

TRACING THE ROMANS COMMENTARY OF ORIGEN  
IN ABELARD'S  
APPEARANCE AND REALITY

I. THE ETHICAL ORIGEN

Origen's theology emphasized ethical living as the outworking of Christian spirituality. For example as he wrote, both in the Commentary on John and in the *Contra Celsum*, the Peter-Paul controversy was no fiction, but was real enough, and, contrary to Tertullian's view, it was crucial that one accept the wisdom of the apostle Paul, since it had implications for treating Jews and Gentiles equally. Indeed Origen viewed the incident at Antioch as also being about Peter's learning to read the law spiritually (CC II,1, Chadwick translation, p. 232) after some amount of moral repentance<sup>1</sup>. For Origen, against Plato, virtue comes first and leads to knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

Moving into the present, in the recent re-evaluation of Origen, we can see two examples of an appreciation for the Origenian Christology, perhaps less for the sake of Christology itself, but more for its anthropological lessons: it is the human moral agent Jesus who steers between the demands of the divine, while all the same living in the flesh, as we too must. One, John Milbank<sup>3</sup>, attributes to Origen the idea that Jesus is Son of God in that he cleaved (*Prin* II,6,3) to God: there is a lesson for the rest of the human race too. In a similar manner, Michel Fédou claims that Origen showed theologians how both to argue for universal Logos and the particularity of the life of Jesus<sup>4</sup>. The latter shows how God wills to

1. F. COCCHINI, *La recezione della 'controversia' di Antiochia (Gal 2,11-14) nelle comunità cristiane di ambiente orientale*, in L. PADOVESE (ed.), *Atti del V Simposio di Tarso su S. Paolo Apostolo*, Rome, Istituto francescano di spiritualità – Pontificio Ateneo Antoniano, 1998, 225-235.

2. Origen, CC VII,44: "...and by a marvellous exercise of divine grace to those whom He saw in His foreknowledge, and knew that they would walk worthy of Him who had made Himself known to them, and that they would never swerve from a faithful attachment to His service". On this theme in general, see M.J. EDWARDS, *Origen against Plato*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2002.

3. J. MILBANK, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Radical Orthodoxy), London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 176f.

4. M. FÉDOU, *La voie du Christ. I: Genèses de la christologie dans le contexte religieux de l'Antiquité du II<sup>e</sup> siècle au début du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Cerf, 2006, p. 533: "de faire

give blessing to a diversity of life situations and means that God's plan is for all, yet he never intended in the Incarnation to take over any more than this particular man, from whose life lessons maybe drawn. Now even in drawing attention to how an arch-heretic of the past becomes the symbol for an alternative theological tradition of today, one recognises a key part of Origen's thought which could be both a strength and a weakness: the interchangeability of Christology and Ethics.

Another recent study has pinpointed just how influential this 'ethical Origen' has been, not least in his interpretation of Paul, and Romans in particular. Thomas Scheck's book on Justification strives to establish how much Origen and Augustine, while being far apart on the question of predestination, were as one on the doctrine of justification: "From Origen, Augustine apparently derived the metaphors that faith is the beginning, root and foundation of justification from which good works grow by means of divine grace ... It appears to me that both Origen and Augustine conceive justification as an interior process of 'being-made-just' through the transformative indwelling of Christ and the Trinity, a process that only begins at justification"<sup>5</sup>. Scheck claims that the two great early Christian writers posthumously "joined forces" at the Council of Trent in 1547, although this has never really been recognised, despite Verfallie's research making this all very clear.

## II. ORIGEN IN THE BACKGROUND DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

The verdict of history, at least for the West was not so triumphantly positive: the received wisdom has been, and to some extent still is, that Origen was accepted as a mystic and exegete, but rejected as theologian. However to give that judgement a very long pedigree might be judged in turn as being guilty of anachronism. Origen was not always so suspect, at least not until the High Middle Ages. Paul the Deacon in eighth-century Lombardy anticipated the Carolingian appreciation of Origen<sup>6</sup>.

droit à l'universalité du dessein de Dieu en même temps qu' à l'unicité de la 'voie du Christ' – unicité tenant à son être *même* comme à l'événement de sa venue parmi les hommes, de ses faits et gestes, de sa mort et de sa résurrection".

5. T. SCHECK, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, p. 101. Cf. C. VERFAILLIE, *La doctrine de la justification dans Origène*, Strasbourg, Université de Strasbourg, 1926.

6. P. BETTILOLO, *Origenismo (in Oriente, secc. v-vi)*, in A. MONACI CASTAGNO (ed.), *Origene: Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Rome, Città Nuova, 2000, 329-337, p. 337: "Già il longobardo Paolo Diacono (720-799) introduce massicciamente Origene nel suo *Omiliario*, vera e propria raccolta di fonti patristiche".

