Origen of Alexandria and St. Maximus the Confessor: An Analysis and Critical Evaluation of Their Eschatological Doctrines

by

Edward Moore

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Edward Moore, S.T.L., Ph.D.

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I dedicate this work to my Muse:

Marilynn Lawrence.

It is sound, I think, to find the primal source of Love in a tendency of the Soul towards pure beauty …

~ Plotinus, *Enneads* III.5.1 (tr. MacKenna)

List of Abbreviations

ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ed. A. Menzies)

CCSG *Corpus Christanorum, Series Graeca*

PG *Patrologia Graeca* (ed. J.-P. Migne)

SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (ed. von Arnim)

TDNT G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. G.W. Bromiley (Michigan: Eerdmans 1964)

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Thanks are due to Walter and Maureen Lawrence for their help in acquiring several rare volumes crucial to the elaboration of my thesis. Finally, I extend my thanks to my parents, Carol and Richard Moore, who managed to guide me toward the philosophical life, against all odds.

Preface

The present study is my doctoral dissertation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy, St. Elias School of Orthodox Theology (2004). This work arose out of my concern with both theology and philosophy. As a philosopher, I consider myself a Christian Existentialist, in the manner of a Bultmann or (more significantly) a Berdyaev; for I see the life of the human person as the primordial and ultimate subject of contemplation for philosophy. For this reason I am also devoted to ancient thought, to the extent that I strongly believe in the exigency of a return to the heretofore glossed-over problems of the Classical, Hellenistic, and Byzantine eras, the most significant of which, in my opinion, is eschatology.

As Andreas Andreopoulos observes, "Christian and pagan writers alike, such as Origen, Plotinos, Gregory of Nyssa and Proklos, have described the tendency of the fallen creation to return to its original state in almost identical terms, pointing towards a future that will be even better than the original Paradise."[1] This is, of course, the eternal hope of the Christian, yet it takes many forms. The two extreme forms of eschatology explored in this study are those of Origen of Alexandria and St. Maximus the Confessor. The former approaches the *eskhaton* creatively, in the manner of a self-determining intellect meeting God in a peculiar fashion in the midst of history; for this reason, Origen is to be understood as a proto-Existentialist. The latter, however, conceives of the

[1] A. Andreopoulos, "Eschatology and final restoration (*apokatastasis*) in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximos the Confessor," in *Theandros: An Online Journal of Orthodox Christian Theology and Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring 2004).

eskhaton as a completion of a process initiated by God, in which human participation makes no difference – for this reason I have come to consider Maximus as an anti-humanist theologian, one of the originators of the intellectual decline of Christian philosophy in Byzantium, to which later thinkers like Gemistus Plethon were responding when they initiated the Renaisssance, and the consequent return of Humanism to Western thought.

There is a wide chronological gap separating the work of Origen and Maximus, yet they are connected, as it were, by a 'golden chain' comprising the works of the Cappadocian Fathers (whom we will explore in this study) as well as several lesser-known Christian Platonists, such as the "Three Gazans," Stephanus of Alexandria and, of course, the better-known seminal Christian Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius, among others. This historical review – which will enter into considerable depth on certain points – will enable us to achieve an overview of the vast influence of Origen on his successors, even on those who attempted, as did Maximus, to distance themselves from the thought of this brilliant, yet unfortunately and wrongfully (in my opinion) condemned, philosopher of the Church.

Edward Moore, S.T.L.

May 2004

Introduction

Origen, Maximus, and the Importance of Eschatology

Eschatology, the doctrine of the end times, the summation of humanity's historical partnership with God, has always held a central place in the Christian theological tradition. But the various ideas concerning eschatology, especially in the patristic era, have been widely divergent.[1] This study deals with two such divergent eschatological schemas, both highly influential – those of Origen of Alexandria, and St. Maximus the Confessor.

Origen believed that salvation is open to all, and that the *eskhaton* will include every soul generated by God, including the devil himself; for Origen believed that God's love is so powerful as to soften even the hardest heart. He also held the human intellect in very high esteem, refusing to consider any soul capable of knowingly choosing oblivion or evil over the enlightening presence of God.[2] St. Maximus, on the other hand, suspended judgment regarding a universal salvation (though he surely hoped for it);[3] further, and more problematically, his vision of the *eskhaton* involved a loss of self-hood,

[1] See, for example, J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row 1978), pp. 459-489.

