

ORIGEN'S SPECULATIVE ANGELOLOGY

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Abstract. Origen of Alexandria can be credited as the founder of a Christian speculative angelology, in which Christ the *Logos* is both the creator and the interpreter of the angels. He introduces the rational beings of the angels as the first created rational beings who, in contemplating the divine Word (*Logos*), freely choose to direct their will as holy angels in service to or wicked demons in antagonism against the love of God. The first created rational beings are divided into three orders: the angels, the demons, and the neutral spirits of human souls. The angels remain closest in contemplation of the *Logos*, yet, due to their negligence, descend to unfold in the angelic hierarchy. The angels and demons thereafter guide the movements of all spirits, substances, and signs in the created cosmos. The neutral spirits of human souls can choose to follow either the guidance of guardian angels or demons. And yet after the Incarnation, the angels are distinguished from the demons by their choice to follow Christ. Origen's angelology has often been regarded as an early Christian alternative to Middle Platonic daemonologies. And after Karl Barth, his angelology has come to be dispensed from Christian theology. However, as Jean Daniélou has observed, Origen had previously departed from Platonic daemonology in affirming that angelic mediacy must pass away like the light of the stars before the brilliance of the *Logos* of Christ. He had, in this way, already assimilated the mediacy of the angels to the absolute mediation of Christ. And, in assimilating angelic to christic mediacy, Origen also attributes the reason with which the world is moved to the divine reason of the divine Word (*Logos*) of Christ in God. Origen's angelology can thus be read both before and after Barth as a science of the angels.

I. SPECULATIVE ANGELOLOGY

Angelology is a theological science that studies the creation, orders, and function of the angels.¹ It began as a study among the earliest Christian theologians. From Philo to Peter Lombard, the angels had been studied as the first among creatures.² Fiery controversies once raged between the followers of Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus surrounding the individuation, communication, and location of the angels.³ And even after Immanuel Kant's critical turn against metaphysics, we may find, starting in Schelling and in Heidegger, a faint echo of the angelic in secular philosophy.⁴ Yet the study of the angels has since Ockham and Schleiermacher increasingly come to be regarded with a foretaste of scientific incredulity as an uncanny and antiquarian interest, which ultimately amounts to little more than an inventory of the records, testimony, and opinions of thinkers from the theological past.⁵ It has increasingly come to be studied in a reductive empirical register as it has come to curate the collection of evidence from the past to present as its last living thought systematic summaries of all that has hitherto been believed.⁶ The great philosophic questions of the origin, nature, and purpose of the angels, which Plato had asked and Origen addressed, appear today to have lost all urgency, and have more often come to be regarded as a question that could only but cannot ever be decided on the promised weight of any empirical evidence. In awaiting its impartial arbitration, we have suspended any judgment as to the truth of the angels, consigned their appearances to the witness of faith, and, in this faith, prematurely arrested any speculative advance for the study of the angels.

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented in July 2020 at the 'Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance', online conference of Sorbonne Université Paris organized by Delphine Lauritzen, and in November 2017 at the 'Religion and Philosophy in Origenism Old and New II' seminar of the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Platonism hosted by Douglas Hedley. I have benefited from advice, comments, and questions from Rowan Williams, Ilaria Ramelli, Christian Hengstermann, Isidoros Katsos, Samuel Pomeroy, and two anonymous reviewers.

2. See C. RANGAR, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire*, Boston – Leiden 2011; E. MUEHLBERGER, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (OUP), Oxford 2013; and A. PLOYD, Participation and Polemics: Angels from Origen to Augustine, *HTbR* 110/3, 2017, pp. 421–439.

3. See D. KECK, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 1998; *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by T. Hoffmann (Brill), Leiden – Boston 2012.

4. See F. W. J. SCHELLING, *The Ages of the World: (Fragment) from the handwritten remains Third Version (c. 1815)*, transl. by J. W. Wirth (SUNYP), New York, NY 2000, p. 25, pp. 65–6; M. HEIDEGGER, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, transl. by R. Rojcewicz and D. Vallega-Neu (IUP), Bloomington – Indianapolis 2012, pp. 313–32.

5. For a recent history of angelology, see D. A. JONES, *Angels: A History* (OUP), Oxford 2010.

6. See for example M. FOX – R. SHELDRAKE, *The Physics of Angels: Exploring the Realm Where Science and Spirit Meet* (Harper), San Francisco, CA 1996.

Speculative angelology is a new philosophical approach to the study of the angels. It can be called 'speculative' as it attempts to see as in a 'mirror darkly' (*speculum in aenigmate*) (1 Cor. 13:12) the angels as the angels may see themselves by an intellectual illumination of divine light.⁷ It can be considered philosophical as it suspends and interprets empirical evidence of the angels as the subject matter of dialectical hypotheses, which, when critically examined, can be shown not merely to correspond to but also to cohere with the first principles of systematic theology. And it can, for this purpose, suspend the search for any empirical correspondence between the theory and facticity of the angels. It expressly acknowledges the insufficiency of appeals to the bare evidence of scripture, testimony, and experiences of the angelic. It thus suspends the entire weight of the angelic past so that we might initiate a new inquiry into those experiences that can be critically examined for its coherence in a hermeneutic circle. As the first created spirits of a pure intellect and will, the angels collaborate in the creation of the physical matter of all observable entities, and, for this simple reason, can *per se* never become the subjects of any positive regime of empirical observation.⁸ The accumulated evidence of angels in scripture is no more certain, as, in each scriptural statement, the literal meaning of the text is ever open to a plenitude of alternative interpretations, for which the truth can perhaps only be scientifically demonstrated in a systematic theology as by a higher spiritual meaning.⁹ To begin to study the angels, we must leap over this sublime limit of empirical angelology, as we may turn the finite over and into its own infinite flight, and speculate so that we may with our minds see the middle of this hermeneutical circle; cycling with the angels; reflected in its radiance as from a divine light.

Speculative angelology thus suspends judgment as to the evidence of the angelic as it searches the traces of its literal significance towards a higher spiritual interpretation. It can, in contrast to what has been called angelology, be considered the most richly philosophical and for that reason most divine mode of answering to the angelic: for it does not merely ask what have we heard of the angels, as though they were little more than literary artefacts handed down to us from a bygone era, but rather and more radically asks whether, what, and who are the angels as they may yet appear to us in our speculative but no less scientific imagination. It can thus be considered to doubly conflict with both a scientific positivist empiricism, which would correlate all judgments of the angels to the observational evidence of revelation, scripture, and tradition, and a negative

7. Origen, *Origen: Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XVII On Numbers*, in *Exhortation to Martyrdom [ExhMart]*, transl. by R. A. Greer (Paulist Press), New York, NY 1979, p. 13, 51.

8. Origen, *Origen: On First Principles [PA]*, transl. by J. Behr (OUP), Oxford 2017, 1.8.1, p. 133.

9. See H. DE LUBAC, *History and Spirit: Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, transl. by A. Englund Nash (Ignatius Press), San Francisco, CA 2007, pp. 159–222; and *Medieval Exegesis, The Four Senses of Scripture*, transl. by M. Sebanc (Clark), Edinburgh 1998.

empiricism which, in suspending all such positive judgments registers scriptural evidence of angels as a sublime limit beyond which nothing can be scientifically demonstrated. Its negative form then suspends the positive form of empiricism: for since empiricism is—most of all in the study of the angels—immediately subverted in its effort to construct an interpretation of finite evidence of infinite spirits, the limit between the observable and the un-observable can at last only be preserved as all scientific certainties may be suspended as each is given by a divine act of revelation.

