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MODELS FROM PHILO IN ORIGEN'S TEACHING ON ORIGINAL SIN¹

Jean LAPORTE

RÉSUMÉ. — Si nous admettons que la notion du péché originel n'est pas nécessairement mesurée par les normes d'Augustin et de Thomas d'Aquin, nous pouvons reconnaître la profondeur et la diversité de ses aspects dans les premiers siècles chrétiens. L'auteur étudie cette notion chez Origène, et montre que celui-ci ne dépend pas seulement de Paul, mais est aussi profondément influencé par Philon d'Alexandrie au sujet de la priorité du mal dans notre vie. Après un résumé des positions de Philon, l'auteur discute chez Origène les thèmes de la pré-existence, du pouvoir diabolique, des Âges de la vie, de la chair, des semences adamiques, de l'impureté lévitique, et du baptême, par rapport au péché originel. Chez Origène, Adam n'a pas l'importance que lui confère Augustin.

SUMMARY. — If we accept the idea that the notion of original sin is not necessarily measured by the patterns of Augustine and Aquinas, we may recognize the depth and diversity of its aspects in early Christian literature. The author studies this notion in Origen, and shows that Origen does not only depend on Paul, but is deeply influenced by Philo of Alexandria regarding the priority of evil in our life. After summarizing the positions of Philo, the author deals with Origen concerning pre-existence, the devil's power, the Ages of life, the flesh, the Adamic seeds, Levitical defilement, and baptism, in their relation to original sin. In Origen, Adam is not the key figure of this doctrine as he is for Augustine.

MY PURPOSE is an investigation of original sin in Origen in the light of Philo of Alexandria. I do not mean by "original sin" the Augustinian definition resulting from the Pelagian controversy, but what the ancients meant by the inheritance

1. A paper given at the International Congress of Societas Liturgica, 17-22 August 1987, in Brixen, Italy.

of the human sinful condition, and the way Philo and Origen explained it in biblical language².

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

I studied this notion in Philo in relation to the theory of the Ages of Life³. This theory, which is classical in Greek philosophy, reappears in Philo and acts as a frame for the development of the soul from the first age (complete subjection to the impulse of the irrational) to adulthood and the threshold of contemplative life. The soul progress through several steps, or ages, which include the appearance of reason, that of malice, the victory of reason, and the development of virtue with education and the acquisition of culture⁴.

However, I also found in Philo interesting developments on Adam, although less as the cause of our miseries than as a type of man⁵. Philo distinguishes between the man created according to the image and likeness of God, who enjoys the fullness of the divine spirit; the fashioned man, i.e., the good Adam put in charge of the garden of his own soul and growing the trees of virtue, but exposed also to the trial of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in his moral conscience; the fallen Adam, who is a type of sinner and of repentance; finally, the "sons of Adam" who are the descendance of Cain, hardened and unrepenting sinners and atheists, which perished in the Deluge⁶.

Since, according to Philo, biblical models stand for our moral constituency, we are a mixture of many biblical types, with the predominance of certain of them⁷. Basically, and sometimes almost perfectly, we are the man created according to the image of God⁸. But, as members of the race of Adam, sin enjoys a priority in our soul

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2. A. I. GAUDEL, "Péché originel", *DTC* XII/I, 1933, pp. 323-339 on Origen.
H. RONDET, *Le péché originel dans la tradition patristique et théologique*, Paris 1967, ch. 4, pp. 85-90, Origen.
G. TEICHTWEIERT, *Die Suendenlhre des Origenes*, Regensburg 1958, pp. 92-111.
H. HAAG, "The Original Sin in Discussion, 1966-1971", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 10, 1973, pp. 259-289.
C. BLANC, "Le Baptême d'après Origène", *Studia Patristica* XI, TU 108, 1972, pp. 113-124.
J. LAPORTE, "La Chute chez Philon et Origène", *Kyriakon*, Festschrift J. Quasten, pp. 319-335.
H. RHANER, "Taufe und geistliches Leben bei Origenes", *Zeitschrift f. Ascese und Mystik*, VII, 1932, pp. 205-223.
 3. J. LAPORTE, "The Ages of Life in Philo of Alexandria", *SBL Seminar Papers* 122, 1986, pp. 278-290 (Abbr. "Ages of Life").
 4. "Ages of Life" pp. 282-286. In Philo, see particularly *Op.* 103-105; *Jos.* 126-130; *Her.* 293-299; *Congr.* 72-88; *Aet.* 58-60; *Sp.Leg.* IV, 68.
 5. "Ages of Life" pp. 286-288.
 6. *Q.G.* I,8; *Op.* 134 (the man created according to the image of God); *Op.* 134; 149 (the good Adam who was subjected to the trial); *Op.* 151-169; cf. *Leg. Al.* I-II *passim* (the fallen Adam and the allegory of the fight of the logos against the flesh); *Plant.* 60; *Post.* 1-124 (the sons of Adam as a wicked generation).
 7. *Abr.* 53.
 8. *Sobr.* 8-9; *Congr.* 34-38 (Isaac is that perfect man); *Mos. I passim*, particularly 1-40; *Virt.* 61-85 (Moses is the perfect man); *Abr.* 53-54 (Abraham is the perfect man).

in the beginning, and, inclining to sin, we are called to repentance⁹. A “breath of life”, or a remnant of the divine spirit (*pnœ*, not *pneuma*), warns us about sin, and kindles in us the flame of repentance and virtue¹⁰.

