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LOOKING ON THE LIGHT: SOME REMARKS ON
THE IMAGERY OF LIGHT
IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE *PERI ARCHON*

This essay is an attempt to address a general question, that of Origen's relation to the Greek philosophical tradition, by concentrating on one particular issue, which I hope will prove adequately illustrative.

As we all know, the battle has long raged between partisans of Origen the systematic philosopher, such as Adolf von Harnack, Eugène de Faye, Hal Koch and Hans Jonas, and those who see him as essentially an exegete of scripture and Christian apologist, such as Walther Völker, Henri de Lubac, Henri Crouzel, or Marguerite Harl. To a certain extent one's attitude is conditioned by how far one concentrates on a text such as the *Peri Archon*, or rather on the *Homilies* and such works as the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and the treatise *On Prayer*, but these emphases are themselves plainly conditioned by the overt or covert prejudices of the authorities concerned, in their anxiety to maintain either the originality and philosophical standing of Origen or alternatively, if not his orthodoxy, at least his essential Christianity. Part of the problem, I think, has been that the alternatives are stated too starkly. Either Origen is presented as a Platonist with a superficial

veneer of Christianity, or he is not to be a systematic philosopher at all. The truth may rather be that he is indeed a philosopher, but one who, rather than adopting Platonism or the doctrine of any other Hellenic school, has forged a system of his own out of the Christian scriptures and tradition, to which he lays Platonism tribute for concepts and formulations which he finds useful, without surrendering to the Greeks any principle whatever.¹ I would suggest that Origen's relation to primitive Christianity is somewhat analogous to that of Plotinus to Plato and earlier Platonism. He draws his inspiration from the tradition, and genuinely aspires to be faithful to it, but his genius drives him to the creation of a new system, built upon what he has inherited. In a word, Origen only wishes to be a Christian, as does Plotinus to be a Platonist, but if we persist in calling Plotinus, in recognition of his achievement, a Neoplatonist, then we must denominate Origen a 'Neochristian'.

What I want to do in this paper is to consider one dominant image of which Origen makes much use in his discussion of the nature of God in

¹We may recall that, as he tells it himself (*ap.* Eusebius *HE* VI.19, 12-13), Origen only began to attend the lectures of "the teacher of philosophy" (sc. Ammonius Saccas) when he himself was already an established, if precocious, teacher of Christian doctrine. He went to Ammonius, not to be converted to Platonism, but rather to pick up useful technical information, to aid in his apostolate to the Alexandrian intelligentsia, a number of whom, such as Heraclas and his brother Plutarch, he actually lured away from Ammonius. This he could not have done, I submit, without a system to offer. The system need not be worked out in every detail, nor even free of contradictions, but one cannot reasonably deny, I think, that it is there. Without going into details, I see it as involving, above all, the concept of a cosmic process of procession (or 'fall') and return, involving the pre-existence of souls and, inevitably, some form of reincarnation and sequence of worlds (though I doubt that Origen ever quite made up his mind on these questions). All other aspects of his thought seem to me to be conditioned by this grand conception, which is itself the product of his concern with the problem of God's providence and our free will. To that extent I remain sympathetic to Hal Koch, in *Pronoia und Paideusis* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1932), and even to Hans Jonas.

the *Peri Archon*, and see how his use of Platonic imagery and doctrine may be seen to support my thesis.²

On the vexed question of the nature of the *Peri Archon*, on which much has been written in recent years,³ I must say that I am inclined to view

²Origen's use of light imagery in general is comprehensively examined in a thesis by M. Martinez-Pastor, *Teologia de la luz en Orígenes* (Comillas, 1962), but Martinez does not address himself to the particular problem that concerns me here. See also H. Crouzel, *Origène et la 'Connaissance mystique'* (Paris/Bruges, 1961), pp. 130-154, for a good account of the uses to which Origen puts the imagery of light.

