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## **Theological Themes in Origen’s First Homily on Psalm 76(77) and Their Subsequent Reception**

**Abstract:** The collection of Origen’s presumably last works, the 29 homilies on the Psalms, was recently discovered and published in 2015. In the homily on Ps 76:1–9, we can find threads of the theology of spirituality intertwined with more systematic speculations. The sanctifying action of the Logos comes here to the fore. God-Logos enables the Christian to sacrifice himself fully with his mind, tongue and all his senses. The Word, which has been living for ages in the womb of the Father, educates the human word, liable to agitation, to silence. Origen looks for a cure in afflictions. He finds it in the image of hands outstretched to God and in constant reminding of Him. The Psalmist ponders “the ancient days” and “the eonic years” and asks if God can reject man forever (Ps 76:6–8). In his commentary, Origen seems to refer to his speculations from much earlier years, known from the work *On First Principles*, in which he expressed views on the preexistence of rational beings, preceding the present world, and the multiple transformation of worlds. Are these speculative threads still present in his last work? The article tries to explain Origen’s statements and understand them properly.

**Keywords:** Origen, Psalm 77(76), God-Logos, patristic exegesis, preexistence of souls, apocatastasis

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Origen’s collection of 29 homilies on the Psalms, discovered by the archivist of the Munich State Library, Marina Morin Pradel, and published in 2015 by Lorenzo Perrone on the basis of the 12th-century manuscript *Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*,<sup>1</sup> complements his literary legacy. The homilies are all the more valuable, because they are the last work of the Alexandrian, written after *Contra Celsum*

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<sup>1</sup> Origenes, *Die neuen Psalmenhomilien*.

and before his arrest and death as confessor.<sup>2</sup> Jerome already reported that Origen had left over a hundred homilies on selected Psalms.<sup>3</sup> Nine of them, namely on Psalms 36–38, have survived in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia and some others, as fragments, have been preserved in a different way. Thanks to this sensational discovery and Perrone’s meticulous editorial work and English translation,<sup>4</sup> the contemporary reader is provided with an insight into the so far unavailable wealth of Origen’s reflection on the Psalms.

A number of articles have already been published on the significance of this discovery and on the formal linguistic side of the homilies.<sup>5</sup> Some theological aspects have been discussed.<sup>6</sup> By studying the theology of one of the homilies on Psalm 76 (HB 77) in this article, I wish to continue the work begun by others. I will look at its theology and check its possible echoes in other writers. Naturally, it is infeasible to establish all influences in this regard, but some observations can be made.

### Offering the mind to God

Origen deals with the following passage of Ps 76:2: “I cried out with my voice to the Lord, with my voice to God, and he attended to me.” The account of 1 Sam 1:11 is particularly helpful for the explanation of this verse. In this account, Hannah promises to God to offer her son if only the male offspring would have been given to her. Moreover, the exegete points out the difference between a pagan sacrifice, which mainly consists of offerings of irrational beings or material things to some kind of deity, and the sacrifice of righteous people like Hannah:

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<sup>2</sup> See L. Perrone, *Codex Monacensis Graecus*, 17–25.

<sup>3</sup> See Jerome, *Epistulae*, 33, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See Origen, *Homilies on the Psalms*.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Perrone, “Origenes alt und neu,” 193–214; M. Mitchell, M. Margaret, “Origen,” 61–82; M. Cover, “A New Fragment,” 15–29; L. Perrone, “Origen’s Interpretation,” 139–161; M. James, *Learning the Language*.

<sup>6</sup> See R. Heine, “Origen,” 21–37; L. Perrone, “Abstieg und Aufstieg,” 321–340; L. Perrone, “Aspetti dottrinali,” 209–242; L. Perrone, “Et l’homme,” 187–220; J. Olheid, “Scripture and Christian,” 417–442; M. Niehoff, “Biblical Women,” 485–507; L. Perrone, “Mysteria in psalmis,” 59–86.

She is prepared to offer her son – a rational being – in a spiritual sacrifice. Hannah is even willing to offer to God what God would first give to her as the most precious gift (ἀνατιθέναι τῷ θεῷ ἄξια αὐτοῦ ἀναθήματα). Christians can imitate this attitude. Since they have been endowed by God with the gift of reason, they can offer Him their reason (τὸν λόγον) in return. However, many do not. This offering is carried out not so much within the scope of an extraordinary act but by using reason in accordance with God's destiny. Man makes proper use of his reason, especially when he discusses about God for his own benefit and the edification of others.<sup>7</sup>

Here there is a certain dialectic of giving. God as Creator endows man with the gift of reason. Man accepts this gift, uses it and, in response to God's generosity, gives it back to God. God as the Sanctifier takes possession of the offered gift but allows the giver to keep a share in it. Moreover, he improves it, deifies it and, in some way, gives it back to man.