Angelology takes its first beginning in this poetic flight of speculation beyond all observable evidence. Ancient Greek philosophers had used the word *daimōn* (δαίμων) to designate the lesser ‘godlike’ spirits that inhabited the aethereal heavens of the corporeal cosmos.¹⁰ Discussion of daemons thereafter proliferates in all of the schools of classical Greek philosophy. The Pythagoreans are reported to have assigned daemons to all countable constructions of numbers, ratios, and proportions radiating in a cosmic arithmogony from the highest god at the central hearth.¹¹ And Parmenides is similarly said to have identified being in its truth with the highest God, and the mixed semblances of being with such an ‘unbroken circle of lights’ cycling from and for the centre.¹² Plato had spoken of the daemons as divine signs, tutelary spirits, and messengers of the gods who animate the celestial spheres.¹³ Aristotle, the Peripatetics, and the Stoics then appear to have subsumed the daemons as the spirits that move the physical cosmos, while the Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists appear conversely to have subsumed the motion of the physical cosmos in and for the spirits of lesser daemons and higher gods.¹⁴ Philo of Alexandria then appears as the first writer to devise a philosophical theory for the angels of Hebrew scripture.¹⁵ Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Origen of Alexandria later distinguished the holy

10. F. MACDONALD CORNFORD, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (Cosimo, Inc.), New York NY 2010, pp. 100–2.

11. See Procl., *Proclus: A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements*, transl. by Gl. R. Morrow (PUP), Princeton, NJ 1970, 130.8; 166.25; 173.11, pp. 104, 131, 136; *Philolaus of Croton: Pythagorean and Presocratic* critical ed., with introd., transl., and notes by C. A. Huffman (CUP), Cambridge 1993, pp. 381–3.

12. Parm., *Parmenides of Elea: A Text and Translation with an Introduction*, transl. by D. Gallop (UTP), Toronto 2000, p. 117.

13. Plat., *Ap.* 27c–e, 31c–d, 40a–c, 41c–d; *Phaedo* 107c–114d; *Symp.* 202d–3a; *Crat.* 397c–398c; *Statesman* 273e–275d; *Tim.* 36e–40d; *Epinomis* 984c–985d, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, ed. by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (PUP), Princeton NJ 1961.

14. See Arist., *M.* 12.8, 1074b, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, transl. by J. Barnes (PUP), Princeton, NJ 1991; Plut., “On the Obsolescence of Oracles” in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, V, transl. by F. Cole Babbitt (HUP), Cambridge, MA 1999, 416c, p. 385; A. KEIMPE, Stoics on Souls and Demons: Reconstruction Stoic Demonology, in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, ed. by N. Vos and W. Otten (Brill), Leiden – Boston 2011, pp. 71–96; J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 2020* (CorUP), Ithaca, NY 1996, pp. 31–3, 90–1, 171–4, 216–21, 287–8, 317–20, 378.

15. Ph., *On the Cherubim*, 6.20–10.31; *On the Giants*, 2.6–7.28, in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, transl. by C. D. Yonge (Hendrickson), Peabody, MA 1993.

angels from the wicked demons.¹⁶ And subsequent thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius and John Scottus Eriugena had thereafter begun to develop a Christian science of the angels.¹⁷ Peter the Lombard's *Sentences* thereafter incorporated this study of the angels into the Medieval scholastic theological curriculum.¹⁸ And with the Latin reception of Aristotle, we witness a profusion of controversies, between the followers of Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, surrounding the individuation, communication, and location of the angels.¹⁹ Angelic speculation thereafter continues to feature prominently in the writings of the later Dominicans, the Renaissance and Cambridge Platonists, and Romantic Idealism. Yet beginning with William Ockham, medieval nominalism, and the Protestant Reformation, we also begin to witness a gradual submergence of angelic speculation as the angelic mediacy of universal forms and scriptural hermeneutics is dispensed in favour of the direct signification of discrete substances which lie flat, open, and exposed to the transparent ocular mastery of empirical science.

Karl Barth has recently offered the greatest challenge to this theological science of the angels. He had, in a chapter on 'The Limits of Angelology' of his *Church Dogmatics*, cautioned against the historic contamination of theology by angelology. As evidenced in scripture, the angels cannot be excised from theology.²⁰ And yet, as 'marginal figures', there appears a testimony of poverty (*testimonium paupertatis*)²¹ with which to warrant the inclusion of angels as a "theme of an independent discussion" in systematic theology.²² He thus renounces the philosophical study of "angels in general", except as the angels have been introduced "in the witness of Scripture and in connexion with the revelation and work of God."²³ While, he writes, we cannot deny the scriptural testimony of the angels, we also are not "at liberty to reinterpret" scripture with the "inventions" of our own concepts.²⁴ Rather, this inventiveness extends only as far as a response to what may be positively given

16. Just., "Second Apology", in *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, the Monarchy*, transl. by T. B. Falls (CUAP), Washington, DC 2000, chs. 5–9, pp. 124–8; Ir., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, transl. by D. J. Unger and J. J. Dillon (The Newman Press), New York, NY 2012, 2.2.1–5, pp. 19–22; Or., *PA* 1.5–8, 3.1–2, pp. 90–143, 284–399.

17. See Dion., *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Paulist Press), New York, NY 1987; John Scottus Eriugena, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy*, transl. by P. Rorem (PIMS), Toronto 2005.

18. *Peter Lombard. Sentences: Book 2: On Creation*, transl. by G. Silano (PIMS), Toronto 2008, pp. 2–11, p. 14. See Ph. W. ROSEMANN, *Peter Lombard* (OUP), Oxford 2004, pp. 93–100.

19. See KECK, *Angels and Angelology* (quoted n. 3); *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy* (quoted n. 3).

20. K. BARTH, *Church Dogmatics [CD]*, III, The Doctrine of Creation, Part Three, ed. transl. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Clark), Edinburgh 1976, pp. 369–418.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

in revelation. The mediacy of the *Logos* is, for this reason, reduced to the bare immediacy of a revelation that is given in the empirical testimony of scripture to which we may respond yet for which we are powerless to speculate. Barth can, with this reduction, break the middle judgment of angelic hermeneutics: for he can interpret revelation only after it is received and never as it is sent, relayed, and mediated by the angels. He instead recommends a '*pistis*' (faith) that "does not press forward to *gnosis*" (knowledge) as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding).²⁵ He thus refuses any prior fore-understanding (*intelligere*) of a philosophical hermeneutics, and reduces the '*rationes probabiles*' (probable reasons) of angels to the 'concrete objectivity' of revelation.²⁶ Yet in so reducing angelic to christic mediacy, Barth has also effectively occluded any speculative interpretation of the empirical evidence of the angelic. And in withholding from faith any backward glance of interpretation, he effectively suspends the middle judgment between the source and the target of revelation to cut the hermeneutical circle, and read of the angels again in a more empirical register.

We may perhaps only find a true place for angelology in Christian theology as we recollect its sources to retrace the path of its historical development as a genuinely speculative and philosophical science. Origen had, as I shall describe, developed the earliest exemplar of speculative angelology for Christian theology.²⁷ He speaks of the angels as the first created rational beings who, in contemplating the divine *Logos*, have freely chosen to direct their will as 'holy angels' in service to or 'wicked demons' in antagonism against the knowledge and love of God.²⁸ To study the angels with this 'light of knowledge' (*lumen scientiae*) is, for Origen, to come to know the nature, orders, and functions of those rational beings by whose creative act of knowing all that we can know may be knowable at all.²⁹ As Christ the creative *Logos* knows of creation as its creator, so too the angels, in collaborating in creation, know, with what Saint Augustine had called 'morning' and 'evening' knowledge, of all created things both before and after they have been created.³⁰ The angels can similarly know in creating and create in knowing the essence of all entities through this creative

25. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 379–80.