A third aspect of Philo’s notion of original sin is the notion of “defilement”¹¹. Defilement is communicated to individuals in many ways, particularly through birth. According to Leviticus, a child needs circumcision in order to remove the defilement inherited from the womb, and a sacrifice must be offered for his purification. The mother also is defiled: intercourse makes a purification necessary for the couple; menstruations and delivery bring about an impure blood. Circumcision and purifications are necessary in order to enter the court of the temple, to sacrifice, and even to obtain the remission of sins. This is pure Levitical theology and practice in Judaism. These impurities are cured by circumcision and purifications¹².

In relation to circumcision and purifications, we must understand that Philo — who requires the material act¹³ — extends the requirements and meaning of these rites to the moral life, far more important in his opinion than the material aspect, but in agreement with it. Whereas the prophets seemed to substitute Ethics for Ritual, Philo, through a reflection on the moral implication of rites, established a continuity between Ritual and Ethical life¹⁴.

Therefore, considered as defilement, original sin in Philo is connected with birth. However, the circumcision on the eighth day does not presuppose the existence of a moral evil, of a sin properly speaking, in the baby at birth. A baby is not circumcised for the forgiveness of the Adamic sin. It is a mere question of Levitical defilement. The real moral purification takes place later, and is related with the idea of the priority of the passions, of the flesh, and vice in the soul. Here Philo is in agreement with the Greek theory of the *Ages of Life*. We can also say that he agrees with the biblical notion of the flesh.

According to the theory of the *Ages of Life* as understood by Philo, a baby is “pure wax” as not having yet lived in good or evil. But, because of the pressure of the passions and of poor early education, he will turn to evil before turning to virtue under the guidance of reason.

9. *Q. G.* I, 90-99; II, 54; *Abr.* 236-243; *Sacr.* 14-17; *praem.* 62-63; *Congr.* 81-88 (10 years in Canaan first).

10. *Leg. Al.* I, 31-42.

11. “Ages of Life” pp. 288-289.

12. *Dec.* 45; *Sp. Leg.* III, 63 (defilement after intercourse); *Q. G.* III, 48, 52 cf. *Lev.* 15: 18 (defilement cured by circumcision); *Sp. Leg.* III, 32, cf. *Lev.* 18: 19 (defilement of a menstruous woman); *Sp. Leg.* I, 113-115 (defilement resulting from intercourse, menstruation, motherhood in the case of priests and high priest); *Deus* 8-9 (undefinite defilement preventing entry to the temple); *Q. E.* I, 10 (priestly purity required of all for passover). I do not see Philo quoting *Lev.* 12: 1-8.

13. Cf. A. WOLFSON, *Philo* I, p. 127.

14. Cf. J. LAPORTE, “Sacrifice and Forgiveness in Philo of Alexandria”, a paper presented at the Oxford Patristic Conference, 1983. In Philo, see particularly *Sp. Leg.* III, 88-89; *Det.* 20-21; *Cher.* 95-96; *Sp. Leg.* I 304-306.

Philo also introduces evil as a twin brother of the good, two innate tendencies figured by the conflict of Essau and Jacob in the womb of Rebecca¹⁵.

Finally, in *Legum Allegoriae*, Philo uses the illustration of the temptation of Adam by Eve to explain the idea that the mind, turning away from direct knowledge from God, yields to sense perception and becomes the slave of the flesh.

Philo recognizes a historical loss of mankind in Adam¹⁶, not a transmission of the sin of Adam. For Philo, Adam is more the type than the cause of our own failure to master the irrational part. Philo is interested in what happens in our hearts according to the Adamic allegory, not in the past event as such.

ORIGEN

Regarding original sin, there are important similarities between Philo and Origen. There are also important differences owing to the Christian faith of Origen.

A. *Pre-existence and original sin*

It seems right to discard old scholarship which ascribed to Origen without distinctions the teachings of Timaeus on the pre-existence of the soul and a fall resulting from a sin in a previous life¹⁷. Actually, the image of the "cooling" of the *nous* into a *psuche*, and its restoration as *nous* is one illustration among many others, such as the mirror looking askance, the spoilt painting, etc. which Origen uses to express the idea of fall and restoration¹⁸.

In his fight against the Gnostics who accused the Creator of injustice, Origen tried to resolve the problem of diversity and inequality by a fall resulting from neglect of participation in the good in the beginning, ultimately by the free-will of the creature¹⁹.

15. *Praem.* 62-63.

16. *Op.* 151-164; *Her.* 292-293; *Sacr.* 14-16; *Praem.* 62-63.