In his meditation on Ps 76:2, Origen goes beyond the biblical context and then returns to it. The ambiguity of the word λόγος allows him to make both reason and its fruit – the thoughts – subjects of his statements. Thoughts are expressed in words. Responsible for the linguistic articulation is the voice (φωνή). It is with his voice that the Psalmist calls unto the Lord. Passing from λόγος to φωνή, our exegete returns to the strict context of the Psalm. By invoking the Lord and using the voice in accordance with its highest destiny, one puts it at the service of God, and He provides further blessings in response to our generosity. God purifies and sanctifies it, appropriates it, makes it His own voice and listens to it. The cry of our voice becomes a sacrifice pleasing to God if it is uttered with a pure heart. It is therefore not a cry of the moment, but it is a constant attitude resulting from relying on God.<sup>8</sup>

A similar consecration is made with regard to our other faculties, for example, our eyesight. A human being with eyes fixed on God looks and sees God. He perceives what God sees, and he doesn't look at what God doesn't look at. Looking at heaven and earth, he sees

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<sup>7</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 2 hom. I 2, GCS 13, 294–295.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibidem*, 295–296.

wonderful works of God. Looking at people, he is not looking for his own benefit but for the benefit of someone whom he could benefit. Looking at things made by human hands, such as money or clothes, he sees them as means of practising charity.<sup>9</sup>

The image of eyes fixed on God allows us to understand better the sanctification of speech and language. In one of his next homilies, Origen expands the topic and shows how the consecration of voice and sight leads to the deification of the whole body.<sup>10</sup> However, in the light of Origen's thoughts presented so far, we notice that sanctification and deification is the result of, on the one hand, our efforts, our turning to God and our following Him, and, on the other hand, of the reality that God dwells in us and takes over the organs of our soul and body.

It can be seen that Origen's interpretation often coincides with Philo of Alexandria's argument, which presented in the sacrifice of cattle, goats and sheep (Gen 15:9) a symbolic act of someone sacrificing his soul, speech and senses. Regarding these three elements of human nature, we find a formulation similar to that used by Origen for one of them: ἀνατεθείκασι θεῶ, ψυχὴν, αἴσθησιν, λόγον.<sup>11</sup> These elements of human nature granted to man by the Creator to make use of it are not intended to be exclusively for his own use, while man tries to appropriate them. Few people attribute these gifts to God and use them for His benefit. Those who act so nobly refer everything in their mind to God, worshiping Him with their mouths.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Alexandrian goes back to the very essence of the Old Testament cult, which is a certain "symbiosis of rite with moral conduct."<sup>13</sup>

In a spirit similar to that of Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus states that it is beautiful to dedicate the firstfruits of our words to the Logos and to those who fear God.<sup>14</sup> The point is – as Gregory expresses the same thought elsewhere in a poetic way – "to offer words to the

<sup>9</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 80, 9 hom. II 1, GCS 13, 497.

<sup>11</sup> See Philo of Alexandria, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 108, Wendland, 25.

<sup>12</sup> See Philo of Alexandria, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 106–111.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kubiś, "I delight in love," 306.

<sup>14</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistulae*, 117, PG 37, 213: Καλὸν γὰρ ὡσπερ ἄλλου παντός, οὕτω δὴ καὶ λόγων ἀπαρχὰς ἀνατιθέναι τῷ Λόγῳ πρῶτον, εἶτα τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸν Κύριον.

