

## Souls

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Although Paul's occasional distinction of the three aspects of the human being, "spirit, soul, and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), is referred to several times in Origen's works, this does not mean that, for him, humanity had originally been created as such. In the beginning, as Origen saw it, God had created a certain number of rational creatures, that is spiritual (*noetic*) beings without material bodies, gifted with reason (*logos*), and destined to contemplate God. In Rufinus's Latin translation of the *First Principles*, these rational, spiritual creatures are called *mens*, which is a translation of the Greek term *nous*, which means "mind", "intelligence", "spirit". Inspired by Plato and Philo, Origen supposes that Genesis 1 deals with an initial, immaterial creation, of which humanity, as *nous*, is said to be created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). But since rational creatures decided to fall away from God, who is fire, they lost their original state of *nous* and cooled down to become "souls". Thus Origen alludes to the then well-known interpretation of the Greek term *psyche* (soul), which was derived from *psyche-sthai*, "to grow cold" (*PArch* II.8.3). Origen believes that Jesus referred to this fall of spirits to become souls in Matthew 24:12, "Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold". To these souls, who chilled in quite different degrees, God gave bodies that corresponded to the gravity of their respective fall. Some souls received celestial bodies (stars and planets were considered as being animated); others became angels or demons; still other souls received human bodies. Origen supposes that the second, material creation of humanity is described in Genesis 2:7, which says that God formed the man of the "dust of the ground" and made him "a living soul". By means of this interpretation Origen intends to explain that people, such as Jacob and Esau, for example, are profoundly different because each one of them as pre-existent spirits took a free and distinct decision to what extent one wanted to participate in this pre-mundane fall. Thus Origen tries to refute the Marcionites and the gnostics, who held (at least as far as he understood them) that the Old Testament Creator was unjust (*PArch* I.7; I.8.4; II.8.1; II.8.3-4; II.9.1-6; *DialHer* 15-16).

According to Origen, however, one soul, namely, the soul of Jesus, the one who would "love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Ps. 45:7), did not fall away from God and was therefore to be anointed, which means that this soul was elected to be united with Christ. It may seem problematic that Origen speaks of the *soul* of Christ as existing prior to the fall of the other rational creatures, who became souls precisely because of their fall. But since Christ clearly refers to his soul (John 10:18; 12:27; Matt. 26:38), and Origen clearly dismisses from consideration that his soul had taken any part in the fall, he was pressed to take account of this scriptural evidence. Since Scripture even speaks of God's soul (Isa. 1:14; 42:1; Ezek. 23:18), Origen presumes that God's soul may be his only-begotten Son (*PArch* II.6.3-5; II.8.2; II.8.4-5).

Origen considers that animals also have souls, at least as they answer to the traditional definition that the soul is an "imaginary and reacting substance"; however, he does not admit

that animals (as less than rational) can ever receive human souls (*PArch* II.8.1; see *Transmigration of Souls*).

As for human souls, Origen is critical about the Platonic tripartition of the soul into a reasonable, a desirous, and an irascible part, since it is not a scripturally validated doctrine; yet he occasionally refers to it positively (*PArch* III.4.1; *HomEz* 1.16; *FragmHomLc* 187). He rejects the (probably gnostic) opinion that human beings have two souls, a good or celestial one, which is related to the spirit, and an inferior or earthly one, related to the flesh. Instead, Origen makes use of the Pauline distinction of the flesh and the spirit (Rom. 8:3-16; Gal. 5:16-26; also Matt. 26:41). He argues that during their earthly lives human souls are placed “in between” these two conditions. If a soul is inclined to follow the spirit (*pneuma*), she is related to the Spirit of God, but if she follows the vices of the flesh and the body, she is hostile to God (*PArch* III.4.2-5). In contrast to the interpretation of Genesis 1:26 given above, Origen even suggests that the creation of humanity according to God’s image as male and female (Gen. 1:26-27) may allegorically point to the existence of the “male spirit” and the “female soul”, which implies that the spirit and the soul have to find an existential unity in order to be “fruitful” (*HomGn* 1.15).

Origen teaches that the soul should acquire self-knowledge regarding her origin, identity, and disposition. She has to learn that she was created in God’s image and that she is destined to be restored to her original state, and not to transmigrate to another body under the conditions of the present life. Furthermore, the soul has to examine her acts, test her progress in the virtues, and review her faults. Basically, she has to know God and his creation and be united to the divine bridegroom, Christ (*ComCt* II.5; cf. *HomNum* 27.5-13). A soul that is inclined to the flesh and to sin will undergo a harsh treatment when the body dies. Origen says that demons will claim the souls who are tainted with vices, whereas the Lord will save pure souls from the demons’ claims (*HomPs* 36.5.7). He refers to Jesus’ saying (according to the Greek text of Luke 12:46) that a bad servant will be “cut in twain” and that his part will be “put with the unfaithful”. Origen explains that just so will the spirit be separated from the soul, the spirit in this case signifying either the Holy Spirit or the better part of the soul (that is, the *nous*), which is made “according to the image of God”. When this spirit will be taken away from the soul, the latter will be “put with the unfaithful”, that is, in hell (*gehenna*). Thus it is true that “the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7; *PArch* II.10.7; *SerMt* 57; 62). Yet Origen essentially holds that the soul’s torments in hell are intended to purify and to restore her to her original state of *nous* (*PArch* II.8.3; *CCels* VI.25).

#### Literature

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- R. Roukema, “Les anges attendant les âmes des défunts : une comparaison entre Origène et quelques gnostiques”, in L. Perrone, P. Bernardino, D. Marchini (eds), *Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition*, Leuven 2003, p. 367-374