27. For previous studies of Origen's angelology, see J. DANIELLOU, *The Angels and their Mission*, transl. by D. Heimann (Christian Classics, Inc.), Westminster, MD 1987; J. LEEMANS, Angels, in *The Westminster Handbook of Origen*, ed. by J. A. McGuckin (Westminster John Knox Press), London 2004, pp. 51–3; C. BLANC, L'Angéologie d'Origène, *StP* 14, 1976, pp. 79–109; A. MONACI CASTAGNO, Angelo, in *Origene Dizionario: La Cultura, Il Pensiero, Le Opere*, a cura di A. Monaci Castagno (Città Nuova), Roma 2000, pp. 6–13.

28. Orig., *PA* pr. 10, p. 21.

29. Orig., *PA* pr. 10, p. 21.

30. Aug., *Augustine. The Literal Meaning of Genesis, I, Books 1–6*, transl. by J. Hammond Taylor (Newman Press), New York, NY 1982, IV.22–46, pp. 129–140; *The City of God, Books I–VII*, transl. by D. B. Zema and G. G. Walsh (CUAP), New York, NY 1962, pp. 351–2, 369–90.

unfolding of the angelic, noetic, and natural hierarchies of creation. At the rupture of this first created difference the angelic hierarchy may fatefully repeat the first divine difference of the Son from the Father, except, absent of the instant intermediation of the Spirit, as its relationality is deferred from the beginning. The angels cannot know of the incarnation of Christ because they know neither of this created difference, nor of this divine difference of the Son from the Father.³¹ Yet at the Incarnation, this difference can also come to be communicated, by the unfolding of the angelic hierarchy, as rational beings can come to know of the angels as the angels also come to know of the *Logos*. The angels are, for Origen, these first created exemplars of free intelligence who serve their creator by serving as the spiritual mediators of creation, as the divine light may be reflected in and through the middle of every extreme, and radiated through the angelic choirs to every corner of the cosmos.

II. THE CREATION OF THE ANGELS

Origen's study of the angels begins, in *On First Principles* immediately after his studies of the three divine hypostases of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.³² He marks the first created difference of the uncreated creator and the created 'rational beings' (*de naturis rationabilibus*) in which "all souls and all rational beings", whether holy angels or wicked demons, "were made or created" (*naturae factae sunt uel creatae*).³³ As the first of creatures, the angels share a primordial similitude with their creator. In this primordial similitude, the angels may receive as a gift all of the perfections of their creator. This first created difference is then inscribed in a similitude that is shared by the angels themselves. The angels can, accordingly, be studied *via analogiae* as both similar to and different from their creator. Origen thus recommends a "similar method or reasoning" (*simili quoque ratione*) in studying the nature, order, and function of the angels.³⁴ He attributes the name of "angel" (*angelos*) to the function "because of their work" rather than "because of their nature."³⁵ The names of the orders of the angels are, accordingly, "not [the] names of the natures of living beings", but "of the orders of which this or that spiritual nature has been prepared by God" according to the "objects over which those names were appointed."³⁶ The characteristic nomenclature of the angels is, for this reason, only a denomination of the analogical predication of their functions within the orders of the angelic hierarchy.³⁷

31. Origen, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10 [ComJn]*, transl. by R. E. Heine (CUAP), Washington, DC 1989, 1.75–78, 49.

32. Origen, *PA* 1.5–8, pp. 90–143.

33. Origen, *PA* 1.5.1, pp. 90–1.

34. Origen, *PA* 1.7.1, pp. 120–1.

35. Origen, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (quoted n. 31), 2.144–5, p.133.

36. Origen, *ComJn* 2.146, p. 133.

37. Origen, *ComJn* 2.144–8, pp. 132–4.

Following Paul, Origen acknowledges that “there are still other rational offices and orders beyond those which he named.”³⁸ The study of the angels thus begins, not from the empirical testimony of the traditions surrounding angelic naming, but, rather and more richly, from such a speculative investigation, into the nature, function, and order of the angelic hierarchies.

The angels are, for Origen, the first created rational beings who of their exemplary reason most of all imitate the goodness, will, and intellect of the divine hypostases in God as Trinity. He initially distinguishes the perfections that are communicated essentially from the divine hypostases with those that may be accidentally given to be imitated among creatures: “For in this Trinity alone, which is the author of all things, does goodness exist essentially” (*bonitas substantialiter inest*), and it is through the Trinity alone (*sola trinitate*) that “others possess it as an accident”, as something that can be given, and as something that can be ‘lost’, as it is given in blessedness, to “participate in holiness and wisdom and in divinity itself.”³⁹ Creatures can, accordingly, be considered good only insofar as their will may be directed towards the Good, that is, to the goodness of God. This created difference then marks the primordial rupture, not of creation from its creator, but, rather in creation, as creatures may be released in their utmost contingency to direct their wills for and against the essential goodness of God. Yet, as we also witness, the Good is, for this precise reason, also deferred in its intermediation, from the first moment to the next: for the free will of creatures can be exercised for and against the Good, in a temporal expectation of the annulling of its opposition, and of the restoration of its relations.⁴⁰ Origen indicates that God defers the Good from the first to the last, so that, in struggling through the trials of temptation, the created spirits can be cured, and can give again the goodness of which they have been given in and for their creator.⁴¹ In this temporal deferral of mediation, the will can then cause effects for which the consequences subsequently cascade in and beyond what may be determined as known by the intellect. And, in its utmost contingency, the will is absolutely free to move in any direction for and against what it knows, and of what it knows it can come to know of its own and the divine intellect.

As the first created rational beings, the angels surpassingly imitate their creator. Origen describes the angels as the “first order, supreme and most eminent, of rational creatures in heavenly places” (*unus iste summus et excellentissimus ordo in caelestibus rationabilis creaturae*).⁴² With no impediments, the angels can freely create everything, and know everything in creating it save for the uncreated principle of their own and every creation. Yet in this freedom, the angels’ will may also exceed the angels’ intellect. For in this

38. Origen, *PA* 1.5.1, p. 91; *ComJn* 1.215, p. 76. See Eph. 1:21.

39. Origen, *PA* 1.6.2, p. 107.

40. Origen, *PA* 1.5.3, p. 97.

41. Origen, *PA* 3.1.14, 3.1.17, pp. 331, 343.

42. Origen, *PA* 1.8.4, p. 139.

volitional excess, the angels can freely cause those effects that are other than and opposed by the intellect. The angels can, by their freedom, thus be distinguished by the exercise of their free intellectual will for, against, and against but for the goodness of God. Origen triply distinguishes the rational beings as 'holy angels', 'wicked demons', or, 'between them', of neutral spirits who are "yet placed in struggle and trial."⁴³ As the first created spirits, the angels are genetically prior and ontologically superior. Yet, in serving God, the angels also serve God's creation. The superiority of the higher angels is thus shown in a kenotic gift of greater service to the lower creatures. The angels function, to this end, as the "ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."⁴⁴ For the angels ever "ascend bringing the prayers of men into the purest heavenly region of the universe, or even to places purer than these beyond the heavens."⁴⁵ Origen thus acknowledges that human spirits, although ostensibly inferior to the angels in their will and in their intellect in the knowledge and love of God, may, nevertheless, "ascend to the likeness of all these" by "living a good life and doing everything according to reason."⁴⁶ The final end, like the first beginning, is, in this spiritual ascent, to become like the angels in the enjoyment of a more perfect love and knowledge of God.⁴⁷ He writes: "We know too that angels are so far superior to men that when men are made perfect they become equal to angels."⁴⁸