Word” (δοῦναι τῷ Λόγῳ τοὺς λόγους).<sup>15</sup> The art of the word is due to the Word of God, to which it must be submitted and be sacrificed.<sup>16</sup> The Cappadocian Father wants to offer God a word of thanksgiving which is holier and purer than any sacrifice of irrational beings.<sup>17</sup>

### Seeking God in affliction “with one’s own hands”

The author further deals with the statement at the end of Ps 76:2 about God hearing a human cry. Due to thoughtlessness and a lack of spiritual gaze, man does not feel whether God is turning towards him or not. Only by entering the path of progress, experiencing purification, acquiring God’s righteousness and spiritual eyes, he is able to sense it. Even more so at times of trouble, one can find out whether one has the above discernment. Distress plunges people who are distant from God into even greater darkness, preventing them from praying to God, while it makes the righteous all the more turn to Him.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Origen reflects on Ps 76:3 with its enigmatic idea of seeking God in the night of afflictions *with one’s own hands*: τὸν θεὸν ἐξεζήτησα, ταῖς χερσὶ μου νυκτὸς ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ. What does it mean to seek God *with one’s own hands*? The Alexandrian gives a simple answer. We seek God through righteous conduct: Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, τὸ πράττειν. We don’t behave like heretics who try to understand the nature of God by starting with unwise words. On the contrary, our efforts to understand God begin with righteous deeds. We discover God by practising justice, temperance and courage through sound thinking and wise searching.<sup>19</sup> We acquire a basic understanding of God by practising the basic cardinal virtues.

This search for God in times of affliction refers to other places in the Bible where hands are raised up. Moses kept his hands raised while fighting the Amalekites (Exod 17:11). Origen concentrated intensely on the high priestly gesture of Jesus who stretched out his

<sup>15</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistulae*, 235, 1, PG 37, 377.

<sup>16</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistulae*, 235, 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, 4, PG 35, 533: Λόγον γὰρ ἀναθήσω τῷ Θεῷ χαριστήριον, πάσης ἀλόγου θυσίας ἱερώτερόν τε καὶ καθαρώτερον.

<sup>18</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 2 hom. I 3, GCS 13, 296–297.

<sup>19</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 3 hom. I 4, GCS 13, 297–298.

hands on the cross. In this way, Jesus sought God and prayed to Him on behalf of the entire universe as if He would have stretched out His hands above the entire universe. Likewise, every Christian, in line with the exhortation of St. Paul, prays to God with raised hands (1 Tim 2:8). Stretching out his hands with Christ on the cross of his own afflictions, a true Christian seeks God and dies to the world.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, we can systematize Origen's concept about the search of God. In addition to seeking Him with the mind by intellectual searching, a Christian seeks Him in his spirit, in prayer, and also with his will, that is to say, by conduct. This search has an intellectual, spiritual and moral dimension. As for the spiritual search, Origen seems to be followed by Eusebius of Caesarea, who had a similar concept about coping with times of trouble and darkness. Like Origen, he quotes 1 Tim 2:8 to underline that the search of God "with one's own hands" consists essentially of prayers and supplications in times of trouble.<sup>21</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, in turn, refers to the moral search, noting that the true search for Christ is to seek Him through keeping the commandments and good works.<sup>22</sup>

### **Remembering God in times of trouble**

The exegete comments on the words of Ps 76:3f: "My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God and rejoiced." It is natural that one becomes confused and despondent when experiencing unpleasantness and distress. Sometimes sadness is so overwhelming that one is unable to listen to God's words of consolation. For Origen, the path to salvation is simple: remember God and you will surely experience consolation. Sorrow will go away immediately when one comes to realize the foundations of Christian hope in the sense of Christ's words: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 3 hom. I 4, GCS 13, 299–300.

<sup>21</sup> See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, In Ps. 76, 3, PG 23, 889.

<sup>22</sup> See Evagrius of Pontus, *Epistulae*, 25, 6.

<sup>23</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 3n. hom. I 6, GCS 13, 302–303.

To illustrate this truth, Origen refers to the etymology of the name “Zechariah,” which means “memory of God.” John the Baptist’s father, who bore this name, did not want to give it to his son (Luke 1:63–64). The name he gave him – “John” – more accurately reflected his son’s mission. John’s task consisted not so much in reminding people about God as in showing Him as already present among them. One reminds of another person if he or she is absent at the moment. According to Origen, the name John means “he who shows (δεικνύς) the coming of God.”<sup>24</sup>

The author of the homily draws a practical conclusion from the truth under consideration. Accordingly, a Christian ought to pray and strive to be found worthy to receive the name “John” from Zechariah. He should move from the stage of “remembering God” to the stage of “seeking His presence and seeing Him” in accordance with another blessing of Christ (Matt 5:8). While the memory of God comforts in sorrow (εὐφραίνει), the standing in His presence gives comfort beyond measure (ὑπερευφραίνει)<sup>25</sup>. Origen’s distinction between the remembering of God and the feeling of His presence seems to be some archetype of the later division of prayer into meditation and contemplation.