³Cf. B. Steidle, "Neue Untersuchungen zu Origenes" *περί Ἀρχῶν*, *ZNW* 40 (1942), 236-243; M. Harl, "Recherches sur le *περί Ἀρχῶν* d'Origène en vue d'une nouvelle édition: la division en chapitres," *Studia Patristica* 3 (= *TU* 78; Berlin, 1961), pp. 57-67; H. Crouzel, Intro. to *Origène Traité des Principes*, Tome 1 (*SC* 252), pp. 15-22. The precise meaning of *ἀρχαί* intended by Origen in this context has been the object of some uncertainty (Cf. Crouzel's discussion *op. cit.* pp. 12-15, and "Qu'a voulu faire Origène en composant le Traité des Principes?," *BLE* 76 (1975), pp. 161-186, and 241-260). It seems probable to me that he sees himself as meaning what any Platonic philosopher would mean by this, viz. a discussion of the three acknowledged "first principles", God, Idea(s), Matter, together with topics arising out of those, and that is the subject-matter of the first section of the work (to II.3), *mutatis mutandis* (e.g. for "Ideas", we have "rational beings", for Matter, the World). How well the title fits the other portions of the work is more problematic (a reference back to the discussion of free will in III.1 in the *Comm. in Rom.* (VII.15, PG XIV 1145A) as a separate *libellus* would seem to indicate that Origen thought of the work rather as a collection of essays).

Some light may be thrown on what particular connotation Origen attaches to the term *ἀρχαί* by his remarks at *Comm. in Joh.* XIII.46, 302, where he presents the *ἀρχαί* of any science or art as what the first discoverer, or "sower", lays down, to be developed further and brought to completion (*τέλος*) by later generations ("reapers")--all this by way of exegesis of John 4:36. This "dynamic" concept of the *ἀρχαί* of a science imports another dimension, I think, into the traditionally static philosophical meanings of the term, as immutable basic principles, or ultimate principles of reality. Certainly Origen is to some extent "transposing" the traditional Platonic meaning of the term, as Crouzel suggests; the connotation "principles of the Christian faith" is superimposed on the basic meaning "first principles of reality." Cf. also *De Princ.* 4, 1.7, where *ἀρχή* is significantly glossed by *στοιχεῖωσις*.

the work as an attempt by Origen to state a reasoned Christian position on the topic of *ἀρχαί*, or 'first principles', arising out of his attendance at the lectures of Ammonius Saccas. I am led to this view, not just by a consideration of the subject matter, but by looking at the very way in which the work starts out. Origen begins abruptly, not with a positive statement of God's nature,⁴ but with an answer to an accusation, plainly from a Platonic source, that Christians regard God as having a *corporeal* nature.⁵ In combating this accusation he has to face a series of passages of Scripture which seem to attribute to God material substance or characteristics.⁶

For instance, Moses says at Deut. 4:24: "Our God is a consuming fire",⁷ and Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at John 4:24: "God is spirit (*πνεῦμα*), and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth". Now Origen's general line of defense is plainly that such passages must be taken figuratively, but that is not the first point that he makes. This first

⁴As one would expect in a statement of First Principles. On the immateriality of God, Cf. Aetius, *Placita* I.7, 31 (p. 304 Diels, *Dox.Gr.*), Apuleius, *De Plat.* I.5, 190-1; Numenius, Fr. 3 des Places. (Albinus in *Did.* ch. 10 asserts, certainly, God's immateriality, but only at the end of his discussion).

⁵In the Preface, also, he begins, rather defensively, by identifying himself with Moses, who preferred, in the words of the author of Hebrews (11:24-26), "the abused state (*δουλοῦσθαι*) of Christ to the treasure-houses of the Egyptians", these latter being the much-vaunted doctrines of contemporary philosophy.

⁶These passages may well have been adduced by anti-Christian polemicists, (and even by Ammonius, whom Porphyry, at least, maintained to have started as a Christian himself), though here Origen only says that they *might* do so (*scio quoniam conabuntur*).

⁷He also describes him there as "a jealous God", but Origen leaves that aside in the present context.

point I find rather interesting, and it is that which I wish to start from, since I think that it serves as a good instance of Origen's complex relationship to contemporary Hellenic⁸ philosophy.

"These men," says Origen, "will have it that fire and spirit are body and nothing else. But I would ask them what they have to say about this passage of Scripture: 'God is light,' as John says in his epistle (1 John 1:5), 'and in him is no darkness.'"

The point of adducing this passage about light is presumably that, in later Platonism, light is agreed to be incorporeal. But this is, strangely enough, not a point which Origen cares to make explicitly. Instead, he goes on:

He is that light, surely, which lightens the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth, as it is written in the Thirty-fifth Psalm, 'In thy light shall we see light.' For what other light of God can we speak of in which a man sees light, except God's spiritual power (*δύναμις*) which when it lightens a man causes him either to see clearly the truth of all things or to know God himself, who is called the truth? (trans. Butterworth).

