

2005

# Man's Participation with God: Origen of Alexandria's Exposition of the "Image and Likeness of God"

Ben Nickodemus

Concordia University-Portland, [BNickodemus@cu-portland.edu](mailto:BNickodemus@cu-portland.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Nickodemus, Ben, "Man's Participation with God: Origen of Alexandria's Exposition of the "Image and Likeness of God"" (2005). *Undergraduate Theses*. Paper 115.

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by CU Commons: Concordia University's Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Commons: Concordia University's Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [acoughenour@cu-portland.edu](mailto:acoughenour@cu-portland.edu).

Man's Participation with God:

Origen of Alexandria's Exposition of the "Image and Likeness of God"

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DIVISION OF THEOLOGY  
AND THE COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY, ARTS, AND SCIENCES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PASTORAL STUDIES

By

Benjamin John Nickodemus

THESIS ADVISOR: Professor Michael Thomas

\_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Department/Division Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Dean of the College of Theology, Arts, and Sciences

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Provost

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
The Image of God.....	28
The Likeness of God.....	45
Conclusion.....	53
Works Cited.....	57

## Acknowledgments

This project has been one of the most challenging academic works of my life. At many times I was very excited and at others I was rather discouraged. I could not have completed this work without the care, love, support, and dedication of those near me. I must first and foremost set all laud to Prof. Spalteholz, Prof. Thomas, and Prof. Wyneken. These three men dared to believe in me when I did not, and they encouraged and guided me into this world known as “scholarship.” I cherish the honesty of Prof. Wyneken whose eager desire to talk to someone who is not his student while his dissertation remains to be written never ceases to challenge and nurture me emotionally. Likewise, I am indebted to the undying dedication of Prof. Spalteholz, who would not give up on a struggling sophomore in Hebrew class and opened my eyes to the field of learning as I have never seen it. And finally the ceaseless belief that Prof. Thomas holds in my ability has driven me more strongly than any reward ever could. Prof. Thomas likewise has taken painstaking hours with me throughout the development of this project editing draft after draft in relatively record time. This paper could not have happened without these individuals. Some had no connection with this paper directly, but the influence they hold on my personal development helped me more than any copy editor could have dreamed.

## Abstract

The nature of Christianity is found within Christ's resurrection. In order to portray the depth and mystery of this resurrection, Eastern and Western Christianity has focused and focuses still on differing events. The Western Church emphasizes the enormous importance of the crucifixion of Christ in line with the central theme of "justification." The Eastern Church tends to lift up "participation with God" as a central theme in the theology and life of the Christian. In the Eastern Church the key to understanding how man participates with God is found in the church's developed anthropology. Of the statements that define the essential nature of man within both Western and Eastern Christianity, the text Genesis 1:26-27 – man made in the image and likeness of God – stands at the forefront. Among the various expositors of this pinnacle text, Origen of Alexandria understands the "image and likeness of God" more holistically than any other theologian of the church. Origen's understanding of the Genesis 1:26-27 encapsulates the soul of Christian theology and proclaims the meaning of the resurrection of Christ for every Christian's sanctified walk through this world and the next.

## Introduction

Throughout the realm of human existence, in the course of unexplained misfortunes, man<sup>1</sup> asks one persistent question: why are these things happening? The discourses that attempt to answer such questions based upon a realm of existence that is outside of this earth, or in the case of this paper, based upon the Christian God, are properly called theological. The proper function of theology is not merely the study of God but the study of who God is in relationship to man. If a man were able to understand the concrete realities of God but not how that God related to him, he would gain nothing. The importance of thinking of theology as relational is compounded even more by the fact that man is unable to understand the concrete reality of God; rather, he is only able to understand God as God is revealed to him, which man only understands through his perception.<sup>2</sup> Thus, one may believe he understands the nature of God, when in fact, he understands God only as God reveals himself to man. Man then only understands God in abstractions and fragments.

Within the context of the fact that theology explores the relation of God to man and vice-versa, there have been two main emphases in Christian theology. Western Christianity emphasizes the idea of a fallen man who cannot objectively understand the

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper the term “man” does not refer simply to the male gender, but as a general term for humanity. This term is used since it facilitates the use of translations of the Church Fathers, and it avoids awkward shifting of pronouns. The original word found within the Greek Septuagint (the Old Testament for much of the early church) is *anthropos* which is usually translated “man” but it in fact is much more of an inclusive term and depending upon the context could be considered gender neutral.

<sup>2</sup> This idea, following Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, is true of all things. Kant argues that nothing in life is understood in its objective form, but man intuits things through *a priori* principles according to his own mind. Therefore, nothing is truly understood in its objective form. This thought, unlike later existential thought, does not deny the objective reality of the thing being perceived. Kant only points out the way man understands such a reality.

reality of God, and as such, is a sinner juxtaposed with the holiness of God. Eastern Christianity posits a living relationship between God and man – albeit a tenuous relationship due to the unfaithfulness of man – with an emphasis on how man participates in God through just that relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the relationship between God and man, Christianity has had a particular difficulty with the concept of evil.<sup>4</sup> Many theologians have looked at this problem and realized, following Greek philosophical speculation, that God must be the highest principle, and as such, could do anything. Christianity goes a step further and identifies this highest principle with the personal God found in the Christian Bible. Thus, this highest principle is known personally through the actions and oracles recorded in the Bible. Along with displays of omnipotence and omniscience, God reveals that He is a moral god capable of only good.<sup>5</sup> This assertion would seem in a logical system to imply that God, being the most powerful and knowledgeable of all beings, has the ability to do whatever he so chooses so long as that action is entirely good.

C.S. Lewis has pointed out the trouble with this view of a god who is both good and all powerful in the face of a world full of suffering. Lewis says, "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God

---

<sup>3</sup> Participation in God is an Eastern Concept talking about the active relationship that is present between God and man. It emphasizes the fact though the historical event of the cross happened once; man is presently living in a relationship with God.

<sup>4</sup>This is also true of all monotheistic religions which claim the existence of an all powerful and all good God; however, this paper will only be addressing issues as these issues as they specifically relate to Christianity and more explicitly this pericopal selection from the creation of nature.

<sup>5</sup> To see an in-depth discussion about why God must be all good and all powerful, see Timothy W. Larsen, "*The Veil of Evil*"

lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”<sup>6</sup> Lewis is pointing out a fundamental issue: there is evil in the world. However, if there is evil in the world and God is a being who is entirely good, He could not want that sort of existence for his creatures, since evil offers no benefit to his creatures. God also is the sole being who could keep evil from occurring. Therefore, if God only does good things and he is omnipotent, the existence of evil is a contradiction to the “good” creation of this world.<sup>7</sup>

But God declared his creation to be “very good.”<sup>8</sup> Whence did evil then arise? Christianity has had to grapple with this apparently contradictory assertion: God, being omnipotent, omniscient, and good, rules over a creation plagued by the existence of evil. For Christianity, the resolution to this philosophical and theological impasse has been to examine the relationship between God and man. The problem lies in how God chooses to relate to man. The universal principle in both Eastern and Western churches is that God does not reveal himself to man in a manner that is contradictory. Since the Bible demonstrates that God is good it is therefore necessary to unpack not so much what the nature of evil is but rather the source of evil. For Christianity, it is a basic postulate that God cannot and is not responsible for the emergence of evil, yet evil exists.

Discovering the source of evil is the key to solving the problem of evil. God, being himself all good, created humanity as all good – as it says in Genesis “And it was very good.” How did man then become evil? Some have argued that the source of evil in man is rooted in man’s misuse of free will. Man freely chose disobedience towards God rather than obedience, and thus man is the origin of evil rather than God. Eastern and

---

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, C.S. “Problem of Pain” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. (San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 2002) 379.

<sup>7</sup> This theological problem is known as "theodicy."

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:31



Western Christianity blame man for the presence of evil. In Eastern Christendom, there seems to be more of an optimistic view of man's potential, for Eastern theologians emphasize that each man himself personally commits all the sins that cause him to fall away from his inherent goodness. The Western tradition posits a more pessimistic view of man's potential, since the Western theologians hold that by his very introduction into the world contaminates him with sin. This doctrine, known as "original sin," does not, however, lessen man's personal responsibility for sin in the world. On the contrary, it only heightens the responsibility of man for his errors by claiming that man is not sinful due to only the misuse of his free will but it is rooted in his very nature.

The following question can then be raised: if man was created good – which God himself declared – how was the first man ever introduced to evil since evil is something other than man's essential nature? If man was created good, then his entire being ought to have been good. Man could not by logical extension have any type of evil desire. This theological problem is usually labeled the "efficient cause" of evil: if everything is created good, how could anything outside of good ever exist?

The logical problem of the efficient cause of evil makes some major assumptions. The main assumption it makes is that a man, being created good, could never possibly turn away from that goodness. However, due to the actual existence of evil, man is identified as the efficient source of evil. To resolve this theological impasse it is necessary to examine exactly how Christian theology understands man to be created if this goodness does not last. What then does being created good imply? In order to do this, it is important to note the uniqueness of man in the order of creation. This goes beyond man being created "good," for the entire creation is created "good" in Genesis 1.

The uniqueness of man lies in the fact that he is the only element of the creation created in the “image and likeness of God.” Genesis 1:26-27 it reads,

"Then God said, ' Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."<sup>9</sup>

From this text it is seen that the uniqueness of man is found in his creation in the “image and likeness of God.” Before one can begin to try and solve the problem of the efficient cause of evil, one must understand the nature of man, and as such, must delve into the meaning of Genesis 1:26-27. The way man relates to God can be explained through man’s connection to God – that is his unique or special relationship based upon the uniqueness of man’s nature.