17. E. de FAYE, *Origène, sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée*, Paris 1923/28, 3 vol.

H. KOCH, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, *Studia ueber Origenes und sein Verhaeltnis zum Platonismus*, Leipzig 1932.

H. RONDET, *Le péché originel dans la tradition patristique et théologique*, Paris 1966.

H. CROUZEL, *Origène et la philosophie*, Paris 1962, pp. 195-215. Against the thesis of old scholarship affirming that Origen followed Plato's doctrine of re-incarnations and of the pre-existence of the soul, the author shows that the so-called quotes of *De principiis* found in Jerome and other later sources, and integrated by KOETSCHAU in his critical edition are unreliable and contradicted by Origen in the original Greek text elsewhere.

J. DANIELOU, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, Paris 1961, pp. 381-390. The author sees Origen in *De principiis* as closer to the Greeks, but as focussing on the radical liberty of men and as rejecting the Gnostic dualism which considered the body as evil by nature.

The dependence of Origen on Plato in *De principiis* was exaggerated by old scholarship which deliberately ignored his exegetical writings, and considered him as a representative of Greek culture. In order to understand Origen's "pre-existence of the soul," we must understand what Philo of Alexandria — who so often inspired him — meant by "existing in the divine Logos."

A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique, et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Paris 1962, *passim*. The author situates the "quotes" in the history of Origenism, and shows their dependence on Evagrius and on the Origenists of the time of Justinian.

18. *Princ.* II, 8, 3 SC 252 pp. 342-348.

19. *Princ.* II, 8, 4, 9 *passim*, SC 252 pp. 348-372.

Origen dealt with the cases of the Prince of Tyre, of Lucifer and of the devils, of heavenly bodies, finally of certain exceptions among men such as the cases of Jacob and Essau, of Eliah, Jeremiah, of John the Baptist, of early possessions by the devil²⁰. In the case of Jacob and Essau, Origen, indeed, suggests the hypothesis of a previous life²¹. If the soul pre-exists the body, he says, the solution of such cases becomes easy²², but, because he is aware of the obscurity of the question of its origin, Origen cannot affirm that the soul pre-exists the body (the Platonic thesis of the re-incarnations)²³.

Regarding early possessions, Origen considers the possibility of temptations by evil spirits, and guilt, taking place in the womb in a soul developed in its emotional and sensitive nature, and always in (radical) possession of free-will²⁴. On the other hand, in the womb also, some may listen to the Father, and more readily adhere to Christ²⁵.

All these speculations are very tentative, and they deal with life in the womb, not with a previous life properly speaking.

Philo also asked questions about the origin of the soul, wondering at the absence of known merit in the cases of certain privileged men such as Melchisedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Essau), Ephraim (Manasseh), Besalee²⁶. His questions may have inspired the questions of Origen. The answers belong to Origen. It is interesting to observe that Philo raises, but does not answer such questions.

B. *Devil and original sin*

It seems that the importance of the Devil was so predominant in early Christianity, and particularly in Origen, that the Redemption was conceived as a ransom paid to the devil²⁷, and Christian life as a fight against the "Strong one", from beginning to end²⁸. Therefore, original sin could only be represented as captivity of the Devil, from which there is no human escape²⁹.

Plenty of evidence, indeed, can be found in Origen in support of such a view. However, Origen grants the Devil a rather limited influence. He disagrees with simple

20. *Princ.* I, 5, SC 252 pp. 174-194 (Prince of Tyre, Lucifer, Devils and Satan); I, 7 pp. 206-220 (devils); I, 8, pp. 220-232 (heavenly bodies); II, 9, 7 pp. 366-370 (Jacob-Essau); III, 4-5, KOETSCHAU p. 260 (early possessions); *Com. on Mat.* XIII, 1-2 (the spirit of Eliah).

21. *Com on John* VI, 62 SC 157, pp. 174-194; *On Prayer*, 5, 4, ACW p. 28; *Princ.* I 7, 4 SC 252 p. 214; II, 8, 3, KOETSCHAU, p. 161; II, 9, 7 SC 252, p. 368; *Com. on John* VI, 62 SC 157, pp. 174-194; *On Prayer* 5:4, ACW p. 28.

22. *Com. on John* II, 182-186, SC 120, pp. 330-332.

23. *Princ.* "Preface" 5, SC 252, p. 84; *Com. on Song* II, 5, ACW pp. 134-136.

24. *Princ.* III, 3, 4-5, Koetschau p. 260.

25. *Com. on John* XX, 52, SC 290, p. 182.

26. *Leg. Al.* III, 79-95.

27. Cf. G. AULEN, *Christus Victor*, "Christ and the Devil", Tr. A.G. HERBERT, Macmillan 1960, pp. 149ff.

28. *Hom. on Ex.* II, 3, SC 16, pp. 97-98, PG XII, 313-314. *Princ.* III, 2, *passim*.