The first created difference, of creation from creator, thus opens the first caesura of freedom, the Fall, and the Restoration. This caesura is at once the condition of freedom and of the Fall. For as creatures, the angels know themselves to be created, yet do not know their creator as they know themselves. Yet, in knowing all things through themselves, the angels, most of all, know that of which they do not know; knowing more of what they know less; and, in this 'learned ignorance', most of all know of the unknown that awaits discovery. To come to know themselves as they are known in all that they may know, the angels must search, through this caesura of their un-knowing, in an originary analysis from that which they know to the first principle of creation, being, and knowing. For corporeal humans, knowledge comes first through the senses, and analysis accordingly begins from the immediately given facts of sensory experience.⁴⁹ Yet for incorporeal angels, knowledge comes – not from without but from within – from this free will to know in creating. An angelic analysis thus begins in a more originary movement; both backwards and forwards; equally as a discovery of prior assumptions, and as a posterior invention of novel syntheses.

43. Origen, *PA* 1.5.1, p. 91.

44. Origen, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [CC], transl. by H. Chadwick (CUP), Cambridge 1953, 5.4., 266. Cf. Heb. 1:14.

45. Origen, *CC* 5.4, p. 266. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c.

46. Origen, *CC* 4.29.

47. See B. P. BLOSSER, *Become Like the Angels* (CUP), Cambridge 2012.

48. Origen, *CC* 4.29.

49. Arist., *Prior A.* 46b38–47a9; *Post. A.* 59b1–59b24.

The angels may, in this analysis, search through the caesura of their un-knowing to discover the first principles; the *Logos*; and, from its systematic unfolding, the invention of any novel synthesis. The angelic hierarchy may then eternally unfold through this angelic analysis of the pure concepts, as the angels themselves search through the caesura of this created difference from their creator, turn to the invention of a productive knowing of another, and, in knowing of another in and for themselves, create in knowing all of the specific differentia of the angelic hierarchy; of the higher generic from the lower specific orders; and of the specific difference among the offices of the angels. The names of the angels are, for this reason, merely a metaphoric denomination of this systematic unfolding of the angelic hierarchy. In its infinite plenitude, the angelic hierarchy is instantly populated by each and every order and office from one eternal creative act of the creation in knowing of the angels themselves. And since the angels create in knowing before the existence of all that can come to be known, the angels can also create in knowing the noetic and natural hierarchies of the cosmos.

III. THE DESCENT OF THE ANGELS

The freedom of creatures is a gift from their creator.⁵⁰ For as creatures, the angels were created in the fullness of goodness and truth in the utmost imitation of the creative *Logos* of Christ. Yet, as creatures, the angels also knew themselves to be created, knew that of which they did not know as they are known by their creator, and, in striving to know, searched through this created difference against but for themselves. All angels are created good, yet with the freedom to turn their will for and against the goodness of their creator. Origen writes: “there is no nature, therefore, which does not allow good or evil except the nature of God”, for God is “the fountain of all good things” in ‘Christ’.⁵¹ Yet with this freedom of the will, we also witness the first turn of the will against the good. Origen attributes this first turn of the will to an originary negligence (*neglegentiam*) of attention to the knowledge and love of God.⁵² The ‘fall’ is as much a failure of the intellect as of the will, when “by fault of his own slothfulness”, a rational being elects to open a rupture in his synchrony with the dialectical circuits of the *Logos*.⁵³ In the midst of this caesura, creatures can then choose to set their will in opposition to their creator, and against but for the essential goodness of God: for in moving against the intellect, the will can also be thought through the intellect in its opposition; known of its will as

50. Orig., *PA* 3.1.20–24, pp. 361–79.

51. Orig., *PA* 1.8.3, p. 137. See also I. RAMELLI, Origen and the Platonic Tradition, *Religions* 2017, 8, 21 DOI:10.3390/rel8020021, pp. 1–20, here 8–12.

52. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 109. Cf. M. Harl, Recherches sur l’origénisme d’Origène : la ‘satiété’ (κόρος) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes, *StP* 8, 1966, pp. 375–405.

53. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 109.

opposed to its intellect; and be known as it is annulled in its opposition, even as it may will again over this opposition to the restoration of its relations in a will directed against but for their own and the divine intellect. The freedom of creatures emerges at precisely this point, from the caesura of this first created difference, in which, while the creator is essentially good as the source of goodness, the creatures are only accidentally good, and yet can choose to become good as they turn over this difference from creation in search of the supreme source of a higher goodness that can be given from their creator.

The origin of evil coincides with this origin of freedom. For in searching through this caesura of the first created difference beyond any foreknowledge, the angels may freely choose to withdraw from the fiery love and knowledge of God, into the descending degrees of cold, negligent, and listless opposition of a self-enclosed singularity. The name of 'Satan' names the "enemy of God" (*inimicus dei*), of a will set in opposition to God, and of a will of creatures in opposition to their creator.⁵⁴ Origen traces the origin of evil to this first fall of 'conceit and pride' with which the Devil had refused to recognize the goodness of his own creative freedom as a gift of God.⁵⁵ For in withholding recognition of this gift, the Devil and his angels had first set their wills in opposition to the design of their creator. And, in their obstinate withdraw, the demons are essentially constituted by this same volitional opposition.⁵⁶ In repeating this rupture from their own specific difference, the fallen angels may infinitely reproduce the negative intervals of this opposition to the good in a parallel yet opposed demonic hierarchy: for, in the Fall, each turns away from the divine light to oppose its radiant reflection; in opposing its reflection, each also opposes its mediacy in the immediacy of its extremes; and, yet, in collecting its immediate extremes, each encloses itself in an evermore particulate universality, in which, even in spite of its striving for universality, each merely repeats the opposition of this same particularity. Since, moreover, it results from such a sheer separation of creatures from the creator, the Fall marks the first lapse of divine mediacy into bare immediacy; the collapse of participation into isolation; and the broken bonds of being. The Fall is, in this figure, annulling of its own particularity. Yet in annulling its particularity, it at once also opens its elements to be related in and through a higher middle.

The descent of the angels down the orders and into the offices of the angelic hierarchy is thus the result of a free exercise of the intellect and of the will for the Good. In their search for the *Logos*, the angels search to discover, and in discovering to invent, the function of their own specific difference, in an increasingly complex specific differentiation of a higher genus into an infinite multiplicity of descending angelic orders, offices, and functions.