Both the Eastern and Western churches define the uniqueness of man within their larger theological frameworks. What is curious is that their understanding of how man relates to God reflects some interesting divergences in the theological understanding of this text. As this text is examined and explicated, disparities between Eastern and Western Christianity emerge. What they find in the text will shed great light on the different understandings of man and by extension God. However, each branch of Christendom has much to offer the other, for they both grow from the same ecclesiastical trunk rooted in Christ and the apostles.

The “image and likeness of God” text in Genesis 1:26 brings up many intriguing questions. The first question is: Why are two distinctive terms used? Furthermore, is

---

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:26-27. NRSV.

“likeness” different than “image?” If the terms convey different ideas, what do these terms add to the idea of humanity? What does it mean to be in the “likeness of God?” Does it mean merely to be like God? Is it even possible to be like God? The text says: “Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness.....and in the image of God, He created them.” Is the man actually in the likeness? This question causes the greatest amount of disparity between Eastern and Western traditions in the exposition of this text. The Western tradition largely ignores the term likeness and explores the meaning of “image.” The Eastern Church, however, finds a distinctive meaning in the term “likeness.”

To draw a sharp distinction and to illustrate the unique exposition of the Eastern Church, it is important to understand the “image” and “likeness” of God. However, to successfully indicate the unique understanding that the Eastern Church, primarily Origen of Alexandria, offers for this text, it is necessary to construct a backdrop against which this exposition may be set. There will be, for a duration, a discussion of many commentators who only address the issue of “image.” They limit their discussion to the term “image” for they understand “likeness” to be merely a synonym of “image.” In other words, the two terms do not indicate different concepts. Therefore, until the exposition of the Eastern Church is brought forward, the term “image” is the sole focus of these exegetes.

The term image is so important in this text that it raises many questions. What is image?<sup>10</sup> Does an image imply an exact image, meaning that man is not God but has the same attributes of him? Or is an image something different? Is this to be allegorically

---

<sup>10</sup> Here it is important to realize that the English term “image” is only semi-sufficient. The Greek word *εικων* (*eikon*) seems to imply an idea of an imprint in wax left from a signet ring. The imprint in the wax is an “eikon” of the ring. (see footnote 33)

understood? Should man consider himself an icon of God to show the rest of creation who God is? If man is the image of God and image is similar to a mirror, what about the existence of evil in man? Furthermore, can man learn things about God through a study of himself? Would this imply that God is somehow anthropomorphic?

One might think that because God is not usually construed as an anthropomorphic being and since man is clearly neither omnipotent nor omniscient, perhaps it is not that God is different but that man is not in his entirety in the image of God. Rather, it is more logical to assume that only a segment of man is in the image of God. Where then is the image of God located? What part of man is holy? Does holiness imply that there is a certain incorruptibility in man? Or is the image something that can be lost in man? If it is not lost what does sin do to it? If it is lost, what significance does that have? If it is never lost, how does one account for evil? Which leads to the most important question for this study: Is man able to do anything to hinder or enhance the exposure of the image of God?

Another series of questions that are raised concern the significance of image. Why is this so crucial? Why is this an important doctrine, not only for understanding the existence of evil, but for all of theology. Is the image of God the part of man that is immortal? Is the image of God truly of God, or is it of a part of God?

When looking at the image of God in man, many commentators have attempted to answer some of these questions throughout the history of Christianity. No commentator answers every question. The personal emphasis of the hermeneutic of each commentator based upon their individual faith, the faith of the community, and the context of their personal biases dictate which emphases appear in their explication of the text.

Since the advent of the historical-critical method of exegesis, many modern commentaries emphasize what the text originally said and what it meant to the people who first heard it. With this emphasis there is a de-emphasis on tackling theological questions raised by the text for a man's spiritual life, and more of an emphasis on etymological meanings in order to discover the intent of the author to his original audience. For many, this is the only appropriate way to examine historical texts, for to do anything other than attempt to recover the authorial intention is to engage in *eisegesis*, i.e. reading an interpretation *into* the text. This is a particular modern sensibility that is found in many modern commentators. However, these concerns are modern and should not be extended to ancient commentators. Indeed, one could surmise that ancient exegetes would see that such a modern approach is a crutch never to form any in depth theological speculations. For instance, Robert Alter, the great critic of Hebrew form criticism, in his *Commentary on the Five Books of Moses*, is so interested in the form of the creation story, that he does not mention Genesis 1:26-27 except to point out that the original meaning of the word man (*adam*) clearly means mankind and not merely a single man.<sup>11</sup> While this may be very true, it does not address or ever raise the deeper theological questions that this text presents. We must, however keep in mind that modern scholarship has offered much to the study of this text, for they emphasize how the text was originally.

Claus Westermann in his *Commentary on Genesis 1-11* points out that just as the text reads, "Let us make man.." so too does the *Enuma Elish*, a Babylonian creation story of the same time period. This text parallels the Biblical account in recording the

---

<sup>11</sup> Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.N. Norton & Company, 2004), 19.

deliberation of the gods before their action.<sup>12</sup> He goes on to point out the distinction in the Hebrew words *selem* (image) and *demut* (likeness). Through an analysis of the Hebrew text of Genesis, he points out that *selem* is often used for idols (image) whereas *demut* is used much more loosely and the meaning seems to float. Westermann supposes that "Gen 1:26f. is not primarily concerned with human nature, but with the process of the creation of human beings..."<sup>13</sup> While Westermann offers Ancient Near Eastern parallels to illumine Hebraic etymology behind Genesis 1:26-27, he does not address the issue of what the image is, and furthermore, does not address the issue of why the words were placed in the text. To this end, he offers only that since chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis were written in the same vein of thought as other creation myths from surrounding cultures, the Israelites would be able to more fully understand them.<sup>14</sup> While his analysis may provide a broader context, it does not answer the questions concerning the significance of the image. Westermann utilizes primarily extra biblical sources to define his stances as opposed to Biblical sources – exactly what historians should do – but his analysis is less helpful for a Christian working within the context of faith. The Christian expositor is left wondering what the theological meaning is behind the terms image and likeness of God.

In the same line of thought as Westermann, H. Wilderberger and W.H. Schmidt offer expositions of Genesis 1:26 that stress the etymological meanings behind the Hebrew words *selem* and *demut*. Likewise, Wilderberger and Schmidt look to parallel texts outside of Israel to provide etymological clues to the meaning of the Genesis text.

---

<sup>12</sup> This to parallel Genesis 1:26-*Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness*. The discussion before action is significant as it appears in no other aspect of the creation story. Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11*. Trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984) 146.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 152

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 92

They see both Hebrew terms as royal titles which reflect Egyptian origins. In Egyptian religion, kings and queens represented visually the image of god on earth.<sup>15</sup> By extension Wilderberger and Schmidt see in these parallels that man represents God. The God of the Christian Bible, in other words, is proclaimed through man as the Egyptian gods were proclaimed through the pharaohs.

Gerhard Von Rad in his commentary on Genesis supposes that the key to understanding this text is through the hermeneutic of the Christian faith<sup>16</sup>. While Von Rad uses a variety of outside resources, in this text he employs the technique “scripture interprets scripture.” He sees that *selem* (image) is used elsewhere in the Bible, but it usually connotes a negative appraisal. In most cases, making a *selem* out of anything is forbidden (I Sam 6:5, Num.33:52; 2 Kings 11:18). Von Rad demonstrates that the account of man being made in the image of God in Genesis is the only place where the image of God displays the importance of the statement of *demut* (likeness). Otherwise man would be contrived as a corporal image of God; however, the use of the word *demut* clarifies the discussion of image. Man is not a corporal image of God, but an inferior resemblance.<sup>17</sup>

Walter Brueggemann offers an approach stemming from the same line of thought. He notices that Israel constantly is prohibited from crafting idols. However, in this text man himself is made in the image and likeness of God. The image (or literally idol) of

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>16</sup> A hermeneutic is a system of understanding something based upon larger principles. The classic Christian hermeneutic is the principle that “scripture interprets scripture.” Another common hermeneutic is known as the “rule of faith” which implies that any particular doctrine must be understood within the context of Christianity as a whole. It is the latter of these two examples that is meant in the context of the above statement.

<sup>17</sup> Von Rad, Gerhardt. *Genesis: Old Testament Library*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 58-59.

God is to be displayed so as to be able to proclaim God to the world. He emphasizes that God is known not through molten images but through his living creatures.<sup>18</sup>

Terence Fretheim sees the occurrence of two synonymous Hebrew words as a common case of Hebrew repetition, where the second word dominates the overall meaning. As such, the image should not be construed as identity, as in the common understanding of one's soul being a person's identity. Instead, he sees the entire man created as the likeness of God, for likeness is an image inferior to the original. Following this etymological exegesis, Fretheim has no problem supposing that the image and likeness denote the entire person, not merely the soul. According to Fretheim, the only reason for the use of the term image is to display the aspect of the mirroring of whom God is to the world.<sup>19</sup>

While it is important to look at the meaning of the words and grammatical constructions, it is also important to examine other elements of the text. If one examines the original questions posed above, the only ones truly addressed consistently by modern commentators are those relating to the nature of the image. The commentators also seem to hint at how this image might inhabit one's body, however, their priority is clearly placed on explaining the meaning of the words and their grammatical functions.

While there are certainly present in modern theology those who are equally interested in addressing the theological problems that this text poses, textual issues dominate. In modern scholarship, the text is interpreted just as any text in antiquity. While commentators provide helpful historical-critical comments, it is unclear if they are Christians or not due to their system of interpretation. The context of understanding this

---

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1946), 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Fretheim, Terence. *Genesis*. *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345.



text as a sacred text for the Christian Church is largely lost. What is missed in the historical-critical method is awareness that other Biblical books may provide hermeneutical insight into Genesis 1:26-27. Although this modern textual approach has much to offer in terms of contextualization and etymological knowledge, one steeped in these methods finds himself lost when turning to texts written before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For these historical critical methods, which themselves come from the Age of Reason, are not utilized. Due to this, before the coming of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Genesis 1:26-27 was explicated within a very different context. During the periods of the Reformation, Scholasticism, Patristics, or Apostolic times, the Biblical text was always explicated so as to speak to people of faith. It was assumed to be a Christian book explaining the Christian God and his relation to man.