29. S. T. BETTENCOURT, *Doctrina ascetica Origenis, seu quid docuerit de ratione animae humanae cum daemonibus*, Romae 1945; L. BOUYER, "Le problème du mal dans le Christianisme antique," *Dieu Vivant* 6, 1946, pp. 17-42.

Christians who admit the necessity of demonic influence³⁰. He maintains the power of free-will to approve and disapprove the suggestions of the Devil³¹. He considers the fight against devils as a fair matching of individuals against individuals, allowed by God for our training and victory. Moreover, the Devil can only foster evil desires existing in our soul; he cannot force our will³². Finally, all the temptations do not come from the Devil, but also from ourselves, even sometimes from God³³.

If we can say that the Devil killed Adam and the whole human race in Adam when he took away from him the true life³⁴ — which is spiritual —, we must admit, however, that, in our fallen condition, we preserve the sense of good and evil, and the presence of the divine Word in our human reason³⁵.

Philo does not offer any parallel to such a theory of the Devil, but he may have provided Origen with the corrective which enables him to escape a psychosis of the Devil, and to make a positive and well balanced analysis of temptation.

C. *Ages of Life, and original sin in Origen*

In the same manner as in Philo, the classical theory of the Ages of Life remains in Origen the basic system of the development of the soul and combines with the biblical teachings on flesh and spirit and on the necessity of education as pointed out in biblical wisdom writings and provided in the catechumenate.

In *Commentary on Romans*, Origen writes: "Certain Greeks rightly taught that in our mortal and rational race, when reason reaches its full development, vice necessarily appears first, and later on, with time and application, vice is overthrown and virtue arises³⁶." *Contra Celsum* distinguishes four steps:

- 1) there is a time when the individual has not yet received reason;
- 2) another time when reason is accompanied by malice, and we obtain evil;
- 3) another time when the individual progresses in virtue;
- 4) another time when perfection is reached in adulthood³⁷.

The Prologue of *Commentary on Song of Songs* describes the progress of the soul toward love according to the schema of the Ages of Life. Infants and children understand nothing of the passion of love. The biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs respectively represent the successive steps in education: Ethics, Physics, Epoptics. But "kisses of his mouth" figure a first communication of the divine

30. *Princ.* III, 1, KOETSCHAU, p. 246; *Contra Celsum* VIII, SC 150, p. 289.

31. *Princ.* III, 2, 3, 4, KOETSCHAU p. 251 (resistance to the devil); *Princ.* III, 6, KOETSCHAU p. 263 (watching); *Princ.* III, 3-4, KOETSCHAU p. 262 (discernment of spirits).

32. *Princ.* III, 2, 4-5, KOETSCHAU, p. 251.

33. *Princ.* III, 2, 4, KOETSCHAU pp. 247-252.

34. *Com. on John* XX, 221, SC 290, p. 266.

35. *Contra Celsum* VIII, 52, SC 150, p. 288.

36. *Com. on Rom.* 3: 9-18, Cf. Jean SCHERER, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III-5—V-7*, 4, lines 11-14, Le Caire 1957, pp. 136-138.

37. *Contra Celsum* IV, 64, SC 136, p. 344.

Word in elementary instruction (in Scripture). The “maiden souls” are not given all at once the full revelation of the Word, their Bridegroom, but first particles only of the mysteries found in the Law and the Prophets, and “inlays of gold and silver” figuring parables, until complete communion becomes possible³⁸.

Therefore, during the first age of life, the soul is under the power of the passions, and bound to vice. “Every soul”, Origen says, “before reaching virtue, is covered with the pollution of vice”³⁹. At the age of reason, we decide for or against vice, for being a son of God or a son of the Devil. The next step is not the ritual of baptism immediately, but the education provided in catechuminate, in which the word of God and the Law exercise their purifying influence⁴⁰.

D. *The flesh*

All beginners, in the first age of life, and as well in a late conversion, have a fight against, and master, the flesh. This teaching is common to the Greeks, Philo, Paul, Origen. Paul specifies that we must fight, not only the flesh, but also demonic powers. Philo does not know these demonic powers. Origen sees the conflict with demonic powers as the lot of baptized Christians who are advanced in virtue, whereas beginners are still entangled in the flesh⁴¹.

The couple flesh-spirit belongs to the teachings of the Bible and of Philo. The connection between the flesh and our beginning makes of the flesh an equivalent of “original sin”, I mean, of the sinful origin and condition of humanity, in relation, or not, with Adam.

The large number of references to the flesh in Origen, and their diversity, makes it more profitable to turn to the particular aspects of original sin which integrate the flesh, I mean, certain biblical images such as those of Adam, the seed of Abraham, defilement, Egypt and baptism.

E. *Adam*

The opening of the eye of Adam to earthly things, and its closing to the contemplation of heavenly things, turns the good Adam, a righteous man and a prophet, into a slave to passions and vices⁴². From the man created according to the image of God, he becomes, as his name indicates, “Adam”, the image of the “Earthly”,

38. *Com. on Song.* II, 8, ACW pp. 148–155.

