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# The Not-So Gnostic Crisis: Encrateia in Exegesis

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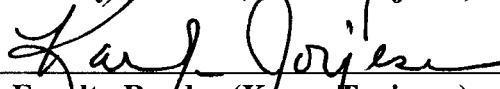
**The Not-So Gnostic Crisis:  
*Encrateia* in Exegesis**


**By  
Andrea Brooks**

**Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Claremont  
Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Religion**

**We certify that we have read this document and  
approve it as adequate in scope and quality for  
the degree of Master of Arts.**

  
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How should Christians live so as to set them apart in manner of life from Jews?

This is one of the first questions asked by early Christian exegetes as Christians sought separation from Judaism.<sup>1</sup> While it may seem like a simple and obvious question, it caused heated controversy from the second century well into the present. This struggle for orthodoxy, or an orthodox doctrine, connects to both Christianity within the teachings of Jesus, the Pauline epistles and pseudo-Pauline writings, as well as to the culture and philosophy of the East and West. Much of the debate finds itself being addressed in the broad question “how should a Christian live?” Out of this question came the development of asceticism, marking the beginnings of monasticism. There are varying degrees within asceticism itself: a mild variation existing in cities with minimal isolation and light fasting to rigorous asceticism with extreme fasting and hermetic living conditions. It is difficult to account for these various types of monasteries as written documentation did not appear immediately after monastic foundation and were sometimes skewed by historical events.<sup>2</sup> However what one can be certain of is that by 324 C.E. Pachomius (an ascetic) had attracted three followers and less than twenty five years later he created what

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<sup>1</sup> With the absence of a canonized New Testament during the infancy of Christianity, most Christians relied upon the same books as the Hellenistic Jews, the Greek version of the Old Testament. In utilizing the same books as the Jews, the Christians tended to subsume the same format of exegesis, what is referred to as “proof texting.” However, the Christians did not have the same end goal or purpose in exegeting the Old Testament, and hence their final product was not similar to that of the Jews. To be even more specific, Christians tended to use typology when exegeting the Old Testament, typology being the process by which a Christian would attempt to draw out or bring to light the events which were to foreshadow the coming of Christ, as well as the events surrounding the beginning of Christianity. Christians focused a majority of their attention, prior to the compilation of the New Testament, towards the exegesis of the Old Testament in order to provide evidence that the law found within the Old Testament was in fact fulfilled through the man called Jesus of Nazareth (R.P.C. Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church” in *The Cambridge History of The Bible: From Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 413- 416).

<sup>2</sup> It was Basil’s contemporaries and followers who often name Basil as the founder of monasticism in the East, however it is curious that there is no concern for monastic organization in Basil’s writings which can be accounted for: Basil’s mother and eldest brother preceded him. It is through Gregory of Nazianus’s letters that one discovers in 358 Basil had become part of a community that was previously in existence. In addition his sister Macrina and mother Emmelia had founded a monastery for women (Susanna Elm, *‘Virgins of God’: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 65, 78-81).

Athanasius titled “a city in the desert,” consisting of nine communities and over 3,000 monks.<sup>3</sup> Due to the movement’s expansive growth in popularity, Pachomius, among others, saw the need for organization of the community.<sup>4</sup> This is evidence of expansive growth of a movement in a short period of time.

Out of the larger question of how a Christian should live, ascetics began to question: Should Christians be celibate? Could they be married and celibate, only engaging in intercourse for procreation? Did God bless marriage and procreation as equal to celibacy? It became apparent that these questions needed resolution, and that resolution must be supported through scripture.

This was not a light task; many of the fragmentations within the early Church centered on issues of exegesis of both the Old and the New Testaments. It is through interpretation of the Scripture that doctrine of the Church took form, and hence debates ensued over who had the correct interpretation of the Bible.<sup>5</sup> This battle is evident through writings (letters, treatises, and commentaries) of ascetics who attempted to assert what they believed to be the “orthodox” position on celibacy, among other heated topics, from the second century onward. It is through the use of writing that many ascetics attempted to codify their practices.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen in a shift in monastic protocol away from seeking the advice of elders to a focus upon the written word (for instance the *Rule*

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<sup>3</sup> Elm, *Virgins of God*, 14-15, 288-289.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999), 73.

<sup>5</sup> The Arian controversy would be one such example; what do the Gospels say specifically about the nature of Christ? This specific controversy is mentioned here as it “is indicative of the weaknesses of the exegetical principles adopted by the Fathers,” that four different exegetes with different Christologies could utilize the same text to support their different theories (Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis,” 441).

<sup>6</sup> Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 68.

of Pachomius).<sup>7</sup> This took power away from individuals, and their unique interpretations, and standardized belief by focusing it upon written text. By putting their position into writing, utilizing their scriptural exegesis to support their position, ascetics and clerics alike were cementing their power and creating for themselves the position they believed to be orthodox, while simultaneously creating for the other the position of heretic.

This is important for several reasons, but what stands at the foreground is how this affected the struggle for orthodox doctrine concerning celibacy between the “heretic” and the “orthodox”, between the radical ascetic and the ascetic.<sup>8</sup> While the “heretics” and “orthodox” were battling amongst themselves and each other it is important to note that they were doing so to discover and possess the Truth.<sup>9</sup> This truth, which finds itself expressed in the term orthodoxy, would then be the foundation of the Church. Therefore, the written position on celibacy, in this case, was functioning in two ways: first, it was asserting through the use of Scriptural interpretation the “orthodox” position on celibacy in answer to the question “is there a new calling for Christians to live as celibates?” and secondly, it was functioning to separate what was the Orthodox from the heretical.

The separation of orthodoxy from heresy has long been misunderstood. It was not until Walter Bauer published his book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* that precepts about the formation of orthodoxy were actualized in a format that was much more complicated than previously suspected. Bauer came to the conclusion that into the beginning of the second century there existed a number of groups which identified

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<sup>7</sup> Rousseau, *Ascetics*, 70.

<sup>8</sup> The words heretic and orthodox find themselves in quotation as by the second and third centuries there is yet to be an Orthodox doctrine.

<sup>9</sup> “But this dispute as to who is a proper philologist, grammarian, editor, or interpreter is ultimately irresolvable and little more than a polemical strategy because the participants are committed more to meaning than to textuality” (David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 230).

themselves as “Christian,” as is supported by Ignatius who referred to the “catholic church” as if there was a uniform structure.<sup>10</sup> However, Bauer points out that by the end of the second century a separation occurs from Rome into the “great” church and the “*mass perditionis*,” the heretic.<sup>11</sup> According to Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, this “heresiological design that pits heresy against orthodoxy... proves to be unsuited to the historical reality of early Christianity, which is more complex and more diverse than ever thought.”<sup>12</sup> As it is the aim of this thesis to provide an overview of the celibacy debate as it pertains to the creation of the labels “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” it is pertinent to examine third-century Alexandria. What is particularly interesting about this time is that:

Even into the third century, no separation between orthodoxy and heresy was accomplished in Egypt and the two types of Christianity were not yet at all clearly differentiated from each other. Moreover, until late in the second century, Christianity in this area is decidedly unorthodox. I avoid for the moment the term “heretics” for the Egyptian Christians of the early period (and the same holds for the beginnings at Edessa) because, strictly speaking, there can be heretics only where orthodox Christians stand in contrast to them or serve as a background for them, but not where such a situation does not exist because all of Christendom, when viewed from a particular later vantage point, is colored ‘heretical.’<sup>13</sup>

Therefore to speak of Orthodox versus heretic is to be vastly misunderstanding the condition of the church at this period. Third-century Alexandria holds a piece of this struggle, to discover who has the truth of Christianity.

One part of the conflict within Alexandria occurred over the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Although this paper focuses on two exegetes within the third century, Clement was certainly not the first to address this issue. In fact, the

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996), 229.

<sup>11</sup> Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “Asceticism and Anthropology: *Enkrateia* and ‘Double Creation’ in Early Christianity” in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valentasis (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 129.

<sup>13</sup> Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 59.

conversation began in the second century within the so-called “Gnostic Crisis.”<sup>14</sup> The debate over celibacy and the relation between the Old and New Testaments actual finds itself linked theologically in some of the Gnostic schools within Alexandria, who were not amiss in their influence upon Clement and Origen.<sup>15</sup> This debate actually had very little to do with Gnosticism,<sup>16</sup> but rather with radical ascetics known as the “Encratites.”<sup>17</sup> The name appears to be first used by Irenaeus in his book *Against Heresies*. These “Encratites,” in a sweeping generalization, preach abstinence from marriage in order to put an end to human reproduction as sexuality was not within God’s plan, but was a result of “the fall.” As sexuality became a result of “the fall” it does not have a blessing upon it as holy, and hence is not considered holy within the practice of Christianity. This movement encompassing *encrateia* spurred on Christian discourse as to whether or not celibacy was required for salvation, to return to paradise. As this movement sparked much controversy it is surprising that one man’s writing, Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*, “was a decisive moment in the development of early Christian discourse on “orthodoxy” and “heresy”...From this point forward, the notion of “heresy” was to include the

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<sup>14</sup> Hunter, *Marriage Celibacy and Heresy*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> There were some schools of Gnosticism that theologically link the debate concerning celibacy to the relation of the Old and New Testament. These Gnostic connected marriage and procreation to an evil creation based upon the Gnostic dualism of principles and natures (Gasparro, “Asceticism and Anthropology,” 130). For more information about Gnosticism and their views on “the fall” and salvation see J. Zandee, “Gnostic Ideas on the Fall and Salvation” *Numen* 11 (1964): 13-74.

<sup>16</sup> Gnosticism is similar in treatment to the term “Encratite” (see the following footnote) in the aspect that it is difficult to define one Gnostic sect/position. For further information see Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> The reason that the title “Encratite” is within quotation marks is due to the fact that such a group is more of a “heresiological fiction” than fact. It seems that “heretical” ideologies which stem from rigorist *encrateia* such as Tatian and Marcion became lumped together to represent a radical ascetic movement against which the “orthodox” are fighting. More or less the term “Encratite,” as well as the names Tatian and Marcion, were used as a category that served a heresiological purpose, that of framing the opposition to the truth (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 101-102). Even though there were moderate views concerning *encrateia*, the word stuck with those of a more radical position and came to function as their label, the “Encratites” (Gasparro, “Asceticism and Anthropology,” 130).



encratite rejection of sexual intercourse and marriage.”<sup>18</sup> Following the writing of Irenaeus the “heretical” discourse came to include denigration the Old Testament blessing of marriage, while the “orthodox” discourse supports reaffirmation of the Old Testament for Christians and with it, marriage. While it appears that this statement by David Hunter marks the end of the debate over what constitutes an Orthodox ruling on the blessing of marriage and procreation for Christians, it only marks the beginning of a conversation which continues today.

For the purpose of this paper two heretical groups which spurred on the most heated debates concerning celibacy, either promoting a liberal or a rigorous ascetic lifestyle, will be highlighted and discussed in their treatment by Clement and Origen: the “Libertines” and the “Encratites” (Tatian and Marcion included).<sup>19</sup> The Libertines, found themselves at the opposite end of the spectrum from the “Encratites” as they professed laws of universality and birth of innate equality.<sup>20</sup> For this reason they posited a lack of right and wrong; henceforth following one’s pleasure did not endanger eternal salvation. Tatian, on the other end of the spectrum, teaches that marriage and fornication are one and the same, and that marriage was introduced by the devil.<sup>21</sup> While Satan did not figure his way into Marcion’s theology concerning marriage, the God of the Old

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<sup>18</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> As previously touched upon in footnote 11 many scholars argue that these groups were not actually separate groups, but perhaps were used by Clement in rhetorical fashion to create separation between those who hold the truth and the “heretical.” While Clement addresses a multitude of “heretical” groups he is actually speaking against, as he later notes himself in 5.40, two opposing ideologies; one being the radical ideas of *enkrateia* found in Tatian and Marcion and the other a more liberal lifestyle argued through the labels “Libertine” and “Carpocratians” (Clement, “Stromata” 3.5.40 in *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 58).

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Clement does not make an in depth analysis of the distinctions between either the Libertines or the Carpocratians within his writing. This again is due in part to the fact that these groups were not separate, but are being used as rhetorical categories. A testament to this is the difficulty to separate who he is speaking against in a large portion of “On Marriage” (Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.5-10, 42-45).

<sup>21</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.49, 62.

Testament, who we are informed he entitles the “Creator God”, has produced evil creations.<sup>22</sup> Due to this belief, Marcion espouses that he does not wish to fill this world and so promotes strict celibacy as the “orthodox” way for Christians to live. It is within this environment that Clement enters into the discussion of celibacy and writes his *Stromata III* entitled “On Marriage.”<sup>23</sup>

As Clement lived from 150-215 C.E., he was located historically before exegesis became formalized into commentary form; which was later to be utilized by Origen. Although exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, as it pertains to Christians, had yet to be taken to the level of formalization it is pertinent to include Clement for a multitude of reasons. First, Clement’s *Stromata III* is an entire treatise specifically devoted to finding the truth, through scriptural interpretation, of the place of marriage in Christianity over and against the Libertines, Tatian, and Marcion; whom he mentions ad-nausem. Clement’s “On Marriage” is a comprehensive segue into the debate over celibacy after the so-called “Gnostic Crisis” through which these groups are labeled “heretical.” It is clear that while radical ascetic ideology concerning celibacy has been labeled “heretical,” there has yet to be an agreement upon a decidedly “orthodox” position, and hence the existence of a so-called heretical position is not in fact heretical. It appears that it is for this reason that Clement devotes a significant portion of his writing to identifying what these “heretics” espouse and proceeding point for point to explain why they are wrong

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<sup>22</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.3.12, 46.

<sup>23</sup> It is not until the end of the second century that the New Testament began to receive even close to the same amount of attention from exegetes as the Old Testament (Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis,” 416). However, it must be noted that this shift in attention from the Old Testament to the New did not occur overnight, nor was there an ease in transition. Many of the early debates which served to fragment the different Christian communities centered on the meaning and application of the Scripture within the second century (Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 290). It is within this time frame that one can see different groups begin to debate over the “orthodoxy” of one book against another, between a Pauline heritage and a Gnostic heritage (Young, *Biblical Exegesis and Culture*, 62).

according to his reading of scripture, taking care to highlight where they are using false exegesis of scripture themselves. In doing so this piece of literature gives an overview of the theological topography of Alexandria and the early division between “orthodox” and “heretical” groups over celibacy.<sup>24</sup>

Clement’s writing functions as an intermediate piece of literature as compared to his successor Origen, who begins to turn the debate back towards ascetic ideology. While Clement is fully accepting of marriage as equal to virginity, Origen will push the envelope away from admitting a blessing on marriage, even though they are both writing in opposition to the same groups of “heretics” to support the truth of the scriptures. What is particularly interesting to look at, and will be shown through this paper, is the pattern of acceptance of the rejection of ascetic tendencies to the gradual acceptance of ascetic tendencies again.<sup>25</sup>

With Origen comes the shift back towards asceticism as it pertains to celibacy being a higher calling than marriage. This difference in opinion was due in part to the impact of the philosophical culture on Origen, how he viewed the body in relation to society, as well as his belief that the unified message throughout the Bible lifted spiritual marriage as higher than physical marriage. Hunter also recognizes this as “Origen presented an approach to Christian asceticism that reproduced key features of the earlier encratite worldview...because sexuality continually threatens to divert the attention of the

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<sup>24</sup> As mentioned previously this is a very muddy period in Christian history, especially in Alexandria, as some version of what we now deem Orthodox Christianity is difficult to prove. In saying that, while Clement is a proponent of “orthodoxy” he is not completely “orthodox” himself as Bauer says: Clement never lost his enthusiasm for ‘gnosis.’ To be sure he makes a distinction between genuine and heretical gnosis, and feels himself to be separated from the latter and linked with the former though the holy apostles Peter, James, John, and Paul (*Strom.* 1.[1.]11.3)” (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 57).

<sup>25</sup> David Hunter notes this shift: “If the writings of Irenaeus and Clement accurately reflect the orthodox consensus in the early third century, it appears the voice of moderation had achieved a tentative victory over radical encratism” as “a new rigorism soon emerged in the churches of the third and fourth centuries” (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 113).

rational creatures away from the spiritual world... it could not serve the salvic purposes of God.”<sup>26</sup> It can be speculated that Clement’s exegesis of scripture was dismissed as the focus upon the decentralized houses of worship shifted to what Brown deems “the upper echelons of the Church”<sup>27</sup> or a focus upon the ones who held positions of ecclesial power. In addition, it certainly did not hurt Origen’s quest to prove an “orthodox” position that he was to the first to formalize exegesis. Origen not only put exegesis into the form of a commentary, but he also revolutionized exegesis; pushing it to the level of an academic pursuit: “commentators would now, following Origen’s example, range freely over the whole Bible in order to illustrate the meaning of a word or an image. It gained in depth of scholarship, in methodical, almost scientific approach.”<sup>28</sup> As he was the first formal exegete<sup>29</sup> within the Christian Church it should prove interesting to view how he turned back to asceticism, favoring virginity over marriage, to be the championed “orthodox” position over Clement’s.

Origen did not write a complete treatise on virginity or marriage, therefore it is the most prudent to look to both his homilies and his commentaries. Of particular importance to the discussion of virginity, as previously mentioned, are the Pauline writings. As 1 Corinthians 7 is a very popular and widely used chapter for ascetics, it would be pertinent to analyze. However, only fragments of Origen’s commentary remain and there are currently no English translations available. Therefore, the first place one

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<sup>26</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 123-124.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University press, 1988), 138.

<sup>28</sup> Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis,” 438.

<sup>29</sup> Origen did not *create* his mode of exegesis, rather it is the Gnostics to which one can give credit to the *form* of biblical commentary that is now familiar to biblical studies students. Gnosticism certainly did not miss Origen in impact and it is to Origen which scholars attribute the first “formalization and popularization” of scriptural exegesis as it is known today (Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis,” 419).

would look to analyze Origen's position on virginity is Romans Ch. 6, 7, 8 and a few verses in Ch. 12, 13, 14 which play a significant role.<sup>30</sup> From there it is of interest to glance at his homilies on Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus to see what Origen contributes to this conversation surrounding the Old Testament blessing on marriage. The fact that Origen's writing is not a treatise, but a commentary does make a difference when attempting to analyze his work in relation to the debate surrounding celibacy as Origen is responding directly to the scripture; however, throughout Origen's commentary he does highlight false exegesis of the scripture he is commenting on. In addition, Origen's commentary is enlightening, in so far as it becomes a foundation concerning the acceptance of celibacy as a higher calling than marriage, as Scripture is not simply listed in succession, rather it becomes dissected and put into a complete picture (something, one will note, Clement does not do). Therefore from the start of the third century with Clement to the end with Origen one will see a vast development of exegesis and application against "heretics."

