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FREEDOM AND PROVIDENCE IN ORIGEN'S THEOLOGY

Abstract: *The aim of this article is to investigate Origen's understanding of grace and free will, or freedom and predestination in a broader perspective. Grace and free will are not opposites in Origen. His theology is a logos-centred theology where reason serves as the basis for free choice. Human freedom and divine grace have the same goal. Humanity's free will is a person's freedom to choose according to reason in the context of concrete historical situation, while divine grace is Logos' guidance and persuasion of each individual to act toward future perfection. However, God does not determine the possible human actions, but He has foreknowledge of them. The foreknowledge should not be understood as predestination, because God has not determined how humans will act in a concrete historical situation, but He has predetermined salvation for everybody at the end of history.*

Key words: *grace, free will, freedom, foreknowledge, predestination, providence*

Origen (185-254) speaks extensively about *free will* but only briefly about *grace*. If one looks for this word or term in Origen's text, one gets the impression that it occurs less than we in the western theological tradition normally make use of these themes. The matter can also be expressed in another way: Origen lived before Augustine and Luther. They have more than anybody else left their mark on the western theology's understanding of the relationship between God and humanity and therefore also on this tradition's understanding of the ideas of *free will* and *grace*. Origen's context was different, specifically it was the early formative period of the eastern church. Therefore his understanding of the relationship with the divine and of the ideas which defined this relationship was also very different from that which we find in the western theological tradition.¹

Grace and free will according to Origen—introductory remarks

The word *grace* is not especially important for Origen's theology. One also rarely finds the diametrical pairing of grace and free will, which is so characteristic of western theology, in Origen.² On the other hand, humanity's free will is central to Origen. We can

1 This article was originally printed in a Danish book, (Bo Kristian Holm and Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen eds., *Nåden og den frie vilje*, Copenhagen 2006, pp. 39-65), in which all the contributions except this one on Origen dealt with 'grace' and 'freedom of will' in the Western theological tradition.

2 Origen naturally understands and uses the concept of *grace* as a theological concept. For example this is the case in his interpretation of the Letter to the Romans. At the same time the word does not

infer from this that the topic, which the western theologians from Augustine onwards seek to pin down with the help of the diametrical opposition of grace and free will, holds no place in Origen or with other early Greek theologians. This is clearly true, particularly in the sense that God's grace and humanity's free will do not appear as opposites in Origen, as is the case with Augustine and in the tradition following him.

It is advantageous to define here how *God's grace*—understood as God's will to redeem creation—came to be expressed by Origen. This happens through God's *paideusis* of humanity, so by the use of their own free will they arrive at the conclusion predestined by God for the entirety of humankind as well as for each individual person. This *paideusis* of humanity takes place in the historical process of redemption that God had preordained. This idea which is expressed in western theology with the word *grace* was more likely expressed in Origen with words and phrases like the plan for redemption (οἰκοδομία), foresight (πρόνοια), and upbringing (παίδευσις).³ Grace is thus, according to Origen closely united with both the whole history of creation and with the history of each individual person.

There is on the other hand more to say about what Origen understood by the idea that people have free will (αὐτεξούσια). In the introduction to *De principiis* (*De princ.*), where Origen outlines briefly the contents of his work on the fundamental principles of Christianity, he divides these principles into two groups. In one group he lists the fundamental principles which are fully described in the Bible and in the Apostolic Tradition. In the other group he lists the principles which are only briefly mentioned in the Bible and in the tradition and which wise men in later time therefore must examine closer. Teachings about humanity's free will belong to the first category (cf. *De princ.* I.5). In *De princ.* III.1 Origen covers the idea of humanity's free will in detail.⁴ In the introduction to this chapter it becomes clear that the idea about humanity's free will is not, as is suggested in the introduction to *De princ.*, a self-contained theme, but rather a theme that is quite closely connected with the idea of God's judgment of humanity in the same way that all the fundamentals of Christian dogmatics are for him. Free will is a necessary condition for this judgment, because it is only meaningful to talk about judgment in connection with actions which are freely done. Judgment is meaningless in connection to predetermined actions. Thereby he has placed the notion of humanity's free will in the correct place in relation to

have the same marked character as it does in and with Augustine. Though rarely do we also find in Origen an Augustinian sounding distinction between grace and free will (jf *De princ.* III.1.12). It would, however, be wrong to claim that this difference is characteristic of Origen.