54. Origen, *PA* 1.5.2, p. 93

55. Origen, *PA* 3.1.12, p. 323.

56. Origen, *PA* 1.5.5, 101–5. Cf. M. SIMONETTI, Due note sull'angelologia origeniana, *RCCM* 4, 1962, pp. 165–208.

Since this search is performed from and for the higher genera, the highest angels can search, through their genericity, to the minutest specificity of the lowest angels. And the higher generic angels can intercede so as to instruct the lower specific angels. The descent of the angelic hierarchy thus extends from genera to specie in a repetition of generic speciation *ad infinitum* into an infinitude of angels. The angels can, for this reason, never be counted: for, as in Plato, its dialectic forever precedes the specific difference of the idea of number, of quantity, and of any act of counting the angels.⁵⁷ The angelic hierarchy thus coincides with as it is creative of the noetic hierarchy, as the angels conceive, and in conceiving, create the ideas, which, from within the particular places of the created cosmos, range as universals over all particular instances. The office of the angels is, for this reason, a result, not of any sheer divine fiat, but rather only of a freely chosen vocation. For this reason, Origen denies that the angelic hierarchy can be arranged “accidentally” (*non fortuito*), but, on the contrary, must be the consequence of the “righteous judgment of God” according to the rational necessity of the *Logos*.⁵⁸ And he denies that “it happens accidentally that a particular office is assigned to a particular angel”, and insists that angels only receive their office according to their vertical descent and horizontal turn into corporeal embodiment.⁵⁹ The order and offices of the angels must, for this reason, be assigned according to their ‘virtue’ (*uirtutibus*) in thinking and willing what they would wish to be within the realm of possibility that opens as reason is spoken concurrently by the angels as by the *Logos*.⁶⁰ The manifold diversity of creation is itself the result of the free intellectual-will of all spirits, who, while, beginning in uniform undifferentiated similarity, may choose, by their own freedom, to descend and turn in any and all directions for and against the providential purpose of creation in imitation of their creator.

Origen thus extends the angelic hierarchy to the natural world: the *Logos* first creates the angels; and the angels then create the cosmos. Since, moreover, the *Logos* also creates through the creativity of the angels, the primary causality of the *Logos* continues to operate in and through the secondary causality of the angels. The angels may then see the light of the *Logos*, and, without diminishment, be illuminated from within, to shine like the stars, as a “flame of fire.”⁶¹ The speculative ‘sight’ with which the angels ‘see’ God is also the sight with which God sees the angels. With this divine illumination, the angels shine invisibly for the intellect, and yet visibly from the body, as the angels may descend down to enter into and shine forth in and from celestial and terrestrial bodies.⁶² The angels watch over

57. Plat., *Parm.* 143a–145c; *Tim.* 31b–32c, 53c–57c; *Rep.* 526c–527a.

58. Orig., *PA* 1.8.1, p. 133.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. Orig., *ExhMart* 13, p. 50.

62. See A. SCOTT, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Clarendon Press), Oxford 1991.

“animals,” “twigs,” and “plants,” as well as over “holy deeds,” in understanding of eternal light, and in recognition of the “secrets of God.”⁶³ Humans emerge, for Origen, at the terrestrial apex of this descent of the angelic hierarchy, as the rational beings descend of their own free thought and will into the particulate corporeality of animal bodies, ‘appointed’ for the purpose of ascending to angelic stature, so that they may, like angels, minister to souls in the future, to work for the restitution of all in Christ.⁶⁴ He could, for this reason, say, with repeat the words that “we shall be equal to angels,” and even suggest that John the Baptist had been an angel.⁶⁵ The creative *Logos* of Christ is, from the end to the beginning, the absolute middle of creation before which the mediacy of the angels is itself immediate, and from and for which the function of all of the angels may be freely exercised. The mediacy of the angels in creation can, for this reason, be regarded as secondary in service to the primary mediacy of the *Logos*. And, in its service, the angelic hierarchy can be considered as a spiritual expression of the noetic hierarchy of the *Logos*, and of the ideas of reason as communicated by the *Logos*. The descent of the angels can, for this reason, be judged as neither wholly good nor wholly evil but rather open to the good in service to the lower spirits; caught between good and evil; yet filled with hope for the final Good of their restoration to the absolute middle of Christ.

With the creation of the world, the angels may descend down the angelic hierarchy to guide by their instruction all the subordinate specie of all created spirits. Origen describes how the angels are ever “reformed by their instruction and salutary discipline,” in an instruction of the lower by the higher angels, until “they may be able to return and be restored to their former state of blessedness.”⁶⁶ The ‘instruction’ (*institutionibus*) of the higher angels is thus given for the ‘reformation’ (*reformati*) of the lower angels in imitation of the higher angels.⁶⁷ The course of this instruction may consist in a recapitulation of angelic analysis, in which, with the ‘punishment’ of explosive contrariety, all spirits can be instructed to search through this difference to discover a new way to be reformed in the likeness of the angels. Origen describes how God had “divided the nations according to the number of the angels of God”, assigning an angel to each of the nations, and “expelling those very angels from the authority and demon-nations which they had among the

63. Orig., *Origen: Homilies on Numbers* [*HomNum*], ed. by Chr. A. Hall, transl. by T. P. Scheck (Intervarsity Press), Downers Grove, IL 2009, 14.2.9, p. 82.

64. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, pp. 109–111.

65. Orig., *ComJn* 2.140, 2.192, pp. 132, 147. Cf. Orig., *Origen: Homilies on Luke Fragments on Luke* [*HomLc*], transl. by J. T. Lienhard (CUAP), Washington D.C. 1996, 4.6. 19; J. LIENHARD, Origen’s Speculation on John the Baptist or Was John the Baptist the Holy Spirit?, in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. by R. J. Daly (LUP), Leuven 1992, pp. 449–453; H. PIETRAS, Dio d’elezione (CIO II, 24), in *Il Commento a Giovanni di Origene: Il testo e i suoi Contesti*, a cura di E. Prinzivalli (Bibl. Adamantium), Rimini 2005, pp. 441–448.

66. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 111.

67. Orig., *PA* 1.6.1, pp. 110–1.

nations,” except as these nation-angels may come to serve or oppose the coming of Christ.⁶⁸ The nation-angels thereafter accompany the particularity of human nations, like the guardian angels, accompany the particularity of human persons, in a repetition of the dialectic of the angelic hierarchy as it descends into and unfolds unto evermore specific differentiae.⁶⁹ The division of the nations, among themselves, and within themselves, is thus a consequence of a free choice of the angels to divide, serve, or oppose the administration of the world.⁷⁰ The angels of the churches are likewise those who may descend to guide the assemblies of Christians, in which a general angel guides the Church and a specific angel guides the churches, as the “angels to whom the churches are entrusted.”⁷¹ And the function of the angels in the field of the hearts of men is to ‘cultivate’ the heart as “governors and managers”, as “their hearts are carefully cultivated and are led to perfection.”⁷² Origen acknowledges both a ‘good or evil advisor’ of guardian angels or demons, with which the soul can choose to turn its will for or against the goodness of Christ.⁷³ He illustrates Jacob’s ladder as a speculative vision of the “angels’ paths” of “the ladders reaching up from earth to heaven”, in which the angelic hierarchy is apprehended as folding in and for the supremely creative *Logos*.⁷⁴ And he describes how the angels may thus cultivate the hearts of men by perfecting their prayers; by the dialectical rectification of errors; and by this remedial exercise of reason in imitation of Christ.⁷⁵

IV. THE ASCENT OF THE ANGELS

Christ is the absolute middle and concentrated singularity of all angelic mediation. Having created the angels, he descends to become “less than” the lowest order of the angels, assumes the flesh of a mortal man.⁷⁶ And, in ministering to Christ in the wilderness, the angels minister to the incarnate *Logos*, to the highest through the mediation of the lowest,

68. Origen, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, in *The Homilies on Genesis [HomGn]*, transl. by R. E. Heine (CUAP), Washington, DC 1982, 9.3, p. 154. Cf. M. FÉDOU, *Christianisme et Religions Païennes dans le Contre Celse d’Origène* (Beauchesne), Paris 1988, pp. 518–524; CASTAGNO, Angelo (quoted n. 27), pp. 13–5; S. POMEROY, ‘To the People a Pure Language’: Fundamental Theology of Nations in the Septuagint, Ancient Judeo-Christianity and 20th Century Theologians, unpublished.