[2] In this, Origen was adhering to the standard Greek philosophical conception of evil as the absence of good through ignorance, and not a state of existence that a person would consciously choose. See, for example, Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia* ("On the Subsistence of Evil").

[3] Maximus adhered early in life to the Origenist doctrine of *apokatastasis* or 'restoration of all things,' as we will discuss in detail in Chapter 6. For now I will simply point my readers to a passage in his *Ambiguum* 7, 3.1088B, where he professes such a doctrine, asking them to keep in mind that Maximus later revised his Origenist stance, arriving at the eschatology described here, and later in more detail.

of a personal ego, which he believed would be replaced by the absolute presence of God.[4] In this, he differed widely from Origen, who held that the soul will remain unique, differentiated, and related to God on its own terms, feasting on the fruits of the divine intellect.[5]

While Origen's influence throughout the history of patristic thought was tremendous, especially among the monastics,[6] it led to numerous theological difficulties, and eventually was branded a heresy. It was for precisely this reason that Maximus, a monk himself, saw fit to revise the most problematical doctrines contained in Origen's influential treatise, the *De Principiis* ("On First Principles"), a favorite of the Origenists inspired by Evagrius Ponticus.[7] This revision of Origen's philosophical theology resulted in an eschatology involving the replacement of the human ego by the divine presence. In this study, I will examine the theological developments that led to this loss of a sense of human freedom and creativity in the face of the divine. By so doing, I will demonstrate the value of Origen's historical-personalist[8] approach to eschatology, and its continued significance in our post-modern, and now increasingly post-human, era.[9]

The most obvious challenge in attempting to compare the eschatological doctrines of Origen and Maximus is overcoming the wide chronological gap separating these two

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[4] See, for example, Maximus, *Chapters on Knowledge* 2.88; also L. Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1985), p. 89.

[5] This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

[6] His influence was also of extreme importance for the theological developments of the Cappadocian Fathers, who will be discussed in a separate chapter.

[7] The Origenism of Evagrius Ponticus will be discussed in Chapter 3.

[8] References throughout this work to personalism, historical-personalist philosophy, etc., are to the Christian existentialist philosophy of Nicolas Berdyaev, particularly in his works *Slavery and Freedom*, *Truth and Revelation*, *The Beginning and the End*, *The Destiny of Man*, and *The Meaning of History*.

[9] On the meaning and implications of our increasingly post-human world, see F. Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Picador 2002).

thinkers. Origen was writing and teaching in the early to mid-third century, and Maximus was active in the early to mid-seventh century. Fortunately, there is a strong link between these two important Christian thinkers, preserved in the intellectual and dogmatical tradition of the Church. Origen's influence extended well into Maximus' time – indeed, this great doctor of the Church was himself influenced by Origenist doctrine at an early stage of his intellectual development. Moreover, this link between Origen and Maximus takes on an extra dimension when we consider the Neoplatonic themes that gradually pervaded the Christian theology of the early Byzantine era, notably through the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, which emerged some time during the fifth century.

The History and Importance of Eschatology in Christian Thought – Some Brief Remarks.

The earliest Christian kerygma was apocalyptical, not eschatological. The distinction resides in the difference between the Greek terms *apokalupsis* [*apokaluptô*] and *eskhatos*, the former denoting an unveiling or appearance ("revelation"), and the latter a culmination of a series of events, understood as a temporal, historical process.[10] While the earliest Christians were confident that Christ was the Messiah, they believed that He did not become Incarnate *as* the Messiah; rather, they understood His Incarnation as a preparation for a Second Coming (*parousia*), in which He would be revealed as the

[10] See TDNT vol. 2, pp. 697-698; vol. 3, pp. 563-592.