3 This concept will seem well-known to some because the title of Hal Kochs thesis about Origen is exactly *Pronoia und Paideusis. Studien über Origenes und sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus*. Hal Koch wants to show that "providence" and "upbringing" are central concepts for Origen—and that they are remnants of Platonism.

4 The majority and most significant of Origen's writings about humanity's free will or freedom of choice appears in the *Philokalia*, which is a selection of Origen's writings. The selection was made during the time period between 364 and 378 by Basilus and Gregor of Nazianz, both of whom were largely inspired by Origen's theology. The texts in this collection center on three themes: a) Origen's biblical hermeneutic (chap. 1-14), b) Origen's apologetic (chap. 15-20) and c) Origen's teachings about humanity's free will (chap. 21-27). This collection of text is important for many reasons, including because it appears in Greek. For this reason we have access to some of Origen's writings in Greek, which otherwise are only preserved in Latin or even totally lost. *Philokalia* is published in the series *Sources Chrétiennes* vol. 302 (*Philokalia* chap. 1-20) and vol. 226 (chap. 21-27). Both volumes contain comprehensive introductions which discuss both the tradition and contents of the writings.

the rest of the fundamental principles of Christian law.

In *De princ.* III.1.2-5 Origen defines free will in the following way: Creation, he says, can be divided into four groups, each according to how they move. Therefore he here discusses creation in terms of *things moved* (τῶν κινουμένων). First one must distinguish between the things which cannot move by themselves, but can only be moved by an outside source and the things which are able to move themselves. Things such as stones and wood (either a firewood or timber—not living trees) belong to the first group. According to Origen, the other group includes plants, animals and everything else that grows and has soul. One could also say that the first group consists of dead things and the second group consists of living things. It is the second group that is of interest in this context. But this group must be divided further for it to be clear which creatures can be said to have free will. First from among the living creatures we must distinguish between those which possess a soul (τὰ ἔμψυκα) and those which have no soul (τὰ ἄψυχα). Origen says that the creatures without a soul move *out of* themselves (ἐξ ἑαυτῶν), but those with souls move themselves of their own accord (ᾧ ἑαυτῶν). Beings with a soul move themselves of their own accord in the sense that there arises in them ideas upon which they act. Further we must also make distinctions within the group of the beings with souls, specifically between the beings with souls which are equipped with reason (λόγος)⁵ and those that are not. Creatures with souls that are not endowed with reason act instinctively upon the ideas which arise in them. When the thought of a honeycomb arises in a bee it instinctively builds a honeycomb without thinking about whether it is reasonable or not. By contrast there are those beings with a soul that are also endowed with reason. They use reason to assess the ideas that occur to them. Based on this assessment they decide how they will act in response to the ideas they have. Free will is, according to Origen, the ability to select between various possible choices in a given situation. Rational beings use free will therefore in the tension between the possibilities given in a concrete situation and reasonable possible responses in order to choose between the various actions possible in this situation.⁶

There are two specific aspects of this definition of the rational beings' free will that need to be examined more closely. The first aspect is the role that reason or rationality—logos—plays. The other is the fact that free will, according to Origen's understanding of it, is expressed in concrete religious and ethical choices. People must choose between a life lived in accordance with virtue or one lived lustfully. *De princ.* III.1.2-5 explicitly states that people use free will in connection with concrete religious and ethical decisions. Origen himself uses an example in *De princ.* III.1.4 as a clear expression of this. The example, which serves the purpose of illuminating the connection between a given future and free choice, is about a pious man, who has decided to forswear sexual relations. However, he is not able to carry out this intention because he meets an attractive woman. Origen's point is that it is in one way the woman, with whom the man has sexual relations, which caused the man to abandon his vow of chastity. But it is not the woman's fault that the man was compelled to give up on his intentions to stay chaste. The woman simply placed the man in a decision making position, where he is free to choose to keep his vow or to break it. Rational beings, through the use of reason, have been given the ability in these situations to distinguish between the good (τὸ καλόν) and the bad (τὸ αἰσχρόν).

5 I translate τὰ λογικά as rational beings. According to Origen this group includes not only humans but also angels, heavenly beings and demons, see for example *Com. Joh.* II.23; X.45.

6 Regarding this definition of *free will* see also Origen, *De oratione (De orat.)* VI. 1-5, and further H.S. Benjamins, *Eingeordnete Freiheit. Freiheit und Vorsehung Bei Origenes*, Leiden: Brill 1994, pp. 58-70.

People who select the good earn praise. On the other hand those who chose the bad or lustful earn blame (*De princ.*III.1.3). In this way choice becomes the foundation for the judgment.