Origen's belief that if the literal sense was unworthy of God then it needs changing began to catch on, in Gregory the Great for example, in a way that would not distinguish much between spiritual biblical exegesis and theology. It was this on-going project of constructing an intellectual vision on the basis of the Scriptures that inspired medieval exegesis and theology to a huge degree. As Regina Heyder puts it, the importance of spiritual interpretation stemming from Origen was transmitted via others, which made Origen, whom Abelard named "the great philosopher of Christians" (*maximus Christianorum philosophus*), safe for theological consumption since he seemed to be "durch päpstliche Autorität legitimiert"<sup>7</sup>. One can see this in Abelard's *Letter 8 to Heloise* where he plays with the imagery of Isaac and the springs of Genesis 26; and in what he writes about Jesus as he gives us water for ethical true living, Origen's 13<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Genesis* can be heard.

Haimo of Auxerre might well have played an important role in linking Origen to Abelard<sup>8</sup>. In his study of Abelard's commentary<sup>9</sup> Rolf Peppermüller seems quite aware of this occurring at a number of points: on the setting and context of the epistle (at p. 21, n. 127); on the question of Paul's two names (at p. 35, n. 212); on Rom 4,9-11 on the difference between the visible *signum* and the invisible *signaculum* (at p. 109, n. 598); on Rom 8,2-4 where the idea is of a sacrifice for sin allowing justifying love to spring up in people's hearts (at p. 102, n. 273); Scriptural law (Torah) was for Israel only (p. 149); true Jews follow the believing fathers such as Abraham (at p. 155 – Haimo has this too.) Commenting on the Isaiah quotation at Rom 9,28 (*quia verbum abbreviatum faciet Dominus super terram*), Haimo chose to follow Origen (p. 167), while avoiding Augustine: *verbum abbreviatum* means the love commandment, the creedal symbol, or the four gospels – the last an interpretation beloved of Origen himself. "Das dieser Text auf Abaelard gewirkt hat, dürfte deutlich sein"<sup>10</sup>.

7. R. HEYDER, *Auctoritas scripturae: Schriftauslegung und Theologieverständnis Peter Abaelards unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der "Expositio in Hexaemeron"*, Münster, Aschendorff, 2010, p. 90.

8. D. IOGNA-PRAT, *L'œuvre d'Haymon*, in C. JUDY – G. LOBICHON (eds), *L'École Carolingienne d'Auxerre: De Murethaci à Remi 830-908*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1991, 157-179, p. 174: "Dans son commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains, Abélard offre un bon résumé de l'utilisation faite d'Haymon dans la tradition médiévale. Il y puise, tout d'abord comme à un encyclopédie ... Par exemple, du début du Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains, Abélard était réticent que Pierre n'est pas le premier à avoir instruit les Romains dans la foi".

9. R. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Abaelards Auslegung des Römerbriefes* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, NF 10), Münster, Aschendorff, 1972.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

However the aim of research in this paper is to examine the debt of Abelard, not Haimo, to Origen. If we can focus more closely on their respective Romans Commentaries, Scheck is bold to claim: “On the other hand [in contrast to Aquinas], Origen’s *CRm* is woven into the fabric of Peter Abelard’s commentary on Romans”. However Scheck’s reference here, which we might expect to substantiate this claim merely refers the reader to Peppermüller’s edition of Abelard<sup>11</sup>. No more is done to make the case. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, and perhaps tellingly, in his earlier work, *Origen and the History of Justification*, Scheck took the road marked “William of St Thierry” at this point and more or less avoided Abelard. Of course the road from Origen passes through William too, but it is arguably a less interesting one.

Of course on William of St. Thierry Scheck is on strong ground when he writes: “Many of these elements have roots in Origen’s thought, such as the idea of returning to God, the necessity of human cooperation, the progressive transformation of the soul through the gradual process of deification, the movement from image to likeness of God, and the creature’s participation in the attributes of the Trinity. It seems clear that William has perfected Origen’s ideas by an Augustinian stress on the constant need for divine grace”<sup>12</sup>. However, that is the point: William quoted twice as much material from *Augustine* as he did from Origen. Moreover, only one-quarter of the commentary by William relies on any patristic sources<sup>13</sup>. So Origen was not hugely present in William’s Romans-exegesis, and if anything, he was useful for alternative readings, and for the definitions of key terms<sup>14</sup>. Bernard of Clairvaux was more interested in a continuous spiritual tradition from the bible through to his own day than in a privileged group of “fathers” as authorities, and there is no sense of them as belonging to a superior past. Bernard felt himself to be in continuity with them, and in no sense their inferior<sup>15</sup>. William

11. T. SCHECK, *Origen’s Interpretation of Romans*, in S.A. CARTWRIGHT (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, 15-49, p. 22, n. 42: “Cf. Peter Abelard, *Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos / Römerbriefkommentar*, 3 vols., Freiburg, Herder, 2000”. Also, T. SCHECK, *William of St Thierry’s Reception of Origen’s Exegesis of Romans*, in *Adamantius* 10 (2004) 236-256, p. 237: “This irenic usage of Origen’s Pauline exegesis during the Middle Ages suggests that the clouds of suspicion that hung elsewhere over Origen’s orthodoxy did not render suspect his CRm. As an exegete of Paul, he was normally cited as a Catholic authority of good faith”.