Even in the era of the Enlightenment certain theologians still held the Bible at least as a book of faith in which the Word of God spoke to Christian devotees. Friedrich Schleiermacher was one such man. Although standing in the Enlightenment era, the underpinnings of this theology reached deep into the former eras of Christian theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher is hesitant to discuss the issue of the image of God in man. Schleiermacher focuses on the "God-consciousness" in man. He meant by this term the perception of the experience of God based on feeling and intuition.<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher hesitatingly identified the image with his idea of "God-consciousness." Aware that the construal of God-consciousness with a created being could logically tie God to the physical world, Schleiermacher refused to elaborate this idea clearly in philosophical

---

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 252.

terms.<sup>21</sup> However, for him, the image was best understood in the context of the moral life found in earlier Christian theologians (the external sign of God-consciousness).

Schleiermacher emphasized personal experience and feeling and thus is not very concerned with answering the question of what the image reflects. Instead he is more concerned with the issue of how the image of God is portrayed in one's life.

Schleiermacher emphasized within the context of the Enlightenment era one of the most common and profound meanings of this text found in earlier Christian theologians. For many, especially those in Eastern Christendom, living the moral life (also called the sanctified life) is how one reflects the divine image.

Before the time of the Enlightenment, the Reformation theologians also devote much time to the exposition of Genesis 1:26-27. Unlike the Enlightenment thinkers, the Reformation theologians understand the image and likeness of God within the context of Christian faith, unlike modern scholars, who understand Genesis 1:26-27 only in the context of Genesis 1, Reformation theologians and all the myriads that came before them understand Genesis 1:26-27 as it relates to the entire Biblical canon as a collection of writings that proclaim the complete Gospel to the world.

From this, Martin Luther, in his *Commentary on Genesis 1*, proceeds from this hermeneutical position. He understands that the image is something that man has lost. If it were merely will, memory, and intellect, there would be a fundamental problem. Luther feels that the Devil possesses these things; therefore, this could not be the right interpretation. His conclusion is that only at perfection is the image actualized. He says of Adam: "As though he said: 'Adam and Eve, now you are living without fear; death you have not experienced, nor have you seen it. This is my image, by which you are living,

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 252.

just as God lives. But if you sin, you will lose this image and you will die.’’<sup>22</sup> Luther surmises that although the image has been lost in man, it can be restored by the Gospel. But this restoration can never be fully realized in this life but will be completed perfectly in the life to come, for at that time man will be at unity with God. Until that time, man is unable to speak definitively about the image of God in man, but can be confident that he will be united with God in heaven. Luther essentially proposes the idea that man is unable to truly understand the image. However, he can understand a bit of what man is: that man is depraved, and as such, needs salvation. Some can argue that by utilizing this hermeneutic, he reads the doctrine of justification into this text, but his intent is clear: to provide an exposition of Genesis 1:26 that relates this text to people's lives in a realistic fashion.

John Calvin, while disagreeing with Luther on many levels, also addresses this text from a practical perspective. Calvin begins by addressing the issue of why the text uses the terms image and likeness as opposed to merely image. He believes it is a case of Hebrew parallelism and ought not to concern the exegete.<sup>23</sup> Calvin believes the image is found in the soul. He argues that the image is not lost, as Luther had said, but that it is corrupted. He says that the image is now seen in the elect, but it is ruined, confuted, mutilated, and tainted with impurity. For Calvin, the role of Christ is to restore the image. Both Luther and Calvin attempt to answer some of the most fundamental questions. For them the key questions are: What is the image?, Does man have it in its

---

<sup>22</sup> Luther, Martin. “Lectures on Genesis” *Luther’s Works*. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan v.1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 63.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Brevenridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989)

full form any longer?, and How does man become right with God in the context of the image?

While some theologians offer theological expositions on the topic, no cohort in the history of Christendom consistently explores the larger theological concepts in the Bible as vigorously as the Church Fathers. The period of the Church Fathers, also known as the Patristic period, is roughly 150-600 A.D. Christian leaders of this time – i.e. the Fathers of the Church – were the bishops, priests and sometimes even laymen of their day. They understood scripture to be one seamless book, since it was inspired by one author, namely God. They assert that since God has written the scriptures, there could not be a single false or unimportant word. Because there is no word that is unimportant to Christian faith, the Fathers painstakingly examine the Biblical text in order that they might understand how a particular portion of the Bible is to be understood for the edification of the reader for his faith. The Fathers read every piece of scripture in this manner, and Genesis 1:26-27 is no exception.

Within the early Church, there exist two distinctive strains of thought on the interpretation of Genesis 1:26. One is considered largely of the "East" and the other strain is considered "Western." (For the purposes of this paper, the Western tradition is best represented by St. Augustine of Hippo, considered by many to be the greatest thinker in the Western Church, if not in all of Christendom.)

Augustine shows profoundly why the image is necessary. The image is not so much the *capability* of man's relationship with God, but rather, man's *active relationship* with God. It is through this medium of the image of God that man relates to God on any kind of substantial level. To highlight the importance of this text for St. Augustine, it is

important to consider the questions that he has in mind as he approaches this text: Of whom is the image?; Can man affect the image in any substantial way?

Early in Augustine's career, he thinks that the image of God was lost in man.<sup>24</sup> However, as his theological acumen matures he disagrees with his earlier assertion. He finds the image to be indwelling in man as he says in *City of God*: "And yet there is still a spark, as it were, of that reason in virtue of which he was made in the image of God; that spark has not been utterly put out."<sup>25</sup> For Augustine the nature of image is the soul.<sup>26</sup> Within the soul, Augustine notes that the highest aspect of the soul (*mens* - intellect, memory, and will) is the house of the image of God.

Augustine holds that the image is covered over and changed, but not destroyed. Therefore, it is the role of Christ to restore the image to its proper state. This happens at baptism with the indwelling of the Trinitarian God in man. Augustine, unlike all Greek-speaking Eastern Fathers, sees the image of God as the image of the full Trinity.<sup>27</sup> For Augustine, the importance of the image is that through the image man may know God. He says in *On the Trinity*,

"Although the human mind is not of the same nature with God, yet the image of that nature than which none is better. But the mind must first be considered as it is in itself, before it becomes partaker of God; and His image must be found in it. For, as we have said, although worn out and defaced by losing the participation of God, yet the image of God still remains. For it is His image in this very point, that

---

<sup>24</sup>Augustine. *De Genesi ad litteram*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: First Series, ed. Philip Schaff. v.3. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1993), retr. 2.24.

<sup>25</sup> Augustine. *City of God* trans. Henry Bettenson. (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 22.24

<sup>26</sup> Clark, Mary "Image Doctrine" *Augustine through the Ages*. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 440.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine. *On the Trinity*. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: First Series, ed. Philip Schaff. v.3. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1993), 14.16.22.

it is capable of Him, and can be partaker of Him; which so great good is only possible by its being His image. Well, then, the mind remembers, understands, loves itself; if we discern this, we discern a trinity, not yet indeed God, but now at last an image of God."<sup>28</sup>

Here Augustine is showing so profoundly why the image is necessary in his doctrine. The image is the active relationship between man and God which can never be destroyed, for it is the only part of man that can relate to God.

The Eastern Christian tradition is slightly different. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the three great Cappodocian Fathers who were largely responsible for formulating the nascent Christian Trinitarian doctrine, has a very developed idea on the issue of image and likeness. Gregory upholds the idea that man, before the fall into sin, was like unto God. For Gregory, if one thing is like another, it shares the same attributes as the original. Man is not God, but man possesses the characteristics of God: reason, freedom from passion, virtue, and immortality.<sup>29</sup> These are attributes of God, and Gregory notices that man no longer holds all of these characteristics, but rather part of them. Gregory accounts man to have gained passions and mortality. As a result, Gregory considers man being like unto the “earthly elements” as well. Therefore, for Gregory man is created as a mix of the natures of the divine and earthly. The divine element is the image of God; the earthly element is the image of the world. This was set out in order that man might be able to understand both aspects of life.<sup>30</sup> Much of Gregory's logic is deduced from the observation of animal world, and concluding from this the uniqueness of man. Gregory

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14.8.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Creation of Man*. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: Second Series, v.5 ed. Philip Schaff & Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1999), 391.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 397. This incidentally is the perfect example for the reason why God becomes man. God becomes man in order that man might understand who God is in his life.

then goes on to discuss what happens to the image after the fall into sin. He makes it clear that an image is no longer an image if it ceases to comprehend the entire archetype.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, if the image is not lost completely, while man does not seem to be holding all four aspects of the divine, then the image must be covered over. After falling into sin, only two aspects of divinity that were originally imparted to man remain in man in this life: reason and virtue. Gregory understands that after the fall man does not retain immortality and freedom from the passions on this earth. Those things are hoped for in heaven but can no longer be realized in this worldly life. Gregory was interested in the issue of the image before and after the fall. Because of his very literal reading of the term “image,” he struggles with the nature of man implying things about the nature of God. However, he does answer some major questions about larger problems in theology. Gregory addresses What the image is for man, What the significance of the image is in the life of the Christian, and What has happened to the image after the fall.