Origen says it is reason which the rational person uses to choose between various possibilities—and choose wisely. This appears in both the above mentioned reference from *De princ.* III.1.3 and in Origen's comments on this example. His commentary on this example, particularly in *De princ.*III.1.4 maintains that while the man discussed here gave up his vow of chastity when he met the woman, another man who finds himself in a similar situation may decide to act differently, *because he has attained more knowledge or understanding*. According to Origen free will is thus the ability, given through reason or intellect, to choose between the many possible responses to a particular situation. This emphasis on reason as the basis for free choice corresponds quite well with the general impression of Origen's theology as a logos-centered theology.

God's grace-filled economy—freedom and predestination

It is apparent, according to Origen, that for humans and the rest of the rational beings free will plays a deciding role in the position that these rational beings assume within God's creation and plan for salvation. Rational beings are not by nature tied to the position which they assume. They can freely decide to choose to follow the will of God or abandon it. Thus they freely can decide between salvation and strife, which comes to be concretely expressed in the theology of Origen. But at same time his theology is—just like many other theologies in the early church—the barer of the notion that the whole of creation as well as each individual's story is part of a plan (οἰκονομία) which God has foreordained. According to Origen this plan necessarily ends with salvation of the whole creation, and seen from this perspective humanity cannot freely choose between salvation and perdition. In God's grace-filled plan there seems to be an inherent conflict or tension between freedom and predestination.

God has before the creation of the world preordained a plan for all created things and for the whole of history, from the beginning to the end. This entire plan and all of its elements are available in Logos as models or outlines for the coming reality. With creation and throughout the history of his created works God has caused this plan and its models to become reality. This plan is not merely an overarching outline but rather a plan that includes every detail—every thing, every event, every act.

Origen's description of the plan for salvation is largely keeping with the traditional description of the sequence of events from the fall of creation until end times. There are however also decisive differences which plays a clear role in this context. The most important difference is that the macro-process of salvation history painted by Origen is determined by and with the teaching of the re-establishment of all things (ἀποκατάστασις τῶν πάντων). Thus his schema for salvation history maintains: God created rational beings with the ability and possibility to choose for themselves the direction for their lives. This freedom of choice was used negatively because although rational beings were created in and to the eternal, unchangeable existence close to God, they turned their lives from God (*De princ.*II.9). This is the decisive fall which took place before the creation of this world, and is the cause of this world's creation. Rational beings' use of freedom to rebel meant that the lives of these beings were driven from God in every direction. Therein resides the difference. The material world was created by God to contain this diversity. Salvation is an overcoming of this diversity, so that rational beings become again similar to God. Salvation becomes a reality because God during the process of history puts his plan through. God's

plan has the salvation and re-establishment of all things as an end goal.

The decisive question is now how God does suffuse everything with his plan—and with that allows grace to take priority over freedom? According to Origen this happened because the Logos is entrusted to be the pedagogue for all of humanity as well for individual people. In the larger historical process of redemption we see the assigned work of the Logos in the creation of the material world as having the specific purpose of framing the commissions of rational beings. We see the work of the Logos in and amongst the Old Testament prophets, and naturally first and foremost through its incarnation in the human being Jesus of Nazareth. After the resurrection the Logos works with the Holy Spirit through the apostles, the church and so forth. Finally Origen notes that the Logos continues its work through new aeons until all rational beings are reacquainted with their original equality with the creator.

The different aspects of Logos' pedagogical work become still clearer at the background of Logos' pedagogical work in relation to individual people. The Logos is described as a good pedagogue, who uses both the stick and the carrot. For Origen it is the case that many people (the majority) have not sufficiently achieved the knowledge needed to choose a good life and with that go straight to perfection. Moreover rational beings do not fall equally far away from God: the Devil and his followers fell the deepest. The pedagogical effort accorded to them will therefore begin from an entirely different place than the action undertaken for the pious ascetic, who has not completely forgotten the good or the divine. The redeeming work of the Logos will thus occur on many different levels and with the Logos God has prepared many different ways to salvation. Everyone can therefore begin the enlightenment process from their own place, wherever they are and from there rise up to the highest levels in order to reach perfection. Origen describes this as an accommodation, because the Logos adjusts (accommodates) itself and its process of redemption to the needs of the individual; and we can read in his teachings on the accommodations how he understands grace and freedom in relation to the history of salvation.