Through an examination of third-century Alexandria it will become apparent that exegesis, as a role player, becomes distinct in the creation of the "heretic." While Clement's writings concerning celibacy were not strictly exegetical, he did utilize scripture within his writings to defend his position on celibacy. This served to safeguard the holiness of marriage, an institution in which the silent majority consisted, against the demand of celibacy from rigorous ascetics. By providing scriptural evidence that

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<sup>30</sup> Origen believed that the theme of Romans is clarification of how the Jewish religion has been transformed, essentially explaining how the religion has changed. Within this transformation there are two changes: salvation is now open to Jews and Gentiles, and transformation of the individual from the flesh to the spirit. Both salvation and transformation require a choice (Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 30-31). This theme runs parallel to Origen's theme of transformation of body, soul, and spirit.

marriage was indeed blessed as holy by God he could condemn the “heretics” as blasphemous, while creating a position of “orthodoxy” that befits the Church parishioners. Origen, on the other hand, does not simply insert Scripture in treatises, but becomes enveloped in the process of exegesis itself. To this day Origen is upheld as the greatest biblical exegete in Christian history, and hence is formative to later exegetes who modeled their interpretation after his. The third century becomes the building ground for later debates. It is within this time period that development of an “orthodox” position concerning celibacy is created, complete continence as a higher calling. Yet, that is not where the debate began. As previously mentioned the main focus within the second century was focused upon “heretics” who promoted strict abstinence. One will see through the scriptural argumentation of Clement and Origen against these heretics” that they move the conversation away from such an intense focus upon sexuality to complete continence in every part of the Christians life. This is done in such a way that it broadens the conversation and use of scripture to complete a larger picture of “orthodoxy” while simultaneously providing more ammunition against the “heretics” to prove themselves as possessors of the truth.

What will be discovered through the discourse of this paper is that the “heretical” groups do not change from the second century to the third, from Clement to Origen. As the journey begins at Clement we are introduced to several different groups, the key players being the Libertines, Tatian, and Marcion. Although neither the “Encratites,” nor Tatian or Marcion’s name ever appears in Origen’s commentary, his translator Rufinus (contemporary and once friend of Jerome) inserts footnotes sporadically to note who he is speaking of when he says “some” or “heretics” without mention of name based upon

general theology. Having said all of that, these heresiological categories or individuals, Libertines, Tatian, and Marcionites, may simply be labels rather than a historical reality. As Teresa Shaw cautions, “both ancient sources and modern scholarship tend to adopt and perpetuate stock heresiological, hagiographical, and theological categories that appear in the second century and are entrenched by the fourth century.”<sup>31</sup> She continues, “individuals such as Tatian became caricatures, and classificatory entities such as ‘enkratite,’ which is ‘in many respects, a heresiological fiction,’ take on a reality that continues to influence our reading.”<sup>32</sup> The application of rhetorical labels is what this thesis seeks to highlight as Clement and Origen write in opposition to these heresiological groups. How do they frame these groups? Do Clement and Origen use derogatory labels or titles to refer to these groups to set them apart as “heretical”? How do they describe these groups and their theology? It is to be expected that these groups or individuals become somewhat of a caricature of themselves, as was noted by Shaw, as each writer is attempting to set themselves up in a position to prove themselves to be or in this case found, orthodox doctrine. In this way each uses his own rhetoric to locate the opposing group in a “heretical” camp.

There will be multiple analyses performed throughout the entirety of this paper concerning each writer’s exegesis. The first is how each writer used exegesis to analyze the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as it pertains to celibacy. This will be viewed in terms of how the “orthodox” situated themselves in relation to the “heretic” and how the “heretic” was fashioned through parameters created by the process of

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<sup>31</sup> Teresa Shaw, “Vegetarianism, Heresy, and Asceticism in Late Ancient Christianity” in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology*, ed. Rachel Muer and David Grumett (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 75.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw, “Vegetarianism,” 76.

exegesis. As it pertains to the creation of a “heretic” in the use of exegesis, one can somewhat too simply describe the use of the Old Testament in two ways: positive and negative. For example, if an exegete interprets the Old Testament in too positive a light, a continuation of the blessing of marriage can be supported; however, if the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is too negative, one may end up denigrating the Old Testament by blaspheming the God of the Old Testament and his creation.

The second issue concerns how each exegete steered away from the intense focus upon sexual abstinence, or liberality, and began to develop an “orthodox” position of complete continence maintaining that denigration of marriage is a “heretical” doctrine. Of particular interest is their use of scripture. Paul has remained a focus of scriptural exegesis concerning celibacy for centuries, as he speaks directly to the subject in multiple letters within Romans 6, 7, and 8, and especially within the most ascetic writing of 1 Corinthians 7. As Paul’s writings appear ascetic in nature<sup>33</sup> he was utilized by ascetic authors to make a powerful argument for celibacy as the higher calling. Paul’s ascetic leaning is due in part to the fact that Paul was writing at a time when he believed the end was imminent, as a result “the hermeneutical principle for Paul had changed, and with it the rules were also changing.”<sup>34</sup> It should be of interest to analyze how each exegete uses Paul as either a proponent for celibacy or a proponent for marriage.<sup>35</sup> In addition, it will

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<sup>33</sup> Will Deming in his book, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, sought to revisit the past scholarship performed on this chapter hypothesizing a gross misunderstanding. According to Deming, Paul may not be the ascetic champion of virginity, but a calculate proponent of being remaining unmarried due to the bonds of marriage, not sexuality (Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthinans 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4).

<sup>34</sup> Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 9. See also Charles A. Frazee, “The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church” *Church History* 41 (1972):149.

<sup>35</sup> Clark notes this specifically in reference to 1 Corinthians 7. As Clark so aptly points out, Paul is not addressing one group of individuals within Chapter 7, but runs the gamut, speaking to virgins, the married,



be of interest to analyze both Clement and Origen's overall use of scripture. Did Clement use different pieces of scripture which Origen would claim speak to the weak? Does Origen choose passages that contain a more ascetic message? How do they tackle the major verses which are in contention between both the "heretics" and the "orthodox" alike? And how do they use scripture to create the "heretic?" Throughout the discourse of this paper these questions will be sought and answered.

Several scholars have influenced my research as it pertains to the history of asceticism. Elizabeth Clark's work is an enormous resource when looking specifically at ascetic exegesis. Her research, especially in *Reading Renunciation*, takes the reader through major passages which were used in the debate over celibacy and expertly analyzes how each exegete used their different "tools" to promote their particular message. For example, during the period known as "early Christianity" all of the exegetes believed that Paul was the author of the pastorals and the epistles and, since there appears to be a double message concerning marriage and virginity, they needed to find a way to reconcile this message. Clark worked intently to show how each writer performed exegesis on these popular but seemingly contradictory verses to speak to the message they wanted to convey. Hence her research provided the foundation that scripture could be asceticized, which is very valuable to my research as this paper is exploring how the debate over celibacy began with a "heretical" viewpoint of rigorous asceticism to equality of marriage and celibacy to asceticism as accepted (within the upper levels of the church) as "orthodoxy."

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and widows. This allows for a large opportunity of varied interpretation and use of Paul. This can be seen in her comment that "the exhortations of patristic writers to *their* contemporaries, intersected in unexpected ways with the varied advice Paul had addressed to specific Christian constituencies at Corinth" (Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 261).

Peter Brown's research in *The Body and Society*, also makes significant contributions to this discussion as he provides much of the cultural and philosophical information on aspects of the body. As philosophy was such an integral part to society, often being intertwined within religion, it became a necessity to understand how the philosophy which affected the view of the body and its relation to religion played upon both Clement and Origen.

David Hunter's *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* also became a valuable tool for examination of the history of the debate over celibacy back to second century. His thorough examination of the main players during the second and third centuries, both "heretics" and "orthodox" alike, aided in placing Clement and Origen within the debate and understanding how they functioned to change its shape.

## Chapter One:

### Clement of Alexandria

#### The Impact of Philosophy on Scriptural Interpretation

No exegete is writing in isolation. This statement will be made evident through a treatise written by Clement, “On Marriage,” as he is very influenced by Stoic philosophy and strains of Gnosticism. Through the use of the philosophy of the body, in combination with the scriptures, Clement was able to divert attention away from the body as sexual to the body as spiritual. In doing so, Clement uses philosophy against his opponents in the same way as he uses scripture. By identifying their misuse of philosophical writings, Clement is able to maintain the label of “heretic” for his opponents, while simultaneously supporting his interpretation of philosophy as a Christian truth.

Although Clement has numerous writings, it is through two of his major treatises which one can extract his ideology on virginity and marriage: *Stromata III* “On Marriage” and *Paidagogos*.<sup>36</sup> Through these two writings Clement attempted to show that both Christian and Greco Roman ideals were compatible; for what cannot be ignored is the fact that Christians were not separate from, but were part of a larger community within society. As Christians were immersed within a pagan society Clement did not limit himself in argumentation strictly to scriptural exegesis, but drew from philosophical

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<sup>36</sup> There is only space in this paper to fully discuss *Stromata III*.

ideals as well. While today theology and philosophy are often kept separate, Clement, and theologians of the third century often did not separate the two.<sup>37</sup>

Essentially, Hellenistic philosophy was part of Christian philosophy. It was Clement's belief that the *Logos* inspired the Greek philosophers; making Christianity the fulfillment of the Hellenistic tradition.<sup>38</sup> Alongside scripture Clement makes use of Hellenistic philosophy of the body to defend the holiness of marriage, concentrating on the physical body as a source of inner spiritual strength. This removes a focus upon the body as flesh, a filthy sexual being, and places focus onto the body as a way to know God, and become more Christ-like. This can be seen in Clement's use of both Stoic ideals and Platonic metaphysics.<sup>39</sup> For instance, the Stoic sage was known to be intimately devoted to a higher power. In order to attain this intimacy, however, one must be very active in pursuing this relationship.<sup>40</sup> Clement's use of the Stoic sage in conjunction with Christian theology, allowed for him to develop a very "introspective doctrine."<sup>41</sup> This idea of introspection connects deeply with what Clement referred to as *apatheia*, freedom from the "passions."<sup>42</sup> This will be teased out much more in depth when an actual analysis is performed on "On Marriage," however, in a simple manner, "introspective doctrine" functions for Clement in this way: Salvation does not come from election, but from knowledge of God. Knowledge of God comes through being able to find the truth within the scriptures and living out one's life accordingly. This then aids one in attaining

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<sup>37</sup> As Hunter notes: "Clement's teaching on marriage closely followed the pattern set by Greco-Roman moralists, such as Plutarch and Musonius Rufus, who saw marriage as fully compatible with the life of philosophical virtue" (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 106).

<sup>38</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 105.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 128. Although it must be noted that Clement's ideology can never be boiled down to pure Stoicism.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 129.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 130.

control over the passions of the body- the desires which drive a person to sin, to attaining complete continence.

By using this "introspective doctrine" supported by both philosophy and scripture, Clement can provide ammunition against his opponents who claim that freedom is gained through rigorist asceticism;<sup>43</sup> for Clement puts forth that "just as humility consists in meekness and not in treating one's body roughly, so also continence is a virtue of the soul which is not manifest to others, but is in secret."<sup>44</sup> If one cannot get control over their passions, then they will never come to the knowledge of God, and hence will never receive salvation. Therefore, it is a looking inward to purify one's body that the mind can be free to accept the knowledge of God. In Clement's use of the Stoic sage, he was able to draw parallels between the lives of Christians and pagan Greco-Roman citizens; by doing so, he inadvertently made Christianity less foreign to those who had not had much interaction with the religion.

While Clement certainly did make use of philosophy, he believed that some philosophers, namely Plato and Pythagoras, were responsible for the beliefs of heretics as he notes: "the philosophers whom we have mentioned, from whom the Marcionites blasphemously derive their doctrine that birth is evil" and "he [Carpocrates] was

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<sup>43</sup> This idea of freedom gained through rigorous ascetic practices has underlying roots in the debate over Adam and Eve's initial experience with sexual intercourse. Tatian put forth that sexuality and sexual intercourse first occurred after the fall and were hence a product of "original sin." Clement, referring to this as "the fall," does not speak in terms of "original sin" (as it implies a defect within creation which he vehemently guards as good). However, as Tatian believes that sexual intercourse was a result of "the fall" of Adam and Eve, he also believes that this form of sin can be transmitted through sexual intercourse and hence freedom from sexual sin can be achieved through physical virginity (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 110).

<sup>44</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata" 3.6.48, 62. By no means did Clement supported indulgence. As found throughout *Stromata III* "On Marriage," Clement did argue for restraint in daily activities such as eating and sleeping, however he did not support a harsh regime in which one would completely deprive oneself of such substances. When commenting on 1 Corinthians 6:13 "Food is for the belly and the belly for food..." Clement interprets this as an "attack [on] those who think they can live like wild pigs and goats, lest they should indulge their physical appetites without restraint" (Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.47, 62).

instructed in the knowledge of the Monad, which is the root-origin of the Carpocratians' heresy.<sup>45</sup> Like Scripture, the "heretics" are using the same philosophical sources to make their argument and as with Scripture, Clement will defend misuse of the philosophers with their writings. For instance, Clement breaks down Plato's argument to show how Marcion is misinterpreting Plato when he states "And to sum up briefly, he has given Marcion no opening for his view that matter is evil, when he himself says of the world, 'All that is good the world has received from him who has composed it;'"<sup>46</sup> By quoting from *Phaedo* Clement is doing the same thing with philosophy as he does with scripture, attempting to come to the correct interpretation and expose pieces which clearly negate their argument. He does not stop there, but pushes forward to make perfectly clear that he has had enough of the misuse of philosophy by the "heretics"; "enough of this...we shall consider the difference between the views of the philosophers and the Marcionites [in discussing *First Principles*]."<sup>47</sup> In recognizing that the Marcionites developed their doctrines from the philosophers, Clement is quick to combat their misuse of these philosophies as he is also using them to support marriage. By making this distinction Clement was attempting to separate "orthodox" Christianity and application of philosophy, from that of the "heretical" who were also making use of Greco-Roman philosophy.

Through the use of the philosophy, one can see that Clement was attempting to escape intense focus upon the sinfulness of physical sexuality to bring forth the correct interpretation of the philosophy of the body. By using the notion of the Stoic sage Clement was able to move focus inward, to using the body as a vehicle to become more

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<sup>45</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.3.12, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.3.19, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.3.21, 49.

spiritually connected with God. In addition, and what will be made clearer later is that Clement used scripture in the same way he used philosophy; he would use the same texts as his opponents and quotes lines from philosophers which stood in opposition to their interpretations. This allowed Clement to place a claim of misinterpretation upon the "heretics." We will see review exactly how Clement separates the "heretics" from the "orthodox" as it relates to Biblical scripture in the next two sections.

### **Positive Interpretation: The Continued Blessing of Marriage from the Old Testament**

Clement belongs to the camp of positive exegetes when it comes to the relation of the Old and New Testaments. There are two major tenets off of which Clement supports the continued blessing of marriage through his analysis of the relation of the Testaments. The first tenet holds that as the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament, the Old Testament cannot contradict the New Testament. The second tenet is that the Son will hold up the laws of the Father. By utilizing Genesis and Exodus in concert with the Gospels, Clement can scripturally support a continued blessing for marriage; allowing him to condemn the Libertines who posit no right and wrong, and the encratites who claim opposition to the evil "creator God."

In order to provide a counter argument to the libertines and encratites Clement found himself in a position where he must find scriptural support between the Old and New Testaments. He begins with a question to set the foundation for his first tenet: "How then can marriage be a state only intended for ancient times and an invention of the law, and marriage on Christian principles of a different nature, if we hold that the Old and

New Testament proclaims the same God?"<sup>48</sup> As the author of the Law and the Gospels are the same, they cannot contradict one another. In order to prove that the God of the Old Testament is the same God as the New Testament he utilizes Paul in Romans 7:12: "the law is holy and the commandment holy, righteous and good" and so states "I do not know how anyone can say he knows God when he asserts that the command of God is sin. If the law is holy marriage is holy."<sup>49</sup> Not only does Clement use Paul to support the law as holy and to disprove "heretical" accusations of the disunity of the Bible, he adds that as the law is still holy, the blessing on marriage is still holy. In addition, Clement adds another Pauline verse where Paul uses "thou shall" language, the same as in the Old Testament, to prove that the law is as Gospel: Romans 7:7: "What shall we say? That the law is sin? God forbid. I had not known sin except for the law; and I had not known lust unless the law had said, Thou shall not lust."<sup>50</sup> By using these specific verses from the Gospel and Paul Clement is creating continuation between the Old and New Testaments.

After firmly establishing his first tenet he makes his second: if the Father commanded it the Son will keep it, using Matthew 5:17: "I come to destroy the law but to fulfill it" as scriptural support.<sup>51</sup> He is directing these verses against the "heretics," the encratites, who denigrate the Old Testament by claiming that the God of the New Testament is a different God, and hence the blessing on marriage is no longer applicable to Christians. By using Paul he can provide strong scriptural support that since Christ did not come to do away with the law, the law still stands. This functions for Clement to disprove the radical ascetics on two of their major tenets.

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<sup>48</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.12.83, 79.

<sup>49</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.12.84, 79-80.

<sup>50</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.11.76, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.46, 61.



Not only does Clement speak of *why* the Old and New Testaments apply to the lives of Christians, but he also addresses *how* when writing against the “Libertines.” Previously mentioned, the Libertines (a label which in Clement’s work encompasses Carpocrates and Basilides) put forth that universal righteousness was given to all and that all births were alike due to innate equality.<sup>52</sup> With the introduction of governmental laws, the universality of divine laws was destroyed.<sup>53</sup> Working off of this foundation, all was common property, even wives. Monogamy in marriage therefore was a human law, and not a law of God.<sup>54</sup> As monogamy, they believed, was not a law of God, but a law instituted by humanity, the libertines engaged in sexual intercourse with whomever they delighted. According to Clement, in order to combat this “heresy” which “through them the worst calumny has become currently against the Christian name,” Clement has “quoted these remarks to prove in error those Basilidians.”<sup>55</sup> The first thing Clement does is highlight the commandments, given by God to Moses, vanquishing the claim that God set up laws which were universal, rather than a system of laws based upon a right and a wrong: Exodus 20:14: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”<sup>56</sup> Secondly, he utilizes the New Testament in Matthew 5:28: “Everyone who looks lustfully has already committed adultery” to show that not only does the commandment from the Old Testament stand, but Christ adds to it by including adultery in thought.<sup>57</sup> He follows this up with another verse from the Old Testament Exodus 20:17: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife” linked to a verse from the New Testament Romans 4:16:<sup>58</sup> “For Abraham is father not

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<sup>52</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.6, 42

<sup>53</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.7, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.8, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.5, 42; 3.1.3, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.8, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.8, 44.