Among others, Maxim the Confessor refers to the same etymology of the name “Zechariah.” This name points to another fruit of remembering God. Keeping the memory of Him alive, one seeks the Lord not only with the mind but also with one’s will, namely, not only by reflecting on God (διὰ θεωρίας), but also by practising the commandments in the fear of God.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Maxim combines into one whole the thoughts appearing in the Origen’s commentary on two verses.

In order to receive consolation, Gregory of Nazianzus gives the advice to desire it with all our strength. Comfort is brought by the Word of God, which is close to us because it is on the lips and in the heart (Deut 30:14). Just call on God – and you will be comforted.

<sup>24</sup> See ibidem, 304–305; Origen, *Fragmenta in Lucam*, GCS 9, 2, 48–49.

<sup>25</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 3f. hom. I 6, GCS 13, 305.

<sup>26</sup> See Maxim the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 48.

Such a way of consolation is easy, fast and beneficial. Consolation not only drives away sorrow, but also brings joy.<sup>27</sup>

### Learning silence from the Eternal Word

The Alexandrian comments on the next verse of the Psalm: “I was troubled and did not speak” (Ps 76:5). In this verse, the Psalmist expresses his own experience: the very highest power in man, reason (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν), was agitated by a bad word that someone said. Despite the inclination to articulate angry words at that moment, the reason refrained from such a reaction. For example, if someone says a bad word to or about us, prompting us to say a similar word in return, we know from the Eternal Word that we who have faith should not do so. Although the pain we experience disturbs our reason, we remain silent, obtaining God’s blessing for our meekness (Matt 5:5). Even someone who is imperfect can do this. As a result of such behavior, the agitation will quickly cease and there will be “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” and guards “hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phlm 4:7).<sup>28</sup>

With the above thought, the author completes his commentary on Ps 76:2, in which he considered the offering of the human mind, thoughts and words to the mind of God. In communion with the Eternal Word of God, man learns to express his own word, and in communion with His Word he also learns to be silent. Through the ages, the Eternal Word had been remaining silent towards people in the womb of the Father before He spoke through His Incarnation.

Didymus the Blind relates the above verse of the Psalm to Job, who, tested by God in his suffering and having lost his certainty of existence, did not succumb to agitation and rebellion. He did not sin in word or thought, mind or deed but was completely innocent before God (Job 1:22).<sup>29</sup> Referring to Ps 76:5, this Alexandrian theologian speaks more often of controlling agitation and silence.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, 17, 2; *Epistule*, 223, PG 37, 365.

<sup>28</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 5 hom. I 8, GCS 13, 307–308.

<sup>29</sup> See Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Job* 1–4, 36.

<sup>30</sup> See Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 35–39, 274.



### Remembering “the ancient days” and “the eonic years”

The next verse prompts the exegete to speculate: “I reviewed the ancient days, and I remembered the eonic years” (Ps 76:6). While on biblical grounds we deal here with parallelism characteristic of Hebrew poetry, which in fact repeats the same thing, for Origen “the ancient days” (ἡμέρας ἀρχαίας) are something different than “the eonic years” (ἔτη αἰώνια). He then explains that “the ancient days” are the beginnings of the history of salvation as known to us from the stories of Adam, Cain, Enoch or Noah. He further gives his own understanding of “the eonic years”: “But, if one must say so, since things that are seen are temporary and years among temporary things are temporary, the years before the cosmos are ‘eonic’ in a different sense, perhaps also those after the cosmos.”<sup>31</sup> These “eonic years” are made up of eternal days and months, in which we also participate. They are affected by the Law, which is a shadow of things to come (Heb 10:1), and which prescribes the celebration of a sabbath year, one in every seven, and of a jubilee year, one in every fifty (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:2–17; etc.). Someone who is intellectually and morally disposed, and therefore has a grasp of the spiritual meaning of the Law and obeys God’s Law, will pass from “the ancient days” to “the eonic years” in his reflection.<sup>32</sup>

Origen introduces the ambiguous term αἰώνιος which can be expressed in a limited way with the adjective “eternal.” The English translator uses three terms, depending on the context: eonic – eternal – everlasting. In patristic thought, we basically find three fundamental meanings of the attribute αἰώνιος: 1) in the strict sense, as having no beginning or ending – thus referring to God; 2) as having a beginning but not having an ending, for example, in relation to spiritual beings; 3) in a relative sense, as an indefinite time but not entirely eternal – an attribute which, for example, was politely applied to the emperor.<sup>33</sup>

In his commentary on Ps 76:6, Origen refrains from speculating about the origins of all creation, confining himself to the origins

<sup>31</sup> Origen, In Ps. 76, 6 hom. I 9, GCS 13, 308, Trigg, 249f.