In *Com. Joh.* I.201 it says that the Lord is the teacher and the interpreter for the pious, whereas for those who are “slave-spirits conquered by fear” he is Lord. The pious need a teacher who can lead them to higher levels of knowledge about the divine. On the other hand those who are still conquered by the slave-spirit need a lord who can lead them further with a whip. Christ accommodates himself to the needs of the individual. The whip helps lead slaves further to a deeper understanding of the divine, so that in that place they become the friends of the lord, because they have learned to know the will of their lord and also to attain knowledge of the divine. The objective of Christ's accommodations is always to lead creation further to a higher standing and deeper knowledge of the divine, the starting point and the goal for humanity's history and material existence. This idea points again to knowledge and wisdom as wholly fundamental for freedom and salvation. Knowledge is essential for free choice, just as it is the way to redemption, whereas grace is the manifold attempts and ways in which the Logos communicates this knowledge to humanity.

According to Origen the Bible is Logos' most important tool, in which is the clearest expression of how many times and in how many different ways throughout history that the Logos has spoken to humanity in an attempt to convey to them knowledge of the divine. At the background of this theory Origen presents a comprehensive biblical theology. Here we shall point to only one principal idea from his discussion of biblical theology that is relevant to this context. This is the idea that the Bible's manifold forms of expression, imagery, etc are representative of the above mentioned idea of Logos' accommodating: the Bible is shown to have a message for everyone. The Bible speaks in many different modes

and on many different levels, so that everyone can find the guidance in the writings, which is suitable for them. For example, in the writings of the Bible we can find hard and direct statements about the eternal torment to which the lustful will be subjected, but we can also find many—indirect—statements saying that God’s plan for redemption concludes with the salvation of all things. The first set of statements is directed towards the simple-minded who can only be motivated to live a good life with the help of threats. For them threats about eternal strife offer a way to salvation. Others, those who have achieved deeper insight, can interpret the writings allegorically and realize that the actual will of God is that all things will be redeemed—a truth, which is only fitting for those who are more spiritual educated. The simple-minded would misuse this wisdom to continue their lustful lives and therefore do not know how to best serve the truth (see *De princ.* IV.1-3; *C.Cels.* V.14-24). Consequently the Logos adapts his “strategy of enlightenment” in response to the target group.

Why then is history full of so many bitter experiences? What is the meaning of them if God endeavors in every way to guide all things to perfection? Does God not control history? According to Origen, God does control history. Nothing in history suggests that God is not master over the situation. All of history is an expression of God’s grace. Therefore history is really understood as the history of redemption. Even when history is full of suffering and painful experiences it is because suffering is in many cases the most suitable “method of enlightenment”. As an example of this Origen repeatedly uses the image of a doctor’s practice. God’s application of grace is comparable to a doctor’s curative work. A doctor is often compelled to prescribe a patient bitter or bad tasting medicine, or he can be compelled to use a knife to remove sickness; or he can even be compelled to use fire to burn sickness out. When a doctor causes a patient suffering everyone knows it is for the healing benefit of the patient. So too is it understood that when God causes humanity suffering it is in order to lead the people in question to definitive perfection (cf. *De princ.* II.4-8; III.1.13).

For a final example of the Logos’ educating grace I will refer to Origen’s long explanation of the meaning of the hardening of Pharaoh, which accounts for a large part of the chapter on free will in *De princ.* III.1. It is not possible here to discuss the entire text in detail. With regard to the question of humanity’s free will what obviously matters to Origen is that freedom and the hardening are understood to go hand in hand, which is a complicated point. However the explanation for this is that it is really not God that hardens Pharaoh but rather Pharaoh himself who chooses to harden himself against the advice of God (cf. *De princ.* III.1.10). In this situation which God has foreseen before the creation of the world, God chooses to use Pharaoh’s self-imposed hardening in a constructive way, using him as a tool for the salvation of Israel (cf. *De princ.* III.1.8). For this reason, the hardening can function as an eye-opening teaching which clearly shows that humanity’s redemption is a consequence of God’s grace not that of their own well lived life. Some rational being will fail to see this if they do not meet with opposition which awakens them to it (cf. *De princ.* III.12). Consequently there is talk about a parallel with the imagery of a doctor, because also in this instance God employs suffering constructively. Incidentally Origen obviously has no doubt that Pharaoh will also come to another way of thinking and will return to God. Although this does not happen while Pharaoh is living it will occur at some point before the larger process of redemption reaches its conclusion.