<sup>58</sup> paraphrased by Clement.

only of the Hebrew, but also of the Gentiles.”<sup>59</sup> He further speaks of Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 when he says “[I]f the adulteress and he committed fornication with her are punished to death,” to show that not only is there a solid law concerning the monogamy of a marriage, but that it also applies to Gentiles.<sup>60</sup> By layering Old/New then Old/New Clement can provide evidence of a specific command by God, not humanity, and that it applies to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. By using scripture in this pattern Clement is able to construct support against the “heretics” claims to innate equality as simultaneously abolishing the law and God; and in doing so making the statement that “[t]hey ought not, therefore, to take as a covering cloak the name of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Clement is essentially ensuring to do two things within this section: the first is to inform the reader that he is purposefully “attempting to prove in error” these doctrines, that they are ruining the name of Christianity, and henceforth do not deserve to take the name of Christ. He intersperses these comments to rhetorically further cause condemnation to these groups. Second, by using both the Old and New Testaments Clement is answering *how* the Old Testament applies to the life of Christians in establishing the Law as continuous.<sup>62</sup>

Through addressing the *why* and *how* Clement also touches upon misuse of Old Testament scripture by both the libetines and the encratites. This is most evident through his discussion concerning those he entitles *antitactae*, or opponents, as they oppose the Father. Notice that Clement does not call the group by the male leaders name (commonly how heretical groups got their sectarian title), but that he labels them *opponents*. This is one way in which Clement can quickly and easily “otherize” a group from Christianity,

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<sup>59</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.8, 44.

<sup>60</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.9, 44.

<sup>61</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.1.3, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.2.8, 44.

creating/sustaining a “heretical” status simply in name. This group puts forth that everything created by God the Father was good, but one of his creations planted evil and hence set creation in opposition to the Father. The sowing of evil then set all of humanity in opposition to the Father, and hence they seek to abolish all commandments by committing them. In this way they argue that Exodus 20:14: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” is a commandment to commit adultery. Clement utilizes the teaching held in Matthew 7:16 to respond: “We have been taught to recognize by their works false prophets and all who merely pretend to the truth.”<sup>63</sup> As they are attempting to rebel against the Father their works will show their evil for “are you not blasphemous, therefore, when you oppose, as you say, the Creator, and endeavor to do the same as fornicators and adulterers?”<sup>64</sup> Clement further challenges this sect through use of the commandments in the Old Testament which they do not oppose. Why not oppose Genesis 1:28: “Increase and multiply” and abstain from sexual intercourse?<sup>65</sup> In addition, they should not be partaking of the food on this earth as the Father commanded in Genesis 1:29: “I have given you all things for food and enjoyment.”<sup>66</sup> By addressing specific commandments to which they do not adhere, Clement brings light to a doctrine that is inconsistent and flawed. This is simply another way in which Clement can use scripture to identify this group as “heretical.” Clement has done two things with his use of scripture: first, he has created a label for them denoting them as outsiders from the Christian faith, and second he has used the New Testament in reaction to a quote from the Old Testament to show how they have misused the Old Testament commandment and to

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<sup>63</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.35, 55.

<sup>64</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.37, 57.

<sup>65</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.37, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.37, 56.

identify them as decidedly “blasphemous.” By accusing a group of blasphemy is to assure their denial of salvation and their status as “heretical.”

The misuse, false exegesis, of the Old and New Testaments is a central issue when it comes to the creation of orthodoxy and heresy and Clement is quick to point out that often “heretics” interpret some verses literally that should be interpreted allegorically, collecting “extracts from the prophets, making a selection and mischievously stringing them together.”<sup>67</sup> For example, Malachi 3:15: “They resisted God and were saved.”<sup>68</sup> The *antitactae* interpret this to support their ideology that God wants humanity to oppose him. By referencing a verse within the same book Clement identifies a group of people with the same beliefs that are not favorable in the eyes of God, but cause God strain: Malachi 2:17: “‘You who provoke God with your words,’ says Malachi, ‘have even said “wherein have we provoked him? In this, that you said, Anyone who does evil is good in the Lord’s sight, and he is well pleased with them; and, Where is the God of righteousness?”’”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, he is able to use the same book to prove their misinterpretation of Malachi.<sup>70</sup> Not only are they misinterpreting this verse, but they added to the scripture by inserting the word “shameless” before God.<sup>71</sup> Clement highlights the insertion of shameless to emphasize how they tamper with scripture itself not only in misinterpretation, but through additions to the text itself: “These are they who

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<sup>67</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.38, 57.

<sup>68</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.38, 57.

<sup>69</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.39, 58.

<sup>70</sup> This same tactic was seen in the previous section concerning philosophy.

<sup>71</sup> Dawson expands this particular incident to the larger debate over the use of allegory within late second-century Alexandria. As there were a variety of communities, attempting to come to the true or literal sense of the scripture, there arose multiple allegorical interpretations. “Indeed, in opposing his allegorical reading opponents (principally Valentinians and Basiliseans), Clement is forced to appeal to something than his own allegorical readings. The need to define and protect group boundaries forces Clement to read more ‘intratextually’ ... He attacks competing Christian groups for failing to read according to these patterns- for arbitrarily selecting texts from the prophets and combining them in inappropriate ways.” This argument, over the misinterpretation or misuse of allegorical interpretation by Clement accuses his opponents of not understanding the rhetorical manner utilized by the *Logos* (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 225-226).

when reading the Bible pervert the sense to their own desires by their tone of voice, and by changing certain accents and marks of punctuation twist words that are wise and useful to conform to their own lusts.”<sup>72</sup> Clement further addresses this ideology and attempts to prove its “heretical” components by using Paul in Romans 3:8: “And not as we are blasphemously accused and some assert that we say, Let us do evil that good may come, an argument which is rightly condemned.”<sup>73</sup> By using Paul he is using the power behind this apostle to condemn their exact doctrine;<sup>74</sup> when he claims he can locate in both the Old and the New Testaments warnings of these doctrines and behaviors, Clement can easily corner his opponent. In addition, he calls attention to their false exegesis, and how they are using the Bible to their own ends, rather than attempting to uncover the truth within the Word. This is a general tactic used by most exegetes.

Clement also attacked the encratites with the charge of misinterpretation. Tatian, according to Clement, put forth that marriage is an institution that was introduced by the devil and is considered fornication. Not only did he promote that marriage is an institution of the devil, but he supported this ideology by claiming that as Christ had no need for a spouse, and lived in virginity, we should imitate Christ. He makes use of the Old Testament to show that one cannot look to Christ as it concerns marriage for “he was

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<sup>72</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.39, 57-58. Dawson further refines this point in noting that Clement, “attacks his competitors not for their false meanings as such, but for imposing those essentially alien meanings on the text, thus perverting the text’s ‘true’ meaning.” Similar to his opponents, Dawson notes that Clement is quite guilty of the same charge (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 228). See Page 44 [133] for further discussion of Clement’s use of particular pieces of scripture.

<sup>73</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.39, 57.

<sup>74</sup> Paul has Apostolic authority, giving weight to any exegetes argument. However, as Clark mentions, ascetics tended to use what she deems as the “hierarchy of voice” where the Paul of 1 Corinthians is said to be delivering a message to strong Christians and the Paul of the Pastorals to weaker Christians. Therefore, while Paul’s word does carry significant weight, there is a division based upon the writing (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 141).

no ordinary man that he should also be in need of some helpmeet after the flesh.”<sup>75</sup> As some “heretical” arguments are based upon the fact that Christ did live in chastity and virginity without a spouse, Clement looked to the Gospels for support in Christ’s own words that marriage was still holy: Matthew 19:6, “That which God has joined together, let man put asunder,” and Matthew 24:37-39, “As it was in the days of Noah, they were marrying and giving in marriage, building and planting, and as it was in the days of Lot, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.”<sup>76</sup> Thus Christ’s coming and the model of his life does not end the blessing on marriage.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Clement uses Paul in Ephesians to note that Christ had his own bride, the Church. And to further prove against the “heretics” that the prophesy found in Matthew 24:37-39 is not speaking of the “heathen,” he uses Luke 18:8: ‘When the Son of man is come, shall he find faith on the earth?’<sup>78</sup> Once again one can see the pattern of Clement using a verse from the Old Testament to provide evidence against those whom he is opposing, and then completing his case in a verse from the New Testament reaffirming the command from the Old Testament.

Towards the end of his treatise, Clement addresses the heretical ideology that marriage stems from the devil. In order to combat this notion scripturally Clement turns to 1 Corinthians 7:39: “The wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if he dies, she is free to marry, only in the Lord, but she is happier in my judgment if she remains as she is.”<sup>79</sup> According to Clement, Tatian is misinterpreting Paul when he asserts that in being bound to a wife the flesh becomes corrupted. By causally connecting the words wife and corruption Tatian is able to use his exegesis to attribute “the invention

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<sup>75</sup> Genesis 2:18 in Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.49, 63.

<sup>76</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.49, 63.

<sup>77</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.49, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.49, 63.

<sup>79</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.80, 77.

of marriage directly to the devil” which Clement is quick to label as a misinterpretation “which dangerously blasphemes the Lawgiver.”<sup>80</sup> Again, note the use of blasphemy. In order to provide an answer to this misuse of the New Testament, Clement harkens back to the Old Testament where in Genesis 4:25: “And Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son, and they called him by the name of Seth. For God has raised up for me another seed instead of Abel.”<sup>81</sup> This specific verse is used by Clement to support, once again, that God gave rise to birth through marriage, not the devil, and hence gives him another opportunity to accuse Tatian of false exegesis: “But he falsifies the truth in that by means of what is true he tries to prove what is untrue.”<sup>82</sup>

The way an exegete supported views on the relation between the Old and New Testaments generally gave a glimpse into their views on marriage within the life of a Christian. This holds very true for Clement as he works hard within “On Marriage” to scripturally support his ideology that there is one God of the Bible and hence commands of the Old Testament are now applicable in the lives of Christians. In positively interpreting the relation between both Testaments, Clement is able to support the blessing of marriage, while condemning his opponents of misinterpretation and misuse of the Bible. As was seen in his treatment of the *antitactae*, Clement used scripture much as he did philosophy, by taking the same book and using it against his opponent’s ideology. Now that a foundation for Clements understanding of the Old and New Testaments is in

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<sup>80</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.80, 77.

<sup>81</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.81, 78.

<sup>82</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.81, 78. The truth to which Clement is referring is that which Clement believes resides within the meaning of the text, whose meaning is consisting in “[w]hat perfectly belongs to [*oikeion*] and becomes [*prepon*] the sovereign God.” Therefore, Clement is not actually rejecting their interpretations because they are actually false in relation to the text, but because they are false to God’s true nature (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 230-231).

place, we turn to how Clement actualized physical marriage in developing a spiritual relationship with God.

### **The Beginning State of Humanity: The Battle with Sin**

Humanity, Clement believes, now operates within the law of sin as a consequence of “the fall.” While Clement believes in the purity, or goodness, of God’s original creation, due to “the fall” an allowance was made for sin to influence humanity.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, to begin addressing how a Christian should live first requires addressing life under sinful influence. Although Clement’s use of allegorical interpretation is rare, he does utilize it when he speaks to the topic of sin; slavery can either be slavery to sin or slavery to God. In setting up this scenario Clement is prompting proper application of continence, and brings the focus away from strict physical virginity.

Clement addresses the place of sin in the lives of humans when he writes in opposition to the “libertine” fallacy. As “[t]he noble Apostle himself refutes the charge against him implied in their false exegesis” of Romans 6:14: ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law but under grace,’ “by the words with which he continues after the saying just quoted: ‘What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid.’”<sup>84</sup> There are several words within this quote which make a huge impact: “Apostle” and “their false exegesis.” According to Clement this group used Romans 6:14 in isolation to support their doctrine that sin no longer mattered or held any sway over their salvation. Cleverly Clement writes in such a way to prompt the reader that these people were addressed directly by Paul himself in the following

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<sup>83</sup> See [43] on page 18.

<sup>84</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.8.61, 68-69.



verse, in anticipation of their faulty interpretation. By using Paul in this way it is not Clement the man who is condemning this group as “heretical,” but Paul the Apostle of the highest moral authority. Once Clement has utilized Paul to prove their ideology “heretical” due to false exegesis, he moves on to using Paul to show why sin is not acceptable under grace: “So then, ‘if any man be in Christ he is a new creation,’ no longer inclined to sin; ‘old things are passed away,’ we have washed off the old life, ‘Behold new things have happened’ there is chastity instead of fornication...”.<sup>85</sup> This supports Clement in disproving their use of Romans to argue that one can sin and still fall under God’s grace for good and evil can still be done in the body. This is another example of how Clement is using scripture in an attempt to draw out particular points to maintain “heretical” categories; in this case presenting strong support for the existence of right and wrong. In maintaining these ideologies as “heretical” Clement is able to expand upon what is not Christian ideology to create Christian ideology: that evil has no place within the Christian lifestyle.

Paul, a powerful tool for Clement, is used to speak against the sins of the flesh: “[a]gain his [Paul’s] remarks are directed against libertines when he continues as follows: ‘The mind of the flesh is death because those who live according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh, and the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. For it is not subject to the law of God. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.’”<sup>86</sup> The first thing that should be noted in his statement is the use of the label or title “Libertines.” It is argued by scholars that groups such as these did not call themselves “Libertines,” but “Christians,” and just in the rhetorical use of their label, Clement is attempting to cement their standing

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<sup>85</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10, 17 in Clement, “Stromata” 3.8.62, 69.

<sup>86</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.11.78, 75.

as a “heretical” sect. The second major piece of information that should be taken from this quote is that once again Clement places Paul as speaking against their specific doctrine. By using this scriptural maneuver Clement uses Paul to condemn this group as “heretical.” Much like the pattern seen above, Clement continues on to show the reader how one should interpret the scripture, and henceforth behave; if one were to claim salvation they would need to follow as Paul says in Romans 8:9-10, 12-14: “But if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. So then, brethren, we are under an obligation, not to the flesh to live after the flesh. If you live after the flesh you shall die. But by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” and Romans 8:15: “You have not received the spirit of bondage that you should again be in fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship by which we cry, Abba, Father!”<sup>87</sup> Within this section, Clement strings together verses in their plain sense to show that humanity no longer belongs to sin, that one must be rid of sin from their lives to be with Christ. This is a very good example of how Clement places verses side by side and lets their plain sense stand, without providing much interpretation himself. Although he does use some allegorical interpretation (as mentioned previously with Malachi), he tends to chose verses which can stand on their own without much allegorical interpretation.

While Clement does not make wide use of allegory, he does use one of the most common allegorical themes surrounding celibacy, the topic of slavery;<sup>88</sup> specifically slavery to God and sin, and the differences between them. By referencing both John 8:34

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<sup>87</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3. 11.78, 75-76.

<sup>88</sup> As Clark notes, slavery and circumcision was often used by the more ascetically minded to refer to marriage and celibacy (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 133). This is apparent when comparing Clement’s analysis of the topic here, where Clement is likening slavery to sin, whereas later, on page 56, Origen will compare slavery to a first marriage to sin and second marriage to Christ.

and Romans 6:16: ‘everyone who sins is a slave,’<sup>89</sup> Clement is making the statement that *everyone* who sins is a slave to sin, that they are no longer of God; that no one can escape sin and no one is above sin. By using scripture to conclude that one is either going to be a slave to sin or to God, Clement is preparing to set up this group as “heretical” when he paraphrases Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13 in saying “For as the Lord commanded, he did not wish to serve two masters, pleasure and God.”<sup>90</sup> By first referencing Paul to argue that if you sin you are serving sin, he is building himself a strong foundation. When he proceeds to the Gospels he stamps the proverbial seal of death on the libertines as his exegesis supports that one cannot serve both sin and God. Therefore, Clement is clearly showing that scripture is differentiating pleasure as something one can be a slave to, which leads one away from God rather than bringing one into communion with God or being a part of communion with God. If one does decide to participate in wanton sexual intercourse they would be considered a slave to sin and no longer one belonging to God. In this way Clement explains that they cannot possibly know God if they are fulfilling or seeking physical pleasure. Interestingly, Clement demonstrates his involvement with secular learning when he supplements his scriptural support with the dictionary definition of physical pleasure: Pleasure is a consequence of appetite, which is the consequence of pain or anxiety, with is caused by need, which requires an object to support his scripture that pleasure is not something one should seek for it is sinful.<sup>91</sup> It should not be a surprise that Clement integrates a dictionary definition of pleasure with a scriptural allegory of sin; it just once again serves to show how secular education plays into scriptural exegesis.

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<sup>89</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.30, 54.

<sup>90</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.26, 52.

<sup>91</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.5.42, 59.

Clement also uses allegory through the language of circumcision, also common to the discussion. As we are no longer circumcised of the flesh, but of the spirit to Christ, we must put away the carnal represented by the physical circumcision and raise to the level of circumcision in the spirit. Clement utilizes multiple verses side by side from Colossians which speak to what humanity was before the coming of Christ, and how one should fashion themselves now: Colossians 2:11: “You are circumcised in Christ with a circumcision not done with hands, which consists rather in the putting away of the carnal body, in the circumcision of Christ,” 3:1-3: “If you are then risen with Christ, seek those things which are above; have your mind in higher things, not earthly things. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God,” 3:5-6: “Mortify therefore your earthly members, fornication, uncleanness, passion, lust; for on account of these wrath is coming,” and 3:8-10: “put away anger, wrath, wickedness, blasphemy, filthy talk from their mouth, putting off the old man with its lusts, and putting on the new man which is renewed to possess full knowledge according to the image of him who created it.”<sup>92</sup> This is another example where Clement simply strings together pieces of scripture to make a statement- that one cannot attain the knowledge of God if one is partaking in physical appetites. By using allegorical interpretation of verses containing slavery and circumcision Clement was able to support this dichotomy of sin versus God.

How was one to properly overcome this dichotomy without being too rigorous? In order to promote what Clement believed to be the “orthodox” position concerning the proper balance of continence, against those who espoused sexual intercourse as a religious “mystical communion,” he utilized Ephesians 4:20-24 ‘But you have not so learned Christ, if you have heard him and have been taught by him as the truth is in

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<sup>92</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.5.43, 60.