Origen here has slipped unobtrusively from making one point to making another. The original purpose of introducing the example of light, to counter the references to fire and to *πνεῦμα*, has been passed over in favour of an argument which applies to all three epithets equally, that they are not to be taken literally but metaphorically.

⁸I use "Hellenic" here instead of the commonly-used term "pagan," which I find objectionable.

Why should Origen make such an apparently inconsequential move? I wish to propose two reasons, both of which illustrate his complex relationship to contemporary Platonism. The first is that, while he was well aware of contemporary Platonic doctrine on the incorporeality of light, he did not necessarily accept it himself; the second is that he also has very much in mind the Sun Simile of *Republic* VI (507a-509c), which certainly since Alexander of Aphrodisias had been brought into conjunction with Aristotle's doctrines of the Active Intellect in *De Anima* III.5 and of the Unmoved Mover in *Metaphysics* XII, and had thus been incorporated in a coordinated Peripatetic and Platonist doctrine of God as Pure Activity (*ἐνέργεια*) and as the *noetic* analogue of the Sun, bestowing both intelligibility and existence on all things, as well as knowledge on rational souls.

Let us explore each of these points in turn. First of all, the incorporeality of light. This is not a Platonic doctrine--neither in the *Republic* nor in the *Timaeus* is light presented as something incorporeal--but it is at least derivable from Aristotle, who, in *De Anima* II.7, declares light to be "the actuality of the transparent *qua* transparent."⁹ Aristotle simply wants to make the point that light is not a substance of any kind, but a condition of a substance (countering the doctrine of Empedocles), but for later Aristotelians and Platonists this incorporeality of light became something rather special, being connected with its preeminent role in the operation of the sense of sight, the most 'honourable' of the senses (cf. Plato, *Tim.* 45B-D), and then being used as an analogy for the role of the Good (or in Alexander's theory, *Nous*) in the activation of the human intellect in its cognising of True Being.

⁹148b9-10: φῶς δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ τούτου ἐνέργεια, τοῦ διαφανοῦς ἢ διαφανέως.

Thus it is that in Alexander's *De Anima* we find, first, at pp. 42, 19-43, 11 Bruns, a straightforward paraphrase of Ar. *De An.* III.7, but then, at 88, 26-89, 6, the use of the analogy of light to illustrate the principle that "whatever is eminently some kind of being imparts this kind of being to everything which is less eminently the same kind of being," to quote Philip Merlan's formulation.¹⁰ The Active Intellect, being preeminently intelligible, imparts intelligibility to the "material" intellect (that is, the immanent human intellect), which becomes intelligible by intelligising the proper objects of intellect, the forms in matter. Similarly, light, being preeminently visible, is the cause of the visibility of everything visible, as well as of the seeing ability of the eyes.

This comparison of Alexander's plainly owes much to the Sun Simile of the *Republic*, and it in turn can be seen to have had considerable influence on Plotinus' view of the status of light in such passages as *Enn.* IV.5, 6-7, II.1,7 and I.6,3.¹¹ The evidence of Origen would seem to indicate that this identification of light as *δσώματον*, against the indications of Plato's doctrine in the *Timaeus*, goes back to Middle Platonism, perhaps to Numenius, or at least to Ammonius Saccas.

For a Platonist, Aristotle's doctrine as presented in *De An.* II.7 is not satisfactory, since Aristotle declares light not to be a body, not for the purpose of exalting it, but simply to deprive it of any independent existence. Quite a different connotation can be put upon this bodilessness of light if one

¹⁰In *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness* (The Hague, 1969²), p. 39.

¹¹See A. H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1940; repr. Hakkert, 1967), pp. 54-57; F. M. Schroeder, "Light and the Active Intellect in Alexander and Plotinus," *Hermes* 112 (1984), pp. 239-245.

chooses to take this, as does Alexander, and later Plotinus, as indicating that light is pure Form without an admixture of matter. In Alexander this is actually only implied in the comparison of light with the Active Intellect, but in Plotinus it is quite explicit.¹² For Plotinus, ordinary, physical light is, by reason of its freedom from admixture with body, the noblest element in the material universe.