Messiah; this revelation would then give final form to the completion of history, of which Christ's Incarnation, death, and Resurrection marked the final stage.[11] The earliest form of Christology, then, is correctly understood as a two-fold apocalypse or revelation of Christ the Savior and Messiah. Yet Christ's promise to return before the deaths of His apostles,[12] when seemingly broken, led to no wide-spread dissension from the faith,[13] as Christians seamlessly adapted to the Johannine-Gnostic notion that the Kingdom had already arrived, and that a Second Coming was not necessary, and indeed not planned, after all, by God.[14]

Instead of a return as Messiah, understood in the Jewish sense of a figure ushering in a glorious age of rejoicing and blessedness, early Christians began to conceive of a return of Christ as *judge*, in a rather primitive sense of a rewarder of good deeds, instead of as a transcendent, soteriological deity.[15] When we read such texts as the early second century *Apocalypse of Peter*, it is impossible not to notice a very clear attitude of brutality and even sadism, as the following passage illustrates. Speaking of those who were murdered, the author of this text describes the enjoyment of these murdered souls, as they witness the torment of their murderers.

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[11] See R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, tr. K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1951), pp. 4-11, 33-42; and Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, tr. R.H. Fuller (New York: The World Publishing Company 1956), pp. 196-208.

[12] Mark 9:1.

[13] See W.C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1983), p. 34; also M. Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, tr. S.G.F. Brandon (Harper and Brothers 1957).

[14] See Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, Part 3, chapters 1-4.

[15] See *The Letter of 1 Clement* 5 ff., *2 Clement* 9; also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 460-461.

> [A]nd they [the murdered souls] shall behold the torment of those who slew them and say to one another, 'Righteousness and justice is the judgment of God. For we heard, but we believed not, that we should come into this place of eternal judgment.[16]

The salvific joy of these souls is described only in terms of a perceiving of their former tormentors' suffering – a sadistic pleasure alien to the later, refined Christian thought of the Hellenistic-influenced Church Fathers, such as Origen of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa. Such is an example of primitive notions of salvation, current in early Christian communities.

However, before the adoption of the Johannine-Gnostic conception of salvation as a present reality (or potentiality) in the process of being perfected through history,[17] we have a writer like 'Barnabas,' for whom the dualism of Light and Darkness is still a reality; yet he is a thinker capable of seeing beyond the "letter" in order to grasp the "spirit" of scripture (even though his grasp may well be considered loose). His eschatology is based on a reading of Old Testament scripture that is not literal or historical, but 'spiritual,' i.e., based on his understanding of the meaning of the Christ-event. For example, 'Barnabas' understands the six days of creation as representing six thousand years, for a day to God is like a thousand years to us (Psalm 90:4), and God's rest on the seventh day as indicating the time of Christ's return.

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[16] *The Apocalypse of Peter* 7, tr. J.K. Elliott, in B.D. Ehrman, ed., *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press 1998), p. 410. This curious text apparently contains a very early form of *apokatastasis* doctrine, albeit couched in the brutal terms of physical suffering as the retribution of humanity for its sins against God (cf. 13-14 ff.).

[17] Origen is the clearest and most profound exponent of this conception, as we shall see below.

> The universe must therefore last six thousand years, of which the greater part has expired. When it is stated that God has rested on the seventh day, the meaning is that Christ will appear at the beginning of the seventh millennium in order to dethrone the Lawless One, judge the ungodly and transform the sun, moon and stars.[18]

Note here that the entire cosmos – "sun, moon and stars" – is to be transformed, and not just the human souls. In this text we have an early indication of the influence of Stoic philosophy on early Christian speculative theology and eschatology; for a main idea of Stoicism was that the entire cosmos, including all of humanity and the celestial bodies, is a product of the psycho-physical expansion of Zeus – expressed in eternally recurring cosmic cycles measured in millennia – the fiery mind out of which all things are made.[19] Now Christianity was never in danger of lapsing into pantheism, yet this Stoic notion, when applied to Christian eschatological teachings, led to the inevitable conclusion that the end of all things must necessarily imply the destruction of the ordered universe, or cosmos.[20] Origen, with his sophisticated doctrine of multiple ages, quite easily assimilated this Stoic conception into his theology;[21] however, for his less brilliant predecessors, such ideas led to strange and un-Christian notions.

The most unsophisticated notion preceding Origen is, in my opinion, millennarianism or *chiliasm*, i.e., the idea that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years, pending the final conflagration and judgment (eternal allocation to either heaven or

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[18] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 462; *The Letter of Barnabas* 4:3, 4:9, 21:3.

[19] See, for example, Aetius 1.7.33 SVF 2.1027. Also Aristocles (SVF 1.98); Seneca, *Letters* 9.16 (SVF 2.606); Nemesius (SVF 2.625).