Christ Jesus' put off with the ways of your former life your old man which is corrupted by the deceitful lusts. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man after which God is created in righteousness and true holiness.'<sup>93</sup> Immediately Clement's choice of scripture leads with a rebuke- "But you have not so learned Christ."<sup>94</sup> In this way Clement can use scripture to point out that as scripture was being written it was known that certain people would pervert the words of scripture itself, as well as its doctrine. So Clement begins with a rebuke, identifying his opponents as those spoken of in Ephesians, and thereby separating himself into a position in which he correctly utilizes scripture. In addition, he notes that they have not even used scripture to found their doctrines, but "derived their doctrines from an apocryphal work... the mother of their licentiousness."<sup>95</sup> To follow is the correct or "orthodox" position, as Clement asserts through his use of scripture: physical intercourse could not possibly be communion, or lead to communion, as clearly stated in this verse lust and desires were of a past time, and not of the new time.<sup>96</sup>

Clement used this notion of "mystical communion" and others like to it to show that the "heretics" focused too much on sexuality.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, rather than stopping once he has proved his point concerning sexuality he notes that Christ specifically commands us what and how to give, and what is truly asked of us in Matthew 25:35: 'inasmuch as you did it for the little ones, you did it to me.'<sup>98</sup> He then moves to commandments to

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<sup>93</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.28, 53.

<sup>94</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.28, 53.

<sup>95</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.29, 53.

<sup>96</sup> When Clement is addressing his opponents use of "mystical communion" he is placing focus upon their use of the word communion, which can have a sexual or non-sexual meaning. Here he is specifically centering upon the distinction between a good use of communion in reference to "food and clothing" and a bad use in reference to "any common sexual intercourse" (Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.27, 52).

<sup>97</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 132.

<sup>98</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.54, 65.

define the correct use of the word “communion” when he references the Old Testament in Proverbs 19:17: ‘He who gives to the poor lends to God’ and Matthew 19:19-21: ‘If you would be perfect, sell your possessions and give to the poor.’<sup>99</sup> One can see here how Clement is addressing sexual intercourse for pleasure as sinful and once he has addressed this particular issue, he brings the reader to the wider picture of continence in all aspects of life, not just focusing upon sexuality.

What Clement does throughout his treatise “On Marriage” is continually set up the sin versus God dichotomy. It has been shown that although Clement shows a preference for literal interpretation, he does use allegorical interpretation where it favors his overall ideology of complete continence. In addition, Clement uses this allegorical interpretation against the libertines who do not believe they are under the power of sin. However, in setting up this dichotomy what Clement does differently than his opponents is to take the stress off of sexuality as *the* sin and broaden the conversation. It is this broader topic of continence to which we now turn.

### **Execution of the Conversion: Emphasis taken off of Physical Virginity as the Saving Virtue**

If one does not focus immense attention on physical virginity, then how does one become a slave to God? In order to escape rigorous argumentation Clement promotes complete continence, a balancing of the virtues. While Clement does integrate philosophy into this conversation, he champions a higher Christian ideal of continence than do the Greeks. Emphasis is placed on attainment through God's grace and not human effort. Clement warns against any rigorous behavior for if one does not have enough grace to

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<sup>99</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.54, 66; 3.6.55, 66.

live a strict continent life they may end up discouraged. It is only with the grace of God, and through the sanctification of living a life of complete continence, that one can achieve true knowledge of God. Unlike the ascetics he opposes, Clement stresses that continence can be achieved within marriage; sexual intercourse does not keep one from attaining perfection. It is to a further discussion of Clements vision of attaining the knowledge of the truth and God to we turn.

Clement argues not only for virginity, but for continence, *encrateia*, in its wider context. He makes use of Aristotle and Greek philosophy to show the variety found within continence itself and what is included. The human ideal of continence, the one discussed by Clement which is mostly linked to Greek philosophy, is to fight desire, to not be made subservient to desire, rather to learn to control it and bring it into practical effect. Diverging from philosophy Clement here states that God's ideal of continence for humans, to extinguish desire completely, is stricter than the Greek philosophical ideal: for "it is continence to despise money, softness, property, to hold in small esteem outward appearance, to control one's tongue, to master evil thoughts."<sup>100</sup> Clement uses philosophy and *apatheia* to support Christianity as the higher ideal. What should be noticed throughout this discourse is that Clement is almost constantly stressing that abstinence in and of itself is not "good" as even athletes abstain to train.<sup>101</sup> Nothing is meritorious about abstinence unless it is done out of the love of God.<sup>102</sup> Only with true continence can one free their body from the passions.

As Clement is trying to maintain distance from a strict focus upon sexuality he turns to scripture that supports complete continence. For example, Clement sums up

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<sup>100</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.7.57, 59, 67.

<sup>101</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.50, 63.

<sup>102</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.51, 64.

Ephesians 5:1-11 in the following words: “Moreover, the apostle teaches us to be chaste in speech when he writes, ‘Know this well that no fornicator...’ and so on as far as the words ‘but rather expose them.’”<sup>103</sup> This is a foundational verse for Clement as it speaks to the entirety of behavior and not just sexuality. Clement places a high value on continence as a way to sanctify the temple, referencing Hebrews 9:14 ‘purifies his conscience from dead works to serve the living God.’<sup>104</sup> The focus on this verse for Clement is through practicing complete continence in all aspect of one’s life, one can attain sanctification.

While Clement does note that complete continence is the goal, he makes it very clear that continence is a gift by God through grace: Matthew 7:7: ‘Ask and it shall be given you.’<sup>105</sup> This is not a novel idea, but is rather common within early Christianity and emanates from Wisdom of Solomon 8:21.<sup>106</sup> Clement notes that he welcomes this gift to whom it is granted, but stresses that it is through God’s grace that continence is attained and not through any human idea or effort.<sup>107</sup> By mentioning effort he is surely writing against the rigorist ascetics who demand severe restrictions and harsh treatment of the body to attain continence. Whether one is married or celibate Clement urges that one “remain unyielding to what is inferior.”<sup>108</sup> Clement believes that humility does not lie in harsh treatment of the body, but in meekness.<sup>109</sup> To show that this sort of behavior is “heretical” Clement uses Colossians 2:23: ‘Let no one disqualify you by demanding self-

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<sup>103</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.28, 53.

<sup>104</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.59, 67.

<sup>105</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.7.57, 66.

<sup>106</sup> “But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me- and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was- so I appealed to the Lord and implored him.” NRSV

<sup>107</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.1.4, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.79, 76.

<sup>109</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.48, 62.



imposed ascetic practices and severe treatment of the body'<sup>110</sup> to prove that the scripture speaks specifically against rigorist asceticism. Again using Paul to speak directly against a specific set of behaviors allows Clement to use Paul's authority to condemn these believers as heretics.

It is a Christian's duty to strive for purity and live a life devoted to God. In order to be completely devoted to God one has to free one's mind from the power of evil; 1 John 3:3: "'And everyone who has this hope in the Lord purifies himself,' says the Scripture, 'even as he is pure.'"<sup>111</sup> By using this verse Clement shows that what he refers to as purification is an active responsibility.<sup>112</sup> Salvation does not come due to some election or innate equality, but from knowledge of God; a knowledge that can only be attained if one gains control of the passions of the body. If the "heretics" do not have their passions under control, and they continually serve them, they will never come to knowledge of God and henceforth can never receive salvation.<sup>113</sup> One's knowledge of the commandments will be shown by one's manner of life. This knowledge is not talk, but a light within the soul that results from obedience to the commandments. This obedience enable knowledge of the self and teaches one to become possessed of God. To support his ideology, that the way to attain knowledge of God is through application of the scripture in one's life, Clement uses 1 John 2:4: 'He who says, I know the Lord, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.'<sup>114</sup> Clement is attempting to break down the "heretical" doctrine in stages. First he identifies that these groups *speak* to prove that they possess the truth, and Clement is attempting to support through scripture

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<sup>110</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.51, 64.

<sup>111</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.5.42, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Once again, this has connections to Stoicism and the Stoic sage being very active.

<sup>113</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.5.43, 59-60.

<sup>114</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.5.44, 60.

that just by claiming one has the truth does not mean one does; in fact, scripture shows that true knowledge of the scripture will be shown through one's *actions* and obedience to the commandments. This is where Clement begins to discuss actuation of the change from a sinner to a Christian. The first step to gaining knowledge is found in obedience to the commands found within scripture. Once one has become obedient, gradually they will begin to understand and truly know God.

Obedience to all of the commands was so important for Clement as physical virginity in and of itself did not hold the key to knowledge of God. He vehemently wrote again this ideology, against the Tatians and the Marcions, "who under a pious cloak blaspheme by their continence both the creation and the holy Creator."<sup>115</sup> He combats their ideology with a passage from Paul:

I for my part do not think the apostle was expressing disgust at life in the flesh when he said: "But with all boldness both now and ever Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If, however, it is to be life in the flesh, that also means for me fruitful work. I do not know which I prefer. I am constrained on both sides: I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; but to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sakes."<sup>116</sup>

Departing from our bodily passions is love for God, not departing from our literal flesh. If we do this we will be one with God. In other words, the flesh itself is just an allegory for sin, it does not mean the literal flesh; as described in 1 Peter 2:11, relayed by Clement, "rather behave as a guest."<sup>117</sup> Clement wants to emphasize that one should be living not as if they were of the world, but as if they were just a passing visitor. If one was a foreigner to a place they would not practice the customs of that land, particularly their fleshly sinful ways. By using the language of guest Clement is creating two separate spheres, one on the earth and one in heaven. Clement creates this dichotomy in his

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<sup>115</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.45, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Philippians 1:20-24 in Clement, "Stromata" 3.9.65, 70.

<sup>117</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.9.65,70; 3.4.31, 54.

writing where the activities of the “heretics” show them to be members of this world, not of God’s kingdom.

Even though Clement does stress complete continence, versus strictly sexual continence, he does make the claim that this can be attained even in marriage. To support a continent marriage he uses one of the most difficult verses for radical ascetics to ignore, 1 Corinthians 7:5: “If by agreement marriage relations are suspended for a time to give opportunity for prayer.”<sup>118</sup> Against Tatian he stresses that marital relations in and of themselves are not falling to Satan or fornication, but suspending relations for prayer is a form of teaching continence.<sup>119</sup> He seems to add a clause by noting that this must be by agreement or the person may fall to sin.<sup>120</sup> He makes use of Paul to provide scriptural support for his argument that not only can one attain this continence, but the husband and wife can actually aid in this sanctification, posing a question surrounding 1 Corinthians 7:14:<sup>121</sup> “what does the apostle Paul mean when he says that the wife is sanctified by the husband and the husband by the wife?” In addition Clement questions the meaning of Christ’s words in Matthew 19:3-9 when he said ‘Moses wrote this; but have you not read that God said to the first man, you two shall be one flesh? Therefore he who divorces his wife except for fornication makes her an adulteress.’<sup>122</sup> What Clement seems to be doing here is selecting verses which support virtues being bred within marriage, a marriage that is a holy union of God. With this passage from Matthew Clement can show how the union is produced from God and as the believing husband or wife has God within them,

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<sup>118</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.79, 76.

<sup>119</sup> Clark also discusses this and puts it in relation to other exegetes specifically concerning the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:5 (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 282).

<sup>120</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.12.79, 76-77.

<sup>121</sup> “For the unbelieving husband is made holy though his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” NRSV

<sup>122</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.47, 62.

and they exist within a holy union, the other partner is drawn into that union with God. By using these two passages back to back, Clement is able to dismiss the idea that marriage is fornication, even with one unbelieving spouse, and that it is even possible to attain *encrateia* within marriage.

Not only does Clement write that continence is attainable in marriage, but he even admits admiration for those who maintain a single monogamous marriage. He utilized Galatians 6:2: 'Bear one another's burdens' to support the marital relationship, that one should not be so naïve to think that they are strong enough on their own not to fall; and concerning the notion of falling makes use of 1 Corinthians 10:12: "lest anyone think he stands securely should himself fall" to exemplify this point.<sup>123</sup> This scripture notes the beneficial aspects of marriage, that the husband or wife could serve as a support in reaching the goal of fulfilling Christ's law; to keep one another from falling victim to sin and the desires of the flesh.<sup>124</sup> What matters most in this instance is that for Clement sexual intercourse between married couples did not keep a Christian from achieving perfection. As he has established that continence can be attained no matter one's relationship status, he presses on to say that the more intense devotion equals greater merit with God.<sup>125</sup> Clement reminds his readers that:

both celibacy and marriage have their own different forms of service and ministry to the Lord; I have in mind the caring for one's wife and children. For it seems that the particular characteristic of the married state is that it gives the man who desires a perfect marriage and opportunity to make responsibility for everything in the home.<sup>126</sup>

So important was the household that Clement even put forth that a husband and a wife could worship alone together using Matthew 18:20 "[f]or when two or three come

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<sup>123</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.1.4, 42.

<sup>124</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.2.8, 43-44.

<sup>125</sup> He derives this from the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which not so surprisingly, given his location and historical time, is now considered apocryphal literature.

<sup>126</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.12.79, 76.

together in my name" in order to support his question: "[d]oes he not by the 'three' mean husband wife and child?"<sup>127</sup> Clement uses marriage in the opposite way of those he is opposing, to show that marriage does not distance one from Christ, but can function to bring one closer to Christ.<sup>128</sup> Clement uses the verse "different services" to mean marriage and virginity are of equal weight, that marriage is a service to God.

As Clement stressed continence received through grace, he also recognized the blessing of proper behavior in marriage. A controlled marriage is the middle ground. In a controlled marriage, based upon continence, sexual intercourse will only be engaged in for the purpose of procreation, a service to God and not strictly partaken of for the sexual pleasure attained. Birth allowed for the Word to be passed down from generation to generation and for God to be praised continually. He is even so specific to note that the right time to procreate will be gained through knowledge, which of course is reached through continence. Clement notes that Adam's fall consisted in the fact that he procreated before the proper time.<sup>129</sup> This is a very interesting interpretation of the fall of Adam as many, although typically ascetic, held the notion that sexuality did not happen until after the fall and hence to be a virgin is to return to paradise. Clement is clearly making a statement against the encratites by adding this statement.

For additional support for continence within marriages Clement uses the apostles themselves and their marital relationships. He cites 1 Corinthians 9:5: 'Have we not a right to take about with us a wife, which is a sister like the other apostles?'<sup>130</sup> This verse

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<sup>127</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.10.71.

<sup>128</sup> Dawson places Clements use of this verse against his opponents to show how these competing allegorical readings are used in an attempt to provide a basis for "alternative social practices." Clement denies the encratic interpretation that the two or three speaks to a creator god and a good God (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 228).

<sup>129</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.12.81, 78.

<sup>130</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.53, 65.

is very important to ascetics in terms of the word “wives.” Clement uses this verse not to comment on the terminology of “wives” or of the fact that the verse may imply such an interpretation, but uses it to show that wives functioned within Christianity to spread the Word to other women so as not to cause scandal. Clark notes that this is one of the verses which “has troubled patristic exegetes” but also finds that “Clement, argues that since the Apostles are here said to be married, that marriage must be a blessed state for later Christians as well” as opposed to ascetic exegetes who translate “*gunaikes*” as “women accompanying the apostles on their journeys, not wives.”<sup>131</sup> This is a perfect verse where one can see how an exegete can use a verse to either support or deny marriage; Clement, clearly using it as support for marriages.

Another factor that was present in the controversy over celibacy was marriage on rational principle. If a man does not want children, but doesn’t want to spend his life as a bachelor then he can marry, but only if he leads his life with his wife with self-control. Marriage on rational principle is not sinful, if it keeps one from sin. The reason Clement addresses this situation is because he wants to caution the general Christian that some have not married and due to the deprivation of that partnership have begun to hate humanity, while in the opposite corner others became absorbed and gave in to their desires.<sup>132</sup> Ultimately, what Clement is doing here is stressing marriage and sexual intercourse within marriage as a means of avoiding fornication, stressing that marriage and marital relations are not fornication themselves.

Through this section it should be clear that Clement's scriptural use highlighted verses or books which pertained to a much less ascetic audience. For instance, Clement

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<sup>131</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 117, 118.

<sup>132</sup> Clement, “*Stromata*” 3.9.67, 71.

chose to use 1 Corinthians 7:14: “what does the apostle Paul mean when he says that the wife is sanctified by the husband and the husband by the wife?”<sup>133</sup> rather than the more ascetic 1 Corinthians 7:9 in which Paul promotes physical virginity. In fact, a majority of the scripture which Clement used to support his argument for marriage as aiding in a continent lifestyle was found within the Pastoral Epistles. Clement's use of the Pastorals is certainly not an accident, but rather can be seen as part of Clement's rhetorical writing pattern: utilizing the same philosopher and/or scriptural author over and against the opponent. Here Clement is seen utilizing Paul, who was a strong voice for the ascetic message, against his opponent. In this way he is softening the rigorism that the ascetics promote as Paul; demonstrating with Paul himself that he does support strong familial virtues.<sup>134</sup> Here the reader is drawn away from such an intense focus upon physical sexuality and human effort to the grace of God. When emphasis is placed upon grace and upon adherence to the commands of the Bible, sanctification and knowledge of God become the focus. By broadening the conversation to such verses as Ephesians 5:1-11: “Moreover, the apostle teaches us to be chaste in speech when he writes...”<sup>135</sup> Clement can take the debate in a different direction while condemning the heretics of blasphemy which is results from of a narrow-minded view of the knowledge of God.

## Conclusion

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<sup>133</sup> Hunter similarly notes Clement's use of Paul: “[r]ereading the authentic Paul in the light of the Pastoral Epistles, Clement refuted the encratic interpretation by pointing to the domestic, familial, and marital virtues stressed in these letters” (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 110).

<sup>134</sup> Hunter supports this observation of Clement's use of Paul and pointedly notes “[b]ecause of their anti-ascetical tendencies, the Pastorals were particularly suited to Clement's anti-encratite agenda” (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 109).

<sup>135</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.4.28, 53.

The focus for Clement's treatise "On Marriage" was in providing opposition, and correction against two main branches of heresy: "either they teach that one ought to live on the principle that it is a matter of indifference whether one does right or wrong, or they set a too ascetic tone and proclaim the necessity of continence on the ground of opinions which are godless and arise from hatred of what God has created."<sup>136</sup> It is through Clement that the reader gets to intricately come to learn the doctrines of the "libertines" as well as the radical ascetics, the "Encratites," Marcion and Tatian. As mentioned previously, he spends a great deal of time summarizing their doctrines and then immediately takes methodical steps through scripture to disprove their positions. Hence with Clement, more so than Origen, one can truly see how he shapes his position as the truth against the "heretics." His first step is to prove that divine law does not consist in universality, but in right and wrong as defined in the commandments of the Old Testament and also through the New Testament. In drawing out that argument Clement showed that the commandments were still applicable for the present Christian. This point was very important in defining oneself against the radical ascetics, as they typically released the Old Testament from use. In addition he not only used scripture, but makes plentiful use of rhetorical labels such as libertine, condemns them of "blasphemy" and "licentiousness," and puts blame upon these groups for the soiling of the Christian name.