39. *Hom. on Luke* XIX, 1, SC 87, p. 272.

40. *Hom. on Ex.* IV, 8, PG XII, 323; *Com. on John* I, 273–275, SC 120, p. 198; XX, 107–109, SC 290 p. 212; 288–289, SC 290, p. 298; *Hom. on Jer.* V, 15–16, SC 232 pp. 318–324; 6, 2, id. p. 330 (the Logos fighting against the passions).

41. *Hom. on Ex.* VIII, 4–5, PG XII 356–358; *Hom. on Josuah* XV, 4–7, SC 71, pp. 344–356.

42. *Princ.* I, 3, 6–7, SC 252 pp. 2156–158; *Hom. on Luke* XVI, 7, SC 87, pp. 244–248; XVII, 1–4, id. pp. 252–254.

a man living according to the wisdom of the flesh⁴³. This teaching is common with Philo.

Origen learnt from Paul that the whole human race is included in Adam and shares in the curse which his sin brought upon the earth⁴⁴. The serpent which beguiled Eve, also poisoned her posterity⁴⁵.

Had Adam chosen life, according to Deut. 30: 15, things would have turned differently for him and his race⁴⁶. But like Philo, Origen is more interested in the present situation than in the “would-be”.

As belonging to the race of Adam, but contrary to Adam, we put on the earthly first, and then must convert to the heavenly⁴⁷. As “sons of the wrath”, all sinners must circumcise the foreskin of their heart, master the flesh, mortify their members⁴⁸.

Since the Divine Word is communicated through human reason, the saints of the Old Testament and all of the human race enjoy a way to come to Christ independent of the Incarnation, and therewith a source of purification⁴⁹. The Incarnation adds a new way of salvation, more adjusted to our present condition, and efficient⁵⁰. Christ comes as the counterpart of Adam⁵¹, and the Bride of Song of Songs and of Ephesians, the right Eve, figures the Church⁵². The reference to Christ is what Origen understands as the “Mystery of Baptism”⁵³.

F. *Seeds of Abraham* (spermatikoi logoi)

Philo wrote a book on the *posterity of Cain*. The “sons of Adam” are the posterity of Cain, a series of wicked generations coupled with a series of holy types (Abel, Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah). The interest of the notion of descentance for the question of original sin is obvious.

Origen considers the theory of Traducianism as a hypothesis which he must maintain as an alternative to the Platonic theory of the incarnation of a pre-existing

43. *Hom. on Num. XVII*, 3, PG XII, 704-705; *Hom. on Jer. II*, 1, SC 232, pp. 240; VIII, 1-2, SC 232, pp. 352-356; *Com. on John XX*, 224-234, SC 290, pp. 268-274.

44. *Contra Celsum IV*, 40, SC 136, p. 288; and ref. to notes 42 and 43.

45. *Com. on Song III*, 12, ACW pp. 225-226.

46. *Hom. on Lev. IX*, 11, SC 287, p. 124.

47. *Hom. on Jer. II*, 1, SC 232 p. 240; *Hom. on Luke XVII*, 2-3, SC 87, pp. 252-254.

48. *Hom. on Jer. V*, 14-15, SC 232, pp. 314-320 (wrath); VIII, 1, *id.*, p. 252 (mortification); Same theme in *Home. on Lev. III*, 4, SC 286, p. 138; *Hom. on Luke XVI*, 7, SC 87, pp. 244-246; *Com. on Rom.* p. 124 & 172 on wrath, and p. 214 on mortification, in Scherer.

49. *Hom. on Jer. V*, 15-17, SC 232, pp. 318-326; VI, 2, *id.* p. 330; *Contra Celsum I*, 48, SC 132, p. 204; III, 68-69, SC 136, p. 136; IV, 25, p. 242; VIII, 72, SC 150, p. 340.

50. *Contra Celsum IV*, 15-16, SC 136, p. 220; *Princ. II*, 6, SC 252, pp. 314-324.

51. *Com. on John, XX*, 224-233, SC 290, pp. 268-272. *Com. on John.*

52. *Com. on Song IV*, 14, AC, pp. 239-240.

53. *Hom. on Ex. V*, 2 PG XII 328; VI, 7, *id.* p. 336; VIII, 5, *id.*, p.-356-358; *Hom. on Num. III*, 3, PG XII 596; XII, 3, PG XII 665.

soul sent from heaven⁵⁴. Actually, he rejects the two theories in their crude form, i.e., respectively, as transmission of the soul in the seed, and as reincarnation⁵⁵. But he must explain the diversity and inequality of men in their origin without joining the Gnostics who accuse the Creator of injustice.

His answer is that the soul inherits spiritual seeds from ancestors, and adds its personal contribution. Therefore, the seed in its spiritual nature is the fruit of works and merit. Origen proposes a kind of “moral Traducianism”, which is of the utmost interest for the question of original sin⁵⁶.