Now as I say, Origen seems to recognize the existence of this doctrine of light, but he is not prepared to approve it. When it comes to employing the similes of the Sun and the Cave of the *Republic*, however, he has no such hesitation; although he employs them in a suitably disguised form. At *De Princ.* I. 1.5, we find the following:¹³

Having then refuted, to the best of our ability, every interpretation which suggests that we should attribute to God any material characteristics, we assert that he is in truth incomprehensible and immeasurable.¹⁴ For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him. For if we see a man who can scarcely look at a glimmer or the light of the smallest lamp, and if we wish to teach such a one, whose eyesight is not strong enough

¹²E.g. *Enn.* I 6, 7, 17-18: light is *δωμάτων καὶ λόγος καὶ εἶδος*.

¹³I use Butterworth's translation, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴*Incomprehensibilis* here translates *ἀκατάληπτος*; *inaestimabilis* may render *ἀπερίμετρος*, an epithet, which, though Greek, is only found in Apuleius' *De Plat.* ch. 5, but *ἀδιεξήγητος* or *ἀπερίοριστος* are also possibilities.

to receive more light than we have said, about the brightness and splendour of the sun, shall we not have to tell him that the splendour of the sun is unspeakably and immeasurably better and more glorious than all this light he can see?

Here, and in what follows, the influence of the Simile of the Cave is palpable enough, I think,¹⁵ but there is another element here also, which is not present in Plato's image. Plato stresses the shock and discomfort of being brought from one's comfortable viewing of the shadows on the wall cast by the fire, first to the realization that the fire is only a fire, and the figures only cardboard cutouts, and then to a view of the outside world dominated by the sun, but the end result is that one *can* view the sun, one *does* attain to a knowledge of the Good. For Origen, God is of such a nature as "the human mind, however pure or clear to the very utmost that mind may be, cannot gaze at or behold" (*ibid.*).

Now this is very much a part of the Christian doctrine of the "invisibility" of God, but it finds an echo also in a passage of Numenius' dialogue *On the Good* (Fr. 2, des Places), a work which Origen certainly knew (since he quotes from it in the *Contra Celsum*),¹⁶ to the effect that we can gain the notion of anything bodily from comparison with things of a similar nature, but in the case of the Good, "no object present to us nor any

¹⁵Though long since formalized in Middle Platonic tradition, the Sun Simile is given by Albinus in *Did.* ch. 10 as prime example of the "way of analogy", while of the "way of *ἀναγωγή*" (*via eminentiae*), of which the Cave is certainly an instance, he actually gives Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* as the example. Origen uses the comparison of the light of a lamp with the light of the sun elsewhere, at *Comm. in Joh.* II.120-121 and *C.Cels.* V.II.

¹⁶I.15; IV.51.

sensible object similar to it gives us any means of grasping its nature." However, Numenius is actually leading up here to his lively description of the mystical vision of the Good, which he compares with a little fishing-boat which by close attention one can just pick out bobbing between the waves. Origen gives no such promise of a mystical vision in this life. The important thing is, though, that Numenius seems here to be giving an interpretation of the negative aspect of the Sun Simile--after all, Socrates does emphasize at the outset, in 506 C-E, that he cannot give an account of the Good itself, but only a series of images.

In the very next section (I.1.6), Origen seems to make further use of the Cave Simile, though sufficiently altered as to make identification less than obvious:

But it will not appear out of place if to make the matter clearer still we use yet another illustration. Sometimes our eyes cannot look upon the light itself, that is, the actual sun, but when we see the brightness and rays of the sun as they pour into our windows, for example, or into any small openings for light, we are able to infer from these how great is the source and the foundation of physical light.

This seems to owe something to *Rep.* VII.515e-516b, where the prisoner, newly freed from the Cave, cannot yet look upon the sun or bear the sunlight: "he would find it painful to be thus dragged out, and would chafe at it, and when he came out into the light, his eyes would be filled with its beam so that he would not be able to see even one of the things which we call real," and a gradual process of habituation is required. The difference, of course, is, once again, that in Plato one does come eventually to a vision of

the Good, whereas in Origen one does not, at least in this life.¹⁷ In fact, Origen has here subtly blended the imagery of the Cave with the later Stoic argument for the existence of God from the contemplation of his works (cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* IX.75-87), which suits him rather better, especially as St. Paul himself had referred to it at *Rom.* 1:20: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." But for Origen the force of this argument, in relation to the Cave Simile, is that we can get no further than inference from God's manifestations and effects to His nature; we cannot know Him as He is.