12. SCHECK, *Justification* (n. 5), p. 126.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

15. R.M. ILGNER, *Scito te ipsum – ethica nostra: Sur les origines et la signification des titres de l’éthique d’Abélard*, in J. JOLIVET – H. HABRIAS (eds.), *Pierre Abélard: Colloque international de Nantes*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003, 389-406,

liked to spin the threads of the fathers into his own kind of cloth, and in his writing, if one will forgive the extension of the metaphor, it is hard to see the joins. For both “Cistercians”, there was an affection of likeness for patristic writers. Quite to the contrary Abelard was known for clearly delineating and distinguishing what was an ancient voice and what was his own. The *Sic et Non* is famous or infamous for its reservation about the fathers having unequivocal authority: if Bernard did not have them on a pedestal, then Abelard put them in their place. Writing about Abelard's employment of patristic sources in general, Cartwright comments: “Compared to William, he is less dependent on them, quoting them less frequently, though occasionally at great length, as he does passages of Origen's Romans commentary on the topic of circumcision at Romans 2,16 and again at 4,10”<sup>16</sup>.

The text of Abelard's Romans commentary is clearly a carefully worked commentary which allows questions or excurses to interrupt the flow of the *lectio continua*<sup>17</sup>. Peppermüller makes it sound as though in this matter Abelard performed a breakthrough, one which would clear the way for Lombard and Robert of Melun, even though Lombard does not seem to have known Abelard's commentary (and the latter's influence can more be seen in the likes of the Anonymous commentary of the 1170s.)<sup>18</sup>. Although the *Glossa Ordinaria* at Laon preserved Origen and others in small chunks<sup>19</sup>, it is unlikely Abelard knew it. He got his Origen in larger sections as we will see below, and it is this which best explains his “imitation” of Origen in the use of excurses. In sharp contrast to Aquinas' *Romans Commentary*'s solitary mention of Origen,

p. 404. But Abelard avoided the trope of *cognitio sui*, since he was not really interested in self-understanding as monks were. “La réflexion éthique d'Abélard, en revanche, envisageait l'homme raisonnable comme sujet responsable de la moralité” (*ibid.*, p. 402).

16. S. CARTWRIGHT, *Twelfth-Century Pauline Exegesis: William of St. Thierry's Monastic Rhetoric and Peter Abelard's Scholastic Logic*, in ID. (ed.), *Companion* (n. 11), 205-263, p. 230.

17. Compare the *reportatio* on Abelard's lectures on the Pauline Epistles which comprise the *Commentarius Cantabrigiensis*. Cf. J. STROTHMANN, *Das Konzil von Sens 1138 und die Folgeereignisse 1140: Datierung und Darstellung. Zur Verurteilung Abaelards*, in *Theologie und Glaube* 85 (1995) 238-254 and 396-410.

18. R. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Zum Fortwirken von Abaelard's Römerbriefkommentar*, in R. LOUIS – J. JOLIVET – J. CHÂTILLON (eds.), *Pierre Abélard, Pierre le Vénéral: Les courants philosophiques, littéraires et artistiques en occident au milieu du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, CNRS, 1975, 557-568. Also, R. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Anonymi auctoris saeculi XII: Expositio in epistolas Pauli (Ad Romanos – II Corinthios 12)*, Münster, Aschendorff, 2005.

19. R. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Schriftsinne*, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 7 (1995) col. 1568-1570; ID., *Paulus, Apostel. II: Theologie und Nachwirkung*, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 6 (1993) col. 1819-1821.

Abelard's Commentary has twenty-eight citations from Origen. Peppermüller has also observed that in general Abelard was not so much of an innovator as had been claimed: methodologically he was a glossator like the rest, one whose first task was to make sense of the text. He like the rest looked backwards to the tradition for help<sup>20</sup>. However, what was distinctively characteristic in his work was the number of excurses, Origen-style, that he employed. Another distinguishing feature could be that, while he shared many things with the school of Laon, he contended that the Mosaic Law with its 'collective' mentality had represented a step back from the Natural Law with its Golden Rule; personal responsibility stood in the foreground of his ethical system<sup>21</sup>. Along with the Alexandrian, for Abelard, grace is offered to each human being, and each must decide what to do with it.

