Landas 28:2 (2014) 1–43

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS IN *THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS* AND ORIGEN

Ramon L. Bautista, S.J.

1. What is this *Shepherd of Hermas* and what is its main contribution to discernment of spirits?

Some contemporary authors make special mention of *The Shepherd of Hermas* (c. 90–140 AD) as one of the most significant works on the subject of discernment in the early Church. One recent writer even holds that as an early spiritual treatise, composed in Rome sometime during the middle of the second century, this work "formulated the essential rules for the discernment of spirits."[1] Another author says that in this opus of Hermas, we can see "the first Christian formulation of the rules for the discernment of spirits."[2]

The Shepherd of Hermas is a Christian apocalyptic work. It urges believers of its time to give themselves to conversion and, specifically

[1]Gustave Bardy, "The Patristic Period," in Jacques Guillet, et al., *Discernment of Spirits*, trans. Innocentia Richards (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 55. Bardy even adds that "[soon after], the advice from Hermas [on discernment] became traditional, even in the manner in which it was expressed" (55).

[2]Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "Angels Black and White: Loyola's Spiritual Discernment in Historical Perspective," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 245.

https://publications.lst.edu/

those who considered themselves as "grave sinners" to take on this "second chance" repentance in the light of an impending persecution and the second coming of the Lord, which they were expecting then would happen soon.[3] It is a collection of revelations made to a man named "Hermas" by an angel in the guise of a shepherd (5th vision). Hermas, the author, remains unknown, though there has been much speculation regarding his real identity. From the work itself, we can know that he was a freed Christian slave who probably was of Jewish origin. Sincere repentance, truthful and moral living, and the overall situation of the early Church are the main themes that he underscores.

The entire treatise is divided into three sections: i) the five visions, ii) the twelve mandates (or commandments), and iii) the ten parables (or similitudes). As a Christian writing, it was highly esteemed in the early Church, and for a time it was quoted often and even considered as canonical Scripture by some of the early Church fathers like Irenaeus. However, it does contain some details that fail to agree with the rest of Scripture.[4] Even so, due to the high regard and strong authority it enjoyed in the early Church, this document has gained a special place in the history of Christian literature and spirituality.

It is in the second part (mandates) of *The Shepherd of Hermas* where the matter of discernment is presented more explicitly. In mandate no. 6, the angel-shepherd (also known as the "angel of repentance") plainly instructs Hermas that "there are two spirits with [a person],

[3]Some scholars believe that during this time there was a rigorist tradition in the Church that went against any form of forgiveness or reconciliation, particularly for believers excommunicated for very grievous sins (like apostasy) after baptism. It is in this context that the term "second chance" is used. See M. H. Shepherd, Jr., "Hermas, Shepherd of," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 583–584. See also mandate no. 4 in *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

[4]For example, the Holy Spirit is identified wrongly as "Son of God" (9th parable or similitude, Ch 1). From this detail, we can see that the Trinitarian nature of God was not yet that clear as a Christian doctrine at that point in time.

https://publications.lst.edu/

one of righteousness and one of wickedness."[5] What follows right after this statement of the angel is Hermas' question which is of enormous practical value, since it is one inevitable and vital question that all discerners have to ask.

Hermas asks: "How shall I recognize them [the spirit of righteousness and the spirit of wickedness], seeing that both spirits dwell with me?" The angel then responds by pointing out some of the most primary identifying marks of each of the spirits. He says that it is by being attentive to these marks and understanding them that we are able to distinguish the spirit of righteousness from the spirit of wickedness.

The angel describes the righteous spirit as "sensitive, tender, modest, gentle and tranquil." As a good spirit, it can enter our hearts and stir them, placing into our minds thoughts "of righteousness, of purity, of holiness, and of contentment, of righteous deeds and of glorious virtues."