According to Origen, God’s grace is expressed through the unfolding of the process of redemption. It is fundamental for him that God’s grace is expressed in history. The same is true of humanity’s free will, which should be understood as a person’s freedom to choose in the context of a concrete historical situation. Grace and free will therefore

should not be understood as just an inner mental condition. God's grace and humanity's freedom come, first and foremost, to be expressed through Logos' guidance and persuasion of each individual and all of history with regard to future perfection. Thus it can be concluded that grace has priority over freedom within Origen because no one and nothing is free to choose final perdition. Yet God does not force redemption. God persuades. Therefore freedom does not move without grace. Humanity's free will and God's grace are not oppositional forces, rather they express a co-operative goal: God redeems humanity through grace, but redemption is not fully available until humanity connects itself to it (*De princ.* III.1.15; III.1.19).

The belief that God has a predetermined plan for humanity and the rest of the world, which is pushed forward by God, who persuades humanity to use its free will correctly, means that on one side Origen must reject every form of determinism in relation to salvation. On the other side it is necessary for him to explain how the determinist salvation of the Gnostics differs from his own belief that God has predetermined redemption for all and knows all the actions of humanity before they happen. Does this not mean that individual actions are predetermined? I will look more closely at these two problems in the following section.

The Struggle with Determinism

A portion of the Gnostics from the Valentinian⁷ tradition, together with the Marcionites⁸, have disputed the idea that humanity has free will and consequently the freedom to choose between good and bad; right and wrong. Origen disagrees with this viewpoint because he finds that it contradicts Christian ideas of judgment. Origen has undoubtedly developed his understanding of humanity's free will in opposition to these forms of Gnostic determinism.

In the important text *De princ.* III.1, which I have taken as a starting point above, Origen does not directly identify whom he is arguing with, although it is directly stated in the text that it is written as a guide in the struggle against the thinking of others. There are however such specific references in the text to those being opposed that it is possible to identify the opposition as the Valentinian Gnostics and the Marcionites. This identification of the opposition is further supported by reference to other texts in which Origen more directly indicates the identity of his opposition. That is, for example, the case in *De princ.* II.9.5 where he discusses the cause for differences within creation. In this text he mentions those who claim that these differences are an expression of the idea that the natures of souls are different. According to Origen the advocates of this viewpoint are the followers of the

7 Regarding the definition of the Valentinian school see the classic but also partially obsolete monograph of Fr.-M. Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée*. A more recent definition see C. Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentinus*, Tübingen 1992; E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the "Valentinians"*, Leiden 2006. The Marcionites also probably have an argument for a form of determinist salvation which is a consequence of their distinction between a creator God and the highest God, cf. *De princ.* III.1.9.

8 Regarding the Marcionites and their theology see the classic definition in A. von Harnack, *Das Evangelium vom Fremden Gott*, Leipzig 1924 (reprinted 1996), see especially pp. 93-142 about Marcion's theology. For a more recent definition see G. May / K. Greschat / M. Meiser (eds.), *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung*, Berlin 2002.

schools of Marcion, Valentinus and Basilides.⁹

In *De princ.* III.1.8 Origen criticizes the thinking of others (τῶν ἑτεροδόξων), which introduces the ideas that some are by their very nature barred from redemption and thus lost, while others are by their nature exempt from perdition and therefore saved. This way of thinking necessarily excludes humanity from being able to exercise free will. Origen is undoubtedly here alluding to the Valentinian Gnostics, who often present exactly this kind of image of a natural division of people into different classes. Origen does not himself describe the Valentinian ideas about the naturally imposed classes of humanity, but he alludes to this way of thinking many times, especially in his commentary on the Gospel of John, where he has an on-going discussion with the Valentinian Heracleon's commentary on the same gospel.¹⁰

We find even more comprehensive descriptions of this idea in other earlier Church Fathers, especially Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Irenaeus describes this idea in connection with his extensive examination of Valentinian-Ptolemaic gnosis in *Adversus haereses* (*Adv. Haer.*) I.1-9. Briefly put, the idea maintains that all living things are divided into three forms of being or substances: the material, the spiritual, and the intellectual. In accordance with these categories humanity is also divided into three classes: the physical, the spiritual, and the pneumatic. Those belonging to the physical class are necessarily condemned, because nothing material can be redeemed or last forever. The spiritual can be saved through good actions and good living, assuming they choose such a lifestyle. But the spiritual can not enter into eternal and incorruptible fullness (the pleroma). The pneumatics are incontrovertibly saved because nothing pneumatic can be lost or degraded.¹¹ Based on this description it becomes clear why Origen accuses the Valentinian of dividing humanity into nature based categories and with this undermining the notion of humanity's free will. At the same time it is clear that the Valentinian system also prescribes a notion of a type of freedom to a portion of humanity. This freedom applies to the physical, who through the choice of a morally good life can attain a form of redemption—just not at the highest level because that form of salvation is reserved for the pneumatics. But as far as the Church fathers are concerned, this restricted type of freedom is meaningless because it does not