[20] See Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 45.1 ff., 57.1 ff., 60.8 ff.; *Apologia secunda* 7.1 ff.; and Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 465.

[21] This Stoic concept, known as *apokatastasis*, after being sufficiently revised along Christian lines, became a key tenet of Origen's teaching, as we shall discuss in Chapter 2.

hell) of all human beings.[22] Looking ahead a few centuries, when we consider the chiliastic notion in light of Christological developments, it is easy to see how this idea leads to a degradation of Christ into a mere despot, and not as a savior who suffered in order to unite divine nature with human nature. For if Christ were to act as a ruler, even for the space of a thousand years, this would mean that He willingly set Himself up and over humanity, in a relationship of ruler to subject – the very relationship between God and man that He came to abolish!

Far more sophisticated, and influential, are the systems of Gnostic theology expounded by Basilides, Valentinus, Ptolemaeus and others. It is with these thinkers that Christian theology can be said to have begun. While Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr are rightfully recognized as supreme authorities of the post-apostolic era, they are not true theologians, but rather pastoral counselors and apologists. It is only with Basilides that we witness the emergence of a true Christian philosophical-theological tradition; for he was the first to question scripture on the basis of his own unaided intellect, and not according to any cultic premises.

Realizing that scripture does not contain all that is required for knowledge, Basilides looked to Stoic and Pythagorean philosophy,[23] and developed a cosmology based on loosely interpreted Christian sentiments, but held solidly together by his own unique and creative relationship with received Christian doctrine and common Hellenistic motifs, employed in service to his endeavor – which was to unite Christian and pagan thought in a single grand schema. In this, he was not far from the intention of Origen,

[22] Origen, in the now fragmentary treatise *On the Resurrection*, rejected chiliasm, as well as the notion of "a literal resuscitation of this [fleshly] body" (Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, pp. 78-79); Origen, *De resurrectione libri ii*, PG 11.96.1-36.

[23] See B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday 1987), pp. 417-444.

who, as we shall see, utilized both traditions in the service of the grand system of his *De Principiis*. Yet Origen differed from Basilides in that he deferred more readily to Christian or scriptural teaching than to Hellenistic thought. Indeed, one need only examine the surviving fragments of Basilides to see that he was essentially a Greek philosopher trying to force Christianity into conformation with his own preconceived notions, while Origen, as we shall see, always attempted to ground his speculations in scripture.[24]

Beginning in the mid- to late second century, Christian theologians emerged whose work consisted of little original speculation, but was rather devoted to the identification and refutation of heresies. Among the first of these was Irenaeus of Lyons,[25] whose *Adversus haereses* ("Against Heresies") is the earliest surviving work of Christian heresiology.[26] While Irenaeus goes far back into history to uncover the source

[24] Basilides attempted to do the same, yet his reading of scripture – like that of Gnostics and indeed the Alexandrian tradition in general – was usually allegorized to the extreme. Origen, while surely a rampant allegorist, nevertheless maintains a more balanced and sober approach to his texts, evidence of which is his *Hexapla*, in the compilation of which he sought to gain the clearest insight into the authentic meaning of the Hebrew scriptures. See H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, pp. 70-71; also, and more expansively, the study of J.W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press 1983).

[25] Irenaeus was a dogmatic theologian and heresiologist, not a philosopher. Accordingly, he based his thought strictly on scripture. He was the first to formulate a doctrine of original sin, and a notion of salvation not as a working toward an *eskhaton*, but rather as *redemption*, i.e., the rescuing of fallen souls from their wretched state by God. Human souls, according to Irenaeus, do not achieve a new life realized and attained in the *eskaton*; rather, they *re-capitulate* (or 're-surrender') to the overwhelming power of God, i.e., they allow themselves to be determined not by their own history, but by the activity of God in their lives, in a tyrannical and impersonal manner. This is the theory of recapitulation (*anakephalaiôsis*), in which all human activity and existence is described solely in terms of the unity imposed upon it by the Redeemer, with no real positive contribution on the part of humanity being recognized as crucial to eschatological life. See Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 32-34, in J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius*; and Kelly, pp. 170-174. We shall encounter this idea, elaborated to the extreme, in the thought of Maximus, which we will examine below (Chapter 5).