### III. THEME ONE: CHRISTOLOGY AND THE SOUL

Also, dialectics changed the method of "Scripture interpreting Scripture" into something different, an exegesis with one eye on the issues and the concepts. One might see this as the reason behind the need for excurses: again, just like Origen. Boethius was also helpful to Abelard, in that this remarkable Christian philosopher had been able to imagine a pre-lapsarian Adam possessed with the possibility of sinning. This influence rather than that of Aristotle directly perhaps helps to explain the philosophical and more positive anthropology in Abelard. Yet one might once more contrastively compare another theologian indebted to Boethius, Aquinas, who mostly used Origen in his Gospels Commentary (*Catena Aurea*), yet who was frequently critical about Origen's doctrine, calling him 'grandfather of Arianism', and accusing him of reducing predestination to mere prescience. In fact in his own Romans commentary Aquinas only mentioned Origen once, on Rom 1,4 regarding the reading *destinatus*, not *predestinatus*: for it would be heretical to think (with Origen) that the eternal Son could be pre-or pro-: this could imply a time when he was not<sup>22</sup>. Yet on Rom 3,26 (*Quem proposuit Deus*

20. R. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Exegetische Traditionen und Theologische Neuansätze in Abaelards Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, in E.M. BUYTAERT (ed.), *Peter Abaelard: Proceedings of the International Conference, Louvain, 1974*, Leuven, University Press, 1974, 116-126, p. 117.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 119.121.

22. *Origène: Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains I*, ed. M. FÉDOU, transl. L. BRÉSARD (SC, 532), Paris, Cerf, 2009, p. 180.

*propitiatorum per fidem* ('whom God proposed as a propitiation through faith') Origen was happy to comment: "this, to say that he was 'proposed' does not fit the One who always was, that is the Word of God, but concerns his soul which although inseparable from the Word of God was all the same created but the Word of God and is posterior to the unbegotten divinity"<sup>23</sup>. In other words, not so heretical as Thomas would imply. Abelard, with a Christology well on the way to a *assumptus homo* position, albeit not quite fitting that label, was, like Origen quite ready and able to see *praedestinatus* as "according to Christ's human nature"<sup>24</sup>. Yet if we read on in Origen, who is prepared to speak of the Son of God as nevertheless somehow *destinatus*, we find: "But it is necessary if that which is born from the seed of David according to the flesh is what really is destined (*destinatus*) in power according to the spirit of sanctification to be the Son of God, and is in the substance of God in such a way as should be accepted regarding the soul of Christ, which is no way named with the flesh and the spirit of sanctification as substance of the

23. *Non ergo convenit de eo qui semper erat, id est de verbo Dei, dici quia propitius est: sed de anima eius quae licet inseparabilis sit a verbo Dei creata tamen est et unigeniti deitate posterior. Origène: Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains II*, ed. M. FÉDOU, transl. L. BRÉSARD (SC, 539), Paris, Cerf, 2009, p. 136. The Greek commentary on Rom 3,25 from the Toura fragments (J. SCHERER, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III, 5–V, 7, d'après les extraits du Papyrus n° 88748 du musée du Caire et les fragments de la Philocalie et du Vaticanus graecus 762: Essai de reconstitution du texte et de la pensée des tomes V et VI du Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains* (Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 27), Cairo, Bibliothèque d'étude, 1957), p. 162: τοιοῦτον δὲ ἐστὶν ἡμῶν τὸ Ἰλαστήριον τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν Θεὸς λόγος ἢ τάχα μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ψυχῆ, ἐπεὶ ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν ... This comes at the end of a passage which speaks of the soul of Jesus itself as the mercy seat containing two cherubims: Ὅν προέθετο τῇ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μᾶλλον ψυχῇ ἢ τῷ Μονογενεῖ καὶ πρωτοτόκῳ πάσης κτίσεως προτίθεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ Θεὸς τὰ μηδέπω ἐνεστηκότα. It is hard to be sure whether the object of adoring contemplation is the divine Son or the perfect soul. Rufinus in the Latin translation keeps things simpler; Christ's *anima* was pre-established as the Levitical propitiatory. There is no mention by Rufinus of this soul's being pre-existent; rather, it was very much created to serve the divinity, and he then mentions the possibility of that divine nature being the propitiation as the view of some (but not his own view): *Nisi forte videatur quibusdam propitiatio ipsa ejus divina substantia*. Cf. Abelard, *Commentaria in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. E.M. BUTYAERT (CCCM, 11), Turnhout, Brepols, 1969, p. 112: *Quem proposuit nobis Deus Pater propitiationem, id est reconciliatorem, in sanguine suo, id est per mortem suam*.

24. Abelard, *Expositio* I,114, moves swiftly to the question of the believer's faith receiving the sacrifice, where for him, the soteriological "action" is to be located: *Praedestinatus, inquam, Filius Dei in virtute, hoc est: ut esset virtus et fortitudo omnium per fidem et cohaerentium*. Cf. M. LANDGRAF, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, 2/1, Regensburg, Pustet, 1954, pp. 172-198. It makes sense to think of a Christology of grace whereby the direction of flow is from God to humanity: in that sense "*praedestinatus*" is meaningful.



divine power”<sup>25</sup>. In other words there is no “destining” of such a free agent. The soul of Christ was not from the seed of David, but the soul is understood as being located somewhere between that seed and the Son of God which are both destined, each in their own way. It is the work accomplished by Christ’s soul to inspire the believing soul that provided the hinge for Abelard’s soteriology, as much as it also did for Cistercian spirituality. It would not be too far-fetched to suggest that there is at least a “family resemblance” with Origen here.