<sup>32</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 6 hom. I 9, GCS 13, 308–309.

<sup>33</sup> See G. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 56f.; P. Plass, “The concept of eternity,” 11–25.

of the present world. However, there remains an open question about his understanding of the attribute αἰώνιος in relation to the origins. Alexandria was a place where various systems, Christian, Platonic and Gnostic, influenced each other. Even before Origen, the Gnostic Basilides was active in Alexandria, and the Alexandrian Neoplatonist Plotinus was a contemporary of Origen. Platonism, and then Gnosticism, assumed the preexistence of souls. A theory aroused about the fall of spiritual beings, as a result of which some of them received bodies by becoming human beings. The present world with its bodily condition is the place of purification for these beings. The worlds can merge into one another and so can the beings which inhabit them. In the end, everything will return to a purely spiritual form.<sup>34</sup>

There is no complete agreement among scholars regarding Origen's final views on the origins of creatures. Some argue that later generations attributed to Origen the views about preexistence. This was mainly due to the development of speculations about Origen's teachings and the rise of Origenism, as well as the reaction of the official Church to these speculations. According to Mark Edwards, however, Origen's writings available to us do not allow for such statements. Misunderstandings of Origen's concept are, among other things, the result of the falsifications that Origen's opponents later brought into circulation by distributing falsely attributed texts.<sup>35</sup> Even if Origen took the view found in his book *On First Principles*, it was only because he wrote it as a still young searching theologian or because his work was rewritten over time. There is also the opposite opinion that the preserved though incomplete writing *On First Principles*, which we now have reconstructed, provides the authentic views of Origen. In this work, the author clearly states that the present world has been preceded by other worlds and will likewise be followed by other worlds.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See M. Edwards, „Origen's Platonism,” 32–35; M. Przyszychowska, „Koncepcja podwójnego stworzenia,” 208–212.

<sup>35</sup> See M. Edwards, „Origen's Platonism,” 34–37; P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: cosmology*, 327–332.

<sup>36</sup> See Origen, *De principiis*, III, V 3; D. Mrugalski, „Stwarzanie wieczne,” 406.

Now, the question is whether the Alexandrian held fast to the speculative views of his youth. His homilies written in the last years of his life are of great importance to answer this question. The preacher clearly states that the soul in its existence preceded the body and formed human nature with it.<sup>37</sup> He likewise attributes preexistence to the soul of Jesus descending to the earth.<sup>38</sup> The view expressed here is in line with the speculations in the writing *On First Principles*. Christ's soul, which had been residing among other rational beings before the material world, came into existence and united itself inseparably with the Logos. Through the incarnation, it assumed a body and descended to the earth.<sup>39</sup> The fact that these and other speculative themes can be found in Origen's homilies shows that shows that on some points he has not changed his views.

If we are to interpret the expressions "the ancient days" and "the eonic years" in the spirit of Origen's views in his treatise *On First Principles*, then the attribute αἰώνιος may refer to the preexistence of a created reality, not measured by present earthly time. On the other hand, the created reality was not co-eternal with God, for it had a beginning as a creature. In a second sense, the attribute αἰώνιος may refer to the present earthly world and its existence from the beginning to the end of this time. In a third sense, αἰώνιος concerns the future world.

As for the future world, another question arises: in the spirit of his earlier speculations, did the author of the homily mean by ἔτη αἰώνια multiple worlds after the present one? The expression ἔτη αἰώνια used by the Greek translator of the Psalms is very broad and could mean for him, in the reminiscence of old speculations, the transformations of future worlds, but also simply an eschatological future in which there will be undefined stages, so that God will finally take full control of the world and triumph in his goodness.

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<sup>37</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 15, 7 hom. II 2, GCS 13, 93: κατὰ τὸν πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως, εἴτε κατὰ τὴν πρὸ τοῦ σώματος ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ.