[26] An earlier cataolog of heresies by Justin Martyr (d. 165 A.D.), apparently dependent on yet an even earlier source, no longer survives. See K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, tr. R. McL. Wilson (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark 1984), pp. 10-11; for an attempted reconstruction of these early heresiological tracts, see A. Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums urkundlich dargestellt* (Leipzig 1884; reprint: Hildeshiem 1963), p. 21 ff.

of all heresies, his main concern is with the contemporary Gnostic schools of thought that were threatening to fragment Christianity into innumerable sects and off-shoots of sects, severely undermining the unity of faith and worship.[27] These Gnostic sects denied that Christ literally died on the Cross, arguing instead that His death was a mere illusion intended to trick the malevolent cosmic powers into thinking that they had succeeded in enslaving humanity and defying the Most High God. This was the concept of *docetism*, which denied the full humanity of Christ.[28]

Akin to this notion was that of a triple division of humanity into *pneumatics*, *psychics*, and *hylics* – i.e., those who are spiritual; those who possess only a soul; and those who are material or 'fleshly' through-and-through. The spiritual humans were said by the Gnostics to be 'scattered seeds' of the Highest God, identified not with the Yahweh of the Old Testament, but rather with an alien God known simply as the Father. These spiritual souls came to be scattered in the material realm through a cosmic drama involving Sophia (Wisdom) and her hubristic desire to know the Father directly, instead of through acts of creation, as He intended. The psychics, or those possessing only a soul without spirit, were considered as intermediary between the spiritual existents and the mere hylics; the psychics recognized the supremacy of the Most High God, yet are not

[27] This was a concern of Origen as well, as we shall see; however, for Irenaeus "heresy comes of following the itch to speculate where scripture has given no clear guidance; we must be content not to know if the word of God is not explicit … Origen is as conscious as Irenaeus of the limitations of human intellectual power for inquiring into the transcendental world, but thinks it possible for the human mind, with the aid of grace given in answer to prayer and purity of heart, to speculate with becoming diffidence even about questions that are not explicitly set out in the apostolic rule of faith" (Chadwick, pp. 81-82).

[28] For a collection of the most significant Gnostic treatises, see J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1978). The following works are indispensable for understanding the history and intellectual character of Gnosticism: K. Rudolph., *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*; G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, tr. A. Alcock (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell 1990); and the now classic study by Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, third edition (Boston: Beacon Press 1958, 2001).

connected with Him ontologically. They will not return to His presence – called the *plêrôma* or Fullness (a purely spiritual realm beyond the the stars and the zodiac) – but will rather subsist, after the final conflagration of the cosmos, in a place situated just below the spiritual realm. Finally, there are the hylics, who are corrupt by nature, purely material, and destined to be consumed in the final conflagration, which will end all history. Such is the basic outline of Gnostic eschatology and anthropology – a set of ideas that thinkers like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and others rightly considered as needing refutation.[29]

The extreme determinism of Gnostic eschatology should be evident from the brief description above. Certain beings were considered to be saved by nature, others (the psychics) were offered a limited chance for salvation, and finally, another group, the hylics, were considered as beyond hope, damned by nature to destruction. The Stoic concept of a conflagration of the cosmos, understood apart from the doctrine of eternal recurrence, when coupled with certain esoteric astrological teachings, likely gave rise to the basic Gnostic conceptions of history, anthropology, and salvation – all inter-connected and based on a dualistic notion of a fallen world created by an inherently malignant god (the Demiurge, called Ialdabaoth and identified by the Gnostics with the Yahweh of Hebrew scripture) set in opposition to a perfect, spiritual realm subsisting eternally, generated by a perfect God who is beyond being, without predication, and utterly unknowable.

[29] I have given a brief and very general account of the basic structure of the Gnostic myth. For a discussion of the numerous variations (and the problematical term "Gnosticism"), see M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1996).

While the heresiologists rightly attacked this extreme determinism and mythologizing of the Gnostics, they missed a key point in the Gnostic schema that was to become of utmost importance to Origen – the idea that a transformative knowledge of God, *theôsis* (or deification, the ultimate goal of salvation), is only possible through a creative existence along the lines set out by God for His creation. The Gnostics taught that the Aeons – i.e., the entities generated directly by the Most High God in His Fullness[30] – were generated in pairs, each meant to complement and aid the other in creative acts begetting yet more groups of Aeons.[31] In this eternal process of creation, the glory and essence of the Father was said to be made manifest.[32] Here we find, for the first time, the value of *personality*, of individual endeavor, recognized as a key element in attaining Truth, or the Good, the One, or whatever epithet is suitable to describe the highest goal of human striving.