Then, on Rom 6,9 which speaks of ‘death having no rule over him’, there seems also to be at least an implicit, anonymous influence of Origen here on Abelard as the Christological theme is explored:

According to the divinity just as he is one with the Father, so too he is of one will, following what he said about himself: *no-one takes my anima from me but I put it down myself* and again: *I have power in the putting down of my anima* and picking it up again. And Isaiah: *it was laid down because he willed it himself*. The soul of that man indeed desired our salvation which in his death he knew to consent, and for the sake of that which he longed for he bore this. It should be said that the soul of Christ did not so much choose as tolerate sufferings since after all he came to do the will of his Father, to the point of hating *animam suam*. ... It seems that he was ruled by death at Gethsemane, but that was only because the soul of the man (not the divinity which was united to the father) consented to stoop before death and put up with being forced to be sick for the sake of gaining health. And it was reckoned on behalf for that great merit and virtue the one who thoroughly renounced his will with love for his God, indeed as Christ said elsewhere, even to the extent of hating his life (*animam*)<sup>26</sup>.

For his part Origen says that Paul daringly implies that since death will no longer rule over him then it did rule for a time. Origen stresses that Christ was a like a king coming in disguise to free prisoners, cloaking

25. Origen, *CRm* (SC 532, 180, on Rom 1,3): *Sed requiritur si id quod de semine David nascitur secundum carnem est quod vero in virtute destinatur secundum spiritum sanctificationis filius Dei et in substantia Dei est, quomodo accipiendum est de anima Iesu, quae hic nequaquam cum carne et spiritu sanctificationis vel divinae virtutis substantia nominatur...*

26. CCCM 11, 179, on Rom 6,9: *Secundum divinitatem vero sicut unum est cum Patre, ita et unius est voluntatis, iuxta quod ipse de se ait: Nemo tollit animam meam a me sed ego pono eam, et iterum: Postestatem habeo ponendo animam et iterum sumendi eam. Et Isaias: Oblatus est, inquit, quia ipse voluit. Desideravit quidem anima hominis illius salutem nostram quam in morte sua consentire sciebat, et propter illam quam desiderabat hanc tolerabat ... anima Christi non tam afflictiones passionum velle quam tolerare dicenda est. Unde et pro magno id merito et virtute reputandum est, cum amore quis Dei suae penitus abrenuntiat voluntati, immo, et ut alibi Christus ait, adhuc et animam suam oderit.*



his power, and he suffered the rule of death by choice, not by necessity<sup>27</sup>. As we have seen, Abelard makes this verse to be about the Passion beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane, and pays particular attention to the *soul* of Christ. Cartwright comments on the Abelardian emphasis on Christ's sinlessness being perfect in that he retained a free choice to sin: but could not sin while (*freely*) united to God<sup>28</sup>.

#### IV. THEME TWO: THE SPECTACLE OF THE CROSS

Bernard of Clairvaux complained that Abelard played around with the inner/outer distinction when it came to texts, and overall tended towards spiritual interiorisation. Even though the Song of Songs' *nosce te ipsum* sounds similar, Bernard (and Courcelle in more recent times) were convinced that Abelard abused that slogan by fixing one's eyes on one's self. Now Abelard's commentary on Romans was "a controversial work, one that led to Abelard's second condemnation at the Council of Sens in 1140"<sup>29</sup>. (Or, one might say, played a part in that condemnation.) A large chunk of Origen on Rom 2,16 serves to remind and to make sure that circumcision was for the race of Abraham only and from which practice Christians were exempt. The logic is that the rules for a proselyte which Origen mentions from Leviticus 17 do not insist on circumcision, so nor *a fortiori* should any such rules apply for 'New Testament' believers<sup>30</sup>. It could be that Abelard is happy to let Origen speak for him here and he intended the reader to know that he (Abelard) could not have put it better himself, and that on such recondite things to do with Jewish practice, Origen knew more than a Twelfth-Century Frenchman ever would and should be heard. Origen was interested in the Jews more than most patristic commentators were. Origen's view, as set out in the Romans commentary was that all, Jew and Gentile are equally under sin. The Gentiles fail to acknowledge the moral law – yes there are different kinds of *nomos* in Romans, as Origen makes clear, and as R. Roukema

27. SC 539, 515-517.

28. CARTWRIGHT (ed.), *Twelfth-Century Pauline Exegesis* (n. 16), p. 229.

29. S. CARTWRIGHT, *Introduction to Peter Abelard, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation, 12), Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 2011, p. 3. Cf. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Abaelards Auslegung des Römerbriefes* (n. 9).

30. *CRm* II,26-27; CCCM 11, p. 94: *Si praeputium, ide est ipsa praeputia gentilitas quam vos, scilicet Iudaei, quasi ad ignominiam praeputium vocatis, CUSTODIAT IUSTITIAS LEGIS potius quam figuras, hoc est impleat morali varietatis praecepta quae unumquemque iustificat.*

has highlighted<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, for Origen, works matter for faith. On the other hand, it is not patent that ‘Trinitarianism’ is such a big issue in Origen’s Commentary on Romans as Thomas Scheck thinks it is<sup>32</sup>, or that even it was of high importance for Abelard in writing his.