9 It is discussed within the research whether Origen was arguing against primarily the Valentinians or the Marcionites. In the past the tendency was to emphasize the Marcionites as his most important opponents. But now the tendency is to emphasize the Valentinians as more important, see for example H. Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System. Zur Rezeption der valentinianischen Gnosis bei Origenes*, Göttingen 1993, 04-154.

10 See for example *Kom. Joh.* X.33, where Origen records Heracleon's interpretation of the system of Temple purification (*Joh.* 2, 13-22). Heracleon says that the high priests, who are allowed to go into the Holy of Holies, are pneumatics and thus saved. The Levites, who must remain in the vestibule, are spiritual, thus some can be saved but some are not fully integrated into the pleroma. The merchants outside of the Temple are corporeal and thus can not be saved. See also *Kom. Joh.* XX.106-113; XX.163-170; XX.287-300. These texts all basically say that, according to Origen, humanity's situation is not decided by assigned natures, but by humanity's own freedom of choice. See W.-D. Hauschild, *Gottes Geist und der Mensch. Studien zur frühchristlichen Pneumatologie*, München 1972, 157-165; E. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis. Heracleon's Commentary on John*, Nashville 1973 especially 98-113.

11 This description is constructed in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.6.1-I.7.5. A parallel description appears in Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 54, 1-3. These texts are found together with other descriptions of the Gnostics by other Church Fathers in W. Wölker, *Quellen zur Geschichte der christlichen Gnosis*, Tübingen 1932.

fundamentally change the nature based predetermination of humanity to either salvation or perdition.

The Church Fathers' statements about the Valentinian classification of people are disputed in research. They are faulted because one can not find a correspondingly comprehensive description of this classification in Valentinian literature itself, which is first and foremost available in the the Nag Hammadi collection, but is also included in other and better preserved texts such as Ptolemaeus' letter to Flora.¹² Yet it seems incredibly that the ideas about a determinist classification of humanity should be invented by the Church Fathers. We have many identical accounts of and references to this in the works of the early Greek Church Fathers. It would be unthinkable that Irenaeus, Clement, Origen and others, who interacted with the Gnostics, could in their writings ascribe a viewpoint to Gnosticism which the Gnostics did not hold. I therefore consider the above description of the Gnostic classification of humanity as reliable.¹³

There also is another and content-wise more interesting discussion taking place in the current research about the Valentinian classification of humanity. Some studies maintain that the strong emphasis on deterministic salvation, which comes to be expressed in the Church Fathers description of Valentinian anthropology and soteriology, gives a distorted picture. According to this research the anthropology and soteriology of the Valentinians is not definitive of a deterministic salvation. Unfortunately this discussion can not be pursued conclusively here. Considering all these circumstances I maintain that it is most accurate to talk about a characteristically deterministic salvation in the writings of the Valentinians because each person's salvation or perdition is determined by naturally given conditions.¹⁴

In addition to the Valentinian Gnostics Origen also criticizes the Mariconites. This criticism occurs in *De princ.* III.1.9 where he addresses a critique towards those who think that God hardens some and then condemns them. If this is true then God is neither just nor good. Indeed, some go so far as to say that this God, who created the world, is evil. Maintaining this idea or the ideas associated with the viewpoint described above has, according to Origen, the consequence of depriving humanity of free will and ascribing to the creator God the responsibility of each persons salvation or perdition. At the same time

12 An English translation of the texts of the Nag Hammadi is available in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Leiden 1988. Ptolemaeus' letter to Flora can be found in G. Quispel: Ptolémée Lettre à Flora, *Sources Chrétiennes* 24, Paris 1966.

13 Concerning this discussion about the reliability of sources see for example K. Rudolph, *Die Gnosis*, Göttingen 1980, 13-14, which maintains the prevailing viewpoint of Gnostic researchers that the Church Fathers' descriptions of Gnostics and their theology is unreliable. By contrast M. Desjardin's "The sources for Valentinian Gnosticism: A question of methodology", *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986), 342-47 asserts that the writings of the Church Fathers are in most cases the best sources for Valentinian Gnosticism. One of his arguments for this is that the writings of the Church Fathers, unlike those of the Nag Hammadi, have not gone through a long revision and translation process.