Finally, one of the first and most unique expositors of this text is Origen of Alexandria. Origen, being trained in the third century Alexandrian school of thought, has an understanding of scripture that interprets every word as edifying to one’s faith. He posits that there is no sentence nor even a word in scripture which does not relate to one’s salvation; therefore, he believes that scripture has both a “literal” (what the text meant at the time it was transmitted) and “spiritual” (how the text is to be understood for salvation i.e. Christological) meaning.

Origen understands that since God is truth, whatever discipline leads to the discovery of truth is valid including Hellenistic philosophy. Being trained in Alexandria,

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 405.

Origen is steeped in Middle Platonist philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Because of his understanding of Plato, his tutelage under Clement of Alexandria, and his experience with the works of Philo the Jew, Origen develops a theory which melds the Bible and Platonic philosophy. With this knowledge, Origen devotes much of his career to expositing scripture in order that the truth of it might be understood through Biblical commentaries. Throughout his career he becomes one of the most prolific writers in Christian history as well as one of the most influential thinkers (his only rivals might be Augustine and Luther). The greatest strength of Origen's commentaries is not his development of Middle Platonism, but rather his mastery of the Biblical canon. Origen always interprets scripture using scripture in order that it might be edifying for faith. For Origen, Genesis 1:26-27 is one of the most significant verses in the entire Old Testament for understanding how God relates with man.

Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness...and He created them in the image of God." Origen notices that the likeness was evidently uncreated in man. This stands as one of the fundamental problems with this text for Origen. He speculates that he knows what an image is and what it means to be like someone; therefore, he understands these two terms as indicating distinct ideas. The image of God, following Greek thought,<sup>33</sup> is to be understood separately from the likeness, which for Origen is the goal of mankind: to be like unto God. Here, Origen sets himself as unique to the entire history of Christendom. There are other Christians

---

<sup>32</sup> The debate whether Origen is first a Christian and second a Platonist or first a Platonist and second a Christian is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>33</sup> An image, following Greek thought, is the complement to a signet ring pressed into wax. In all aspects, the wax looks like the complement of the signet ring, but is not the ring. In fact, it in reality is not all that the ring is, but all that the ring is not. Where the ring has a depression, the wax has an impression. However, the elements of the ring are still portrayed upon the wax. If one were to let the wax harden, the ring would always fit perfectly into that image. Therefore, the wax is a perfect receptacle of the ring.



(Clement of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind) who agree with this idea, but Origen is the only theologian who develops fully this thought. He is also the first Christian to fully develop any kind of thought about Genesis 1:26-27. Origen's basic argument is that since the likeness has not evidently been created is extremely significant. Moreover, to ignore this text, is to misunderstand the entire passage. Every other theologian discussed above failed to see this distinction as significant. Even the champions of the Trinitarian doctrine, Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine do not see any distinction at all between the terms image and likeness. They speak of the image as if it encompasses all the meaning of both image and likeness. For Origen, this cannot be so.

Origen notes that likeness - becoming like God - is the goal of mankind. The fact that this term is linked textually to the image is significant. He is then able to understand the significance of the image of God for man. The image for Origen, is the part of man that houses free will and reason. It is this part of man that enables him to accept the spirit within himself. Therefore, this is not merely an issue of anthropology (the nature of man) but also an issue of soteriology (the nature of salvation). Man is to be saved through his image, and thereby also his participation (his relationship with God) is born through becoming more and more like unto God. For Origen, Genesis 1:26 is a concrete exposition of man's total relation with God.

The enigma of the lack of the term "likeness" being created in the text is largely ignored by all modern commentators and most theologians.<sup>34</sup> This contribution of Origen is unique.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Luther and Calvin are the only theologians who mention this distinction but they both in turn dismiss the importance of it.

<sup>35</sup> Origen's predecessors Clement of Alexandria and Philo the Jew did have similar ideas, but few after him, outside of his disciples, shared his belief.

Origen is very interested in answering the question of what the image of God is within the context of the presence of evil in man. The term likeness is important since in the term image, Origen sees the indication of how man is able to communicate with God. For Origen, the term likeness suggests that man participates in God by becoming like Him. The term likeness denotes a process. Man does not achieve likeness to God fully but becomes like unto God through the process of living the moral life. Eastern Christianity reserves the term “deification” for this process – becoming more and more like the divine God. This is analogous to the Western Church’s concept of “sanctification.”

Origen is trained in Greek philosophical inquiry and is convinced that no word is extraneous in the Biblical text. He is unwilling to allow any question to go unanswered. Origen asks the question with which this survey began: what is the efficient cause of evil? Whereas Augustine, the great champion of the church, who lives 200 years after Origen says in *City of God*, "To try to discover the causes of such defection...is like trying to see darkness or to hear silence."<sup>36</sup> Origen would never allow such a question to go unanswered. In an attempt to answer these questions, Origen often speculates albeit within a logical framework provided by Christian theology. Origen puts forth many innovative ideas, and as such, will later be condemned by the emergent orthodox church as it distances itself from some of his theological speculations on various topics. Because of Origen’s speculations concerning the nature of man and the emergence of evil, he will be condemned as a heretic in the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. The question concerning the efficient cause of evil, however, plays an important

---

<sup>36</sup> Augustine. *City of God*, 12.7.

part in Origen's understanding of the image and likeness of God, for Origen finds the image of God to be the house of free will and the soul.

The fact that it took the Church so long to respond effectively to Origen's theory of the emergence of evil and that after 300 years the church still felt that it must respond signals the power and endurance of his ideas.

Nonetheless, one ought to look beyond the heretic and look to the logic of Origen.<sup>37</sup> The logic of Origen is, in most cases, infallible. If one agrees with his premises of the nature of man and the nature of evil, one is led to the similar logical conclusions. From time to time his premises are faulty, but if one understands his premises, his arguments are strong.

Concerning the issue of the image of God in man, Origen is willing to address every question he can think of. He is not only prepared with an answer, but he is not willing to avoid asking questions. In addition to this, Origen is also continually looking at the whole of theology as relational. This principle becomes very clear when looking at the image of God. The terms image and likeness both signify important issues that cannot be ignored. Both words appear in the Bible for a purpose, and as such, these terms must relate to the constitution of man and his relationship with God. Man does not understand who God is, but man does understand who God has revealed himself to be.

The emphasis of the Western church on God's grace juxtaposed with the sinfulness of man can never be forgotten. However, Eastern Christianity's emphasis on

---

<sup>37</sup> The reputation of Origen has undergone recently what can only be called a renewal. Many scholars are again investigating Origen's contributions to Christendom and the fact that his condemnation in 553 A.D. was largely due to the fact that various heretical sects had lifted ideas out of Origen's speculative work *De Principiis* and offered them as somehow factual. Origen's original caveats – that his ideas were put forth as speculation for the Church to grapple with were ignored when examined and rejected by the Council of Constantinople.

the relational aspect of God participating with man must never be neglected. It must be realized that the both Eastern and Western branches of Christendom need to learn something from one another.<sup>38</sup> The Eastern Church's emphasis on man's participation with God is found in no greater place than in the work of Origen of Alexandria. Within the works of Origen, there is no greater text for understanding man's participation with God than Genesis 1:26-27. Through Origen's interpretation of the image and likeness of God in man, it is possible to see the implications of the Eastern Church's view of participation God which may in turn shed light on the Western view of the sanctified life.

---

<sup>38</sup> Though there are many good arguments for categorizing the image and likeness of God into merely the image, the development of such ideas, and also those of sinners being juxtaposed with God's holiness ought to be explicated; however, this paper does not attempt to go to such ends. This paper merely attempts to exposit the Eastern Church's idea of participation through Origen's understanding of Genesis 1:26.

## Chapter 2- The Image of God

The emphasis of all orthodox Christian theology must focus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For as Paul says, “If Christ was not raised from the dead and our faith is in vain.” The resurrection is the point at which Christ reigns in victory. It is the point at which man can understand the mission of Christ. If Christ would have remained dead after being executed, while he could have atoned for man’s sins, man would be unable to understand the workings of Christ. Without the resurrection of Christ, Jesus seems a prophet and a teacher but nothing more. The resurrection is the victory. The resurrection is the point at which Christians are able to stand firm upon solid ground.

When one views the resurrection as the victory, one must wonder what the victory is over. What task is so great that it requires a man to rise out of the grave? This question can be answered in different ways. The Western Church, following the thought of Augustine, focused on the cross of Christ. Without Christ’s death, the resurrection is meaningless. It is in the cross that man’s sins are forgiven. When Jesus pronounces “It is finished” on the cross, he proclaims the deed is done. The task is accomplished. This legal metaphor makes a profound statement: the sins of the world are remitted.

The Eastern Church too acknowledges the importance of the crucifixion of Jesus. However, the Eastern Church notes that God could have used any man to do the work of Jesus if all one had to do were to die and rise again. The Eastern Church posits a different, but equally profound understanding of Christ, he is more than just a way that God remitted sins - he is God himself coming to the world to communicate to man the nature of God for man’s salvation. Therefore, the way the Eastern Church looks to the resurrection is by looking at the incarnation (God becoming man). God came into the

world, died, and rose again. The message of Christ is stronger than any prophet before or after him because of his identity as God. Without his being fully God and fully man, he would not have been able to remit the sins of the world in the way that he did. Therefore, the Eastern Church proclaims the resurrection by emphasizing the incarnation of Christ.

From this, it is more clear as to why the Western Church views the heart of theology – the mode by which the resurrection is proclaimed – as fallen man (sinners) with the holiness of God (using the cross as the means to remit sin), whereas the Eastern Church views the heart of theology as man participating with God (who came into the world to participate with man). It is important to remember that both of these viewpoints point to the resurrection of Christ; however, the way that each of them directs their gaze influences the nuances of all aspects of their respective theologies.