However it seems patent that when it comes to the Cross there is quite an affinity here between Origen and Abelard. Lawrence Bond has highlighted on Rom 3,26 that having rejected the ransom theory and the satisfaction theory (God recompensing God) Abelard says the cross worked *tam verbo quam exemplo*. Bond has various attempts at explaining this. The *exemplum* is a singular grace in which God bound himself by love and is thus the crucifixion is more than just a cognitive “sign”: “God’s joining with us ... is the atoning work”<sup>33</sup>. When it comes to *verbo*, it might be simpler to say that Abelard thinks of this as the teaching of Jesus, and by this and by his exemplary action love is stimulated in believers. This love is then transmitted to the believer by the Holy Spirit. It allows the natural drive towards God, which had become tangled and out of service, to work freely again. Abelard does not get any sense that Paul regarded the Cross of Christ as a cultic event: in trying to avoid the transactional for reasons of the debt being increased rather than taken care of by Christ’s death, he has overlooked anything priestly, as that which is to be regarded as no more valid than circumcision. Abelard preferred to emphasize the Incarnation and Christ’s loving death. One might say that he is labouring under the same categories as Anselm: atonement has to be quasi-monetary and civil rather than to do with “holiness”.

Yet if we look at Abelard more favourably, the overall sense is that of a revelation of God’s true character, and here he comes close to Origen’s *Tendenz*. This is not so much “subjectivizing” as it is “standing in awe”, as the external force of the event seeks to shine into the hearts of all

31. R. ROUKEMA, *The Diversity of Laws in Origen’s Commentary on Romans*, Amsterdam, Free University Press, 1988.

32. Scheck points to Ayres and Rafalli on Origen’s proto-orthodoxy. “‘*Homoousios*’ sounded materialist to him, so he would have avoided it. I agree with Peppermüller’s overall judgment of Abelard’s Romans: ‘... so vor allem zur Soteriologie und zur Ethik. Hinter ihnen tritt in der Expositio die speculative Theologie deutlich zurück...’” (p. 173). Cf. E.M. BUYTAERT, *Abelard’s Trinitarian Doctrine*, in ID. (ed.), *Peter Abaelard* (n. 20), 127-152.

33. L. BOND, *Another Look at Abelard’s Commentary on Romans 3:26*, in W.S. CAMPBELL – P.S. HAWKINS – B. DEEN SCHILDGEN (eds.), *Medieval Readings of Romans* (Romans Through History & Culture), New York, T&T Clark International, 2008, 11-32, p. 24.

through preaching and sacrament. One might wish to compare Origen at this point, as a theologian for whom salvation was very much about revelation and the receiving of this by faith. The erection of the cultic apparatus in Exod 25,10-16 is described: by “pure gold” one means the holy and pure soul of Jesus who is the mediator between God the Trinity and humanity since he has something less than the nature of the Trinity<sup>34</sup>. Fédou notes that Scherer gave ‘le Dieu-Verbe’ as another possible candidate for being the “golden mediator”<sup>35</sup>. The point that comes out of Exod 25,22 is of *et loquar ad te desuper propitiatorum* – it is a place for revelation, even as the Midrash Rabbah emphasized.

#### V. COMPARISON OF METHOD AND STYLE

If Stephen Cartwright is correct, then Abelard was perhaps looking for trouble: “If Abelard regards the words of the text as mutable, then so also does he regard the order of these words”<sup>36</sup>. Origen himself of course liked to point to other versions in order to widen the semantic range and link by catchword with other parts of the canon. Indeed, the Alexandrian’s presence and influence is significant, not least in the delight in playing around with textual meaning. However, it is somewhat inaccurate and certainly too positive for M. Fédou to claim that Abelard received Origen’s expositions readily and without critical qualification<sup>37</sup>.

To evidence that critical stance towards the Alexandrian, on Rom 4,11 there comes another long quotation from Origen, to the effect that Christians (“we”) have “another type of blood” – not that of the circumcision: Origen commented that it was impossible for Joshua to have circumcised the Israelites a second time<sup>38</sup>. However, while discussing the reason and order of circumcision, Abelard was astonished that Origen refused the obvious literal interpretation at Josh 5,2-9: “They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way”<sup>39</sup>. Origen read Scripture in an oracular way; but Abelard, according to the rules of literature. For Origen, it had to be a reference to our Jesus circumcising

34. SC 539, 128, on Rom 3,25-26: *aurum purum indicet sanctam illam et puram Iesu animam ... videtur mihi inter Deum et hominem media haec esse anima quae inferior quidem sit a trinitatis natura et minus aliquid habens.*

35. M. FÉDOU, *Introduction* to SC 532 (n. 22), p. 128.

36. CARTWRIGHT, *Introduction to Peter Abelard* (n. 29), p. 17.

37. FÉDOU, *Introduction* (n. 35), p. 98: “Abélard ne met en cause les explications d’Origène mais les reprend pleinement à son compte”.