Origen does not grant much importance to the seed of Adam, which is found in Abraham, indeed, but seems to represent mediocrity rather than wickedness, and is superseded by the seeds of Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah, Sem, finally by the seed resulting from Abraham’s own works⁵⁷.

Origen asks how we can be “sons of Abraham”. His answer is that we can reach the same spiritual worth by other means, because our particular ancestry — our fathers — is not the ancestry of Abraham. Pharisees and Sadducees rightly claimed their dignity as “seed of Abraham”, but they were not “sons of Abraham” because they did not do the works of Abraham. Therefore, what is essential in order to be “sons of Abraham”, is to do the works of Abraham⁵⁸.

Similarly there are “sons of the Devil”, those who perform the works of the Devil. And all will join their “fathers” after death : either Christ and the Patriarchs, or Cain and his descendance⁵⁹.

Finally, there are those “born of God”, who cannot sin (I John 3 : 8–10)⁶⁰.

We do not inherit the seed of Cain and of his descendance, because “God destroyed the seed of Cain in the Deluge”⁶¹. It was, indeed, a good way to stop the “Traducianism” of moral evil. Unfortunately, we can always perform the works of the Devil, and repeat the sins of Cain. Moreover, if, according to Origen, nobody is completely deprived of good and salutary seeds⁶², we must admit that we all also inherit seeds of evil in larger or lesser quantity.

54. *Princ.* III, 4, 2 KOETSCHAU pp. 264–267 : the “lower soul”, according to the Valentinians, comes along with the seed, but Origen doubts Traducianism, and rejects the Gnostic division of the soul. *Comm. on Song II*, 5, ACW pp. 135–136, Origen raises many questions about the soul and its origin.

55. *Com. on John VI*, 64, SC 157, pp. 176–178 ; *Com. on John XX*, 2–8, SC 290, pp. 156–158.

56. *Com. on John XX*, 2–65, SC 290, pp. 156–188.

57. *Com. on John XX*, 12, 25, SC 290, pp. 162–170.

58. *Com. on John XX*, 30–43, SC 290, pp. 164–176.

59. *Com. on John XX*, 77–79, SC 290, p. 196.

60. *Com. on John XX*, 106–110, SC 290, pp. 210–212.

61. *Com. on John XX*, 25–27, SC 290, pp. 168–170.

62. *Com. on John XX*, 34, SC 290, p. 172.

G. Defilement and original sin

I noted in Philo the importance of the ritual of purities in practice and in its moral extensions, particularly the defilement coming from birth and its moral symbolism. Although affirming the Christian freedom from the observance of the levitical laws on purities⁶³, Origen inherits the moral interpretations inaugurated by Philo, and even the existence of a real defilement attached to birth.

In *Homilies on Luke* we read that no soul is spotless from the beginning, that a *macula* (stain, defilement) must be removed in order for the soul to be *immaculata*⁶⁴. Even Jesus needed a purification *a sorde* (uncleanness) — not from sin —⁶⁵, for he put on the dress sown in corruption, although he was not defiled, like all other men, in his Father and mother. A sacrifice was offered for his purification.

The defilement attached to birth is independent from personal sins, and even from sins committed by forefathers. It is related to birth, to the impure blood accompanying birth, and it has some similarity with the blood of menstruation and with the loss of seed of the male⁶⁶. Origen also sees in intercourse a kind of shame which prevents the presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer⁶⁷.

Origen brings forth as evidence for a defilement at birth regardless to personal sins, infant baptism which, for him, cannot be given for the remission of sins, but only for the removal of the *macula* attached to birth⁶⁸.

Regarding original sin, Origen can repeat the statement of Psalm 51 ascribed to David, “My mother conceived me in sin.” It seems that, from a mere question of impure blood, he passes to the consideration of the defilement of our sinful condition and of our past sins, just as the Psalmist probably himself did⁶⁹.

H. Baptism

Origen does not theologially relate baptism to the fall of Adam, but to the typology of Exodus.

The image of the crossing of the Red Sea, and of leaving Egypt for the desert where the people of Israel is trained by Moses and taught in the Law, becomes in Origen, as it was in Philo, a symbol of purification from the passions, and of the catechumenate⁷⁰. Philo developed the same symbolism⁷¹.

63. *Com. on Mat.* XI, 12 SC 162, pp. 328–334.

64. *Hom. on Lev.* VIII, 3, SC 287, p. 20; *Hom. on Luke* II, 2, SC 87, p. 112; *Contra Celsum* VII, 50, SC 150, pp. 130–132.

65. *Hom. on Luke* XIV, 3, SC 87, pp. 218–220.

66. *Hom. on Lev.* VIII, 3, cf. *Lev.* 12:2, SC 287, pp. 14–22; XII, 4, SC 287, p. 178; *Hom. on Luke* XIV, 5, SC 87, p. 222; XIV 6, p. 224 (*nativitatis sordes*);

67. *Hom. on Num.* XXIII, 3, PG XII, 749; VI, 3, id. 610; *On Prayer* 31:4-5 ACW pp. 132–134.