Origen certainly approves of the central images of the *Republic*, as we can see from *Contra Celsum* VII.45-6, where he first quotes Celsus making use of the Sun and the Line, and then says, "We are careful not to raise objections to good teachings, even if the authors are outside the faith," but he is not committed to the full implications of the doctrine behind them, nor does he feel constrained from modifying them with other doctrines of his own. For instance, in the next chapter of Book I (2, 7) dealing with the Son or *Logos*, he identifies the process of habituation (*συνήθεια*) mentioned in *Rep.* VII.516a with the activity of the *Logos* (who is, after all, "light from light"):¹⁸

... for it is through his brightness that the nature of the light itself is known and experienced. This brightness falls softly and gently on

¹⁷There seems almost an explicit contradiction of *Rep.* VII.516B, αὐτόν καθ' αὐτόν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ δύναται ἂν κατιδεῖν in I.1, 6: *mens nostra ipsum per se ipsum deum sicut est non potest intueri.*

¹⁸*Splendor ex luce* (presumably translating δαύγασμα ἐκ φωτός) a phrase inspired by Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 and Hebrews 1:3.

the tender and weak eyes of mortal man and little by little trains and accustoms (*adsuescens*) them to bear the light in its clearness; and when it has removed from them all that darkens and obstructs their vision, . . . it renders them capable of enduring the glory of the light, becoming in this respect even a kind of mediator (*μεσίτης*, 1 Tim. 2:5) between men and the light.

Here, indeed, it seems as if, through Christ, we *are* enabled to see the Father, which would be fully in the spirit of the imagery of the Cave, but in fact Origen is allowing himself to be carried away slightly. This impression is severely qualified in what follows (sects. 8-10), particularly by the striking image of the immense statue, which is too big for us to view, and the miniature statue which is its faithful copy, which we can see, and which gives us a true image (*εἰκὼν*, *similitudo*), but still only an image, of what we cannot see.¹⁹

In all this we cannot, unfortunately, be sure that Rufinus is not indulging in a certain degree of censorship and "laundering" of the text (as he certainly is seen to be doing in the few places where the original is available to us), but Origen seems to be struggling with the problem of how far God is knowable or unknowable, and to what extent Christ is the means to that knowledge, and Platonic imagery is both a help and a hindrance to him in this.

This is not quite the whole story, however. Origen gives ample indication, in ch. 1 of the *Peri Archon*, that he is aware of the considerable development that had taken place over the previous centuries in the Platonic

¹⁹This is very much in the spirit of Origen's view of Christ as the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15)--one of Origen's favorite texts (119 citations listed in *Biblia Patristica* 3).

doctrine of the nature and the knowability of God. He is influenced not only by his knowledge of the speculations of such Pythagoreanising Platonists as Moderatus and Numenius, and also possibly of the more "main-line" Platonist Albinus, but also by his acquaintance with the works of Philo, who was himself influenced by contemporary Platonism. The consensus that appears to have been reached by 200 A.D. or so was that God was both absolute Unity (*μονάς*, *εἷς*, *εἷς*) but also an Intellect--an Intellect, however, which is to be distinguished from a second, active, demiurgic intellect or *λόγος* (Moderatus, Numenius and Albinus favour a second *νοῦς*, Philo, Plutarch and Atticus a *λόγος*), by being "static" (Num. Fr. 15 des Places) as opposed to "in motion", a fount and first principle of *νοῦς*, or, more vaguely "something higher" (*ἀνωτέρω*) than *νοῦς* (Albinus, *Didaskalikos*, ch. 10).

Such an entity can be known, if at all, only in some rather special way. Plato's famous dictum at *Timaeus* 28c about the difficulty of discovering the nature of God and the impossibility of communicating it to the general public gave much stimulus to negative theology of various kinds in later times, but it was not until the second part of the *Parmenides* was given a metaphysical interpretation, from the 1st century A.D. on, that the problem of how the First Principle could be cognised became an acute one for Platonists. At the end of the first hypothesis (142A), we reach the conclusion about the One that "it cannot have a name or be spoken of, nor can there be any knowledge or perception or opinion of it. It is not named or spoken of, not an object of opinion or knowledge, not perceived by any creature."