Origen of Alexandria holds unique views on Genesis 1:26 that very few other Christian theologians past and present hold. This uniqueness might be seen as unorthodox teaching; however, if one looks at the larger theological framework of Origen, his teaching on Genesis 1:26 makes sense and is hermeneutically consistent. This does not necessitate that his exposition is true; however, given Origen's hermeneutical framework, his conclusions are necessary to maintain consistency. Therefore, before one can understand Origen's explication of Genesis 1:26, one must understand his larger concepts of the doctrines of God.

As stated in the introduction, Origen of Alexandria (ca.185- ca.255) understands theology differently than many of his western counterparts. For Origen, theology is not merely the study of God and the things that God does, but theology is always how man relates to God. Beginning with Clement and Origen after him, the Eastern Church adopts

the idea of the "mystery of God." This idea is that while man may understand how God relates to us through experience, man can never truly know who God is in this life. Anything that can be known by man about God is not the doctrine of what God is, but the doctrine of what man perceives him to be.

The understanding of man that is not able to understand God's essential nature leads to an understanding of God through relationship. If man is not able to understand the nature of God, but only is able to understand how God communicates himself to man, it follows of necessity that all of the theology that is studied is about relationship. This insight from the Eastern Church was supported and implanted by Origen, who, following his predecessors Clement of Alexandria and Philo the Jew, understood everything about theology to be relational.

Origen then examines man. If man is unable to understand concrete reality of the nature of God, what is the important aspect of God that man can understand? At this point it is important to realize that Origen was a churchman, who lived in a time of persecution of Christians. Origen's own father was martyred before his eyes, and Origen narrowly escaped his own death. Origen did not despair over not being able to understand the finer points of Trinitarian theology; he was more interested in the practical application of theology, that is, how a man can relate to God.<sup>39</sup>

The question that Origen constantly addresses in all of his theology is how sinful humanity can participate in a holy God. If sin is inconsistent with God, God ought not to have any part in sin, therefore making man, being in sin, unable to participate in God. Origen throughout his career explicated how man could and does participate in God.

---

<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that for Origen, God being relational is a logical necessity. However, this logical necessity also fits very well into his practical applications of theology. Therefore, the necessity of a relational God is both pastoral as well as logical.

The answer to the tension between a sinful man and a holy God being in relationship is found within the true nature of man. Origen needed to wrestle with the idea of what a man consists of, what of those things are spiritual and what of those things are earthly. His Christian assumption is that God is all good and all powerful. The variable to understanding these matters lies in man. God is the constant; man is the part that must be misunderstood. Origen feels that if one understands how man is created in essence, then the responsibility of sin is not upon God but upon man. Thus, if one understands the nature of man correctly, the possibility exists for man, though being sinful, to be able to participate in God. In this context Origen develops his understanding of man (including his discussion of the soul). Through his understanding of the origin, goal, and nature of man, Origen is able to comprehend how it is possible for man to participate in God.

For Origen, man is not created in the manner that most Western and Eastern Christians today believe. Origen assumed that because God is outside of time, his works too are outside of time, so there is not a time when man “was not”. Though man would then exist from eternity, this does not imply that man is not created. Man is a creation of God; Origen’s comment is merely that if God is outside of time, he would constantly be acting. While Origen feels that the creation of souls has been in the mind of God outside of time, he does follow the idea that there is a historical time when man is brought upon earth in human form. The fact that man is created at a particular time in history upon earth is clear from the text of Genesis 1 and 2. While this text could be understood as an allegorical explication, it remains that man at one time was created and appeared on the earth. For Origen, man is ahistorically created in the eternity of God, but historically



created on the earth. While this may seem an irreconcilable contradiction – as one being cannot be created twice – Origen perceives no problem. He believes that man is once created in perfection and then created again in another manner. It is less a man being created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) twice, but man shifting from one mode of existence to another.

If man has shifted from one form of existence to another, Origen is forced to reason what essential change has occurred in man in this shift or “second creation.” He assumes that anything that exists with God must be in harmony with God. If man is created in the eternity of God, yet not on the earth, then man must exist on a plane with God, and as such is without blemish (i.e. without sin). He also notes that when man is created upon earth, he is full of blemish. Origen looks at the story of Genesis 3 not as a historical story of the first two human beings falling into sin, but as the story of the fall which happens as each individual soul, existing with God, sins and falls to the earth. Therefore, the first sin of man happens not on earth, but while man is united with God. Humans fall from God by means of turning from the focus on God to a focus upon themselves.

Origen then addresses the following question - How did man, being united with God, sin? He answers it by examining one aspect of the nature of man: one possessing free will. Free will is the means by which man can either choose to accept or reject God. The fall of man, and by extension the origin of evil was the result of free will being used to reject God. Thus, God did not create man as an evil being but a being that could with the exercise of free will either fall or rise respectively.

From this essential nature of man, what did Jesus do in saving mankind? If at one time man was united with God, then salvation is by definition the restoration of man to that position once again. Given this premise, the system of life in this world is educative; the world is designed to assist man in remembering who God is and come to follow him again. On account of man's spiritual fall, he is made into a physical reality. Before the fall upon the earth, man is wholly spiritual, but after the fall, man is forever bound to a physical reality of some sort in order that man might be able to be restored.

What role does Jesus play in this picture of soteriology? Where does he fit in this scheme of man starting in unity with God, falling into physicality, and once again being united with God spiritually? It is important to remember the primary tenet of Eastern Theology – man in participation with God. Origen sees that man, while on the earth, is in a fallen and hopeless state. Jesus comes onto earth in order that man might be able to participate in God once again. Athanasius, a fourth century Christian church Father from Alexandria, summarized this theology saying, “God became a son of man, so man could become a son of God.” Jesus came into the world in order that man might be able to regain the unity with God that man once enjoyed. Jesus, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection communicates with man the heart of God, and with this, man is able to begin the spiritual process towards the unity with which man originally came. For this reason, the incarnation of Christ is an extremely apt way to illustrate the hope of the resurrection. God became man so that the fallen man (physical body) could understand how to fully participate in God and thus the human soul could be assumed into the realm of the divine thereby attaining the position it once held before falling and becoming a physical body.

While the above summary of Origen’s doctrine is not complete, it provides a basic framework from which the importance of Genesis 1:26 can be understood. Genesis 1:26 says: “Let us make man in our image and our likeness. In the image of God created he them.” Origen took the terms “image” and “likeness” as two separate things. To understand them separately is challenging, but in order to unpack the importance of such terms in Origen’s theology, such a venture is necessary.

The image of God is a rather ambiguous term to define, and those who are honest acknowledge that an understanding of the “image of God” reflects not an implicit exegesis of the Genesis text, but one’s larger theological framework. In this, Origen is no exception. Origen must be understood as he sees the nature of man. It has been shown how man came into being in the world but not yet as to the nature of man as he exists on the earth. Origen sees man as having three natures in essence while on this earth. The highest is the spirit (*pneuma*). The second part of man that is lower than the spirit is the soul (*psyche*), and the lowest element of man is the body (*soma*).<sup>40</sup>

Origen, like Plato, describes man’s being in two senses, a rational and irrational. Rather than using the terms rational and irrational, Origen thinks of the soul in terms of upper and lower divisions. While he does view man to be tripartite as defined above, he does not view the *soma* to be the physical body. It is the lower element of the soul. The higher element of the soul is the *psyche*. Thereby, he is able to break man down into a dichotomy – the higher and lower element. The *Psyche* is the more holy element of the soul. The *Psyche* is the part of the soul that can either be drawn towards good or evil. A discussion of the *Psyche* will be done below, but for now, the discussion of the *Soma*

---

<sup>40</sup> It is easy to see here a reminiscence of Plato’s idea of man in a similar tripartite division as: *nous* (mind), *thymos* (spirit), and *epithymia* (covetousness). –Crouzel, Henri. *Origen*. trans. A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 87.

must be in place. The *soma* is that “lower sort” of element that is within man. It is from this place that has been created since the fall. The lower soul is “produced along with the body from the bodily seed.”<sup>41</sup> The lower part of man is that which “possesses earthly wishes and desires.” It is what is called the “soul of the flesh.” Origen uses this term because he does not want to say that flesh itself is able to “lust against the spirit” but actually it is not flesh, but this “soul of the flesh.”

The Spirit (*psyche*) is the power of God coming upon a man. This is the highest division of man. This can be seen as a “special coming” of the Holy Spirit within man. It is the Holy Spirit coming from without. In *De Principiis (On First Principles)*, Origen says, “the special coming of the Holy Spirit to men is declared to have happened after Christ’s ascension in to heaven rather than before his coming into the world...But after the coming of the Savior it is written that ‘the saying that was fulfilled which the prophet Joel’ namely, that ‘it shall come to pass in the last days, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and they shall prophesy.’”<sup>42</sup> Origen wants to make it clear that the Spirit is something that comes upon man after he has believed in Christ, or better, if one is to believe in Christ, the Spirit will come upon him. Origen supposes that all men, because they are being pulled upwards, will eventually come to receive the Spirit. However, Origen also affirms the reality that some do not apprehend the nature of God in a real way at one given time. Therefore, Origen, in order to stay consistent, has to solve the inconsistency of man’s unbelief in his theological system, which he does most startlingly in his views of afterlife which are described below.

---

<sup>41</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*. Trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 3.4.2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7.2.

