Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church (review)

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third century. Explaining how North African villages and estates established or maintained communal recognition in the face of imperial resistance constitutes the second part of the book (Chapters Four and Five). The answer was the church. In the fifth century, the provinces of North Africa had more bishops than any other place in the empire, and while the struggle between the Catholics and Donatists is partly to blame, Dossey argues that the push to ordain bishops actually came from rural populations who were seeking to become self-governing communities. *Rustici* who had previously thought of themselves only as members of their separate estates now looked to their *cathedrae* for identity. The North African peasantry was not only wealthier than it had ever been, but also politically active.

In the third part of the book (Chapters Six and Seven), Dossey asserts that these rural bishops and their clergy preached and read to their congregations, creating not just political communities, but textual ones, defined in Brian Stock's *The Implications of Literacy* (1987) as people organized into a "group centered on the shared internalization of canonical texts" (174). At the core of such North African communities was, of course, the Bible, whose stories and the sermons generated from them looked askance at many of the activities practiced by creditors or patrons, such as the forced sale of property, including human, to repay debts. Thus, for example, the disruptions at rural markets perpetrated by Circumcellions, where creditors often tried illegally to seize goods as a way of collecting debts, was indicative, not of anti-Roman or random violence, but of the presence of a scriptural and legal discourse, previously absent, which now inspired the peasantry to express discontent with traditional forms of domination. Catholic clerics acted similarly, freeing slaves and flogging well-born magistrates for violations against the texts that constituted imperial law. Rural populations were not rebelling against the Roman way of life, but involving themselves in it on a scale unattested before—materially, politically, and intellectually. Moreover, these developments in the countryside were facilitated by the fragmentation of the Roman elite. If an appeal to a decurion failed, peasants might gain the ear of an imperial official. A catholic bishop could be consulted about the need to protect an estate from a Donatist landlord. The elites could be played off each other.

Dossey has written an important and learned book. One marvels at the diversity of sources the author has assembled and the depth to which she has plumbed them. Her revelatory way of examining the ancient countryside will come to be, I believe, a necessary part of the discussion on Roman North Africa.

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Ronald E. Heine
Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church
Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

The credit Origen has received for being among the first systematicians of the Christian tradition has frequently led scholars to study the inner coherence of

Origen's statements rather than to search for the particular historical occasions that gave rise to them in the first place. Without lessening Origen's status as an early Christian intellectual, Ronald Heine endeavors to displace every "homogenized view" of Origen's thought in favor of one that locates his many works in their original contexts (vii ff.). Heine's rigorous historical commitments have the happy result of preventing concerns about determining Origen's "orthodoxy" (however defined) from becoming the monograph's organizing center. Heine navigates around the many centuries of polemics that have dogged this most controversial of Christian thinkers while demonstrating a mastery of the vast sea of fragments of lost works of Origen preserved in the citations of later writers that are frequently the only evidence we have.

As the subtitle makes clear, in the long running debate about whether Origen should be considered as a churchman or a pagan philosopher in Christian garb, Heine concludes that Origen understood himself from the beginning to be a decidedly Christian intellectual principally worried about theological problems afflicting the local church communities to which he belonged. The fundamental undertaking in the book, therefore, is to show how Origen's thinking was deeply shaped first by his Alexandrian context and then subsequently developed in response to the local challenges he encountered in Caesarea. Heine, thus, divides the book into two parts each beginning with an extended discussion of the geography, history, economics, politics, and intellectual traditions of the respective cities Origen inhabited. Considerable space is devoted to describing Alexandria's cosmopolitan intellectual culture, especially the grammatical and philosophical commentary practiced in schools upon traditional texts. Influenced by this environment, the early Origen—as a lay teacher—promoted a daringly intellectual Christianity that, on the one hand, opposed simplistic unreflective forms of Christianity yet, on the other hand, simultaneously undermined gnostic forms of Christianity that thrived in Egypt. Heine supplies a detailed account of such things as the books Origen can be shown to have read during this time, what can be known of Origen's early notions of the extent and limits of the biblical canon, and the evidence there is for Origen's earliest biblical commentaries and polemical works. In surveying the early materials, Heine finds that the structural elements of Origen's highly theorized exegetical methodology were already in place during his time in Alexandria.

In midlife, Origen relocated to avoid further conflict with Alexandria's bishop, Demetrius. By attending to the extensive, but sometimes neglected, homiletical materials of Origen's Caesarean period, Heine uncovers how Caesarea presented Origen with new problems that may well have caused him to rethink his prior positions. According to Heine, both the composition of Origen's new city (especially its active Jewish community) and the wider range of ecclesiastical duties Origen was able to carry out as a priest greatly affected him. In the mature writings, Heine finds a greater engagement by Origen with Jewish argument that caused him to reconsider his own understanding of what "Israel" might be, a greater interest in a theology that encompasses the tension between the present and the future, and an increasing appreciation for the work that the literal meaning of Scripture can do. Heine, finally, presents evidence that the mature Origen may

well have qualified the universalism implied in his earlier Alexandrian writings. What appears to have caused the shift was not the emergence of an alternate system as much as a growing hesitation on Origen's part to go beyond what Scripture says. According to Heine, the mature Origen was less confident in logical deduction, and more prone to struggle with the ambiguities of Scripture and not resolve what it leaves as mystery (244).

By laying out Origen's life in sequence and situating his written works within that progression, Heine has produced a book with important scholarly implications. If we cannot assume the existence of a single unchanging intellectual system, then scholars will need to exercise care in using the earliest Origen texts to fill in gaps in the later works. Since Origen, above all, emphasized the surpassing value of Christian *thinking*, then it is not a great leap to be convinced by Heine that the mature Origen may well have also done a good amount of continued *rethinking*. If, however, the parallel discussion in Augustinian studies is any indicator, then any development thesis, even one as modest as this one, faces formidable obstacles and will likely spawn others accounting for the same material in different ways.

The monograph does not assume significant prior knowledge, largely explains its technical terms, is written clearly with frequent useful subheadings, and refrains from the extended interpretations of single Origenian texts that can try the patience of the non-expert reader. The theologically interested reader will still do well to read the more expansive accounts of Crouzel and De Lubac, but one would be hard pressed to find a better place either to begin one's study of Origen or to be guided through the chronological sequence of his writings. This is a substantial book from a senior Origen scholar that is sure to become a standard work for anyone working on Origen and early Christian intellectual traditions.

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Hans Arneson, Emanuel Fiano, Christine Luckritz Marquis, and Kyle Smith
The History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qentos and Priest John of Edessa
Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 29
Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010.

In recent years, the publication of new editions and translations of key Syriac texts has brought Syriac hagiography to greater scholarly attention. The *History of Paul and John* continues this trajectory, making this fascinating account available for the first time. Although a slender book, it is filled with everything one would want in such a volume: facing pages of Syriac and English, a carefully produced critical edition with appropriate notes, a thoughtful translation, and a helpful introduction. What, however, makes this volume to be such a gem is the hagiography itself.