38. SC 539, 134, on Rom 3,26.

39. CCML 11, 138.

his people; with the first circumcision his taking the former people away from idolatry. Egyptian priests were also circumcised, thus it was quite a noble thing: and we should not despise it because it seems hard. And not all unnecessary things – such virginity – are bad. Abelard's disdain for Origen here did not make him refuse to set out in full the spiritual interpretation of this passage by the Alexandrian, before adding that Ambrose agreed – in *Epistle LXXII,1-2*; and Ps-Jerome (Pelagius) concurred too. Yet Abelard then proceeds to offer his literal explanation, which can be found, not in Augustine as such, but in Ambrosiaster's *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti*: the text really meant that the second time it was a circumcision for all the people, not for select individuals. Abelard then explains that Abraham underwent a duplex circumcision, both spiritually for the sake of doctrine, and physically for the sake of example, since both the inward and the outward realities matter. This spiritual interpretation serves to drive home a “faith alone” line for those who are in future to believe, both Gentiles and Jews by the flesh. The promise is, however, to Gentiles especially: they are like stars, meaning the contemplatives and in a secondary way, theology teachers; finally “sand of the sea” stands for the ordinary married people.

There is, for all the criticism of Origen for missing the literal sense, an appreciation of his spiritualising, albeit done in a rather sober way. One might observe in passing that there is huge divergence between the Greek Origen and that preserved by Rufinus in the commentary on Rom 4,19 (Abraham's body being dead: τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα νεκρωμένον). Origen in the Greek fragments seems interested in the historical question: was Abraham's body, naturally speaking, past its ability to reproduce<sup>40</sup>? Rufinus misses this point by making the moral sense to be *the* sense, whereas the Greek tries to justify the text as it is: it was indeed not impossible at that point for Abraham to reproduce naturally as later births to his maid show. It could be claimed that Abelard unwittingly was closer to *Origenes graecus* than he could have known.

The major point to be made here is: Abelard's theological originality arguably came to the fore where he adapted Origen's *style*, rather than simply quoted his exegesis. And yet to adopt method from someone is to

40. “(L)a question est de savoir si la νεκρότης d'Abraham est d'ordre physique et naturel ... ou si le mot doit être pris dans un sens moral (et alors il s'agirait de la ‘mortification’ intérieure)” (FÉDOU, *Introduction* [n. 35], p. 102). His view is that Rufinus' translation is a creative patchwork of sources: “Ce morceau, en soi, n'est pas authentique: mais il est une combinaison d'éléments authentiques”. Cf. SCHERER, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III, 5–V, 7* (n. 23), p. 100.

show a deeper kind of influence, arguably. There are twenty to thirty passages where he offers 'spiritual interpretation'; only three come from other writers, on 4,11 from Origen, as we have seen; 15,28 from Jerome; 16,3 from Bede. The rest are his own, apparently. Of the patristic era writers, "Abelard uses Origen more than any other ... he cites half again as much material from Origen's Romans commentary as he does from all the works of Augustine, though over half of this material is found in two passages, on the single topic of circumcision"<sup>41</sup>. Cartwright then concludes: "He also uses him to discuss newness of life, the tradition of Christ as one's neighbour and Christ as a sacrifice for sin. Origen's overall influence in Abelard, with regard to his doctrinal teaching is thus quite limited..."<sup>42</sup>. But the point is: he is following Origen's method, not slavishly his content. Moreover, "(t)he passage Abelard quotes or alludes to most often is Deuteronomy 7.6/14.2/26.18, which refers to the Jews as 'the peculiar people' to God"<sup>43</sup>. It should be noted that this is not so much a phenomenon of biblical verses, but of a phrase or a concept appearing in three places. Likewise, within Romans, 5,12; 8,28; 13,10 are his favourites, allowing him to return to what the key matters of the book are, wherever he might be in his commentary.

## VI. ETHICS ONCE MORE

Cartwright tells us that Abelard used Augustine more for moral questions, and was less faithful to him on doctrinal matters, such that when one gets to the bold predestinarian language of Rom 9,21<sup>44</sup> he claims: "grace is only an inspiration to do good", one is then not surprised to see that Abelard is happy to overlook questions of predestination, vocation, justification, and remission of sins. Yet that does not mean that in not contradicting Augustine, Abelard was therefore following him. So far we have mentioned ethics, Christology, the cross, and the practice of dialectic and excurses, where he seems closer to Origen. In fact he does explicitly depart from Augustine on the issue of original sin, on

41. CARTWRIGHT, *Introduction to Peter Abelard* (n. 29), p. 25 gives the main, most obvious examples of Abelard's "borrowing" from Origen: on 2,11: circumcision for Jews only; on 4,11: the symbolism of cutting away; on Chapter 16, the context of Romans and Paul's "pastoral" material.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 42: "... additional grace is not necessary to do good". The image employed by Abelard is that of the doctor not being responsible for those who refuse to take his medicine.