Like the Gnostics, Origen considered eschatology in terms of a provisional or accidental cosmos. The Gnostics viewed this universe as the accidental result of the ill-fated desire of Sophia to know the Father directly, apart from her own creative self-expression, and considered life in the cosmos as a process of restoration of all spiritual beings, accidentally 'spilled' by Sophia into the material realm, to the Fullness. Origen viewed the cosmos in terms of a provisional arena set in place for the education of souls who were unable to know God directly, therefore requiring a process – history – by which to gain self-knowledge, leading eventually to knowledge of God. Yet this

[30] These Aeons correspond roughly to Origen's pre-existent souls, discussed below.

[31] See, for example, the elaborate Valentinian system of Ptolemaeus, preserved by Epiphanius, *Against Heresies* 31.9.1-31.32.9, tr. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, pp. 281-302.

[32] See *The Tripartite Tractate* (I,5), tr. H.W. Attridge, E.H. Pagels, D. Mueller, in Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 58-103.

knowledge of God is understood by both the Gnostics and Origen not as a static fulfillment or an end of motion and growth, but rather as an endless engagement with a reality that always exceeds the soul or spiritual being in question. As N. Berdyaev writes:

> The end is not merely the destruction of the world, and judgment, it is also the illumination and transformation of the world, the continuation, as it were, of creation, the entry upon a new aeon. The creative act of man is needed for the coming of the Kingdom of God, God is in need of and awaits it. The future coming of Christ presupposes that the way has been prepared for it by man.[33]

Yet it must be stressed that man's preparation for the coming of Christ, the ushering in of the *eskhaton*, is done as much for the sake of man as it is for Christ, God. Both the Gnostics and Origen emphasize, in their different ways, the co-operative nature of the human-divine relationship. God did not create humanity on a whim; His act of creation is based on love, and His own essence is bound up with that of His creation, which is why He sent His Son to die for the salvation of His creation. A proper understanding of Christian eschatology must take into account the risk taken by God in creating entities who are absolutely free to either accept or reject Him on their own terms.

The Gnostics did not make it this far in their speculations; they thought that one accepted – or not – the supremacy of the true God based on one's ontological status. This notion, while severely restricing any conception of free will, nevertheless included the

[33] N. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, tr. R.M. French (New York: Harper and Brothers 1952), pp. 151-152.

concept of creativity, which is crucial to any personalist philosophy. Origen, however, accepted the notion of a risk taken by God, and ended up placing God in the service of history, and not vice-versa. As this study will make clear, God acts in history as the great educator, in service to His fallen souls, and He will not cease acting in this capacity until all souls are led back to the truth and goodness of divine proximity. Origen allows for an infinite number of ages (*aeons*) to take place, if necessary, for the salvation of all humanity. The eternal existence of God, then, is placed in the service of historical humanity, as it strives for an eternal relationship with, or orientation toward, God, and an endless contemplation of His mysterious nature.

The importance of eschatology in Christian thought resides precisely in this idea: that God, in His act of creation, placed Himself at risk. The culmination of history, dependent upon humanity's response to God, is potentially both the deification of humanity and the justification of God. His decision to create absolutely free, self-determinate beings will be judged at the end-time, along with the humans who defied the conditions of this creation. Both God and His creatures will be called into question, and history will either continue or be fulfilled based on the *rapprochement*, at this moment, between God and His creation. If the human response to God's judgment is not favorable, then history will continue, dragging God along with it, toward the goal of a final, eschatological *rapprochement* between God and humanity, when eternity will obtrude upon the finite life of man, bestowing deification upon all, and humanity upon God. The Incarnation means nothing more or less than this: that God becomes man so

that man may become God.[34] This is the eschatological goal that I have in mind throughout this work – *theôsis*.

[34] This is the famous formula of St. Athanasius, to which is connected his lesser known – and more radical – statement that human existence is "the cause of His [Christ's] taking human form" (*De Incarnatione* 4), anon. tr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1996), p. 29.