On the other hand, the wicked spirit is regarded as "quick tempered, bitter and senseless," drawn to do evil works. As a bad spirit, it too can enter our hearts and stir them, placing into our minds "angry or bitter thoughts." In addition, the spirit of wickedness can awaken also in us evil and dangerous desires, such as the "desire for much [worldly] activity, for extravagant kinds of food, for drinking bouts and for various luxuries, the desire for women [or men], greed, haughtiness, boastfulness."[6]

The entire 6th mandate ends with the warning from the angel-shepherd that, after recognizing these two kinds of spirits, we should go out of our way to trust and follow the righteous spirit. Conversely,

---

[5]For the text of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, see www.AnabaptistChurch.org/Shepherd_of_Hermas.htm (accessed September 19, 2012). The translations by J. B. Lightfoot and Roberts-Donaldson are also available online at www.earlychristianwritings.com/shepherd.html.

[6]Like in mandate no. 6, lists of "evil desires" can also be seen in mandate nos. 8, 11, and 12.

https://publications.lst.edu/

we need to go against the wicked spirit and part ways with it so that we will not be tempted to do its sinful works.

Looking at the section on mandates alone and its treatment of discernment as part of the theme of true repentance and moral living, we can see how *The Shepherd of Hermas* has provided the most basic elements of a doctrine on the discernment of spirits. Without contradicting the Bible on this matter, especially the NT, the author supplements what we find in the Gospels and in the epistles. Curiously enough, one significant difference between this work of Hermas and the NT on discernment is on how we can identify more precisely which spirit is at work in us. While the NT, especially the epistles, places great emphasis on our *loving relationship with Christ*, plus the role of our *virtues* and *vices*, *The Shepherd of Hermas* adopts these but at the same time takes a step further by including more explicitly the role of our *thoughts* and *affections*, especially the different *desires* of our hearts when sifting the spirits. It is this particular emphasis apparent in Hermas that makes his discussion on the theme of discernment of spirits original and novel. To top it off, his utilization of certain images and analogies also helps clarify some of the principles of discernment that he sets forth.

At the risk of being a bit repetitive, we can summarize these fundamental elements of Hermas on discernment of spirits as follows:

1. There are two kinds of opposing spirits: the spirit of righteousness and the spirit of wickedness (mandate no. 6).

2. Each spirit has its own distinctive features. The spirit of righteousness is "delicate, tender, modest, gentle and tranquil" (and it is drawn to persons who are such), while the spirit of wickedness is "quick tempered, bitter and irrational" (and it is drawn to persons who are such) (mandate nos. 5–6).

3. These spirits can influence us, our choices, and our actions by entering into our hearts and stirring them, and putting *thoughts* and *desires* (including other feelings)

https://publications.lst.edu/

into our minds and hearts.[7] Thus, it is important to be attentive to these spirits and understand the kinds of thoughts, desires, and feelings that come to us.

4. We will know that the righteous spirit is at work in us when certain thoughts and/or feelings incline us toward righteousness, purity, holiness, contentment, and virtues (mandate no. 6).

5. Other marks of the spirit of righteousness are:

    - faith, fear of God, and self-control (mandate no. 1);
    - giving and serving in simplicity and sincerity, guilelessness, not engaging in evil speech, peace, reverence for God, and an overall experience of peace and joy (mandate no. 2);
    - truthfulness (mandate no. 3);
    - chastity, faithfulness in marriage, forgiving heart, sense of healing, repentance, understanding of sinful deeds, disturbance and torment due to sin, and humility (mandate no. 4);
    - patience (especially in long suffering), meekness, calmness, absence of bitterness, freedom from the cares of the world, and the desire to glorify God at all times (mandate no. 5);
    - temperance and self-restraint from doing evil, bearing no grudge, hospitality, and generosity in

[7]Hermas seems to be quite ambivalent regarding the issue of *freedom*. He insists that if we "cloth [ourselves] in the desire of righteousness" and "arm [ourselves] with the fear of the Lord," we can *resist* evil desires (mandate no. 12). Yet he also says that even if we are a person of faith, if we allow the desire of the spirit of wickedness to enter into our hearts, then we "must commit some sin." On the other hand, if we are a person of wickedness and the spirit of righteousness enters our hearts, then we "must of necessity do something good" (mandate no. 6).