If it is to be cognised at all, then, it cannot be by any 'normal' cognitive process, such as *αἰσθησις*, *δόξα*, or *ἐπιστήμη*. It will require a distinct supra-noetic faculty, termed poetically by the *Chaldaean Oracles* (Fr. 1.1DP) "the flower of the mind" (*ἀνθος νοῦ*), recognized by Plotinus as the

νοῦς in a state of sober intoxication (*Enn.* III 5, 9; VI 7, 35), and also perhaps by Numenius in his eloquent description of the vision of the Good in Fr. 2 (mentioned above).

Origen, however, does not seem to have arrived at a formula for this special faculty. In his exhaustive study of Origen's terminology and doctrine of the modes and levels of knowledge (*Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'*),²⁰ despite the promising title (which he does, admittedly, enclose in inverted commas), Henri Crouzel cannot come up with any clear reference to a direct vision of God himself *in this life*. The term which best expresses the sort of direct intellectual contact envisaged by Origen for the beatific vision to be enjoyed by the saints after death is *προσβολή*,²¹ but the significant thing here is that this same term is used by Plotinus, along with *ἐπιβολή* and *ἐπαφή*, for the sort of supranoeitic contact which is attainable by the νοῦς while still in the body.²² This is not to deny that Origen had mystical experience (Crouzel makes an eloquent case for his having had some, quoting in particular his first Homily on the Song of Songs (sec. 7),²³ but the fact remains, I think, that for theological reasons he denied that

²⁰Paris/Bruges, 1963, pp. 496-508.

²¹Interesting passages are *Fragm. In Joh.* XIII (GCS, IV p. 495), *κατὰ προσβολὴν νοησέως*, *Exh. ad Mart.* XIII, where the "friends of God" will enjoy direct knowledge *ἐν εἰδει*, *προσβάλλοντες τῇ τῶν νοητῶν φύσει καὶ τῇ τῆς ἀληθείας κάλλει*; *P. Euch.* XXV, 2 ὁ νοῦς *προσβάλλει τοῖς νοητοῖς*.

²²E.G. *Enn.* III.8, 10, 33 *προσβολή*; VI.7, 35, 21 *ἐπιβολή*; V.3, 10, 42 *ἐπαφή*.

²³*Origène*, pp. 162-4. Even here, though, as Patricia Cox points out to me, Origen may after all only be talking about the frustrating experience of having at one moment a vision of the spiritual meaning of a certain text, only to lose it again on further reflection.

the human soul or mind, while still in the body, could achieve the equivalent, in Platonic terms, of looking directly at the sun.

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This has been, I fear, a rather superficial study, based only on one particular series of connected passages in one work (though a major one), of a very prolific and many-sided thinker, but, such as it is, it serves to bear out Crouzel's characterization of Origen as a "transformer" of Platonism, rather than a crypto-Platonist of any sort. One could, obviously, pursue this theme much further, in various directions. One direction that occurs to me is the paradoxical presentation of God as "darkness" (*σκότος*) in the *Commentary on John* (II.172), arising out of the exegesis of John 1:5, where precisely God is, after all, declared to be "light shining in darkness". By way of going one better, it would almost seem, than the traditional Platonic image of God as light and standing it on its head, but also in order to explain certain troublesome passages of the Old Testament, such as Exodus 19:9, 16, and 20:21, where God is described as enveloped in a thick cloud, and Psalm 18:11: "He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water" (passages which, it seems, Gnostics such as Marcion had fastened on to support their argument that Jahweh was an evil Demiurge), Origen presents this "darkness" and "cloudiness" as a symbol of God's unknowability to the human intellect; in himself, of course, he remains Light.²⁴

But this is just by way of coda to my main theme. It seems suitable that a discussion of Origen's use of light imagery should end, paradoxically, with a discussion of God as darkness. My main purpose has

²⁴Cf. Crouzel, *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'*, pp. 91-95.

been to suggest that Origen, while making extensive use of Platonic images and formulations, is never enslaved by these, but subordinates them always to his own independent purposes. In view of that I would like to substitute for the misleading notion of Origen the Neoplatonist what I hope is the more accurate picture of Origen as "Neochristian".

IN ORIGIN OF ALEXANDRIA