The struggle of unbelief for Origen is the struggle between the body and the spirit. When he reads Galatians 5:17, “Flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” he sees this as a way of saying that not all sin is from the devil, but is based in our bodily nature. The reason man can and does sin is that in man there is a constant battle between the body and the spirit<sup>43</sup>. Much like the Platonic doctrine given above the soul is the only mediator between the two powers, each trying to take control over one’s life. The soul can either choose to let the body control one’s life or the Spirit. He notes that Jesus does not tell his disciples that their “souls are willing but their bodies are weak,” but rather, he says “your Spirits are willing but your bodies are weak.” From this, Origen sees the pull from the two directions. The one is heavenly, the other earthly. “The soul is a kind of medium between the weak flesh and the willing spirit.”<sup>44</sup> He says “If [the discussion about the body and spirit] is so, then the soul is something intermediate between the flesh and the spirit, undoubtedly obeying one of the two.”<sup>45</sup>

Origen will also acknowledge that man is inhabited by either good or evil spirits. Man will affirm in himself the spirit of holiness or the spirit of evil. In this context it is important to recall that for Origen, the being itself is only bipartite –soul and body, but the spirit comes from without, creating a third part. Evil spirits will inhabit in man and remove man’s free will while on earth. While this may be true, it allows for the possibility of a good spirit (including the Holy Spirit) to be included in man as well. Origen is very logical, and he would not allow a blatant inconsistency in logic. For man

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 3.2.3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.8.4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3.4.3. also see Origen. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Books 1-5*. Fathers of the Church. Trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America Press, 2001), 1.18.

to be able to be embodied by the Holy Spirit, but not embodied by an evil Spirit would be for him, a logical inconsistency.

This then would imply that the soul is the place where free will lies. Free will for Origen is the only way of solving the problem of evil. A thorough discussion of free will will be presented below. For the purposes of the soul, it is only necessary to show that the “upper division” of the soul (*psyche*) is that part of man which is able either to receive God or reject him. The source of the spirit (*psyche*) is located without the man, the body is the fallen element from the heart of the man, but the soul is the element that can choose the direction that man wants to go.

One question then can be raised about free will. If man is embodied with good and evil spirits, then where is the place for free will? The key is to recall that the spirit (*psyche*) comes from without, but the soul is the place that the said spirit is accepted or rejected. As explained before, this idea for Origen does not disallow free will as he feels that the soul had already fallen and was experiencing its just desserts as a type of rehabilitative pain.<sup>46</sup> It is the spirit where the divine in man resides.<sup>47</sup>

For Origen, the nature of the soul and free will is tied up with the problem of evil. The nature of the soul is called into question when living in an evil world. The simple answer is that man has been granted free will. However, this idea has problems when set before the light of certain events in life which occur with no apparent sin of anyone involved. Origen asks such questions specifically about birth. That is, why are some born into poverty, broken homes, or illness? Recall the disciples’ question: “Who sinned that this man was born blind?” If all are born equal, then why are some put in environments

---

<sup>46</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 3.3.5.

<sup>47</sup> Crouzel, Henri. *Origen*, 88.

that are better than others? Origen's answer to this question lies in his explication of the nature of souls. Origen then is forced to answer the question of what a soul is in essence.

It has been shown what man is on this earth, but it has not been made clear exactly what man is when glorified in heaven. For man relates to God from this basis on earth, but if part of the essence of man is strewn from man's earthly existence, are then the other aspects of the soul from the heavenly realms? Here it is important to understand briefly the nature of man when in heaven. A "soul" for Origen, when it was made, was created incorporeal.<sup>48</sup> However, while being made incorporeal, anything outside of God must exist within some structure of a body, for God is the only "invisible" being while everything else is "visible."<sup>49</sup>

It is clear though that the nature of the man when he is not on the earth is very profound. He speaks of the *nous* (mind) of the man that is in participation with God. For Origen, a person needs to be pure in heart and blessed to be able to see God.<sup>50</sup> For Origen though, to see God is not to see him with one's eyes, as God is incorporeal, no one would be able to do this, but to see God is to understand him.<sup>51</sup> Following this logic then, to understand God would be to be in unity with him as much as possible. As such, the soul is actually a mind when in heaven. He says, "When the mind departed from its original condition and dignity it became or was termed a soul, and if ever it is restored and corrected it returns to the condition of being a mind."<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 1.7.1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 2.2.1 Origen is a bit inconsistent in his view about the bodily nature of the soul when it is from without the earth. He seems to want to believe that the soul is not corporeal in heaven, but is not sure if he can get away with it logically and scripturally. He seems to decide to stick with the idea that the soul itself is not corporeal, but it is always drawn towards a body. Ibid. 1.6.4, 2.2.2, 4.3.15.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 5:8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 2.8.3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

This discussion will be more important when the issue of the likeness of God is explicated; however, for the moment it is important to realize that the process of sanctification, or deification as the Easter Fathers usually label it, is to understand more and more fully who God is. If it will be recalled that all of Origen's theology is relational, one might come to the conclusion that if one is able to understand everything about God, then he would also be in a right relationship with God, or one might even be so bold as to say union with God<sup>53</sup>.

As Origen tried to relate man with God, he continued to struggle to find how these souls could be created by God equally with so much diversity even for those who have done no apparent sin in their life. Therefore, Origen, while looking at what the nature of the soul is, felt that something had to be accounted for in the reason for these "unfair births." Origen, taking the problem of evil to its logical conclusion, felt that the reason that children were born into better or worse situations was not because God put them there by chance, for God is good and just. To put babies into a situation that they did not deserve would not be just nor would it be beneficial for the baby. Thereby, Origen concluded it must have something to do with the nature of the baby.

For Origen, the problem of evil was a constant awareness. He recognized the solution to the problem of evil was in free will. Origen recognized that if God were good, he would not have created anyone evil, and if he were all powerful he would be able to create things in whatever manner he would want them to be created. Therefore,

---

<sup>53</sup> From this it makes sense why Origen is so insistent on the nature of reason. If the consequence of being in a right relationship with God understands him, then reason would be a virtue of holiness.



Origen, and most other Christian theologians all the way up to C.S. Lewis<sup>54</sup> provided the solution to the problem in man's free will.<sup>55</sup>

From this understanding, Origen felt that all those born must have already had an ability to choose obedience unto God or disobedience to God. Therefore, he developed a doctrine of the "pre-existence of souls." When Origen speaks of this, he is asserting that all souls were created at one apparent time (at that particular time though, it might be more helpful to think of the souls as minds (*nous*) as opposed to souls.). All of these souls then had the power of free will, and all that chose wickedness fell. From this fall, God, in his goodness, put them into a bodily existence (at this time merely as souls as opposed to merely thoughts, or minds – after this, man was put into the category of humanity) as punishment in order to provoke those souls to draw themselves back unto God. Therefore, when a creation is put into human form, it is made according to its own works that it has already performed. In this context then, the baby himself is responsible for its being born into a poor family that cannot afford to feed it rightly.<sup>56</sup>

For Origen then, the end is like the beginning. He logically figures that if in the beginning of time all souls had union with God, then at the end of time, all souls would again have union with God. This is the goal or end of all life. He argues that God put man into the world to punish him so that man might be drawn back to God. He does not see why this necessarily has to end with just one lifetime. This led Origen to an understanding of souls that would eventually become anathematized 300 years later.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> See Senior Thesis of T.W. Larsen, *The Veil of Evil*.

<sup>55</sup> Here it is important to recall that free will for Origen started before man is born. One falls into the earth because one chooses to break his unity with God.

<sup>56</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 1.8.1.

<sup>57</sup> In 553, the council of Constantinople II condemned some of Origen's teachings- the universal salvation for all and the pre existence of souls.

He feels that God is a loving God and would put people in the right circumstance so as to lead them back towards a greater understanding of him.<sup>58</sup>

From Origen's relational understanding of God's participation in man, after he has defined what man is, he can then try to relate that to God. The soul is the active agent. The soul is that which accepts the spirit or the body within man. The most crucial point of the relationship of God and man is "the image of God." The image is not, as most modern thinkers tend to think, the Spirit of God. The image is the soul. The image is the thing that is built within man that makes it possible for man to relate and thus to participate in God. God grants his Spirit to all who call upon his name; however, it is the image that makes man able to accept God.

Therefore, the pinnacle of Origen's theology, and of the Eastern Church concerning anthropology is not understood in the same way by the Western Church which held to the more legal metaphor of sinners juxtaposed with the Holy God and his gracefulness. For Eastern theologians, the pinnacle is how God relates to man through man's soul, i.e. through the image of God.

Once an understanding of the soul of man is understood, it is possible to unpack Origen's definition of the image of God in man. An image, following Greek thought, is the complement to a signet ring pressed into wax. In all aspects, the wax looks like the complement of the signet ring but is not the ring. In fact, in reality it is not all that the ring is, but all that the ring is not. Where the ring has a depression, the wax has an impression. However, the elements of the ring are still portrayed upon the wax. Therefore, if one were to let the wax harden, the ring would always fit perfectly into that

---

<sup>58</sup> Just as noted before that man comes closer to God with understanding, so also is reason exalted. If one in this life runs on passions, he becomes more animal like and further away from a union with God.

image. The wax is a perfect receptacle of the ring. This analogy is helpful in thinking about the nature and significance of the image of God for Origen.

For Origen, the image of God is analogous to the ring print in the wax. The ring fits into the wax at that juncture. The image of God is the way God fits in with man. It goes back to the Platonic idea that like must be known by like. The idea is that a substance can only apprehend another substance that is in at least some capacity similar to it. For instance, at the beginning of this paper, it was pointed out that man can never fully understand the mystery of God. This is due to man's separation from the economy of God. Man can never, on this side of eternity, understand what God truly is, but only what God posits towards man. Only after the soul is purified will man be pure enough to see the workings of who God is. We have to become holy before it is possible to see the Holy of Holies. In the same way, in order for man to be able to be apprehended by God, man must have something in common with God. It is this idea that brings about the importance of the image of God for Origen.

Origen emphasizes the ability to see the source (or archetype) in the image. The pure image of God is Christ.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Origen says, "For just as someone sees the image of someone sees him whose image it is, so also one sees God through the word of God."<sup>60</sup> If Jesus is the pure image of God, then one ought to be able to see God through Christ. This idea is proclaimed by Christ in the Gospel of John: "He who has seen me has also seen the father."<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Col. 1:15.