<sup>38</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 15, 7 hom. II 3, GCS 13, 95: ὅρα τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καταβαίνουσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

<sup>39</sup> See Origen, *De principiis*, II, VI 3.

In the homilies under consideration, we find no other statements of the preacher about the worlds to come.

The allegory of the seventh and fiftieth year relates to the next eon. According to Origen, those years, which in the strict sense of the Jewish law mean the forgiveness of various debts, concern future ages – the eschatological reality. Origen challenges the mundane Jewish expectations that saw the future Jerusalem as an earthly place and a long-lasting triumph for Yahweh and Israel.<sup>40</sup> These symbolic years are an image of God's universal forgiveness of sins committed by rational creatures. It is possible that we deal here with some distant allusion to apocatastasis, i.e., the return of everything to God. Elsewhere, Origen characterizes, also quite cautiously, the jubilee year that will follow the passing of the eons. It will last until fulfillment, as the year fills up after the passing of a certain number of days. Then the Savior will appear, sin will be conquered (Heb 9:26), and the riches of God's goodness will be revealed (Eph 2:7).<sup>41</sup>

According to Gregory the Wonderworker, the suffering Job for his consolation contemplates "the ancient days" and "the eonic years," which are by no means measurable by the current measure of time: οὐ τῷ διαστήματι τούτῳ τῷ χρονικῷ μετρούμενας.<sup>42</sup> A preserved commentary of Didymus the Blind on Ps 76:6 does not give to the expression τὰ αἰώνια ἔτη any speculative meaning. David is a model of a man who trusts God and contemplates the blessings that God has given his ancestors, with the hope that he will achieve his goal, namely, salvation.<sup>43</sup>

A certain speculation on Ps 76:6 is made by Evagrius of Pontus, who tries to reconcile this verse with the somewhat contradictory words in Eccl 1:11, where there is no memory of the old ancestors. For Evagrius, the Psalmist expresses our present state, while Ecclesiastes describes the future state, when a rational being will be able to know the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and God will become "everything in

<sup>40</sup> See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII 28; R. Wilken, "Early Christian Chiliasm," 298–307; M. Szram, "Orygenes a millenaryzm," 39–53.

<sup>41</sup> See Origen, *Commentarium in ev. Matthaei* (12–17), XV 31; Origen, *De oratione*, 28, 14–16.

<sup>42</sup> See Gregory the Wonderworker, *Fragmentum in Job*, Pitra, 590.

<sup>43</sup> See Didymus the Blind, *Fragmenta in Psalmos*, fragm. 794a and 625a.

all.” The mind recalls past events. When a rational being sees God and becomes a partaker of the Holy Trinity, then the relics of earlier thoughts will be abandoned, and past things will be forgotten.<sup>44</sup>

### **Deliberating at night in the spirit**

Origen then reflects on Ps 76:7: “At night, I deliberated with my heart, and my spirit stirred” (ἡδολέσχουν καὶ ἐσκάλευον τὸ πνεῦμά μου). Furthermore, he gives pastoral advice. When it happens, that sleep passes away from us, and we lie awake, according to the above Psalm, instead of wasting time in idleness or dealing with something useless, we can devote ourselves to good thoughts. With his peculiar analytical approach, Origen emphasizes that it is not about deliberating in the body or in the soul, but in the spirit. Whoever searches in the earth will find earthly things there, and whoever searches in the spirit will find spiritual things and will reap spiritual fruits. While searching in his spirit, man also searches in God’s spirit.<sup>45</sup>

It seems that the distinction made here between body, soul and spirit does not directly concern the ontological order, i.e., the trichotomy in the structure of human nature. This concept was, for example, developed by Origen’s predecessors and successors, men like Irenaeus of Lyon and Evagrius of Pontus. Perhaps this concerns the cognitive order, namely, the threefold biblical sense, discovered from the “body,” “soul” and “spirit” of Scripture, that is to say, according to the initial, advanced and perfect stage.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, this three-part division in Origen is today often overstressed, because he generally distinguished between two senses: the literal and the deeper one.<sup>47</sup>

However, we might find some distant echo of Origen’s reference to the triple sense of the Divine Word in an author of uncertain identity who, by “deliberating in the spirit” in Ps 76:7, understands the search for various meanings in the Word of God. Finding various biblical

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<sup>44</sup> See Evagrius of Pontus, *Scholia in Ecclesiasten*, 3 (in Eccl. 1, 11).

