbors that we love them not as if they were foreign bodies but as our own members. Due to the fact, then, that we are members of each other (cf. Eph. 4:25), we should have an equal and similar love towards all..."²⁰¹

Though Origen and Sophrony have opposing views in the subject of universal salvation, they both express the hope that all of those who have fallen will eventually find God's grace. Sharing an understanding of the spiritual being that stresses the importance

²⁰⁰ Origen, *Peri Archon* 3, 5, 8. trans. Butterworth, pg.243.

²⁰¹ Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. 3. in Von Balthasar. *Origen: Spirit and Fire - A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*. pg.306.

of community, these two fathers remind us of the significance that Adam's choices had for the rest of creation and, indeed, for the whole of humanity.

Not only do Adam's choices come to bear on the existence of every other soul but, as we have learned, so do our own: whether our actions are committed in the public arena, or in the secret depths of the heart, they come to take on a cosmic significance. The whole of our lives come to touch the existence of the whole of the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Origen and Sophrony teach us that one can gain much from an exploration of the Garden of Eden and the life of Adam as described in Genesis.

Even before focusing on the question of Eden, we come to gain some insight into Origen's understanding of the 'senses of Scripture' and his use of them in the study of the earliest chapters of Genesis. In particular, Origen teaches us that, while the literal sense comes to play an important role in his reading of other passages in Scripture, it takes on a secondary position in his conception of the Adamic narrative and its significance for the human soul.

In comparing the works of Origen and Sophrony, it becomes immediately evident that their respective views are colored by exterior factors: in the case of Origen, the scholar is faced with a vast collection of writings that bear the mark of both Hellenistic and Judaic influences. As well, in facing Origenian thought, one must come to terms with the polemical nature of many of his works and the sad loss of his most comprehensive work on the earliest book of the Bible: the Commentary on Genesis.

In turning to Sophrony, we are greeted by other factors. Among these, we find the noticeable difference in the volume of work written by this thinker, who when compared to Origen can be described as less than prolific in his role as author. As well, Sophrony, not aiming to present his readers with a scholarly analysis of the earliest chapters of Genesis, falls short of any serious attempt at the task of Biblical hermeneutics. We learn

that the value of his words lies in their connection to the tradition of spirituality lived on the holy mountain Athos.

We come to find that, in the works of both authors, the exploration of the Genesis account of life in the Garden of Eden is directly related to the essential question of self-knowledge. The pre-fall reality of Adam in paradise leaves us with important clues as to the true nature of our identity as beings created in the image and likeness of God. Both thinkers remind us of the nobility of the human soul called to communion with the creator of the universe. Through Adam, we learn where our ultimate fulfillment is found and come to a greater understanding of our place in eternity.

There is a decided stress on the role of contemplation in the life of the saint in both readings of Genesis. This becomes particularly evident as we look at Origen and Sophrony's discussion of the two trees. The division of thought and state of confusion that have reigned in the human soul as a result of Adam's transgression finds a solution in this work of contemplation. We come to learn that it is in the presence of Christ that one gains true understanding and the eternal perspective needed to confront the challenges that face the soul in daily life.

Exploring two very different cosmological systems, we also discover that one of the greatest points of divergence between Origen and Sophrony lies in their understanding of the 'land'. On the one hand, we find the creative views of Origen, who speaks of Eden as a celestial reality divorced from the history of the earth and a vision of pre-existent souls. On the other, there is Sophrony who is hesitant in dealing with the exact nature of the pre-fall 'land'.

Both fathers, as different as their understanding of the garden may be, teach us that the study of the Adamic narrative is not divorced from the problems of the world. While Origen, in his struggle with the question of suffering and injustice, comes up with some rather fascinating ‘explanations’ for the problems that come with post-fall state of diversity and division, Sophrony leaves us with open-ended questions, instead, leaving us with a mystery and calling us to trust in God.

Our study of the joys and sorrows of the soul, both before and after the fall, takes on a communal dimension as we look at our relationship with the ‘creatures’ and the reality of the ‘body of Christ.’ Origen and Sophrony share an awareness of the tension between the free-will of the individual and the love of God, who seeks the salvation of all. While Sophrony may not agree with Origen’s eschatological vision, one of universal restoration of all things to Christ, he shares this early father’s hope: that all would find the fulfillment of their souls through the grace of Christ and make the important discovery of the true freedom which is only found in a relationship with the Divine.

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