69. Origen, *CC* 5.30–32, p. 287.

70. Origen, *Origen: Homilies on Joshua [HomJos]*, ed. by C. White, transl. by B. J. Bruce (CUAP), Washington, DC 2002, 23.3, p. 199.

71. Origen, *HomLc* 13.5–6, p. 54. Cf. Rev. 2:15, 3:4.

72. Origen, *HomNum* 11.3.3, p. 54.

73. Origen, *HomNum* 20.3.7. Cf. SIMONETTI, Due note (quoted n. 56), pp. 165–171.

74. Origen, *Origen: The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies [ComCr]*, transl. by R. P. Lawson (Longman, Greens and Co.), London 1957², pp. 44–5.

75. Origen, *HomNum* 11.3.3–5.1, pp. 54–7. See E. PETERSON, *The Angels and the Liturgy*, transl. by R. Walls (Herder and Herder), New York 1964.

76. Origen, *ComJn* 2.82, p. 115.

in a kenotic reversal of the genus-species subordination of the lower to the higher angels.⁷⁷ As the singularity of angelic mediation, Christ can be called the 'angel of great counsel', not merely as a messenger, but as the singularity of the message that had "proclaimed to men the great counsel of the God and Father", and of the 'pure religion' with which to 'ascend to God'.⁷⁸ As the "high priest of all angels", the angels offer their service as a sacrificial gift on behalf of creation through the unfolding of the angelic hierarchy.⁷⁹ Origen describes how "the angels descended because Christ had first descended."⁸⁰ In descending in service to creation, the angels administrate creation; in its infinite particularity; between all extremes; and in all beings. "All things", Origen says, "are full of angels."⁸¹ Their service to creation is thus also a service to Christ in creation: for after Christ has descended from the height of the *Logos*, and entered into the lowest specific rank of a human person, the angels may most of all serve God by serving Christ in creation. In offering the highest as a sacrifice in service to the lowliest, Christ on the Cross achieves a pivotal reversal of the subordination of the lower to the higher ranks of the angelic, human, and natural hierarchy.⁸² As Jean Daniélou has observed, Origen radically departs at this decisive point from the tradition of pagan daemonology in radically affirming that the mediacy of angelic instruction must pass away before the singular mediacy and absolute middle of creation in Christ.⁸³ Quoting Paul, Origen writes: "For Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet"; "for all things must be subjected to him."⁸⁴ There can, thereafter, be no lasting opposition between christic and angelic mediacy: for the extremes of angelic mediacy are at once also the extremes of christic mediacy. Angelic mediacy is also an extreme to christic mediacy. Angelic mediacy appears as but a manifestation of christic mediacy. And angelic mediacy is ultimately immediate before the mediacy of Christ the *Logos*. The relative mediation of the angels is thus mediated in and through the absolute mediation of Christ, as angelic mediacy is sublated in service to christic mediacy, and the mediacy of the angels serves without subtracting from the absolute mediation of Christ.

Creation thus provides the material media for the restoration of all things to Christ in God. The angels can participate by consuming, being consumed by, and be preserved as the

77. Orig., *PEuch* 11.3, p. 102. Cf. Mt. 4:11.

78. Orig., *CC* 5.2–5.8, p. 306. See J. W. TRIGG, The Angel of Great Counsel: Christ and the Angelic Hierarchy in Origen's Theology, *JTS* 42/1, 1991, pp. 35–51.

79. Orig., *CC* 5.4, p. 266.

80. Orig., *Origen: Homilies 1–14 on Ezekiel* [*HomEz*], transl. by T. P. Sheck (The Newman Press), New York, NY 2010, 1.7, p. 36.

81. Orig., *HomEz*. 1.7, p. 37.

82. Orig., *Origen: Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XVII On Numbers*, in *On Prayer* [*PEuch*] (quoted n. 7), 11.3, p. 103.

83. DANIELOU, *The Angels and their Mission* (quoted p. 27), pp. 92–3. Cf. *ComJn*. 1.25; *HomNum*. 11.3; 14.3.

84. Orig., *PA* 1.6.1, p. 107. Cf. Cor. 15:25–28.

subject of consumption in subjection to Christ. Origen describes the originary divine light as the reflective radiance by the Son of the Father, and of the *Logos* that is communicated by Christ, as altogether as one in God as Trinity.⁸⁵ In this divine light, rational beings are illuminated to see the mediacy of the angels, as the angels see the mediacy of the *Logos*, in which this ‘light’ illumines the mediacy of the *Logos*.⁸⁶ Origen writes: “just as the ability of the moon and stars to give light becomes faint when the sun is shining, so those who are illuminated by Christ and have received his rays have no need of any ministering apostles and prophets—for we must dare to speak the truth— or angels.”⁸⁷ The light of Christ outshines without diminishing the light of the angels, just as the light of the Sun outshines without diminishing the light of the moon and stars. Origen describes how the angels are “nourished by the Wisdom of God” by receiving this ‘bread of Being’, as it is given by the *Logos* and the Spirit to their intellect and their wills in the “contemplation of the truth with wisdom” with the “bread of angels.”⁸⁸ In consuming the ‘rational food’ of the *Logos*, the angels also consume the material media of the *Logos*, so as to assume within themselves a part of the *Logos*, and equally be assumed themselves as a part into the *Logos*. The angels are thus united, through this transmission of their parts, into a new whole, as all rational beings are consumed and are equally consumed in and by the *Logos*. In this circuit of consumption, all rational beings may then “become more ready to assist” other rational beings in “their comprehension of more and greater aspects” of the *Logos*, as they too “feed angels” and “worship [God] through the mediation of his *Logos*.”⁸⁹ The light of those illuminated by Christ likewise requires no light, save that of Christ, for “those who are illuminated by Christ and have received his rays thereafter have no need of the radiance of any ministering apostles and prophets... or angels”, for “they are instructed by the firstborn light himself” in the absolute mediation of Christ.⁹⁰ As a lesser light passes into a greater light, while preserving the lesser, and without diminishing the greater, so too may the relative mediacy of the angels pass into the absolute mediation of Christ.

The story of the Restoration in the *Apocalypse* thus remedies the story of the Fall in *Genesis*. This consummate restoration occurs when, as Paul says, “the form of this world passes away”⁹¹, the order of the world is abolished, and yet, in passing, “the world passes away” yet “does not perish” in the “annihilation or destruction of the material substance”, but, rather, results in a “transmutation of the form of this world” and a “renewal of heaven