<sup>45</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 7 hom. I 10, GCS 13, 309–310.

<sup>46</sup> See Origen, *De principiis*, IV, II 4.

<sup>47</sup> See Ch. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 1, 546.

meanings, he is like a farmer who can harvest a crop three times a year from his field.<sup>48</sup>

### Investigating the mystery of God's rejection

Against the background of hermeneutic distinctions, Origen refers to the spiritual reading of the Divine Word for a specific purpose. This is particularly evident with regard to the spiritual interpretation of the next verse of the Psalm: "The Lord will not reject unto the eons, and he will not add to be pleased any longer" (Ps 76:8).<sup>49</sup> The preacher examines the measure of the rejection by God, who can abandon us and expose us to various tribulations. Suppose God does this for one or two years, or even for a lifetime, i.e., fifty or sixty years. Presume He abandons someone for a century. But will he leave us for all ages? From the Psalmist's rhetorical question, it can be concluded, as Origen does, that God will not abandon man forever. So, it is allowed to wish and pray that he would not abandon man even for one century. There may be times, however, when this God rejects someone for this age and the next. This is evidenced in the words of Jesus' warning that anyone who speaks a word "against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come" (Matt 12:32).<sup>50</sup>

Origen encourages us to consider the misfortune of man rejected by God for some time. The belief that God does not reject him for all ages must by no means lead us to disregard the threat of losing God, even for a while. The consequences of this misfortune are twofold: the type of punishment and its duration. It may be that someone in Adam's times sinned and added more sins to sin, and his punishment lasts from the beginning of the world until the measure of evil which will be exhausted in the moment known only to God. Nobody knows the duration of one eon, including the present one. Even one hour of rejection by God is a great loss. What is this rejection? God ceases

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<sup>48</sup> Por. John Chrysostom (?), "In illud: Credidi," 355.

<sup>49</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 7–8 hom. I 10, GCS 13, 310.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibidem*, 310–311; Origen, *Commentarii in ev. Joannis*, XIX 14, 88; Origen, *De oratione*, 27, 15.

to protect man, and this divine judgment comes under the control of Satan. With regard to incest, St. Paul judges in the same way. In this case man will be handed over to Satan (1 Cor 5:1–5).<sup>51</sup>

Origen quotes another verse: “Shall he cut off his mercy to the end from generation to generation?” (Ps 76:9). The exegete already knows the answer to this question, which is hidden in God’s mercy. However, in order to avoid the possibility of being misunderstood, he does not go into further detail. Origen follows the Psalmist, John the Evangelist and Paul the Apostle, who understood much of God’s goodness, but did not say everything. Sometimes it is preferable to remain discreet. God reveals His goodness to those who fear him.<sup>52</sup>

We find in Didymus the Blind the same line of thought when he comments on another Psalm. Nevertheless, he also refers to the judgments of God’s mercy through which the Savior will become “everything” for the sake of people.<sup>53</sup> Didymus makes a delicate allusion to the announcement by St. Paul of the eschatological presence of God, who in Christ will become “everything in all” (ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) (1 Cor 15:28). For Origen, the words of St. Paul are central to his concept of apocatastasis<sup>54</sup>. In an interesting discourse, Didymus further talks about the transformation after the resurrection of the human body, which, despite the fact that it changes from psychical to spiritual, will not cease to be a body and will not deprive man of his bodily nature.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

In the homily under consideration, like under a burning glass, fundamental theological questions are concentrated, among whom the themes of spirituality are predominant. Origen, the theologian of the Incarnate Logos, explains how Christ as the Incarnate Word forms the Christian spirit. In his homily, the sanctifying action of the Logos

<sup>51</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 8 hom. I 10, GCS 13, 311.

<sup>52</sup> See Origen, In Ps. 76, 9 hom. I 10, GCS 13, 311–312.

<sup>53</sup> See Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 40–44,4, in codex p. 327–328.

<sup>54</sup> See I. Ramelli, “Christian Soteriology,” 314–338.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibidem*, 328–329.

comes to the fore. God-Logos enables the Christian to sacrifice himself fully with his mind, tongue and all his senses. The Word, which has been living for ages in the womb of the Father, educates the human word to patience and silence.