14 Arguments against the notion of a Valentinian determinist salvation are found in B. Aland, "Erwählungstheologie und Menschenklasselehre" in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1977, 148-181 and in J.A. Trumbover, "Origen's Exegesis of John 8:19-53: The Struggle with Heracleon over the Idea of Fixed Natures", *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989), 138-154. On the other hand H. Strutwolf argues that Valentinian gnosis operates with a fixed-nature determinism. E. Pagels, 1973, 98-113 denies that the idea of determinism is altogether useful in this context. According to Pagels the idea of choice ought to be used in its place. Still the problem remains the same.

this thinking creates another problem that is even more serious than the deprivation of humanity's free will. It creates a problem with the way God is understood. The viewpoint of Gnostics and the Marcionites implies that God can not be said to be both just and good (*De princ.* III.1.9). In this way the Gnostics and Marcionites introduce the idea that there are two or more Gods and this constitutes a fatal breach with mainstream Christian theology since its very starting point is that there is only one God who is both good and just—at one and the same time (cf. *De princ.* I.praef.4).

The fight against determinist salvation, which Origen finds primarily among the Valentinians, consequently demonstrates itself to be a significant driving force in his defense of humanity's freedom of will. There is, however, still a tendency towards determinism in Origen's own salvation history theology in the sense that God is assumed to know beforehand all the events of history. The question is therefore, what does he do in order to combine foreknowledge with freedom?

The conflict between foreknowledge and free will in God's plan

As has already been mentioned, Origen emphasizes that God has preplanned all of creation's—including each and every person's—path to perfection, and consequently that God has foreknowledge about everything that will happen. At the same time Origen contends, as we have seen, that humanity has the freedom of will to choose between good and evil. Because of this a conflict arises between God's foreknowledge and humanity's free will. Origen attempts to dissolve this conflict by maintaining that the foreknowledge of God is a foreknowledge about the actions humanity and all other rational beings will freely undertake in the future. The most thorough discussion of this problem is found in a long fragment of Origen's commentary on Genesis, which is located in *Philokalia* XXIII. The problem surfaces when he turns his attention to the statement in Gen. 1:14 that God created the lights in the firmament as a sign to fix celebrations, days and years. This allows him to begin a discussion about Greek astrology's understanding of the stars and heavenly bodies as beings that determine the timing of earthly events. According to these astrologers the position of the heavenly bodies completely determine the events of humanity, thus those events are not occasions for punishment or praise, as is prescribed by Christian doctrine (*Philokalia* XXIII.1). Origen does not find the astrologers' point of view totally incorrect but rather imprecise. For this reason he does not reject the idea that the movement of the heavenly bodies represents an order along which the events of history unfold. He also does not dispute that God as the creator has knowledge of this order and that because of this he has knowledge of all future historical events (*Philokalia* XXIII.4). On the other hand he does dispute that humans who know to watch the heavenly bodies can discern and foreknow the passage of history (cf. *Philokalia* XXIII.6), and in this context he decisively puts forth the question: how can God's foreknowledge of all the events of history be reconciled with the freedom of humanity (*Philokalia* XXIII.6). He turns to a discussion of this question in *Philokalia* XXIII.7-11.

Origen's solution to this problem is as follows: God has—because he is God—foreknowledge about all future events. Prior to creation God had thought through all the possibilities and he knows which of the given possibilities people will choose in each future situation. Contained in God's foreknowledge are therefore both all the possible actions available in all future situations and all the possibilities that people choose in the given situations. God knows thus not only the possibilities which people will choose in the future but also all the possible actions that will not be used. This foreknowledge about people's future actions does not make God the cause of or responsible for these actions. It is, Origen

says, like when a person sees another person step on to a slippery path and thus foresees that the person will fall. Although the first person has foresight about the fall it is not because of that knowledge that the second person fell. It is not the person's foreknowledge that determines the situation, but rather it is an understanding about falling that determines the first person's foreknowledge. It is likewise the case with people's freely chosen actions in the future: they determine God's foreknowledge and the plan that he has arranged on the basis of his foreknowledge but the foreknowledge does not determine them. It is an instance of reverse causation. God's foreknowledge does not preclude humanity's freedom of action.