<sup>60</sup> Origen. *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*. Fathers of the Church. Trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America Press, 1981), 65.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; John 14:9.

Origen claims that a given image is the image of its creator or beginning. Therefore, Seth was purported to be the image of Abraham.<sup>62</sup> From this, Christ is from the source of the Father and thus man would be in the image of their creator.<sup>63</sup> The creator of the world while being the Father, created all things through the Son (through whom all things were made).<sup>64</sup> Therefore, man is in the image of the Son. This makes man then an image of an image of the Father. Origen consistently avoids referring to man as the image of God, but man made *according to* the image.<sup>65</sup> This distinction is important so that it keeps from equating man with God.

Origen also argues that the image must not be corporeal, as the original form is not corporeal. If the Son, who is the image of the Father, is not a bodily image, then it is not possible that the image of the image would be corporeal. This then makes sense of how Origen can avoid issues with the pre-existence of soul dealing with body, for the soul (image of God) is eternal, whereas the body is not. Origen affirms that man is of necessity corporeal after the fall from the mind of God, he does not tie that corporality to an earthly body. He even would go far enough to make it appear that a soul could be joined to a different body later on in its passage through time.

For Origen, the soul is the place where the image of God and free will reside. Therefore, some of the content of the soul plays a large part in the context of the image of God. The discussion of the soul as the place that is in man that is able to choose or reject God is tied inextricably with the image of God. From this context, the doctrines of the soul make more sense as the soul contains the image and as the soul is the dwelling in

---

<sup>62</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 1.2.6.; Gen 5:3.

<sup>63</sup> While the idea of Christ as coming from the source of the father might sound subordinistic, Origen makes it very clear that there was never a time when the son was unbegotten.

<sup>64</sup> John 1:3.

<sup>65</sup> κατ εικον - Crouzel, *Origen*, 93.

man where one can either choose or reject the spirit of God. If the image is the thing in man that makes them able to commune with God in a meaningful way, then it follows logically that it would be connected with the element in man that is the house for accepting or rejecting God.

With this knowledge, Origen's formulation of human free will makes more sense. Because of the image of God in the soul, making the soul the place that gives man the capability to be saved, true free will must also be residing in the soul in order that one can decide what they are to do with this image that is in them. Free will found anywhere else in man would not be as logically consistent.

The image of God in man therefore is man's ability to be able to receive God, as the image creates man as a complement to God. God is the ring, and the image is the wax. The wax can fit the ring, but it is in itself merely a receptacle for the ring. Not only is it not the ring itself, but it is completely opposite the ring. While this is true, it is still possible for another individual to see the original ring in the image.

The image of God then for Origen is not how man participates in God, but rather, the seat in man that makes any kind of participation possible. The image can never be destroyed, no matter how far man falls. The image is the place where God can relate to man while mankind is in a fallen state. The image is the basis for the salvation of humanity. To understand how man participates in God, it is necessary to examine how Origen understands the corollary texts: the "likeness of God."

### Chapter 3-The Likeness of God

The Eastern Church's main pillar in their teaching lies in man participating with God. All of the doctrines of the Eastern Church are developed with participation as the way of explicating the importance of the living Lord in the life of a believer. In this larger theological framework of the entire Eastern Church, but more specifically of Origen of Alexandria, it has been shown that the creation of man in the image of God is understood as necessary for man's participation with God. Man must be in the image of God in order to have the capacity to relate to God. In order for man and God to relate, one must be created to correspond to the other. The image of God is where one relates with God. Through the image, man and God are able to have relationship. As man is created to serve and relate to God, one would expect that the entirety of man would relate to the entirety of God. Origen agrees with this statement. However, as man chooses to separate from God, He then is created in a temporary material body in order to provide a context that inclines man to rediscover the value of unity with God. Therefore, the image of God in man is the specific part of man that is not fallen by means of sin so far that it can no longer relate.

According to Origen, the image of God in man makes it possible for man to relate and participate in God. The image of God in man is fully realized while on earth. It is created in the beginning of time (and by some measurements outside of the beginning of time) as the text reads, "Let us create man in the image and likeness of God...In the image of God he created them." In the text of Genesis 1:26, the image is stated to be created in man. The likeness is raised in a hortatory deliberation concerning man's

creation, but is not mentioned when man is created. Origen sees the inherent “likeness of God” to be very simply man being like God.<sup>66</sup>

The image of God is how one is able to relate to God, the likeness is the active way that man does relate to God. Since some men choose to relate to God and other men choose not to relate to God, the likeness of God is not something that is inherent in man from the creation. For Origen to be “like God” is not the innate constitution of mankind, but the proper goal or end of mankind. For 1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”<sup>67</sup> The goal of humanity is to be like God. For Origen, to be like God is to participate fully with him. Therefore, the text reads “In the image of God he created them.” Origen sees in differentiating between the two terms, the proper end of all men to be the image and likeness of God. All men become the image of God upon creation, but become like unto God in the process of living the divine life. In the language of the Eastern Church the image is granted at creation, but the likeness is attained through a process of deification – Although this term is generally unfamiliar to Western Christians, it is closely related to the understanding of “sanctification” in the Western Church. This is why the text does *not* read “In the image and likeness of God created he them.”

In the Western Church, the emphasis of the active relationship with God on a day to day basis in this life is often referred to as “sanctification.” It is the process of living one’s life day to day after baptism. It is the aspect of the Christian faith that does not

---

<sup>66</sup> Origen. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 4.5.11.

<sup>67</sup> 1 John 3:2 NRSV.

save a man; however, if a man is saved, he will want to do the will of God. Many in the church, including some in the West have questioned this logic. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says,

"Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes. It is quite unbiblical to hold the first proposition without the second. We think we understand when we hear that obedience is possible only where there is faith. Does not obedience follow faith as good fruit grows on a good tree? First, faith, then obedience. If by that we mean that it is faith which justifies, and not act of obedience, all well and good, that is essential and unexceptionable presupposition for all that follows. If, however, we make a chronological distinction between faith and obedience, and make obedience subsequent to faith, we are divorcing the one from the other."<sup>68</sup>

Bonhoeffer points out the danger in the thought process. Because the Western Church is so focused on God's holiness juxtaposed with the sinfulness of man, it focuses on "justification" and answers the question how God can relate to man. The danger in this is that while Jesus may save man once for all on Calvary, that event is not sufficient to speak of how one relates with Jesus after he has done this event for a man. Bonhoeffer is quick to point out that there can be no separation of the two realities. Jesus truly did die for each individual man; however, he also lives in each person's life. While this may make it more difficult to understand the dogmatic theology of the church, it remains the reality of the situation. The Eastern Church would follow the same line of thought of Bonhoeffer; however, the Eastern Church would proceed one step further. The Eastern Church does not divide so dramatically the process of justification and sanctification. Such a strict division grows out of the dominant Western metaphor used to understand

---

<sup>68</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), 63-66).



these processes: legal proceedings – influenced heavily by St. Paul’s doctrine of justification by grace through faith. The Western Church chose to emphasize that justification is wholly God’s doing. Man is acquitted of his crimes and is not held responsible for his sins. Once the man is acquitted, then that man may live a new, free life – one hopefully dedicated to God. The Eastern Church differs drastically. The Eastern Church chooses to understand this process in a more fluid and dynamic manner. As mentioned above, the Eastern Church emphasizes the incarnation of Christ, since in his assumption of flesh, the divine has lifted up man so that man might become God. The Eastern Church would affirm that Jesus died for the sins of the entire world; however, the church points out that the even that Jesus accomplished on the cross helps a man nothing if that man is not in a living relationship with the Lord. Therefore, it is through one's living relationship, or participation in God that the East chooses to emphasize.

It is this understanding of participation in God that Origen speaks about when explicating the "likeness of God" text in Genesis 1:26. Participation then is tied inextricably with not just participation with God during the earthly life, but participation with God before and after the earthly life. It is important here to recall Origen's idea that before the corporeal creation man possessed a relationship with God without fault. It is so perfect that man was not even created but was merely in the "mind of God." He was united to him and living within him, but still possessing a separate identity. The fall thus occurs when these beings within the mind of God turn from God towards themselves and thus fall from contemplating and worshiping God. The result of the soul’s fall is the gradual hardening of a ephemeral soul into a material being. Man inherits from that willful act a corporeal body. The process of deification leading to the perfect goal or end

of human life (the likeness of God) eventually will result in man reclaiming his original state. Once heaven is attained, Origen posits that man will come once again to the original bliss of the relationship with God that man once possessed. These issues were brought up when discussing the image of God, but a keen reader might notice that all of these stages of life have a unique relationship between God and man.

The "likeness of God" is the aspect of man that defines where man is in relationship to God. The image of God is present in all men. It is the part of man that makes man capable of relating to God. It is the process of deification – becoming like unto God - that man realizes the capability of relating with God and makes the relationship a reality. Following the Platonic doctrine that "Like must be known by like."<sup>69</sup> While the image is the possibility of becoming like God, the image can be covered over by images of Satan and the earth.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the image is not the agent that decides man's relationship with God. The likeness of God is the factor that dictates the status of how closely man relates to God.

In order for man to be like God man must be in line with all of his precepts. Man must obey the will of God. For, as Bonhoeffer pointed out, if man truly is in relationship with God, he would then obey. Thus, if man is fully like God, that man would then be in full obedience to God. This is what "unity with God" means. Unity with God does not suggest that man ever was or ever shall be the same substance as God. Unity with God implies that, while having one's own identity, man is able to relate fully with God. The two (that is God and man) fit together in perfect unity. There is not a juncture at which

---

<sup>69</sup> Plato. *Theatetus*, trans. Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library, ed. T.E. Page, et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921) 176-177.