As touched upon in the second section, "The Beginning State of Humanity: The Battle with Sin," the foundation off of which Clement's analysis of scripture builds is the notion of ridding the body of what he deemed the "passions." For Clement salvation was not the result of election, against the "Libertines," rather it resulted from knowledge of God. Knowledge, or *gnosis*, resulted from conducting one's life in an entirely chaste

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<sup>136</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.5.40, 58.



manner, resulting in sanctification of the bodily temple, and hence bringing the believer closer to knowledge of God.<sup>137</sup> The dichotomy that Clement attempted to set up in reaction to the “libertines” was that if one cannot get control over their passions (living in sin), then they will never come to knowledge of God, and hence will never receive salvation. As it pertained to the “encratites” Clement argued that too much focus upon physical virginity also hindered one from knowledge of God as it was done in opposition to God. In setting up this form of argumentation Clement is condemning his opponents, utilizing verses to back the heretics into the proverbial corner, and placing them as liars and blasphemers.

It is important for Clement to not only take the conversation away from focus on physical virginity, but to also support the continued blessing on marriage. Therefore, as Clement is essentially writing an anti-ascetical treatise it is not enough to simply support marriage as acceptable. Clement, even admitting admiration for monogamous marriages, needed to show attention to how those married persons should live. While Clement does stress sanctification in manner and body, he does emphasize that it can be achieved in marriage. The husband and wife can aid one another so they do not fall off of the path to sanctification. As emphasis is laid on the possibility that one cannot possibly know God if they seek pleasure for the mind of the flesh is death, he is very clear that sexual intercourse within marriage should be purely for procreation and not for gratification. Ultimately for Clement what the overriding factor is concerning the debate of marriage and virginity is the practice of complete continence achieved through obedience to the

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<sup>137</sup> The knowledge or *Gnosis* that is attained according to Clement is discussed further in Dawson’s *Allegorical Readers*: Accordingly it is not enough to know what suit’s God, but to able to point to several places within scripture which also support that ideology. This pattern of unification of similar themes is how Clement believes knowledge of God will appear as. By reading scripture according to these patterns and rules one can achieve the knowledge of God (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 231).

commandments, leading one to the knowledge of God. By placing emphasis upon these three things Clement is able to accuse his opponents of blasphemy, and hence provide the label of “heretic” to create an enemy for the “orthodox,” which Alexandrian Christians are attempting to define.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Origen of Alexandria**

## The Influence of Platonism

What must first be understood about Origen is his drive to find unification throughout the Bible. It is through the introduction of allegory and the commentary format of his scriptural exegesis that Origen brings forth his ideology of the theme of transformation. As with Clement, Origen is not isolated from philosophy, specifically Platonism. Evidence of this influence is the idea that sexuality was not original to our nature as our soul pre-existed our embodiment. Therefore, sexuality is something which can be surpassed and literal transformation of the body to an angelic state, to be in union with God, is possible while on earth.<sup>138</sup> As Origen does stress that sexuality can possibly hinder one from attaining that perfect union, he is located between the rigorous ascetics who press for physical virginity and Clement who finds equality between marriage and virginity. What will stand out about Origen, as opposed to Clement, is the influence which allegory has had upon his exegesis and the way in which he combats “heresy” through this form of scriptural interpretation. It is now to the influence of Alexandria upon Origen which we examine.

Origen personally experienced the age of martyrdom as his father and brother were taken from their home for being Christian. His mother, in order to keep Origen from following, his mother took his clothes; knowing he would not run out of the house in the nude.<sup>139</sup> As a result of the loss of his father, his mother and he were forced to move. Origen had the good fortune of being taken in by a wealthy woman. Within the walls of

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<sup>138</sup> In part of this literal transformation from a being of sexual differentiation some took the call in Matthew 19:12 “those who make themselves eunuchs” very literally as he underwent castration. This operation was highly controversial as the male who underwent this surgery was said to have broached the boundary between the sexes, no longer choosing to be a male (Brown, *The Body and Society*, 169). For an in-depth discussion of the implication of “*eunouchia* (condition of being a eunuch)” see Gasparro, “Asceticism and Anthropology,” 134-135.

<sup>139</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 160.

that woman's house Origen continued his education amongst a group of learned Gnostics.<sup>140</sup> From here Origen became the first to formalize the process of scriptural exegesis into a commentary form, writing homilies as well.

Origen was the first to formalize the use of allegory for the interpretation of Christian texts.<sup>141</sup> Through the introduction of allegory into interpretation comes the danger of author subjectivity, but Origen, being a learned scholar, claims to account for this conflict. His defense against subjectivity actually stems from his view of the unity of the Bible; as Origen believed that every verse within the Bible had a literal and a spiritual interpretation and it was this spiritual interpretation which he is simply uncovering, not placing his own ideology into the Bible.<sup>142</sup> Wiles notes that:

Origen believed that his spiritual interpretations could be checked by their conformity with that Christian truth which is ever and always the same. But there is no such truth available to us in advance before the work of exegesis has been undertaken and therefore able to act as an independent check upon our performance of the exegetical task...<sup>143</sup>

Clearly Origen is referring to the truth of the Bible, from which orthodox doctrine arises. The only problem is there is yet to be a decided upon orthodoxy, and therefore Wiles is correct in noting that Origen's exegesis cannot be checked to the conformity of something which is yet to exist, in so far as Christians have come to understand it.

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<sup>140</sup> Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. by A.S. Worrall (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 6.

<sup>141</sup> As exegesis began to develop, it moved away from literal interpretation to allegory, which can also be credited to the Gnostics whom had impacted Origen (Hanson, *Biblical Exegesis*, 418). What is of note about Origen's allegorical exegesis is that fact that allegory played a part in what David Dawson deems "culture wars" within late antiquity. Within his book, *Allegorical Readings and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Dawson notes that "the very tensions between literal and non-literal readings that characterized ancient allegory stemmed from efforts by readers to secure for themselves and their communities social and cultural identity, authority, and power" (Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 2). For further discussion see Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 170.

<sup>142</sup> M.F. Wiles, "Origen as Biblical Scholar" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 478.

<sup>143</sup> Wiles, "Origen as Biblical Scholar," 488.

Origen, like Clement, brought both Christianity and Greco-Roman culture/philosophy together. To begin the discussion on Origen's ideology concerning virginity one should consider his most notable message, for it tells all: "be transformed."<sup>144</sup> This ideology of transformation provides the key to Origen's viewpoints on marriage and virginity, and how both of these behaviors have an effect on one's involvement within earth based communities. Virginity, part and parcel with complete continence, served as a way to become alien to earth, to come closer to heaven. Through Biblical exegesis, Origen posited a transformation which could occur within the body while on earth. Essentially in discussing marriage and virginity Origen was attempting to provide support for the Christian understanding of "where to find the holy in the visible world."<sup>145</sup> Amid this is a tension to reach beyond the limits of the body, a common struggle found among philosophers and theologians in the third century. This change from fleshly to spiritual being was held by both Platonists and Christian Gnostics.<sup>146</sup>

As was made clear with Clement, Origen did not just supplement his scriptural exegesis with philosophy, but philosophy was intertwined within his religious doctrine. Brown claims that Origen's views on marriage are "so much sharper" than someone like Clement's due to the influence of what Brown deems "wild" Platonism.<sup>147</sup> It is through Platonism that Origen began to see sexual intercourse in marriage as distant from the true spiritual self.<sup>148</sup> Origen began to diverge from his contemporaries in that he thought it necessary to engage in this bodily struggle, in order to become under the law of

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<sup>144</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 162. Origen, "Dialogue with Heraclides" in *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 446.

<sup>145</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 176.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 164.

<sup>147</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 173.

<sup>148</sup> This ideology also contains aspects of Valentinian Gnosticism aside from Platonism.

righteousness/ law of God, leaving behind the law of the members (sin in the flesh).

Origen believed that along with the soul, the body went through a transformation; that sexuality encapsulated within the body was, or could be, a passing phase:

Do not think that just as the belly is made for food and food for the belly, that in the same way the body is made for intercourse. If you wish to understand the Apostle's train of reasoning, for what reason the body was made, then listen: it was made that it should be a temple to the Lord; that the soul, being holy and blessed, should act in it as if it were a priest serving before the Holy Spirit that dwells in you. In this manner, Adam had a body in Paradise; but in Paradise he did not "know" Eve.<sup>149</sup>

As exemplified through this quote sexuality was not a defining characteristic of being embodied, and hence was unnecessary.<sup>150</sup> This ideology has many implications as the body could assume transformation on earth, rising above sexuality and gender to an angelic state.<sup>151</sup> Once that transformation had taken place on earth the flesh would no longer be at war with the soul and would come into a union with righteousness and God which in his commentary Origen will describe as coming under the law of righteousness. This ideology will later have a major effect on both the ascetic debates of the 380's, as well as the Origenist controversy.<sup>152</sup>

Origen finds himself between the rigorous ascetics and Clement who supports equality between marriage and celibacy as it relates to salvation and perfection. Origen certainly has ascetic leanings as he posits virginity as a higher calling than marriage. In fact, Origen barely mentions marriage at all. When marriage is mentioned it is usually in the form of allegorical interpretation; the marital bond spiritually referring to the law of the members.

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<sup>149</sup> Origen, "Fragments on I Corinthians 29" in Brown, *The Body and Society*, 175.

<sup>150</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 168.

<sup>151</sup> This ideology also later caused issues as it concerns orthodoxy surround Origen's ideology concerning the embodiment of the soul was later condemned as heresy. See Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>152</sup> This will later lead to a controversy in the late fourth, early fifth centuries. For more information see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 121-151.

Due to Origen's copious use of spiritual interpretation, marriage as an institution, or the blessing on marriage found in the Old Testament, is rarely discussed. Rather than risk any form of denigration of the institution itself, Origen focuses on bringing the truth out of the scripture to formulate how one can attain unity with God. One will see through his commentary that by using allegory Origen actually dodges a significant portion of the controversial texts by relating the text not to something earth bound, but something heaven bound in order to actuate the transformation of the unity of soul and spirit and not soul and flesh. Ultimately Origen is attempting to prove throughout his commentary that transformation from a sinful presence within the body to the Spirit reigning in the body can take place, and must take place on earth in order for one to be acceptable to God and receive salvation.

### **Analysis of the Relation Between the Old and New Testaments: Origen Erases Time**

Origen essentially obfuscates the argumentation over how and why the Old Testament relates to the lives of Christians through the use of allegory. Essentially, the Christians inherited a piece of scripture, which the Jews could not yet fully understand until the revelation of Christ. With the revelation of Christ came the full meaning of the Word. Therefore, it opened up the scriptures to a deeper, more spiritual interpretation. Origen now calls for spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament in accordance with body, soul, and spirit.

What Origen is doing through his exegesis is operating outside of time. He does not separate "then" and "now" in terms of 50 B.C.E. and 50 C.E., but separates exegesis of the scriptures in terms of fleshly understanding (literal) and spiritual understanding

(allegorical). Karen Torjesen supports this observation in her book *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* noting two distinct differences in Origen's approach to the relationship between both Testaments: the Old and New Testaments differ from one another as the Old Testament is telling of a good to come, while the New Testament is announcing the good which is now in existence.<sup>153</sup> As a result the Jews were not capable of understanding their texts in a spiritual way as Christ had not yet brought the revelation. Consequently the Old Testament only consists of partial revelation as the prophets were not exposed to the *Logos*, and therefore were only partially aware of God's plan. Revelation came piece by piece, being completed with the full revelation of the *Logos* through Christ represented in the books of the New Testament.<sup>154</sup> In viewing the relationship between the Old and New Testaments based upon these suppositions, Origen can use the same passages from the Old Testament which for the Jews in the plain/literal sense meant one thing, and uses them to show a deeper more spiritual meaning.

By using this dichotomy of literal versus spiritual Origen can give recognition to past interpretation, but completely obfuscate the argumentation by giving a completely different interpretation on a "spiritual" level. For instance, when it concerns Paul's Epistles Origen uses the language of liquid (or vegetables) and solid (or meats) foods to represent one's understanding of scripture. A good example of this is Origen's commentary on Romans 14:3-4.<sup>155</sup> The plain meaning is discussed first: believers should

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<sup>153</sup> Karen Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 66.

<sup>154</sup> Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 68.

<sup>155</sup> "Let not him who eats despise the one who does not eat; and let not him who does not eat judge the one who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? He stands or falls to his own



not let dissension rise between them over food. However, after devoting one sentence to the literal interpretation Origen says:

[b]ut Paul seems to have uttered these things with a still profounder meaning. For to those who come from the circumcision, the law did not command anything about eating vegetables that would seem to fit what he says, 'He who is weak eats vegetables.' From this it is established that he is discussing these matters with respect to the food of the Word and he calls 'weak in faith' him who is not so perfected in his senses that he can take in every kind of food of the Word of God...<sup>156</sup>

The use of weak and strong according to the Word is speaking of one's understanding of the scripture. As he refers to the Jews eating vegetables, or food for the weak, he is noting that Jewish exegetes often read the scripture in the literal sense. But what Paul is saying here in Romans is that there are two dimensions to the Word and those who have knowledge of God and are spiritually stronger have the ability to digest and dissect passages to a deeper level.

Often in gaining this deeper understanding Origen is able to avoid support for marriage. A perfect example of how Origen takes a verse with a popular literal translation and transforms it through spiritual interpretation, leading it away from the conversation, is Genesis 1:28. Origen begins his homily on Genesis with a literal interpretation, noting that the divine blessing to increase and multiply was peculiar as it was given before the creation of the female; yet her creation is mentioned, as is the blessing. As the female was not yet created when the blessing was imparted, Origen believes it was written in this fashion for one of two purposes: first, to ensure the reader that the divine blessing will be given, as a female will be created, or second, because all things that were created by God

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master; but he will stand; for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2001), 9.36.1, 234).

<sup>156</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.36.1, 234.

were united, and serves to show that humanity is a good work of God.<sup>157</sup> Yet, Origen is quick to surpass the inferior literal interpretation and follows with an allegorical or spiritual interpretation, a pattern seen throughout most of Origen's exegesis. Accordingly, this verse is truly talking about the dichotomy found within humanity. The inner consists of a soul and spirit. The soul is said to be in reference to the female, and the spirit male. If the soul and spirit are in agreement with one another they will increase and multiply and produce sons. These sons are good inclinations, understanding, and useful thoughts which will fill the earth and have dominion over it. Essentially, if the soul and spirit are united, "in wedlock," these inclinations and understanding will change the sinful desires of the flesh and will have dominion over them.<sup>158</sup> In using allegory Origen is able to draw out his unifying principle of flesh, soul, and spirit, while simultaneously circumventing the conflict over the literal command.

Essentially by using this allegorical/spiritual interpretation Origen avoids any accusation of "heresy" through denigration of the Old Testament. Clark supports this in *Reading Renunciation*, "Through allegory, by contrast, the "time" of the Old Testament engages present-day Christians through an exegesis that erases chronological difference."<sup>159</sup> Instead he makes great use of the Old Testament to prove that there is a unifying principle within the Bible, transformation, that some cannot see as they are not yet spiritually mature enough to understand the Bible on a deeper level. It is to this deeper level that Origen attempts to take the reader of his commentaries concerning virginity and the place of marriage in the life of a Christian, to push to uncover

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<sup>157</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 67-68. This falls in line with his ideology that human embodiment is not a punishment.

<sup>158</sup> Origen, *Genesis*, 68.

<sup>159</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 171.

Orthodoxy, while simultaneously maintaining the “heretics” within their place by essentially deeming them as the weak who cannot see this unifying principle.<sup>160</sup>

### **The Embodied State of Humanity: Service to Sin**

Origen was highly influenced by Platonism when it comes to the ideology of sin. Essentially, free will was what separated the good from the evil souls.<sup>161</sup> Origen believes that with free will comes a choice, to serve sin or to serve God. This choice either results, or does not result, in salvation. Although one is bound to commit a sin sometime in their life, sinfulness and evil are not part of God’s creation, rather they are a part of the fall. It is a return to the angelic quality found within Adam, before “the fall,” a return to paradise and the original condition of man which Origen attempts to achieve through his ideal of continence.<sup>162</sup>

Origen notes that sin is the first master served in every human being and uses the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes 7:20: “Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning” to support that sin is part and parcel to every human being at one time or another. As discussed with Clement, the slave language was used by a majority of exegetes concerning this topic and Origen is no exception. Origen uses slave language to denote the position within which one begins their life, and also of one who

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<sup>160</sup>It is against Marcion to which Origen is stressing his unification of the Bible within *Commentary on Romans* as Marcion posited an inferior creator god as the god of the Old Testament. Scheck notes that Origen also draws a parallel between the unification of faith and works, both being necessary for perfection, to function similarly to the union of the Old and New Testaments (Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 25-26).

<sup>161</sup> It the denial of free will by the Valentinians, the Basilideans, and also Marcion, that upsets Origen. According to Origen it is free will which sets good and evil souls apart. According to Scheck it is against this claim by the “heretics” to which Origen will write his lengthy doctrine of the justification of free will within his *Commentary on Romans* (Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 21).

<sup>162</sup> This ideology of the return to paradise, and Adam having an angelic quality versus one characterized by sexuality, is common among early encratite circles. For further information see Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “Image of God and Sexual Differentiation in the tradition of *Enkrateia*” in *Image of God and Gender Model in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Borresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 139-140.

has completed transformation to come to the knowledge of God. These he refers to as either a slave to sin, letter, members or a slave to righteousness and God. As we are born into a world in which sin operates, the first master we serve is sin, however, due to free will, Origen stresses that we can choose to serve another master, righteousness and God. When utilizing the slave language Origen leaves no room for a person to be in limbo between a slave of sin or God when he comments on Matthew 6:24: “‘But no one can serve two masters at the same time,’ sin and righteousness. ‘For either he will hate the one,’ sin, of course, and ‘will love the other,’ i.e. righteousness; or ‘he will endure the one,’ sin obviously, and will ‘despise the other,’ i.e. righteousness.”<sup>163</sup> Origen uses this particular verse of Matthew to show that there is no middle ground.<sup>164</sup> One is either on the side of sin, or on the side of God. To further impress this notion Origen connects the reader to John 8:34: ‘Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.’<sup>165</sup> Proverbially speaking “you cannot have you cake and eat it too.” Origen is stressing the flesh and sin, but not as an instrument necessarily of sexuality.<sup>166</sup> This will be particularly pertinent shortly as Origen discusses “heresy” as a sin.

If Origen claims that sin is the first master humanity serves, does Origen posit that creation is inherently evil, taking the side of Marcion? While Origen does make the claim

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<sup>163</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.4, 6.