85. Orig., *PA* 1.2.6–13, pp. 49–65.

86. Orig., *ComJn* 1.164, p. 67.

87. Orig., *ComJn* 1.165, p. 67.

88. Orig., *PEuch* 27, p. 143.

89. Orig., *PEuch* 27, p. 143; *CC* 8.6, p. 457.

90. Orig., *ComJn* 1.165, p. 67.

91. Orig., *PA* 1.6.4, p. 117. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:31.

and earth”, “in which end God is said to be all in all.”⁹² In this dissolution of its self-enclosed particularity, every site of particular self-opposition will be released into new relations. All of the angels, stars, and animate souls will, without any separation in space, “also” be “part of the all”, with “God in themselves”; God “in all things”; and all in God.⁹³ The “souls of human beings” may then be “assumed into the order of angels”, “forsaking the darkness” so as to “have loved the light and made sons of the light” as ‘sons of God’.⁹⁴ And when the “last enemy” will be “destroyed”, its “hostile purpose” will “disappear”, and, if cured of evil, even the Devil will be saved.⁹⁵ With this advance, “every rational being is able, passing from one order to another, to go from each order to all and from all to each”, and, thereby, to freely ascend or descend up and down the angelic hierarchy; “susceptible of promotions and demotions according to its own actions and efforts”; in a spiralling ascent against but for its final end.⁹⁶ The consummation of the end thus annuls the opposition of the will and intellect of the rational beings. Origen writes: “We think indeed, that the goodness of God through Christ may recall his whole creation to one end, with even his enemies being overcome and subdued” by Christ in God.⁹⁷ At the end, the opposition of every evil is annulled, even as it exceeds so as to be related in and by Christ from the beginning, at the centre, and altogether as one. When, therefore, “all enemies will be subjected to Christ”,⁹⁸ we can “contemplate the beginning of things.”⁹⁹ We can, at this end, contemplate the entire dialectical circuit of creation, from the Fall to the Restoration, as the opposite intellectual will of the demons may be pacified in and by the ‘peace’ of the angels.¹⁰⁰ And, in this pacification, the antagonism of the world will be abolished; the old world will pass away as a new world is made; and the ‘souls of the pious’ will “put off their bodies” to process, cycling through the circuits of the cosmos, through a ‘method of training’, where the soul in its purification returns to its restoration in and for its originary beginning and final end with Christ in God.¹⁰¹

92. Origen, *PA* 1.6.4, p. 117. Cf. Isa. 65:17.

93. Origen, *PA* 1.7.5, p. 131.

94. Origen, *PA* 1.8.4, pp. 139–141. See BLOSSER, *Become Like the Angels* (quoted n. 47), pp. 174–82.

95. Origen, *PA* 3.6.5, pp. 447–9. Although Origen had in his Letter to Candidus denied that the Devil can be saved, his doctrine of Apokatastasis implies that all creatures can be saved. We may, with Rufinus, answer Jerome’s objection, that, as the “enemy” of God, the Devil cannot be saved, yet, if cured of evil, even the “last enemy” can be saved. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:26; *St. Pamphilus Apology for Origen, With the Letter of Rufinus On the Falsification of the Books of Origen*, transl. by T. Scheck (CUAP), Washington, DC 2010, pp. 59–60, 128; M. EDWARDS, The Fate of the Devil in Origen, *EthL* 86/1, 2010, pp. 163–170; I. RAMELLI, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Brill), Leiden 2013, pp. 387–90, 628–30, 797–99.

96. Origen, *PA* 1.6.3, p. 115.

97. Origen, *PA* 1.6.1, p. 105.

98. Origen, *PA* 1.6.2, p. 107; 1 Cor. 15:24–7.

99. Origen, *PA* 1.6.2, p. 107.

100. Origen, *CC* 8.44, p. 484.

101. Origen, *CC* 8.44, p. 484.

Christ the *Logos* can thus complete the dialectical circuit of the creation, as every difference is annulled and related in the novelty of its creation.¹⁰² Origen writes: “An end or consummation would seem to be an indication that things are perfected and consummated.”¹⁰³ Its novelty is, for Origen, that of the freedom of creatures, in which, in their volitional excess from the overdeterminations of the intellect, creatures are free to will for, against, and yet, in the overcoming of every opposition, against but for their creator.¹⁰⁴ He does not say that the end is the same as the beginning but, rather, that “the end is like (*similis*) the beginning”, in an analogical similitude of a circuit of this created difference, which closes from its end to its beginning upon the circumference that is its centre, and, yet, in the cycling of its creation, also adds something new.¹⁰⁵ He can thus repeat in creation the novelty of the creator, who, in the divine essence of God as Trinity, proceeds from the self-same identity of two-in-one to the surplus relationality of the third; of the Spirit; in which the Spirit returns to reflect the Father and the Son in a new way in God as in creation. The end, as of the beginning is, in this way, not merely identically but moreover non-identically repeated in time, not as one cycle closed in upon itself, but moreover, as an open circle that exceeds so as to envelop itself, where temporality appears as a variegated instantiation of its own eternal procession. The restoration of reason is “promised by the Lord Jesus”, in this angelic instruction in every exercise of reason, and as every opposition of the body, is annulled, overcome, and related over its difference, as all “may be perfected in one”, in the “perfect man”, as ultimately in “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”¹⁰⁶ There will, in the restoration of reason, be “no divisions”, but to be of “one and the same mind and in one and the same judgment”, in the judgment of that which is true of the *Logos* of Christ, so as to concentrate in Christ, altogether as one in God as Trinity, in a trinitarian logic.¹⁰⁷ The final and ultimate end of this progress of the human soul is then to be restored in reason as a rational being to a mind illumined by the *Logos* and *Sophia* of Christ in God, where, from the end to the beginning, human minds can know the angels; know the angelic in noetic hierarchy; and, at last, know all creation as creators in the most perfect knowing.¹⁰⁸

102. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 107.

103. Orig., *PA* 1.6.1, p. 105.

104. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 107.

105. See also I. RAMELLI, Apokatastasis and Epektasis in Hom. in Cant.: The Relation between Two Core Doctrines in Gregory and Roots in Origen, in *In Canticum Canticorum: Commentary and Supporting Studies, Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Rome, 17–20 September 2014)*, ed. by G. Maspero, M. Brugarolas, and I. Vigorelli (Brill), Leiden 2018, pp. 312–339.

106. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 111. Cf. A.-Chr. JACOBSEN, *Christ, the Teacher of Salvation: A Study on Origen's Christology and Soteriology* (Aschendorff), Münster 2015, pp. 260–72; D. PAZZINI, Figlio, in *Origene Dizionario* (quoted n. 27), pp. 161–8.

107. Orig., *PA* 1.6.2, p. 111.

108. See I. RAMELLI, Origen and Apokatastasis: A Reassessment, in *Origeniana Decima*, ed. by S. Kaczmarek and H. Pietras, (Bibl. *EthL*), Leuven 2011, p. 244, pp. 649–670.

V. ANGELIC HERMENEUTICS

We may come to know of the angels, as the angels know themselves, lit by the same divine light, and guided in their freedom by this same speculative flight. As creatures, the angels know themselves as created, know not their creator, and yet know of this sheer difference of their creator in and for themselves. In searching through this difference, the angels can come to create in knowing all things in and beyond but for themselves. And yet, at the Incarnation, the angels recapitulate the *kenosis* of Christ, release the opposition of every difference, and restore the relations of all in Christ.¹⁰⁹ Since, moreover, this restoration is equally a restoration of the will and of the intellect, and this restoration of reason is promised by the Gospels, we can come to know of Christ as Christ knows the angels. We must, however, acknowledge with Origen that the promise of such knowledge of the angels radically depends for its credibility upon a spiritual hermeneutic. For the evidence of the angels can neither be positively constructed from the finite elements of its literal significance, nor be negatively suspended over the limit of its immediate givenness, but —against all empiricisms— must suspend the natural priority of sensory evidence before free concepts, subsume the literal in and for the spiritual meaning, and sublimate the hermeneutical into the dialectical circuit of the *Logos*, from which all such angelic appearances may shine forth with the light of the angels. Origen of Alexandria can thus be read to have prepared the path for this advance in the study of the angels, in which the light with which we speculate of the angels is the light with which the angels see themselves.