68. *Hom. on Lev.* VIII, 3 SC 287, p. 20; *Hom. on Luke* XIV 5, SC 87, p. 222; *On Prayer* 5, 4, ACW p. 28.

69. *Contra Celsum* VII, 50, SC 150, p. 130; *Hom. on Luke* XIV, 6, SC 87, p. 224.

70. *Contra Celsum* II, 4 SC 132, p. 288; *Hom. on Lev.* VI, 2, SC 286, p. 274; *Hom. on Num.* XXVI 3, XXVII, PG XII, 774–801.

71. *Sp. Leg.* I II, 147 (*Diabateria*); *Leg. A* II, 71–108 (the serpent of Eve is pleasure, and the brazen serpent of Moses is self-mastery).

In this context of thought, Egypt represents a beginning in evil, and the Exodus a moral and religious conversion. Egypt also figures the body which enslaves the soul, and Pharaoh, who, not allowing the service of the true God to take place, becomes the champion of an earthly and atheistic philosophy.

Origen reinforces this outline. Egypt is attachment to carnal vices, dependance on demons, enslavement in the life of the body, in the image of the earthly man⁷². We all begin in Egypt, in the moral laxity and doctrinal error of youth, before reaching virtue through reason and education⁷³. We must all “descend to Egypt”, fight the temptation of Egypt, remove the “shame of Egypt” from ourselves⁷⁴.

The Apostle Paul sees in the Exodus from Egypt a figure of the purification of baptism. Origen accepts this Pauline tradition⁷⁵, and sees in the crossing of the Red Sea the mystery of our burial and resurrection in Christ through baptism⁷⁶.

However, Origen prefers to spread the interpretation of baptism over two crossings instead of one. The first is the crossing of the Red Sea, and the second is the crossing of the Jordan. The first is closer to the renunciation of catechumens to idolatry, and leads them to instruction in the Law and its purifying influence. It is baptism, indeed, but in some regard superficial, fragile, still in need of the guidance of Moses⁷⁷.

The second crossing is that of the Jordan, the “river which rejoices the City of God”, a symbol of Christ⁷⁸. Baptism now becomes deep and serious, and focusses on the mystery of Christ. It consists of sharing in Christ’s burial and resurrection. We mortify our members, and we are renewed, regenerated, by the Spirit of God⁷⁹. Origen likes to relate this baptism in the Jordan to the “second circumcision” accomplished by Josuah after the crossing⁸⁰. This “second circumcision”, or “circumcision of the heart”, removes the impurities which prevent the edification of the “new man” with his “internal senses” and his ability to see God. With the baptism in the Jordan we are already living in the heavenly Kingdom in its eschatological reality⁸¹.

72. *Hom. on Gen.* XVI, 2, PG XII 247.

73. *Hom. on Ex.* IV, 8, PG XII 323-325.

74. *Hom. on Gen.* XV, 6, PG XII 245.

75. Rom. 6: 1-11; I Cor. 10: 1-5.

76. *Hom. on Ex.* V, 1 PG XII 326; *Hom. on Num.* XXII, 4, *id.*, 745; *Hom. on Josuah* V, 1, SC 71, pp. 146-156; XV, 5 *id.*, pp. 346-354; *Com. on John* VI, 166 SC 157, p. 254.

77. *Hom. on John* VI, 2, 248-251, SC 157, pp. 316-318; *Hom. on Josuah* V, 6, SC 71, pp. 174-176; V, 2-3, pp. 166-172; *Hom. on Ex.* V, 1-5, PG XII 325-331.

78. *Hom. on Luke* XXI, 4, SC 87, p. 294; *Hom. on Josuah* IV 2, SC 71, p. 150; V, 1, *id.*, p. 160-162; *Com. on John* VI, 227-251, SC 157, pp. 302-318; *Hom. on Num.* XVI, 4, PG XII 776-777.

79. *Hom. on Josuah* IV, 1-2 SC 71, pp. 146-154; *Com. on Song* IV, 14, ACW pp. 240-246; *Hom. on Luke* XIV, 1, SC 87, p. 216; XXVI, SC 87 pp. 338-342; XXVII, 5, *id.*, p. 348; XXIX, 1, *id.*, p. 360.

80. *Hom. on Josuah* V, 1, SC 71, pp. 160-162; *Com. on John* VI, 217-237 SC 157, pp. 294-308.

81. *Hom. on Josuah* I, 7 SC 71, p. 114; V, 5-6, SC 71, pp. 164-172; *Hom. on Jer.* V, 14, SC 232 p. 316-320; *Hom. on John* VI, 168-169, SC 157, p. 256; *Dialogue with Heraclides* 16-22, SC 67, pp. 88-98; *Com. on Mat.* XI 20; cf. K. RAHNER, “Les débuts d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène” *RAM* 13, 1932, pp. 113-145; Hugo RHANER, “Taufe und geistliche Leben bei Origenes” *ZAM* 7, 1932, pp. 205-223.