<sup>164</sup> While Clement does make use of the language of slavery as it concerns matters of the flesh, he does not use it as black and white as did Origen. Something that should be kept in mind, as noted by Clark, is that “[a]scetically inclined exegetes, eager to wrest renunciatory injunctions from every possible passage read seemingly irrelevant verses pertaining to sexuality and renunciation” (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 130). However, what is interesting about Origen is the fact that he also takes passages which speak directly to sexuality and interprets them away from a focus on sex to a focus upon the soul. While Origen is certainly ascetic in ideology, and appears the take passages which do not pertain to sexuality and interpret them in relation to sexuality, he does so for the purpose of maintaining a uniform message throughout the Bible of spiritual transformation away from desires of the flesh to knowledge of God (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 171).

<sup>165</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.4, 6-7.

<sup>166</sup> Henri Crouzel argues that Origen’s doctrine on sin is influenced by Platonism. Accordingly, the flesh can be considered impure due to its ambiguity, however if used according to God’s plan, the flesh is good (Crouzel, *Origen*, 139).

that one is first a slave to sin, he does not believe it is part of creation, but rather operates outside of human nature. Origen examines the wording of Jesus when he is speaking of fruit in Matthew 7:17<sup>167</sup> and notes that he is particular to call good fruit “your” and to not claim bad fruit as ours. Origen purposefully picked this verse to make the point that God, our creator, did not plant a bad tree to bear bad fruit, but sowed us in good. The bad will, represented by bad fruit, is foreign to us. Although Origen does not mention that he is writing against any specific doctrine, it appears that he is writing against Marcion as Marcion put forth that creation was evil: “[f]or God has not planted a bad tree in us that would produce bad fruits...so then, even though we may produce bad fruits, they are not our own but foreign to us.”<sup>168</sup> It appears that in order to combat heresiological ideas, that we are evil in nature, Origen takes care to specifically insert an interpretation of Matthew 7:17 that God did not create evil, but that forces outside of God’s creation, as a result of “the fall,” cause humanity to sin.

Once Origen has established that sin is a strong force operating upon our bodies and that we have a choice which to serve, he moves on to what the product of each choice is: death or life.<sup>169</sup> If we choose to follow the law of our members, then we will receive what our teaching has provided us, for as Origen interprets Romans 1:28: “those who do not approve to acknowledge God, God hands them over according to the desires of their hearts to impurity,” but if one chooses to acknowledge God and become a slave to righteousness, they will be “instructed and trained in accordance with the form of teaching about righteousness.”<sup>170</sup> Due to the fact that Origen promotes the existence of

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<sup>167</sup> ‘So what fruit did you have?... You have your fruit in sanctification’ (Origen, *Romans* 6.5.7, 15).

<sup>168</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.5.7, 15.

<sup>169</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.6, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.7, 8.

free will, if one makes the choice to continue on in sin, God will give them over to sin which is sure to result in death. He uses Paul to support sin as death in Romans 8:6 "the prudence of the flesh is death."<sup>171</sup> Origen focuses on the flesh and what the works of the flesh are that cause death in Colossians 3:5: "fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, unchasteness, idolatry, evil deeds, enmity, rivalries, jealousy, rage, contention, dissensions, heresies,"<sup>172</sup> specifically noting "heresy" as a sin of the flesh as it proceeds from the mind. He uses Paul to speak directly to the "heretics" to use the moral power of Paul in citing Colossians 2:18-19: "He is puffed up without cause by the mind of his own flesh, and does not control his head."<sup>173</sup> Origen uses Paul as an instrument of condemnation against "heretics" in much the same way as Clement, allowing Paul to directly speak against such ideologies. In doing this he is able to directly warn his reader of human notions and laws that are claiming to be "orthodox" doctrine. Not only is Origen then linking "heresy" to unorthodoxy, but to death. However, Origen does not leave his reader in despair as he notes that if one does choose to turn from their members (sinful desire of the flesh or heretical doctrines) they will be guided to the proper training to become a slave to righteousness.

Origen stresses free will, and choice, in stark opposition to Marcion. For Origen, salvation rests on controlling the flesh, making the decision to not participate in sinful activities. Are the flesh, soul, and spirit in union with God or with sin? With proper training, and the ability to understand the deeper meaning of scripture, one can attain that union with God.

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<sup>171</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.1.2, 1.

<sup>172</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.1.2, 1.

<sup>173</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.1.2, 1.

## The Transformation: How to Become the Perfect Bodily Sacrifice

What is very important to keep in mind about the actual transformation is Origen's focus upon grace. It is through the grace of God, with the coming of Christ that humanity can now put to death sinful behavior. Not all are given the grace to achieve physical virginity. However, if they are given that gift of grace, they can then voluntarily give up sexuality to God. What Origen is highlighting, against the "heretics," is the freedom to willingly give up sexual intercourse. As Origen is focused upon transformation he stresses complete continence for physical virginity will not keep one from being tarnished by other sins; and hence, that physical virginity does not make one an unblemished sacrifice to God.

Origen asserts that death to sin is possible through grace, utilizing Paul in Romans 6:14: "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace." What is particularly important for Origen are the words under *grace* and not the *law*. Origen is very particular to explain what law Paul is referring to as, Origen attentively points out, often without warning Paul changes between laws (sin, members, flesh, Spirit, righteousness, etc.).<sup>174</sup> Here Origen believes that Paul is referring to the law of members (or as he often refers to it as, the law of sin), which fights against the law in our minds (which desires to seek union with God). Not only does he explain why he believes it refers to the law of the members, but provides a coordinating verse, Romans

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<sup>174</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.8.2, 29. According to Origen Paul did this intentionally as Scripture is divinely uttered (2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness") and was not meant to be polished or "trampled," as is warned against in Matthew 7:6: "Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you," rather Scripture comes to us in parable, or, as Origen describes it, a mystery of the kings delivered in a hidden/spiritual manner (Origen, *Romans* 6.8.2, 30).

7:23<sup>175</sup>, with a unifying theme where Paul explicitly mentions “law of members” to support his exegesis of Romans 6:14. As one of the arguments of the "heretics" was based upon the literal interpretation, "the letter kills" i.e. the Law of Moses is sin, Origen corrects this "heresy" and promotes his "orthodox" position by correcting this poor literal interpretation with an allegorical interpretation of the phrase "the letter kills." Origen notes that there is an acceptable alternate interpretation that the law found in Romans 6:14 is the law of Moses and he supports this with another verse from Paul (2 Corinthians 3:6). If one were to interpret this verse as such it would read that Christians are no longer under the letter that kills, but under the law of Spirit that makes alive.<sup>176</sup> This is a perfect example of how Origen raised the level of scriptural exegesis. Not only is he utilizing verses which stand on their own in the plain sense, but he delves further into Paul and Paul's use of the word law; how it changes, and how one can tell which “law” Paul is referring to in what verse. In this way Origen is using a spiritual reading to combat the heresioloical denigration of the Old Testament.

Origen is very careful when making the statement that the letter kills so as not to condemn the Old Testament, but rather highlight how the Old Testament can enhance sanctification of the flesh through spiritual interpretation. The way in which he explains the phrase “the letter kills” is to say that the law of the letter is both “impossible and weak” in reference to Romans 8:3-4<sup>177</sup>, but not only is it both these things, it is also dead

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<sup>175</sup> As paraphrased by Origen: “we are not under that law that is present in our members, which he says fights against the law of our mind” (Origen, *Romans* 6.2.9, 5). The NRSV translation reads, “but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

<sup>176</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.1.9, 5.

<sup>177</sup> Romans 8:3-4: ‘For what was impossible for the law, in that it was weakened through the flesh, God [has done] by sending his own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and, concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the justification of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (Origen, *Romans* 6.12.1, 47).



as far as one understands it in the flesh (literal interpretation).<sup>178</sup> Origen avoids denigration by stressing that he is speaking to literal interpretation of Jewish law, such as not moving, or being distraught on the Sabbath.<sup>179</sup> He notes that “[b]ecause the Jews, who observe the law according to the flesh, also regard these things as impossible, they contrive certain inept and ridiculous interpretations in order to seem to repair the impossible aspect of the law.”<sup>180</sup> He is not denigrating the commands of God from the Old Testament, only criticizing Jewish interpretation of those laws; that the Jews focus solely on the fleshly aspect of the law, or “understand it according to the flesh... the prudence of flesh is death” so “the letter kills.”<sup>181</sup> Once again Origen uses allegorical interpretation to avoid denigrating the Old Testament, while using the same phrases or verses, in this instance “the letter kills,” to his advantage to promote his ideal that literal interpretation is a sign of weak faith and knowledge of God. Thereby he combats the heretics who use this phrase to support dismissal of the Old Testament, while proving that through the use of the spiritually interpreted Old Testament, one can put to death sin.

Origen is very explicit in his commentaries that Christ descended from heaven to impart full revelation of the scripture and that one can now attain a higher spiritual understanding and thereby can cause death to sin, no longer abiding by fleshly understanding (literal interpretation). In order to support his argument that Christ brought full revelation, Origen uses 2 Corinthians 3:15-17: “For a veil was placed on the face of Moses; but when someone is converted to the Lord, the veil will be removed. For the

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<sup>178</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.12.2-3, 48.

<sup>179</sup> Origen believes that the Christian will not be judged according to how many Jewish laws have been kept, i.e. the Sabbath and circumcision, but believes that Christians will now be judged by the law of God (Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 28).

<sup>180</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.12.3, 48.

<sup>181</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.12.6, 50.

Lord is the Spirit. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>182</sup> Origen is asserting that Moses and the Jews could only gain partial knowledge for the Spirit who imparts knowledge had not revealed all until the coming of Christ, which has found support in Torjesen's research.<sup>183</sup> This is the first time in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* (books 6-10) that one finds Origen directly addressing a "heretical" view. He notes that "some," who Rufinius footnotes as Marcion, interpret the Spirit as something new, having been apart from the Father and the Son. Origen argues against this, noting that the Spirit was always with the Father and the Son, and now renews believers from oldness of letter to newness of Spirit.<sup>184</sup> Once again he is using the literal versus spiritual understanding to combat heresiological ideologies. To this point it should now be understood that Origen puts forth that sin has the ability to operate upon humanity, but through the grace of God, free will, and the impartation of full revelation found in spiritual interpretation, death to sin within the body is attainable.

Once Origen has established *why* ridding oneself of sin is possible the next question Origen seeks to address is *how*? Knowledge of the truth sets you free from sin for according to Origen: "[i]f anyone has been set free from sin, he will serve truth and serve wisdom and serve chastity and serve piety."<sup>185</sup> By mentioning multiple virtues Origen is combating the ideology that by practicing the virtue of physical chastity one can free themselves of sin. According to Origen it takes practicing multiple virtues in order to bring one to complete transformation.

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<sup>182</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.7.18, 28.

<sup>183</sup> Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 68.

<sup>184</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.7.19, 20.

<sup>185</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.9, 10.

While Origen does encourage his readers to strive for complete continence and its many virtues, through his interpretation he has come to the understanding that these virtues are only “shadows” of true virtue. Origen is careful to digest Pauls’ use of “form of teaching” rather than just “teaching” in Romans 6:17: “But thanks be to God that you were slaves to sin, but you obeyed from the heart in the form of teaching to which you were handed over.”<sup>186</sup> Origen notes that Paul would not have understood the phrase “form of teaching” to be the teaching itself, but inserts “form of” for a very specific reason relating to humanity being in an earthly form. The influence of Platonic philosophy upon Origen is evident in his use of earthly form versus a higher spiritual form as Platonic philosophers believed that one could literally transcend this form. By using a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament in Wisdom 9:15: “this earthly tent burdens the very thoughtful mind,” Origen is able to place his philosophical orientation into scriptural exegesis to support the idea that due to our earthly humanity we can only possess the form of the teaching and not the teaching itself.<sup>187</sup> Once again he looks to Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:12 to support his interpretation: “But now we see in a mirror, in a riddle.”<sup>188</sup> As this verse expresses it, we are currently looking into to a mirror, looking at the form or shadow of ourselves; we will currently only be able to see that image, or attain some shadow of virtue. Later, however, we will be able to “see face to face.”<sup>189</sup> Due to the fact that Paul was so specific, Origen believes that Paul was attempting to explain the attainment of virtues; that in our present state one can only attain some

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<sup>186</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.1, 6.

<sup>187</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.8, 9. The term earthly humanity also has ties to Platonism as the soul was believed to have been embodied and hence is only a form of its actual self.

<sup>188</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.8, 9.

<sup>189</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.8, 9. The embodiment caused a disruption in the union between the soul and God and hence as this union was broken, until the soul is retransformed into union with God, one will only see a shadow of true virtues.

“shadow” of the virtues and not the perfect virtues themselves. Origen believes that this ideology is expressed in Hebrews: “For this reason as well, I think that in the present life we may be able to attain the form and shadow of the virtues, but then, when the perfect comes, to the virtues themselves ” (10:1).<sup>190</sup>

Although Origen does lay emphasis on serving the truth through multiple virtues, he recognizes that having the will to change one’s life does not mean it will occur quickly or painlessly. Paul, being the great apostle and moral authority, aids Origen in Romans 7:14-25.<sup>191</sup> Origen immediately argues that the text is written about a person who is a slave to sin, and notes that “we should conclude from these things that it is custom of the Holy Scripture to imperceptibly change the personae and subject matter” as here Paul is not the strong man of Spirit, but is taking on the personae of the weak. In order to guard against “heretical” accusations that Paul is actually weak Origen quotes 1 Corinthians 9:22: “I became weak to the weak to win the weak,” essentially having Paul defend himself against such accusations.<sup>192</sup> Origen notes that Paul takes on this persona to show that having “will” does not mean that something is guaranteed to occur; rather Paul is recognizing the struggle that exists with the activation of the will to righteousness. He specifically speaks to chastity in this section, noting that having the will to be chaste does

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<sup>190</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.8, 9.

<sup>191</sup> ‘For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want; but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. But now it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The will is there within me, but I do not attain to the perfecting of the good. For I do not do the good I want; but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find that the law is in me while I want to do the good, because the evil lies close at hand to me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man; but I see in my members another law fighting against the law of my mind, leading me away as a captive to the law of sin that is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Origen, *Romans* 6.9.1, 35-36).

<sup>192</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.9.3, 37.

not mean one will become chaste overnight, rather one will struggle.<sup>193</sup> Here Origen cites one of Paul's most abundantly used verses<sup>194</sup> concerning the flesh and chastity, Galatians 5:17: "The flesh fights against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."<sup>195</sup> Through the commentary on this passage of Romans Origen has accomplished two things. The first is that he has protected Paul against the so called double message contained within his letters.<sup>196</sup> Paul is not the weak individual who is portrayed through this verse, but rather he is taking on the persona of the weak. Second, Origen uses Paul to show that conversion is not easy, but will be a struggle for those who are weaker.

If then, Christians are to strive for a broad base of virtues which aid in complete continence, where does marriage, and Paul's words concerning marriage, fall in line with Origenistic ideology? As Origen attempts to raise a majority of verses to their "spiritual" level, marriage is truly referring to the law of sin (first or fleshly marriage) and the law of God (union with God), not physical marriage. A perfect example of this is Origen's commentary on Romans 7:1-6.<sup>197</sup> Origen believes that this introductory section to chapter

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<sup>193</sup> Although Origen expressed frustration towards the body, he believed that God embodied each human soul into a suitable "sparring partner." This particular way of viewing the inner spiritual struggle became integrated into the ascetic ideology/tradition both in the Greek and Near Eastern worlds (Brown, *The Body and Society*, 165- 166).

<sup>194</sup> In his commentary on the Book of Romans books 6-10.

<sup>195</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.9.11, 41.

<sup>196</sup> As the Deutero-Pauline and Pauline epistles were thought to have been written by Paul there appeared to be multiple messages concerning celibacy. The more ascetic minded exegetes tended to attempt to conform the other "Pauline" messages to 1 Corinthians 7 which was certainly more rigorist than the messages found within the epistles (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 13).

<sup>197</sup> "Do you not know, brothers- for I am speaking to those who know the law- that the law exercises dominion over a man for as long a time as it lives? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law of her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she belongs to another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is freed from that law, so that if she belongs to another man, she is no longer an adulteress. Consequently, my brothers, even you have been put to death to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, who rose again from the dead, in order that you may bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the vices of sins, which were through the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now, having died we have been discharged from the law in which we were being held, so that we might serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Origen, *Romans* 6.7.1, 19-20).

seven of Romans referencing husband and wife is simply an allegory referring to his prior use of language concerning slavery: slavery to the law and to God. As he interprets this passage, in relation to slavery, the death of the first husband is the coming of Christ through which one is joined to a second husband, the Spirit. Origen believes this is the death to the law of sin and a union to the law of righteousness or God, and so Paul is actually noting, as he does in Romans 8:9, “For we are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, while Romans 7:1-6 speaks to marriage in a literal fashion as an acceptable/unacceptable institution in Christianity, Origen actually obfuscates that conversation by claiming that, if one were to interpret the passage spiritually, it does not speak to physical marriage at all. In this way Origen can take a passage that is speaking to marriage and transform it into one which speaks of conversion from sin to righteousness.

While Origen does proverbially dodge controversy over marriage, he does not shy away from pressing for virginity when the moment presents itself. This can be seen again in his use of Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 “simplicity of the faith which is in Christ.”<sup>199</sup> Origen interpreted this verse to mean that Paul wants all the Corinthians to be presented as virgins to Christ; which, according to Origen Paul would never want if everyone being a virgin to Christ was not possible. This virginity is possible for all, Origen claims, because Paul was not speaking to virginity of the flesh, but the chastity of the soul whose “simplicity of the faith in Christ” was his virginity.

Origen is showing his ascetic leaning by being extremely careful, when speaking about marriage, not to speak of it as blessed by God; instead he stresses continence in

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<sup>198</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.7.4, 21.

<sup>199</sup> Origen, *Genesis*, 227.

whatever position in life one finds oneself.<sup>200</sup> As Clark notes in *Reading Renunciation*, “Origen thus takes the verse [1 Corinthians 7:1] as Paul’s congratulations to more ‘perfect’ Christians who are able to sustain a high degree of abstinence.”<sup>201</sup> It is through these scriptural citations and interpretations that one can see Origen shifting back towards asceticism. What is particularly important and appears to be a strategic move is for Origen to move away from such a focus upon the physical and literal interpretations of some passages to bring the conversation into a wider circle. This appears to be what Clement was doing in attempting to move away from “heresy” and in stepping towards creation of orthodoxy. By moving away from the direct conversation Origen is able to speak to a broader range of actions concerning the Christian lifestyle, complete continence.