As the example shows, Origen points out that foreknowledge of future events does not determine future actions. Falling is not the necessary result of going out on a slippery path. However, it must be acknowledged that there is a decisive difference between the foreknowledge described in the example and God's foreknowledge, in the way that Origen pictures it elsewhere. For example, Origen maintains that God's foreknowledge is infallible. This means that what God knows that will necessarily happen. It does not happen *because* God knows that it will happen; it happens *when* God knows it will happen. For this reason there remains in practice a tension in the theology of Origen:¹⁵ On the one hand he contends rightly, that God does not determine with his foreknowledge what shall happen. But on the other hand, according to Origen, it is not possible to act outside of God's foreknowledge. Consequently one can say that in principle Origen certainly distinguishes between foreknowledge and predestination, but that this distinction cannot be seen in practice. The result is exactly the same: Humanity must necessarily act as God has foreseen that they will act.

Grace, Freedom and Predestination

There is one perspective in particular from the above that I find interesting with regard to the viewpoint of systematic theology: It concerns the clash with the deterministic ideas of salvation and the consequences which can follow from this encounter.

As has been noted above there is no doubt that Origen endeavors to avoid the determinism that he finds in Valentinian Gnosticism. But does he succeed? His insisting on God's foreknowledge of each of humanity's actions and of every event in history undermines his attempt to avoid determinist ideas of salvation. The same is true for his teachings on apokatastasis, in which he maintains that in the end God leads everything to redemption. It is quite clear that Origen himself goes to great lengths to avoid this determinism because this is the only way that he can retain humanity's free will and responsibility, however he will not go so far that he gives up the notion of God's omnipotence and omniscience. For this reason Origen must live with an inner tension in his theology between God's foreknowledge and humanity's freedom.

Having said this we also must not forget that humanity's freedom played a much greater roll for Origen than it did especially for the later Augustinian theological tradition. Origen's understanding of *grace* and *free will* represent the tradition which Augustine works out through his campaign against Pelagianism. According to the anti-Pelagian Augustine there is no free will amongst humans, with which humans are able to chose between evil and good. According to Augustine everyone selects evil and is therefore condemned. This is where grace first comes into the picture—because some of the condemned are still saved. As a consequence of his clash with the Pelagians, Augustine comes from time to time to plead for a slightly altered version of the determinism which

¹⁵ Also see C. Cels. II.20. For a more detailed analysis of these texts see, H.S. Benjamins, 71-98.

Origen opposed. With Augustine western theology really returns to the determinism and dualism that the early Greek Church Fathers opposed in their clashes with Gnosticism. Variations of this determinism have remained within a large portion of the western tradition ever since Augustine.

Even if, according to Origen, humanity's freedom is an unalienable part of that which is in God's creation, this does not go so far as to mean that people can choose perdition for themselves. We must therefore say that Origen's theology does truly include a form of determinism. Because according to Origen's understanding of redemption God has predetermined redemption for everything. But in contrast to the Gnostics he maintains it is only a positive determinist salvation. The freedom of humanity extends only to the point that they can select for themselves the path to their redemption, but the end goal stands fast. People can choose many directions and thus a painful journey to their goal but God has predetermined salvation for every body and for all things. With this understanding Origen separates himself not only from the Gnostic tradition but also from a large part of later western tradition, which is characterized by Augustine. According to this tradition God predestines some people to salvation and others to perdition, and God can because of this in the most extreme consequence also be said to be the source of evil.

I think that with Origen and with the theology of the Eastern Church in general we must maintain an opposition to determinist salvation in its Gnostic and its later western form. At the same time with the early Eastern Church we must maintain that the thinking about God is undermined if freedom extends to such a degree that any form of predestination is rendered impossible. The tension between humanity's freedom and God's graceful predestinating of redemption must therefore be retained.

Андерс-Кристијан Лунд Јакобсен

СЛОБОДА И ПРОВИЂЕЊЕ У ОРИГЕНОВОМ БОГОСЛОВЉУ

Циљ овог рада је да истражи Оригеново разумевање односа благодати и слободне воље, или шире гледано односа између слободе и предестинације. Благодат и слободна воља нису супротстављени појмови код Оригена. Његово богословље је Логоцентрично, у коме се слободна воља заснива од Бога даном разуму (*Логосу*) те људска слобода и Божија благодат имају исти циљ. Људска слободна воља је слобода личности да разумно бира у оквиру једне историјске ситуације, док Божија благодат представља *Логосово* вођство и убеђивање сваке особе да дела у складу са будућим савршенством. Међутим, Бог не одређује могуће људска деловања, већ их предвиђа. Провиђење не треба разумети као предодређење, јер Бог не одређује како ће људи делати у конкретној историјској ситуацији, већ само предодређује спасење за свакога на крају историје.