Josuah removed from the sons of Israel the “shame of Egypt”, and “he was exalted”. Our Josuah — Jesus —, in the mystery of baptism, in the exaltation of the cross, removes from our hearts the “shame of Egypt”, i.e., the servitude of the flesh, which is far more difficult to uproot, because internal, than idolatry⁸².

Origen warns the catechumens against returning to the “shame of Egypt”, after baptism, that is, against maintaining the routine of sin and going back to the old habits and vices of the flesh⁸³.

In addition, a return to the “shame of Egypt” implies the prostitution of a member of Christ, and the profanation of a temple of the Holy Spirit⁸⁴. A Christian returning to sin can be purified only through a baptism of fire, i.e., through penitence⁸⁵, unless he/or she has repented and become an accuser of self while “on the way”, before being accused by the Adversary on the Day of Judgment⁸⁶.

Therefore, Origen would have defined the original sin as our evil beginning in Egypt, an image belonging to the biblical language of baptism, instead of emphasizing the inheritance of Adam’s sin. Adam was not a prominent figure like Abraham or Moses in the gallery of the Fathers. Paul “dramatized” the case of Adam, in whom we have all sinned, only, it seems, in order to show salvation in Christ, the New Adam.

CONCLUSION

Origen does not rely on infant baptism as a model for his theology of original sin and baptism. He interprets the sin of Adam as a loss for mankind, indeed, but counterbalanced by the presence of the Word from the beginning, the gift of the Law, the mission of the prophets and of Christ. The seed of Adam is unimportant. Baptism is the remission of our sins and our integration to Christ’s Mystery. In the case of children, who have not sinned, baptism only purifies the defilement of birth. We must also remember that there is a priority of evil which results from the predominance of the flesh before the development of reason. Origen agrees with biblical statements affirming that we are sinners from the beginning⁸⁷.

As in Philo, in Origen Adam is still a type : the type of the “earthly” man, and the type of the sinner who repented. We cannot ascribe to him the classical notion of original sin developed by Augustine. Paul’s sentence, “In Adam we all sinned” does

82. *Hom. on Josuah*, I, 7, SC 71, pp. 112–114; V, 6, *id.*, pp. 170–172; *Hom. on Num.* XXVII, 2, PG XII 783.

83. *HOM. on Ex.* V, 4, PG XII, 329–330; *Hom. on Josuah* V, 6, SC 71, pp. 172–176; XXVI, 2, *id.*, p. 492.

84. *Hom. on Josuah* V, 6, SC 71, pp. 172–174.

85. *Hom. on Lev.* VIII, 10, SC 287, pp. 50–52; XI, 2, *id.*, pp. 156–158; *Hom. on Jer.* XVI, 5–8, SC 238, pp. 144–150; *Hom. on Luke* XXIV, 1, SC 87, pp. 324–326; XXVI, 3, *id.*, p. 340; *Com. on John* VI, 125, SC 157, p. 226.

86. *Hom. on Ps.* 37 II, 6, PG XII, 1396; *Hom. on Lev.* III, 4, SC 286, p. 140.

87. *Hom. on Num.* XXV, 6, PG XXII 767 (Nobody is pure when leaving this life); *Hom. on Lev.* II, 3, SC 296, pp. 100–102. 106 (sin is contagious); *Hom. on Jer.* V, 15, SC 232, p. 318; VIII, 1–2, *id.*, p. 120; *Com. on John* I, 121, SC 120, p. 124; XX, 224–244, SC 290, pp. 268–278; *On Prayer* V, 4, ACW p. 28; *Hom. on Luke* XXIV, 2, SC 87, pp. 324–326; *Com. on Mat.* XV, 22.

not have the same meaning in Origen and in Augustine. In Origen it means the universality of sin. In Augustine it means the inheritance of sin.

But, besides Augustine's so-called "historical" interpretation of the original sin, which seems to discard, or absorb, all other explanations, it is not pointless to notice — with a bit of humour — that Augustine himself witnesses to another view of original sin, unrelated to Adam, well known in Greek literature, in Philo of Alexandria, in Origen and other Fathers, the theory of the Ages of Life. The terrible report of the sins of babies which he gives in the beginning of his *Confessions* is the best illustration of the "first age" in which the child is totally subjected to the influence of his passions and of his environment.

One word seems to contain the essential teaching of Origen on baptism: the Mystery of Christ. In relation to it, everything else is but image or preparation. One does not build a theology on the basis of the original sin, but on the Mystery of Christ. In baptism rightly understood, we get rid of the "old man", and die to sin; then, being raised again together with Christ, we are regenerated and live to God.

Origen's notion of original sin might, by the variety of its aspects, help today believers and theologians to look into early Christian tradition for more than one way to conceive of our sinful origin, and to accept one answer without rejecting the others. It would also free us from the now impossible Augustinian system of original sin abusively built on the corner-stone of Adam. Certainly, sin is as old as mankind, and its beginnings in ourselves is beyond remembrance. The story of Adam and Eve remains a powerful symbol of this mysterious reality.