Origen’s position on physical virginity heavily ties into free choice, willingly refusing sin to make our bodies worthy to sacrifice to God. One can find his argumentation in his commentary on Romans 12:1-2.<sup>202</sup> Origen draws out of this passage “your bodies” now being the sacrifice to God, rather than animals under the letter. In order to become the sacrifice and transform our bodies into that which is acceptable to God, Origen urges readers to put to death earthly members, and uses Colossians 3:5, placing emphasis on lust. If they can learn to be continent in their actions with their bodies, they may begin to understand and fulfill the laws of sacrifice in Leviticus 4:3: “in

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<sup>200</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 227.

<sup>201</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 265.

<sup>202</sup> ‘I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice living, holy, pleasing to God, your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you may test what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect’ (Origen, *Romans* 9.1.1, 191).

the first place a calf, second a ram, third a goat,”<sup>203</sup> What Origen is pressing here is that the Jews in the “fleshly understanding” were sacrificing these animals in the hope of forgiveness, when really they should have been interpreting the sacrificial laws spiritually. According to Origen’s interpretation pride is equal to a calf, anger a ram, lust a goat, wandering and deceitful thoughts are doves and turtledoves.<sup>204</sup> Therefore it is no longer animals which are sacrificed, but our bodies to the Lord as Origen spells out: “Then it is the undefiled body that will chiefly seem a sacrifice that is living and holy and pleasing to God.”<sup>205</sup> Remember that Origen was working under Platonic philosophy and henceforth actual perfection could be achieved within the body while on earth; therefore it was pertinent that one achieve this perfection, found through continence, so as to become that sacrifice.<sup>206</sup>

Marriage and virginity are not always addressed through allegory, but at some points must be addressed directly. While Origen is attempting to prove through his exegesis that complete continence is the lifestyle a Christian should be striving to attain, he has to respond to the fact that the Apostles and saints were married, a point Clement used in order to promote the blessing of marriage. The way he deals with the apostolic marriage is through the order of rank in the Levitical sacrificial system. He notes that specifically because men of the highest moral authority were themselves married it cannot be expected that one can attain a body worthy of sacrifice to God through virginity alone, although according to Origen virginity is in the first rank of sacrifices. He

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<sup>203</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.1.3, 192.

<sup>204</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.1.4, 192.

<sup>205</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.1.7, 194.

<sup>206</sup> Crouzel elaborates upon this point that while Origen believes that physical virginity is a gift given by the grace of God, physical virginity is also considered a gift in return to God. It is “a most perfect martyrdom.” Here he notes that Origen does take into account that each individuals struggle will be different, according to their grace. In addition, he also notes that there is not a virginity that is safe from the dangers of falling, that even the saints were not free from sin (Crouzel, *Origen*, 143).



references here the different sacrificial laws according to the plain sense of the letter in Leviticus 4:3, 13, 22, 27. He notes that the priests, rulers, assembly, and the individual all have different animal sacrifices for the sins which they committed. Origen extends this ideology to spiritual sacrifices of the Church: The first sacrifice is the Apostles, then martyrs, then virgins, then the continent. However, Origen is very careful to note that while this is the ranking of spiritual sacrifice according to his exegesis, he is unsure, or cannot say for sure, that married persons who make prayer a devoted part of their lives will not be able to be bodily sacrifices to God, using Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:5.<sup>207</sup> On the other hand, strictly being a virgin without holding other virtues, will not be enough to be a sacrifice to God, as the priest (in the spiritual interpretation, God) checks the sacrifices for blemishes, as can be spiritually read through Deuteronomy 15:21.<sup>208</sup>

By giving an interpretation of the spiritual sacrificial system Origen is noting that physical virginity is not enough to make the body or the spirit acceptable to God. By specifically noting this, Origen maintains the category of “heretical” for those radical ascetics who strongly promote physical virginity as the key to salvation. In addition, like Clement, one can also see Origen attempting to widen the conversation to create an orthodox position by extending the key to salvation as “complete” continence. He also speaks against virginity, or chastity, that is not from faith in God: condemning those “who pay attention to deceitful spirits and to teachings of demons, speaking by false

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<sup>207</sup> “Do not deprive one another except perhaps by the agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” NRSV

<sup>208</sup> As paraphrased by Origen: “For even in the law, when a sacrifice was offered, it was carefully inspected by the priest, not only to see whether it came from the clean animals, but to make sure it did not possess a defect in its eyes or ears or feet, lest a lame or one-eyed or plucked animal should be removed from the divine altar” (Origen, *Romans* 9.1.7, 194). This idea that other virtues must accompany physical virginity is further discussed by Crouzel as one of three affirmations for virginity, the second, the purpose of physical chastity is to attain chastity of the heart, and third, virginity as something which is voluntary and not forced (Crouzel, *Origen*, 142).

hypocrisy, having a seared conscience, forbidding marriage, and abstaining from foods, which God created' for this action or good work is 'converted into sin, because it is not from faith...'”<sup>209</sup> It is only virginity that arises from conversion from the law of sin to the law of God that is a virtue in the eyes of God, and hence not even virginity in itself is a virtue. Rufinus notes in his footnotes that Marcion and his followers are the intended audience for this remark as Origen is attempting to prove that Marcion's position is not "orthodox."<sup>210</sup>

In fact, Origen is quick to speak against this anti-marital ideology. The way in which Origen addresses this “heretical” viewpoint is through his commentary on Romans 12:3-5.<sup>211</sup> It is concerning these verses that Origen speaks out against Marcion, whom he labels as “heretical,”<sup>212</sup> forbids marriage and demands abstention of food. In order to combat this ideology Origen paraphrases 1 Timothy 4:1-3, “those who attend to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons that utter lies in their hypocrisy and that forbid marriage to these, having seared consciences, and have them abstain from foods that God created.”<sup>213</sup> This verse aids Origen in connecting these particular beliefs with “heretics” and allows him to truly identify Marcion as “heretical.” It is not only he who is condemning them, but Paul who is writing against such doctrines. He notes that in light of Romans 12:3 they are too wise when it comes to chastity.<sup>214</sup> After addressing the “heretics” in their wise ways, Origen comments on the other portion of this passage:

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<sup>209</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1-3 in Origen, *Romans* 10.6.6, 262.

<sup>210</sup> [58] in Origen, *Romans* 10.6.6, 262.

<sup>211</sup> “For through the grace given to me I say to you all who are among you: Do not be wiser than you ought to be, but be wise in moderation, each according to the measure of faith that God has allotted. For as in one body we have many members, but not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another” (Origen, *Romans* 9.2.2, 198).

<sup>212</sup> Rufinus believes that due to the ideology that Origen was speaking against it is likely to have been Marcion (Origen, *Romans* 9.2.[64], 201).

<sup>213</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.2.9, 201.

<sup>214</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.2.9, 201.

different gifts and functions given to members of the church. It is his interpretation that these different gifts are merited through grace and that a “gift” is a person’s principle duty; however, one should not to be lax about the other virtues, but are expected to be a participant and practitioner of every other virtue.<sup>215</sup> While he notes that it may be beyond our human comprehension to know why God gives certain gifts to different individuals “it should never be conceded that...divine providence does not dispense each one in such a way that each one’s merit, which is acquired through free will, furnishes material to the one who dispenses. For God is just and there is no injustice in him.”<sup>216</sup> Therefore, while physical virginity may not be attainable for all, as all are not given the gift of virginity by God’s grace, everyone must practice complete continence in all virtues to the best of their ability to be accepted as a sacrifice to God. In saying that physical virginity is simply not possible for all Origen did not specifically mention that he was writing against the “heretics,” but he is certainly writing against the “heretical” notion that all must be physical virgins to receive salvation.<sup>217</sup> Again Origen is certainly using more ascetic passages in addition to employing an asceticizing interpretation, but he is also utilizing his Platonic view of the body and its relation to the spirit to bring forth the unifying message of the Bible: the transformation of one’s body in conversion to Christianity and conducting oneself in complete continence.

Origen's ideology of transformation is set upon two notions, grace given by God and free choice. It is due to grace that the Christian is able to put death to sin. Origen posited that with the coming of Christ there was a full revelation of the meaning of

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<sup>215</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.2.15, 203.

<sup>216</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.2.16, 204

<sup>217</sup> Crouzel posits this as virginity of faith over virginity of morals “which has no value if the doctrines are false” (Crouzel, *Origen*, 141).

scripture. With that revelation came a second level of interpretation, spiritual. This allows the Christian to enhance the sanctification of the Old Testament. As Origen does typically stick to allegorical interpretation he does end up skirting many of the debated scripture which literally speak to marriage by claiming they speak to the law of sin or God. That being said, Origen does not hide the fact that he holds physical virginity as a higher calling over marriage when he expresses ambivalence over the acceptability of married person as a sacrifice to God. Against the "heretics" Origen stresses not physical virginity, but chastity of the heart. Origen takes the conversation away from such a focus upon physical virginity as he does not believe that an act such as that has no redeeming quality if it is forced, and if it is done out of contempt for God. By practicing multiple virtues of chastity one is able to serve truth and come to knowledge of God. In this way Origen continues to expand the conversation away from physical virginity as did Clement, while still stressing physical virginity as a higher calling to marriage.

## **Conclusion**

As Origen's writings are in homily and commentary form it was more difficult to exhume his scriptural warfare against the heretics. While some of his remarks are blatantly against "heretics," others had to be footnoted by Rufinus against a specific group or person. Therefore, in order to present a complete understanding of Origen's position on the subject of celibacy I focused more heavily upon Origen's overall view of the body in relation to Christianity, specifically the process by which one completes transformation. Through looking at his scriptural analysis of this process, Origen's

position concerning celibacy and marriage are lifted, as well as remarks against “heretics” (whether they are blatant or subtle).

Essentially it begins with Origen view of the unity of body, soul, and spirit as exemplified in Origen’s allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1:28. This verse is typically used by proponents of marriage and procreation; however, with the use of allegory Origen is able to side step the entire conversation. In claiming that the male and female are not references to sex, but to soul and spirit, Origen is able to assert that the command to increase and multiply does not refer to children, but to producing good inclinations and understanding. These good inclinations can then fill and gain dominion over the flesh, turning the flesh away from itself. This is the basis for Origen’s exegesis surrounding virginity and marriage. Other exegetes within this debate focus upon the passage in order to either directly support or refute marriage, yet Origen interprets this verse to truly be speaking to the union of the soul and spirit. Marriage is referred to as marriage to the flesh and can be linked to the law of the members, law of flesh, law of sin, law of the letter (in so far as the letter is death to sin). A second marriage (where acceptable) is to Christ in causing death to her members or flesh. The more one merits the grace of God, the closer one will be to attaining these virtues and the more one tries, strives, and struggles for chastity (inner not fleshly) the more grace will be poured out.

Origen expresses a majority of these ideologies through his use of scriptural interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments. For instance, Origen uses Paul, and the notion of liquid and solid foods to show that scripture is a mystery. The more knowledge you gain the more solid foods one can ingest. Liquid food for Origen is truly pertaining to the literal/plain meaning versus the ingestion of solid food which stands for

the spiritual meaning. This allegorical treatment of food is discussed by a multitude of scholars including, but not limited to David Dawson, Karen Torjesen, David Hunter, and Elizabeth Clark. Clark mentions this dichotomy in saying that “even Origen...thought that these verses were directed only towards ‘infants,’ to the spiritually immature Corinthians who could not compare to the more ascetically advanced Christians at Ephesus.”<sup>218</sup> The more spiritual understanding one has of God’s word the closer one can get to understanding and the more pure one can become- more acceptable to God as a sacrifice. This is how one escapes being a slave to sin and becomes a slave to righteousness and then eventually God.

Origen as Hunter notes, is a “moderate encratite.”<sup>219</sup> He walks the line between rigorous ascetic views on marriage and equality of marriage and virginity. Against the “heretics” Origen promptly notes that physical virginity does not result in salvation if virgins have blemishes. Henceforth he promotes chastity of the heart. Yet, he cannot say that marriage will make one unacceptable as a sacrifice to God, as the apostles and the saints were married. He further acknowledges Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 7:5: “Do not deprive one another except perhaps by the agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer.”<sup>220</sup> Origen believes that he cannot make sound judgment in exegesis one way or another concerning married persons’ salvation; but it is clear that Origen does not support marriage where the couple frequently or even occasionally engages in sexual

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<sup>218</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 270.

<sup>219</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 126. Gasparro touches upon this terminology as well, expressing that the “moderate interpretation coincides in large measure with the position of the Catholic Church” (Gasparro, “Image of God,” 138).

<sup>220</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.1.7, 194.

intercourse.<sup>221</sup> He makes no allowance for sexual intercourse for pleasure as that is a sin of the flesh, and henceforth should only be engaged in for procreation purposes.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the impact which outside forces had upon two biblical exegetes in second-century Alexandria. Neither Clement nor Origen was writing in isolation, but against opponents whom they attempted to label and sustain as “heretics.” Second-century Egypt is a particularly interesting place to examine because, as Bauer mentions, there is no overwhelmingly sense of orthodoxy.<sup>222</sup> In fact, Clement himself uses *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which is now considered apocryphal, to develop and affirm what he believed to be the truth of the scriptures. Just the fact that Clement fully believed in the “orthodoxy” of the literature he was using, while accusing his opponents of using apocryphal literature, shows the nature of orthodoxy in third-century Alexandria. As there was yet to be the creation of an Orthodox doctrine, the terminology of “heresy,” as presented by Clement and Origen, is better viewed as rhetorical.

In addition to influence by the condition of the church, one should consider the impact which philosophy had upon each exegete’s ideology. Clement utilized Stoicism to develop a Christian doctrine which focused upon the state of the inner being. He focused

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<sup>221</sup> Hunter expounds Origen’s hesitancy to support marriage and sexual intercourse within marriage as it concerns prayer. Accordingly, within Origen’s *On Prayer*, due to abstention from prayer, sexual intercourse prevents one from being in union with God. He even goes so far to say that people should not even pray in a place where sexual intercourse takes place. Origen supports the incompatibility of sexual intercourse with union with God through the literal interpretation of the purity laws in the Old Testament. For further discussion see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 125-126.

<sup>222</sup> Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 59.

on the Greek notion of *apatheia*, freeing one's body from the passions. In combination these philosophical notions allow Clement to direct the conversation away from intense focus on the body as filthy, to the body as a means to attain knowledge of God. Platonism had a profound effect upon Origen's ideology of the notion of the embodiment of humanity, as well as the notion of sin. Due to its influence Origen put forth that the soul existed prior to "falling" into a body and hence once embodied the soul lost its original union with God. In positing free will Origen allowed for the separation of good and evil beings, and hence opened up the possibility for union with God in body, soul, and spirit while in an earthly form. This transformation, arguably erasing one's gender, is influenced by Platonism. Philosophy aided Clement and Origen in moving the conversation beyond physical virginity, yet they both used Stoicism and Platonism to steer their scriptural interpretation in separate directions as we will now see.

Despite the differences in their application of philosophy and theology, Clement and Origen find themselves on the offensive against denigration of the Old Testament. This is arguably due to the fact that they are attempting to find a line between too liberal a Christian lifestyle and too rigorous an ascetic lifestyle. In order to provide a balance between their opponents they hold the tenet that the God of the Old and New Testaments is the same God. To support this claim Clement uses Paul in Romans 7:12: "the law is holy and the commandment holy, righteous and good."<sup>223</sup> According to Clement's interpretation, if the law then is holy, then the blessing found in Genesis 1:28 to "increase and multiply" must also still be holy. In order to prove that the coming of Christ did not excuse the Old Testament from use by Christians, Clement uses a quote from Jesus in

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<sup>223</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.12.84, 79-80.



Matthew 5:17: "I come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it."<sup>224</sup> Clement used Jesus in concert with the Old Testament to highlight their continuing support of marriage.<sup>225</sup> Note that Clement chose verses which literally speak to the continuation of the Old Testament law in the life of Christians. Origen took a completely different approach to the unification of the Old and New Testaments due to his application of allegorical interpretation, but none the less affirmed their continuity. The way in which Origen scripturally supported the Old and New Testament's unity was through the notion that with Christ's coming the Word was fully revealed. Origen also uses Paul to support continuity, but does so in a way that supports his ideology of full revelation with 2 Corinthians 3:15-17: "For a veil was placed on the face of Moses; but when someone is converted to the Lord, the veil will be removed. For the Lord is the Spirit. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>226</sup> According to Origen, the Old Testament is not meant to be understood in a literal sense, but in a deeper spiritual sense. According to Origen, "the letter kills" truly means that literal interpretation will keep one from attaining salvation, but the spirit that makes alive aids one in understanding the Bible spiritually and hence will aid one in perfection. There is a unified theme throughout the Bible, unity of body, soul, and spirit, and if one believes the Bible is contradicting itself they simply do not understand or see the spiritual interpretation. Hence the Old Testament does not and cannot contradict the New Testament.<sup>227</sup> While it is very apparent that Clement and Origen stress continuity between both Testaments to avoid denigration of the Old Testament, it is also clear that they do so in diverging ways.

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<sup>224</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.46, 61.

<sup>225</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 107.

<sup>226</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.7.18, 28.

<sup>227</sup> While they do share this ideology, they use different means of supporting it, which will be addressed shortly.

Clement quotes scripture which literally speaks to a connection between the holiness of the law and its application to the lives of Christians as spoken by Christ. Through Clement's exegesis he is attempting to show that not only are they united, but he stresses that as they are, marriage must still be considered holy. Origen, on the other hand, selected verses from Paul which support his unification principle, and use of allegory that the Bible speaks to unity of the flesh, soul, and spirit: to transformation. Therefore, while they both uphold the unity of the Bible, they certainly do not do so in the same way or for the same reason: Clement to support marriage, Origen to support transformation. In supporting the Old Testament's continuity, both exegetes are maintaining distance, while propitiating the notion that separation from the Old Testament is considered "heretical."