Rom 5,19, where he looks a bit like Origen: sin must be actual sin. Again, this interpretation is as moral as it is doctrinal. Origen subscribed more to an ‘*Erbstrafentheorie*’, although as Fédou explains<sup>45</sup>, Rufinus managed to fudge the issue. Although grace can be repeated, in fact an abundance of grace is required (*CRm* V,3,7; SC 539, 428), as he comments on Rom 5,17, nevertheless there is no need for a preparing grace. Indeed on Rom 9,21 Abelard in turn denies the need of a *new* grace, of an “Augustinian” sort to enable people to receive the grace of Christ, a situation that he likens to a patient deciding to follow an instruction to drink some medicine prepared by the doctor. What draws us onward is the hope of blessedness<sup>46</sup>. This as Weingart insisted is not Pelagianism<sup>47</sup>, although one might call it “semi-Pelagianism”<sup>48</sup>. And if that is so, then he is in good company: Trent and Origen. Intention rather than works are what God looks on, although on Rom 14,23 (“but everything which is not of faith is sin”), Abelard notes that a “good intention” does not excuse one if the action be wrong<sup>49</sup>. So there is appreciation of Origen’s content as well as his method, again in the area of applying or actualising external grace<sup>50</sup>.

45. In his note at SC 539, 348.

46. CCCM 11, p. 242: *Ac desiderium itaque nostrum in Deo ascendendum et ad regnum caeleste concupiscendum, quam praeire gratiam necesse est, nisi ut beatitudo illa, ad quam nos invitat, et via, qua pervenire possimus, exponatur atque credatur? ... Nec necesse est ut per singula quae quotidie nova succedunt opera, aliam Deum gratiam praeter ipsam fidem apponat.*

47. R.E. WEINGART, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard*, London, Clarendon, 1970, pp. 125f.

48. PEPPERMÜLLER, *Abaelards Auslegung des Römerbriefes* (n. 9), p. 174: “Zugegeben, der Grundsatz des ‘facienti quod est in se, deus not denegat gratiam’ ist bei Abaelard, wenn auch nicht wörtlich, so doch der Sache nach zu finden: Der Mensch kann durch seine ratio Gottes Existenz, seine *potentia*, *sapientia* und *bonitas* erkennen und auch zur Gottesliebe gelangen”. Even though grace comes before all, there is no special saving grace: “Mensch kann sich nicht aus eigenen Kräften, wie in der Spätscholastik, auf den Heilsgnade disponieren”.

49. Sin can mean a number of things (Thesis 14; *Opera theologica* I,164 (ad Rom 2): on the matter of the Jews and the Crucifixion of Christ, neither the deed nor the desire is sin but both together. See M. PERKAMS, *Liebe als Zentralbegriff der Ethik nach Peter Abaelard*, Münster, Aschendorff, 2001, p. 101: “Will” implies recognition of something that is good. The adulterous man does not really want to break the marriage; and conversely ends can justify (evil) means. Human reason is imaged on Trinity as *synderesis*, such that humans can decide between good and evil; not to follow good is to be in self-contradiction. It is not “we ourselves” but sin itself that does the evil deed (as per Rom7). Sins do not willingly happen, and the will itself is not evil. “Wenn Abaelard diese Gottesliebe als Wiederherstellung der Vernunftnatur des Menschen deutet, in der der Konflikt zwischen Vernunft und Begierde aufgehoben ist, wird leicht verständlich, warum seiner Meinung nach die Zuwendung zu Gott den Kern wahrer Nächstenliebe ausmacht” (*ibid.*, p. 115).

50. See the comparisons drawn between Abelard and Luther by Peppermüller.

Once again, the appreciation of the natural law and reason is a place where our two great thinkers correspond. As Cartwright puts it: “He [Abelard] also equates reason with our spirit, which receives and recognizes the testimony from the Holy Spirit that we are the sons of God, and with the natural law that enables the Gentiles, who lack the written law of Moses, to obey God’s will ... But unlike William ... Abelard does not move beyond rationality to a supra-rational, ‘spiritual’ level”<sup>51</sup>. The idea of love as a rational force also echoes Origen<sup>52</sup>. As mentioned at the beginning, Origen much more on giving an account of biblical religion as “living” and the ethical consequences of this. In their ethical, sober and serious approach to the Christian faith Abelard and Origen were like brothers in arms.

School of Divinity  
University of St Andrews  
South Street  
St Andrews KY16 9JU  
Scotland, UK  
mwe1@st-andrews.ac.uk

Mark W. ELLIOTT

51. CARTWRIGHT, *Introduction to Peter Abelard* (n. 29), p. 80.

52. A. SCHROETER-REINHARD, *Die Ethica des Peter Abaelard*, Freiburg/Schw, Universitätsverlag, 1999, p. 156.