<sup>70</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, 96.

the man is inconsistent with God. To recall the imagery of the signet ring with the wax, the ring fits exactly into the wax as it was when it was originally created.

For Origen, if man is in full obedience to God, and thus, is fully participating with God, man then would be so closely aligned with God that man would see God face to face. As 1 John 3:2 says, "When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." This text shows that when man is in the full likeness of God, man will see him as he is.<sup>71</sup> It is also important to note Jesus' statement recorded in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." If man is like God, he will see God. If man is pure in heart, he will see God. This affirms the original statement that likeness of God is after all unity with God. This though begs the question, what does it mean to see God? What kind of aspect of participation with God is this? Origen answers the question by realizing that God is incorporeal. God cannot be seen visibly as he has no body. Therefore "seeing" must be referring to something outside of the stimulation of the optic nerve. Origen believes that "seeing God" is actually "understanding or knowing God."<sup>72</sup> This then does follow. If a man who is participating with God is fully obedient to God, that man must know the things God wants of him. Therefore, it is of absolute necessity that man understands God. So also does it make sense that the pure in heart are the ones that understand and know God? Therefore, it is no coincidence that the most beloved scriptural passage for the Fathers of the Eastern Church is Matthew 5:8. Throughout the Bible, the holiest men – or most deified men if you will – are the ones who desire to behold God. Although none fully attain an unmeditated vision of the divine, the desire and goal of each of these men is to behold the face of God. Indeed, this is the proper goal

---

<sup>71</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.11.7.

<sup>72</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.4.3.

and end of every human life: to be so fully participating in God that one can see God face to face.

This understanding or knowledge of God though, is not the modern view of knowledge. The kind of knowledge that is significant for one's salvation is a "mystical knowledge" or knowledge through experience. It is not so much a logical understanding of propositional principles as an intuitive set of values based on the concrete evidence of one's interaction with God.<sup>73</sup> This kind of knowledge only comes through one's participation with God. One cannot understand anything about God outside of the realm of the revelation he has received.

For Origen, man is continually either progressing or regressing from God due to the active relationship one has. Origen claims that the fall is a gradual process as the fall is a gradual falling away from unity with God.<sup>74</sup> The progress towards God Origen explicates into 42 logical steps that lead a man through his life, and even after his life.<sup>75</sup> Before one is fully realized into unity with God, he will see all things earthly and heavenly. Then, only when he has understood all is he able to fully comprehend God.<sup>76</sup> The greatest spiritual experience possible on this earth is to go up as John and Peter did to Mt. Transfiguration and beheld Christ in his glory to the highest ability possible on the earth.<sup>77</sup>

Man spiritually ascends in a continual manner until his heart is pure. Then, he will "see God" for at that time, if he sees God, that man has realized the likeness of God in his

---

<sup>73</sup> Crouzel. *Origen*, 99.

<sup>74</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 1.4.1.

<sup>75</sup> Origen. "Homily 27 on Numbers," *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 245-269.

From this idea of progress still continuing after death would eventually rise the idea of purgatory.

<sup>76</sup> Origen. *On First Principles*, 2.11.6-7.

<sup>77</sup> Crouzel. *Origen*, 101.

life. This is the goal of the creation. At that time that man will be fully participating with God and he will at long last be united with God as he was in the beginning. For Origen proclaims, “the end shall surely be like the beginning.”<sup>78</sup>

This Eastern understanding of man's participation with God leads not to the dogmatic truths about God that the Western Church holds so dear, but rather, it provides a means for an active relationship between God and man.

---

<sup>78</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, 3.5.1.

## Chapter 4-Conclusion

Origen's understanding of the image and likeness of God illustrates well the emphasis in the Eastern Christian Church on how man relates to and participates in God. When one exposit the text of Genesis 1:26-27, the honest scholar is the one who recognizes that the definitions of the said terms are based not upon textual support but upon larger hermeneutical principles.

For the modern commentators, the hermeneutic that defines the meaning of Genesis 1:26 is that each kind of biblical book – and also literary types within the books – is unique and can only be examined independently. Therefore, the only universal truths can come from the context of the Ancient Near East during the time period that the works were produced. The meaning that is extracted from the text is limited largely to historical and etymological arguments concerning the use of the Hebrew words *selem* and *demut*. Modern commentators usually do not read this text within the broader context of a larger Christian faith, and as such, are not concerned whether such a definition is helpful for theologically understanding either God or man or their relationship.

The Western Christian Church from Augustine forward understands the "image and likeness of God" to be one term that is the constituent hallmark of why a man is able to be justified by grace through faith. The image of God for the Western Church fits within the larger principle that fallen man must be saved. The image is the part of man that is worth saving. The image is the beauty of man that must be rediscovered. Due to this, the likeness of God is largely ignored. The image has already explicated the necessity of this text for justification, and rather than likeness meaning anything separate

from that context, the Western Church assumes that likeness, is merely a synonym for image, strengthens and emphasizes the meaning of image.

The Eastern Christian Church sees this text as a way to explicate the very nature of man's relationship with God. Through this text, it is clear how man is able to and does participate with God on a daily basis. Therefore, the terms “image” and “likeness” denote distinct ideas indicating exactly how God relates to man and vice versa.

Apart from these distinctions, modern commentators, Eastern Christians, and Western Christians agree on the basic purpose of the text. Genesis 1:26-27 defines the essential nature of man for Christianity. Therefore, at this juncture, it makes complete sense that diverse interpretations are necessary for a body of faith. The understanding of the nature of man is in many cases just as important as the understanding of the nature of God. Therefore, the disparity between these three general modes of thought have less to do with the scholarly exegesis of the words in Genesis 1:26-27, but rather have more to do with the larger theological framework of salvation that is held.

The theological structures on which all three of these views are built all are important and must be considered. The first standpoint - that one must look to the historical context of the situation to try to gain any kind of meaning from the text - is often seen as a less religious viewpoint. While this historical-critical standpoint may not answer some of the theological questions, it is important to recognize that when these texts were originally written they meant something to a specific people at a specific time. To bring out the "original intent" of the authors is a rather difficult task that requires the use of linguistic analysis and cross cultural comparisons. Largely this is accomplished by comparing extra-biblical sources from the surrounding culture. The "original intent" of

the author in which he was writing is helpful for understanding how the text can be applied to faith today.

The standpoint of the Western Church - sinners juxtaposed with the holiness of God - is a very concise, understandable segment of the heart of Christianity. With this emphasis, one focuses on the cross of Christ to bridge this gap. The value in this understanding is that it is made very clear from where salvation is coming. There is nothing that man does that saves him, but rather, it is due to the work of God who loves his creation. This emphasis on the cross and the death of Jesus is crucially important for understanding how man is saved. Without this knowledge, man is lost. Man will forever be searching and yearning for God without a juncture by which he can stand firm. However, the criticism of many - like Bonhoeffer - in the Western Church is valid. With this strong emphasis on the historical event of the crucifixion of Jesus, the role of the living God in one's life is often deemphasized. The effects of the Protestant Reformation continue. The reformers refocused Western Christendom toward the power of God's grace to affect justification of sinful man. With this refocusing, the importance of living a proper divine life in response to this gift of grace is often obfuscated. Sanctification – living the divine and holy life – is often seen as an afterthought for Western Christianity which focuses more on justification by grace through faith.

Finally, the standpoint of the Eastern Church focuses on the participation of God with man. The focus is on the birth of Christ rather than on the death of him. The manner in which God saved humanity is more significant for the Eastern Church than the fact that God did save humanity. The fact that God would be made man and live among sinful men in order to save them is profound. The Eastern Church would be quick to point out



that God, being all powerful, could have saved humanity any way he so chose; however, God acted the way he did in order that man might be able to comprehend and understand him. The value in this statement is irrefutable; the criticism of it though, also is strong. If one takes the fact that God came down to earth too far, one might be prone to standing in awe at the wonder of the great God and forgetting the mission of this God while on earth.

Therefore, all three standpoints have things to offer the larger church. To accept wholly the Western viewpoint of this Genesis 1:26-27 as an explication of the point of the cross of Christ is to only see a segment of the truth and to be in error. While this text does show the point of the crucifixion, it also shows the active relationship between God and man. Therefore, the Eastern and Western Churches ought to look to one another as brothers in the faith mutually assisting one another in the understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Only with the more unified and more respectful appreciation of the individual theological emphases of the two bodies of Christendom is a full picture of the relationship between God and man possible.

## Works Cited

- Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: W.N. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Augustine. *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
- . *De Genesi ad litteram*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: First Series, ed. Philip Schaff. v.3. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1993.
- De Trinitates*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: First Series, ed. Philip Schaff. v.3. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1993.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis: A bible commentary for teaching and preaching*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1946.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Brevenridge. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989.
- Fretheim, Terence. *Genesis*. New Interpreter's Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994
- Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Creation of Man*. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers: Second Series, v.5 ed. Philip Schaff & Henry Wace. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1999.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn. Amherst, Prometheus Books, 1990.
- Larsen, Timothy W. *The Veil of Evil*. Unpub. Senior Thesis. 2004.
- Lewis, C.S. "Problem of Pain" *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 2002.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989
- Origen. *On First Principles*. Trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973).
- . *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Books 1-5*. Fathers of the Church. Trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America Press, 2001)
- . *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*. Fathers of the Church. Trans. Ronald E. Heine

- (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America Press, 1981)
- . "Homily 27 on Numbers," *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 245-269.
- Plato. *Theatetus*, trans. Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library, ed. T.E. Page, et. al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.
- Von Rad, Gerhardt. *Genesis: Old Testament Library*, trans. John H. Marks. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11*. Trans. John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.