In addition to defending the Old Testament, Clement and Origen went on the offense against "heretical" ideology by speaking to the law of sin. Similar to the fact that Clement and Origen needed to agree on specific points to avoid falling into the category of "heretical" themselves, there are certain verses that serve as backbones to the debate over celibacy which required agreement for continued condemnation of the "heretics." Matthew 6:24 is one such verse: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."<sup>228</sup> Slave language is seen as a common tool throughout the debate and is often used by exegetes, as was seen through the writings of both Clement and Origen, to draw a clear line between sin and God. Clement uses Matthew 6:24 in opposition to the libertines to disprove their doctrine that one can sin and still be in union with God. Something particular to Clement is the way he places verses one after another to stand without any in-depth explanation as to their meaning. For example when

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<sup>228</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.4, 6.

attempting to combat the “libertines” who live a licentious lifestyle, Clement quotes Romans 8:9-10: “But if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. So then, brethren, we are under an obligation, not to the flesh to live after the flesh...”<sup>229</sup> then Romans 12-15.<sup>230</sup> Clement, mostly writing against the libertines concerning sinful behavior, is attempting to support that right and wrong do exist, and that they do apply to both Gentile and Jew. Origen, on the other hand, is emphasizing the role of free will.<sup>231</sup> In order to highlight the role of free will as it pertains to slavery to sin Origen uses Romans 1:28: “those who do not approve to acknowledge God, God hands them over according to the desires of their hearts to impurity,” to draw attention to the sinner that if they choose God over sin they will be “instructed and trained in accordance with the form of teaching about righteousness.”<sup>232</sup> He specifically calls heresy a sin of the mind and uses Colossians 2:18-19: “He is puffed up without cause by the mind of his own flesh, and does not control his head”<sup>233</sup> to prove that one’s doctrine is “heresy”, thereby proving they are a slave to sin. While the language is different, the sentiment is the same, Clement is stating that one cannot have both “pleasure and God” and for Origen it is “sin and righteousness.” Clement and Origen share the allegorical interpretation of slavery and use it to similar ends, to combat heretics as slaves to sin. Once again Clement chooses verses which stand on their own in the literal sense, while Origen, in choosing Romans 1:28 uses verses which within

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<sup>229</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3. 11.78, 75-76.

<sup>230</sup> Romans 12-14: “If you live after the flesh you shall die. But by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” Romans 8:15: “You have not received the spirit of bondage that you should again be in fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship by which we cry, Abba, Father!” (Clement, “Stromata” 3. 11.78, 75-76).

<sup>231</sup> Remember that Origen is emphasizing free will against Marcion who takes away this choice when he posits mandatory physical virginity as the way to attain unity with God (Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification*, 21).

<sup>232</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.7, 8.

<sup>233</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.1.2, 1.

themselves communicate the mysteriousness of scripture. Origen takes his exegesis a step further by explicitly expounding upon the role that free will plays within this relationship to slavery. In stressing free will he condemns Marcion, who leaves no choice for his followers.

Clement and Origen also find themselves opposing mandatory physical virginity. To begin, they note that there is nothing inherently good about physical virginity in and of itself. In order to function as a virtue aiding one in the knowledge of God, physical virginity must be enacted out of faith and love for God for as Clement notes: even athletes abstain for a time to train.<sup>234</sup> They both argue that physical virginity will not aid one in coming to an understanding of the truth. It is the wider context of complete continence that purifies one's way of living as a Christian. In reaction to the "Encratites" Clement quotes Colossians 2:23: 'Let no one disqualify you by demanding self-imposed ascetic practices and severe treatment of the body.'<sup>235</sup> Clement wrote to promote meekness, that harsh treatment of the body was not necessary to achieve complete continence. To support complete continence Clement cites Ephesians 5:1-11 in the following words: "Moreover, the apostle teaches us to be chaste in speech when he writes, 'Know this well that no fornicator...' and so on as far as the words 'but rather expose them.'"<sup>236</sup> By using the Pastorals Clement is taking the conversation away from the heavy ascetic focus upon physical virginity to the broader conversation of chastity. Origen approaches the conversation in a more scholarly manner when he notes that Paul speaks to virginity as attainable by all in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 "simplicity of the faith which is in Christ." He carefully examines that in saying it is attainable by all Paul was

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<sup>234</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.50, 63.

<sup>235</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.6.51, 64.

<sup>236</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.28, 53.

not speaking of physical virginity, but of the chastity of the heart.<sup>237</sup> To combat the “heretics” who hold physical virginity as the end all and be all virtue, Origen uses an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 15:2: God will check bodily sacrifices for *all* blemishes.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, if one is a liar, but a virgin, God will note that blemish and reject that person from heaven, for “[i]f anyone has been set free from sin, he will serve truth and serve wisdom and serve chastity and serve piety.”<sup>239</sup> By stressing complete continence both Origen and Clement could defeat the intense focus on physical virginity and once again avoid denigrating the Old Testament.<sup>240</sup> This scriptural tactic functioned not only to prove the “heretical” aspects of these groups, but widened the conversation to promote what was the truth, complete continence. Both used similar language to speak of this conversion from the physical desires to knowledge of God as physical/spiritual circumcision and as a slave to sin/God. As can be seen through the discussion of their similarities it appears that each position they took was in response to a certain “heretical” doctrine or ideology. Note, however, that they take very different approaches. Origen relies heavily on allegorical interpretation and his ideology that the body is a sacrifice to God. It is this allegorical idea of the body as a sacrifice by which Origen argues for complete continence. Clement, on the other hand, chooses multiple quotes from the Pastorals “[b]ecause of their anti- ascetical tendencies, the Pastorals were particularly suited to Clement’s anti-encratite agenda.”<sup>241</sup> It can therefore be surmised that Clement and Origen, although they have their differences, agreed on these larger

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<sup>237</sup> Origen, *Genesis*, 227.

<sup>238</sup> As paraphrased by Origen: “For even in the law, when a sacrifice was offered, it was carefully inspected by the priest, not only to see whether it came from the clean animals, but to make sure it did not possess a defect in its eyes or ears or feet, lest a lame or one-eyed or plucked animal should be removed from the divine altar” (Origen, *Romans* 9.1.7, 194).

<sup>239</sup> Origen, *Romans* 6.3.9, 10.

<sup>240</sup> Once again Origen did affirm this, but not in the typical way.

<sup>241</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 109.

points in order to separate themselves, while creating a box for their enemies, the “heretics.”

The ideology of grace found in Romans 6:14 becomes a sizable portion of the conversation, which “heretics” and their “orthodox” counterparts seek to interpret correctly as it pertains to the life of Christians. Clement uses Romans 6:14 to directly battle against the false exegesis of the libertine who held that as we are not under the law, but under grace, sin can no longer exercise dominion; thus giving license to sin. Clement used Paul to speak directly to their false exegesis. Clement notes that Paul’s response, “By no means,” condemns the “heretic’s” doctrine which protects the act of sinning. Clement’s use of Paul was clever as it was written in such a way that Paul was directly condemning their “heretical” beliefs. To promote the ideology that sin is not acceptable under grace Clement uses another verse from Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:10,17, that we are a new creation in Christ, with chastity replacing fornication. Origen, although having a very similar interpretation, stresses different portions of Romans 6:14. What was important for Origen concerning Romans 6:14 was Paul’s claim that death to sin is possible due to the law of grace and the dismissal of the law of sin. As “heretical” argumentation posited that the law of sin is the Law of Moses, Origen provided an in-depth scriptural interpretation of Paul’s varied use of the word “law.” Origen noted that here Paul is referring to the law of the members and supports his exegesis by paralleling Romans 6:14 with Romans 7:23.<sup>242</sup> For Origen, “the letter that kills” is referring to the literal interpretation of the Old Testament law. In order for Christians to become sanctified by the Old Testament, it must be read spiritually. By specifying which law Paul

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<sup>242</sup> As paraphrased by Origen: “we are not under that law that is present in our members, which he says fights against the law of our mind” (Origen, *Romans* 6.2.9, 5).

is referring to he can condemn the “heretical” interpretation that Paul is speaking to the Law of Moses as sin and in so doing they denigrate the Old Testament. Both Clement and Origen are very blatant that they are correcting false exegesis of Paul and actually use him in a similar fashion to combat this “heresy,” by noting that one should no longer sin as grace has entered upon the Christian. The main difference is the fact that Origen’s overall theology seems to be much more developed and the exegesis is performed in a much greater depth, which is shown through the fact that Origen takes the time to support what law Paul is referring to by using other verses from Paul, rather than relying upon a literal interpretation.

The differences continue as we approach a major point of contention for those who solely propose virginity for Christians, the marriage of the apostles. Clement uses this in a positive way to support the continued blessing from the Old Testament to the New Testament. He even continues to show that not only were apostles married, as exemplified in 1 Corinthians 9:5: “Have we not a right to take about with us a wife, which is a sister like the other apostles?”, but other important moral players (bishops, priests, etc.) were also married.<sup>243</sup> The mention of the apostolic marriages are limited in Origen’s commentary and when referenced are done so to show that physical virginity cannot be the only virtue which gains salvation. He references Levitical law in Leviticus 4:3 and provides a list of spiritual sacrifices of the church, the first being the Apostles. There are several things to note concerning how Clement and Origen used this piece of information to support their ideologies of marriage. Clement immediately uses apostolic marriage to reaffirm the continued blessing of marriage. If the apostles were married then it cannot be a hindrance to perfection. Origen uses this to comment against “heretical”

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<sup>243</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.6.53, 65.

belief that strictly through physical virginity perfection and transformation can be attained. The fact that the Apostles were married does seem to cause hesitation for Origen's ideology of sacrificial purity, and so he references Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:5, that if couples abstain in times of prayer he cannot say they will not be accepted as sacrifices. As the apostles, according to Origen's spiritual interpretation, are the highest sacrifice in the order of the church, physical virginity cannot be *the* virtue which aids in actuating transformation. It is through the discussion surrounding apostolic marriage that one can clearly see both Clement and Origen's agenda: Clement is attempting to affirm the holiness of marriage for the life of Christians and to reaffirm perfection as attainable within marriage, while Origen is using apostolic marriage to support chastity of the heart over emphasis on physical virginity. It appears that Origen is attempting to avoid being too rigorous in his ascetic ideology and therefore sticks to being ambivalent over whether or not it will blemish his ideal of body sacrifice.

In an in-depth analysis of Clement and Origen's writings it soon becomes apparent that Clement is blatantly supporting marriage, while Origen is attempting to avoid commenting on marriage when possible. Clement, proving himself to be a supporter of marriage as equal to virginity, interprets this verse literally. In addition, Clement uses it against the "heretical" group labeled the *antitactae* in order to question why they do not oppose such commands as are found in Genesis 1:28 and to prove that their doctrine and behaviors are inconsistent.<sup>244</sup> Therefore in using the literal interpretation Clement is affirming the continued blessing while using it as ammunition against those he seeks to maintain within the "heretical" label. Clement actually writes in admiration of monogamous marriage: "we admire monogamy and the high standing of

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<sup>244</sup> Clement, "Stromata" 3.4.37, 56.



single marriage.”<sup>245</sup> Clement believes that marriage can actually aid in sanctification by holding one another accountable as expressed in Galatians 6:2: ‘Bear one another’s burdens’<sup>246</sup> and 1 Corinthians 7:14:<sup>247</sup> “what does the apostle Paul mean when he says that the wife is sanctified by the husband and the husband by the wife?”<sup>248</sup> Here Clement can be seen using the Pastoral Paul to soften the more ascetic Paul of 1 Corinthians. In light of this Pastoral softening of Paul, sexual intercourse does not keep one from attaining perfection. By linking these verses Clement is showing contrary to “heretical” doctrines that marriage is holy; that as this union is resultant from God, marriage cannot be equated to fornication. Another verse which Clement uses to support the notion of familial importance is Matthew 18:20 “[f]or when two or three come together in my name” in order to support his question: “[d]oes he not by the ‘three’ mean husband wife and child?”<sup>249</sup> Clement believes that the three could plausibly be husband, wife, and child as he uses Paul to support the importance of the family. Clement even notes the presence of the three as flesh, soul, and spirit, as later highlighted by Origen in his spiritual interpretation of Genesis 1:28.<sup>250</sup> When spirit and soul are united they create good thoughts and intentions which grow, and multiply, and fill the earth; eventually changing the disposition of the body away from desires of the flesh to the spirit.<sup>251</sup> This is just one instance of many where Origen dodges the conversation of marriage and tends to allegorically interpret verses which speak directly to marriage. Another such example is

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<sup>245</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.1.4, 42.

<sup>246</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.1.4, 42.

<sup>247</sup> “For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” NRSV

<sup>248</sup> Again, Hunter similarly notes Clement’s use of Paul: “[r]ereading the authentic Paul in the light of the Pastoral Epistles, Clement refuted the encratic interpretation by pointing to the domestic, familial, and marital virtues stressed in these letters” (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 110).

<sup>249</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.10.71, 73.

<sup>250</sup> Clement, “Stromata” 3.10.68, 72.

<sup>251</sup> Origen, *Genesis*, 68.

Romans 7:1-6.<sup>252</sup> This particular passage for Origen is not speaking to physical marriage, but is speaking of marriage of the soul to either sin or God. Hence, the first marriage to sin is bad, and second marriage to God is good. In certain cases where Origen is forced to speak to physical marriage, in such a case as 1 Corinthians 7:5, he confesses that he is unsure if married persons will be acceptable as sacrifices to God: “And yet I am not convinced that those who are married... are going to be denied to be able to present their bodies as a living sacrifice.”<sup>253</sup> Yet, Origen balances out this hesitancy with the addition that he does not think that strictly attaining virginity is enough to make one an unblemished sacrifice to God. In noting that virginity in particular is not enough, he is writing against the radical ascetics who believe that it is the key to salvation, while promoting his own asceticism in being hesitant that married persons will be acceptable.

Another large difference between Clement and Origen’s choice of scripture pertains to their mode of exegesis. Approximately 95% of the verses quoted by Clement within this paper are literal interpretations, as compared to Origen who uses allegory 90% of the time. There are several factors which play into their selection and their mode of exegesis. The first is the historical time period of the process of exegesis. As Clement

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<sup>252</sup> “Do you not know, brothers- for I am speaking to those who know the law- that the law exercises dominion over a man for as long a time as it lives? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law of her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she belongs to another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is freed from that law, so that if she belongs to another man, she is no longer an adulteress. Consequently, my brothers, even you have been put to death to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, who rose again from the dead, in order that you may bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the vices of sins, which were through the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now, having died we have been discharged from the law in which we were being held, so that we might serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Origen, *Romans* 6.7.1, 19-20).

<sup>253</sup> Origen, *Romans* 9.1.7, 194.

wrote this treatise, allegory was a not formalized mode of exegesis.<sup>254</sup> Therefore, Clement had the tendency in his writing to string together verses of scripture that spoke literally to the message Clement wanted to convey. In addition, Clement chose verses that spoke directly to the support of marriage through Paul, but appeared to steer away from other verses from 1 Corinthians 7, such as 7:9 which noted that Paul wished most would remain virginal as he. Therefore, one should note that Clement uses verses from Paul that support the ideology of union, a union supported from God. As previously mentioned Clement had a tendency to use the Pastorals much more frequently as they did function to promote his agenda, which was anti-encratic.<sup>255</sup> He even read the more ascetic messages of Paul in light of the Pastorals.<sup>256</sup> However, even though he did use several verses from 1 Corinthians 7 one finds that through this treatise on marriage that Clement does avoid addressing a majority of these verses; which one can surmise is due to the fact that he is looking for pieces of Paul which would show that marriage can be and is equal to virginity.<sup>257</sup> The same is true for his use of the New Testament. As the controversy was heavily engrossed in the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament Clement spent a significant portion of time devoted to choosing scripture that supported that continued blessing. He then sought scripture from Paul which could be used to support the idea that marriage could be used to sanctify one another in marriage.

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<sup>254</sup> This is not to say that allegory was not in use in late second-century Alexandria; it was simply yet to be formalized as this was done by Origen. To get more information about the use of allegory prior during Clement's time period see Dawson's *Allegorical Readers* Chapter Three.

<sup>255</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 107.

<sup>256</sup> "Clement refuted the encratite interpretation by pointing to the domestic, familial, and marital virtues of these letters... the "Paul" of the Pastorals was the hermeneutical key to the Paul of 1 Corinthians 7" (Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 110).

<sup>257</sup> This goes along with Clark's mention of the double message contained in Paul and how each exegete would reconcile the writings of Paul so they did not appear to contradict one another (Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 262).

Origen's use of allegory is explained by his ideology that the Bible is unified by a message of transformation. In avoiding denigration of the Old Testament (as Origen does not promote the goodness of marriage, but holds it as a concession), it appears that he exclusively uses allegory, or what he would deem spiritual interpretation, when it concerns the Old Testament. According to Origen, Moses only received partial revelation. It was not until the coming of Christ that one received full revelation. The implications of this ideology are that the Jews could only have a literal, or fleshly, understanding of their scripture; whereas Christians who have come to the knowledge of God can now go back and read the underlying spiritual message within the Old Testament. However, as Clark has noted, Origen has no problem using literal interpretation when the literal message speaks directly to the unification of the soul and spirit.<sup>258</sup> This is evident in Origen's application of the literal interpretation of the Levitical laws concerning cleanliness during prayer. He is very careful to separate himself from the radical ascetics, as he himself is turning away from Clement's promotion of marriage and virginity as equal. This move back towards asceticism is accomplished by placing emphasis on literal transformation to once again be in union with God. Hence he is attempting to promote complete continence over strictly physical abstinence. Origen goes on a different offense against the ascetics from Clement, as he himself is ascetic.<sup>259</sup> For instance, he uses Romans 12:3-5<sup>260</sup> against those "heretics" who

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<sup>258</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 172.

<sup>259</sup> As Hunter notes, "Origen is an excellent example of the moderate encratite perspective" as "his perspective reflects the encratite dichotomies that we have seen in Tatian and elsewhere: physical union opposed to spiritual union, the Old Law opposed to the New Law, the body destined for death opposed to the body resurrected to life." For further discussion on Origen's moderate encratite position see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 126-127.

<sup>260</sup> "For through the grace given to me I say to you all who are among you: Do not be wiser than you ought to be, but be wise in moderation, each according to the measure of faith that God has allotted. For as in one

adhere to strict chastity, calling them too “wise.” This is certainly a different tactic from Clement who typically falls back upon the label of blasphemy.

As can be seen Clement and Origen were certainly not writing in isolation and were confined in their discussion to reaffirming that which had been labeled “heretical,” namely the denigration of the Old Testament. While they did seem to have much in common, this is believed to have been in part a result of reaction to “heresy.” In turn, the broadening of the conversation to complete continence, taking the spotlight off of physical virginity, served as a foundation off of which one could promote an orthodox stand point. Both exegetes used scripture according to their mode of literature, for Clement a treatise, and for Origen a commentary, that they selected verses which served their direct purpose. Clement chose verses that centered upon a literal interpretation, letting the texts stand on their own, while Origen’s attack came from an apparent higher level of education and much deeper exegesis, utilizing allegory as his main weapon. In addition, not only did they use different forms or mode of exegesis, they chose different pieces of scripture in reaction to the “heretical” ideologies they were addressing and the ideology they were attempting to make orthodox. This entire debate is the perfect example of how orthodoxy was created out of or in reaction to heresy. Therefore, this analysis of third-century Alexandria and the fundamental debate over how a Christian should live served to show just how young and undeveloped orthodoxy was by this point in time, and how quickly it began to develop into a more scholastic endeavor through exegesis.

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body we have many members, but not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another” (Origen, *Romans* 9.2.2, 198).

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