Origen develops pastoral thoughts by considering the attitude of the Psalmist in the time of afflictions. The seeking hands in the night of troubles are a symbol of prayer, which is then needed all the more (Ps 76:7). This prayer takes the form of “remembering God,” as Origen says in his commentary on the precedent verses (Ps 76:3–4). For the preacher, hands are also an image of noble conduct. The preacher seems to give to himself a lesson of correct attitude in the time of troubles, facing persecution that will soon affect him personally.

Origen does not avoid speculative approaches. The Psalmist considers “the ancient days” and “the eonic years” in which God carried out salvation, and he inquires about the possible future rejection of the sinner by God (Ps 76:6–9). In his interpretation, the preacher extends the Psalmist’s question to the reality that follows the present earthly world. “The eonic years” seem to allude to the many eons that may follow this age until God becomes “all in all.” This final state will be preceded by the “jubilee year,” which means that there will be a stage of the destruction of all sins. Such reflections appear in Origen’s other homilies on the Psalms as well.

Looking for echoes of Origen’s thoughts in the writings of other authors, we examined the regular commentaries on the Psalms, such as Athanasius the Alexandrian’s and John Chrysostom’s *Expositiones in Psalmos*, Didymus the Blind’s and Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Commentarii in Psalmos*, Evagrius of Pontus’ *Scholia in Psalmos*, Theodoret of Cyrhus’ *Interpretatio in Psalmos* and Cyril of Alexandria’s *Expositio in Psalmos*, among other works. Thereby, we discovered some parallels, but they are not very numerous and generally do not come from the commentaries mentioned. We find them mainly in writers sympathetic to Origen. Some parallels appear to be formal dependencies.

Origen himself could have been inspired by Philo of Alexandria’s thought of dedicating the human mind to God. In the works of Gregory of Nazianzus, there is a related idea of surrendering one’s



mind and thought to God's Logos. It is to Him that we are to dedicate the "firstfruits" of our words. Eusebius of Caesarea seems to imitate Origen in the image of hands stretched out in prayer and seeking God. Gregory of Nazianzus also points to the practice of frequently reminding God, which is helpful in driving away sorrow and fear. What is noteworthy is that the Pauline idea of the eschatological omnipresence of God who becomes "everything in all" (1 Cor 15:28) appears in the context of "the eonic years," as mentioned in Ps 76:6, in the writings of Origen's disciples, like Didymus the Blind and Evagrius of Pontus. This idea is essential to Origen's concept of apocatastasis.

### **Wątki teologiczne w pierwszej homilii Orygenesa do Psalmu 76(77) i ich późniejsza recepcja**

**Abstrakt:** Zbiór niedawno odkrytych i wydanych w 2015 r. dwudziestu dziewięciu homilii Orygenesa do Psalmów to prawdopodobnie, jak wykazuje L. Perrone, jego ostatnie dzieło. Homilie stały się przedmiotem analizy pod kątem formalnym: języka, okoliczności napisania, aluzji historycznych etc. Przychodzi czas na zgłębianie ich treści teologicznych. W homilii do Ps 76,1–9 przeplatają się wątki z zakresu duchowości i pewne spekulacje. Na pierwszy plan wysuwa się uświęcające działanie Logosu. Bóg-Słowo uzdalnia chrześcijanina do pełnej ofiary z samego siebie, swego umysłu, języka i wszystkich zmysłów. Przebywające od wieków w łonie Ojca Słowo wychowuje do milczenia ludzkie słowo, podatne na wzburzenie. Kaznodzieja szuka lekarstwa na utrapienia w rękach wyciągniętych do Boga i w ciągłym przypominaniu sobie o Nim. Psalmista rozważa „dni dawne” i „lata wieczne” oraz pyta, czy Bóg może odrzucić na wieki (Ps 76,6–8). W komentarzu do Psalmów zdaje się nawiązywać do swoich spekulacji z dużo wcześniejszych lat, znanych z dzieła *O zasadach*. Wyrażał tam poglądy o preegzystencji bytów rozumnych, poprzedzającej obecny świat, i wielokrotnej transformacji światów, po których nastąpi powrót wszystkiego do Boga. Czy te wątki spekulacyjne są obecne w ostatnim jego dziele? Czy poglądy Orygenesa zmieniły się? Autor artykułu stara się wniknąć w dość zdawkowe wypowiedzi kaznodziei i właściwie je zrozumieć.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Orygenes, Psalm 77(76), Bóg-Logos, egzegeza patrystyczna, preegzystencja dusz, apokatastaza

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