The study of creation begins with this study of the angels. For, as Origen suggests, we can only begin to study the physical world as we begin to study the exemplary knowing of these first created rational beings. The angels know themselves as created, know that of which they know not of their creator, and, in searching through this created difference, create in knowing the specific differentiae of the angelic, noetic, and natural hierarchies. The unfolding of the angelic hierarchy thus results in an unfolding of its interior mediacy into diverse sites of exterior mediation: first among the angels; then in the unmediated opposition of the demons; and finally as every external site of mediation may be shown to be subjected to the absolute middle of Christ in God as Trinity. This exterior mediacy of the angels may thus serve to elaborate without in any sense diminishing the absolute mediation of Christ. In its exteriority, the meaning of signs may also be communicated among the messages carried by the angels. The circuit of angelic mediacy then extends to the hermeneutic circuit of semiotic mediacy. The hermeneutic practice with which the angels are read is that with which the angels read. And this circuit of angelic in hermeneutic mediacy is an act of messaging by the angels from and for the creative *Logos*:

109. Orig., *HomEz*, 1.7, p. 36.

the *Logos* first creates the angels; the angels second create the cosmos; and yet the primary causality of the *Logos* continues to operate in and through the secondary causality of the angels. Angelic mediacy can, in this way, be dialectically sublated into christic mediacy. And yet such a sublation does not at all dispense with, but rather more richly shows how creation points from its furthest extremes to its absolute middle. Thomas Aquinas thus writes: the angels “fulfil the office of mediator, not indeed principally and perfectly, but ministerially and dispositively.”¹¹⁰ The *Logos* of Christ thus messages as it communicates through the mediacy of the angels. And angelic mediacy is but a further expression of the absolute mediation of Christ.

In its surpassing mediacy, angelic knowing is saturated with all possible ways of knowing. For the angels can be said to know in creating, and mediate in knowing, all of the intelligible specie of the noetic and natural hierarchies. There can, for this reason, be no hidden reserve of the intellect, as angelic knowing may illuminate the furthest reaches of thought. All of the abstract ideas of mathematics, geometry, and logic are, accordingly, first created as known in the invisible thought of the angels, before these ideas can be concretely repeated in creation, and, finally, in any response of rational beings, who, while thinking the reason of the world, can also respond to create in thought the ideas which were first conceived by the creative angels, as by the divine *Logos*. The universal ideas are, accordingly, first conceived by the angels, but, after their creative instantiation among the traces of things, can also be thought again, as each are collaboratively created by angelic and human intellects, which mirrors the collaborative creation of all rational beings with the *Logos*. Logic appears for humans both necessary and contingent: for, as it is communicated by the *Logos* and created by the angels, it appears necessary for humans; and yet, in the analogical concurrence of creation, it may also appear equally constructed by humans. The elementary logical constructions of all of the arts and sciences is similarly contingent as artificial but no less necessary as a free gift of the *Logos*.¹¹¹ As a gift, it can also be annulled whenever it withholds this gift from its giver, and encodes the circuit of its forms into an abstract mnemonic computer of formal and mathematical logic. The angelic hierarchy both corresponds to and is of itself constitutive of all that can be thought and thought to be, both invisibly among the ideas, and visibly among the physical cosmos. And the human construction of logic is, although contingent as artificial, no less necessary, as an outward expression of the inner freedom of the *Logos*.

Speculative angelology can, in the creativity of such a spiritual and angelic hermeneutics, be acknowledged as a philosophical science of systematic theology. Yet this speculative advance has by all accounts since been arrested by appeals to the arbitration of a more

110. Aquin., *The Summa Theologie of St. Thomas Aquinas*, transl. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers), New York, NY 1911, Tertia Pars Q.25.A.1.Re.2.

111. Orig., *PA* 1.8.3., p. 137.

empirical register of directly signified evidence. Karl Barth had affirmed the 'biblical witness' of the angels in scripture even as he denied any understanding of the angels, excises angelology from theology, and effectively collapses angelic into christic mediacy, where all creation is equally mediate before Christ without mediation. Hans Urs Von Balthasar could, for this reason compare the angels of Barth to those of Philo, like "potencies and radiances emanating from the inaccessible essence of God."¹¹² For as messengers of the 'Word of God', angels act only as negative intermediaries, receiving messages in the absence of mediation, and immediate before the absolute mediation of Christ. Yet, in its negative mediacy, the hermeneutic circle is sundered from the angelic circuit. And, once sundered, the entire meaning of the angelic can only be read as it is received. Barth thus evacuates angelic into christic mediacy, renders angelic mediacy as a negative mediacy without mediation, and dispenses with the mediation of the angels as "basically unnecessary" for systematic theology.¹¹³ Angelology thereafter retains only a negative significance, as an empty marker of a silent fact absent lacking in the spirit of understanding. And yet in dispensing with the angelic, he also tacitly suspends this middle judgment that mediates the hermeneutic circle. Since, as we have seen, the middle of the hermeneutic circle may be mediated by the angelic in noetic hierarchy, this collapse of angelic into christic mediacy breaks the middle of the hermeneutic circuit; reads under erasure; and ultimately un-reads all that it reads in every effort to read of the angels. In evacuating angelic mediacy, it also evacuates hermeneutic mediacy, such that the angels can only be read of as they are also instantly un-read, as 'facts' without 'understanding', and as a splendid object of the most brilliant opacity that shines outward into all of the signs of scripture without any reserve of hidden truth.¹¹⁴

Origen's angelology can, as I have shown, be read in response to this and every empirical angelology as it speculates of the angels with that light with which the angels see themselves. He begins to speak of the angels immediately after speaking of the first principles of God as Trinity, as the first created rational beings with whom the light of the creative *Logos* of Christ is most brilliantly reflected and radiated in every act of creation: the first difference of the Father from the Son results in the first reflection of the Son into the Father; the second reflection of the Father and the Son in and through the Holy Spirit; and, only afterwards, as this reflectivity of the Holy Spirit may be given in the inspiration of all created and rational spirits. Origen's speculative angelology can thus be radically distinguished, not only from pagan daemonologies, but moreover from all preceding angelologies, by his much more radical insistence upon the reflection of the Trinity in the angels.

112. H. URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, transl. by E. T. Oakes (Ignatius Press), San Francisco, CA 1992, pp. 248–56.

113. BARTH, *CD*, p. 412.

114. BARTH, *CD*, p. 373.

For he denies that God participates in being, and instead affirms that God is participated in by those who possess the Spirit of God.¹¹⁵ The Spirit then communicates the divine difference of the Son from the Father of its own difference in every created difference: first, in the first created difference of creation from the creator; then of the vertical specific difference of the angels; and finally, of the horizontal difference between beings.¹¹⁶ Every difference of the sign, as of being, is, for Origen, equally inscribed as in a trinitarian ontology. The specific differentia of the angels, like the first created difference of creation from its creator, is, for Origen, a product of this first divine difference of the Son from the Father.¹¹⁷ The dialectical circuit of the Trinity is thus reflected in the dialectical circuitry of the angels. And this messaging of its meaning in hermeneutics is accordingly a channel of communication that cycles in and through the angels, as ultimately in and for the *Logos* of Christ in God. To read of the angels we must wrestle with their meaning as we turn our thoughts to heaven and look up Jacob's ladder.

115. Orig., *CC* 6.64, p. 379.

116. J. MILBANK, *The Second Difference: For a Trinitarianism without Reserve*, *MTh* 2/3, 1986, pp. 213–34. See also I. RAMELLI, *Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis*, *HTbR* 105/3, 2012, pp. 302–50.

117. C. CUNNINGHAM, *The Difference of Theology and Some Philosophies of Nothing*, *MTh* 17/3, 2001, pp. 289–312; *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (Routledge), London – New York 2002, esp. Ch. 8, pp. 169–218.