https://publications.lst.edu/

doing good (like helping widows and orphans, encouraging those who are sick in soul, guiding back those who have fallen from the faith and restoring them to peace of mind, not oppressing debtors and the needy) (mandate no. 8);

- trust in God, asking and praying to God without ceasing, and disdain for the vanities of this life (mandate no. 9);
- cheerfulness and understanding of truth (mandate no. 10);
- not considering oneself as superior to anyone, and a sense of contentment with not so many wants (mandate no. 11);
- sense of justice, actual practice and living out of our good desires, and a sense of confidence that one can live a good life and keep God's commandments through his grace (mandate no. 12).

6. We will know that the wicked spirit is at work in us when certain thoughts and/or feelings incline us toward anger, bitterness, preoccupation with (worldly) activity, extravagance and luxury, drinking bouts, lust, greed, pride, and boastfulness (mandate no. 6).
7. Other marks of the spirit of wickedness are:
    - slander, having grudges, restlessness, lack of peace, and strife (mandate no. 2);
    - falsehood and lies (mandate no. 3);
    - impurity, adultery or fornication, and lawlessness (mandate no. 4);
    - impatience, double-mindedness, fickleness, harshness, and being blinded and bereft of any good intent (mandate no. 5);

https://publications.lst.edu/

- complacency with no fear of God and no guilt when doing wicked deeds (mandate no. 7);
- lack of temperance from evil deeds, hypocrisy, malice, backbiting, blasphemy, theft, false witness, deceit, food indulgence, vainglory, and remembrance of injuries (mandate no. 8);
- doubting God and his mercy, and weariness and wavering in faith (mandate no. 9);
- sadness and sorrow (mandate no. 10);
- idolatry, exalting oneself, superiority over others, self-seeking attitude, shamelessness, and love for money and vanities of this world (mandate no. 11);
- hardening of heart, covetousness, and little or no confidence to live a good life and keep God's commandments through his grace (mandate no. 12).

8. A prophet needs to be tested by his life and works to find out whether he is a true or false one. A true prophet is unworldly, peaceable, humble, and meek. He speaks only when and what God wants him to speak. A false prophet is proud, imprudent, and talkative. He prophesies mainly for money and for what he can gain for himself. He says to people what they want to hear from him (mandate no. 11).[8]

[8]The *Didache* (ca. 140 AD) is one other famous work during the early Church. As a spiritual treatise, it has its own list of "virtues and vices." It also tackles the theme of the "two ways" (the way of life *and* the way of death) and discusses this question of how to distinguish a true prophet from a false one. Here the author says, "But not everyone speaking in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he should have a lifestyle of the Lord's character." See *Didache*, trans. Tim Sauder, www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Didache-text.html (accessed September 20, 2012), XI.

https://publications.lst.edu/

9. Patience enables us to have power over all evil deeds. The Holy Spirit or the righteous spirit (drawn to patient hearts) and the devil or wicked spirit (drawn to angry hearts), being in discord with one another, find it difficult to dwell together for long in the same person. Like wormwood placed in a jar of honey, anger "pollutes" (and "chokes") the Holy Spirit. As a consequence, the Holy Spirit leaves persons "polluted" with anger and seeks out those who are more gentle and tranquil of heart. Thus, we need to guard ourselves against anger and learn true patience (mandate no. 5).

10. We need to fear the Lord and not the devil, because the power is in the Lord and not in the devil. What we also need to fear is the act of the devil (not his person) for his works are evil. Fear of the Lord will make us avoid evil and do good (mandate nos. 7 and 12).

11. Sorrow (or grief) is the sister of doubt and anger. It is the most wicked of all the spirits, destroying humans and "crushing out" the Holy Spirit (but sorrow due to a bad deed done can lead to repentance and salvation). As fine wine is different from vinegar, so is the Holy Spirit most incompatible with sorrow. We need to put on cheerfulness instead of sorrow, and if we do so we can set aside both doubt and anger in us (mandate no. 10).

12. We need to purify our desires for "the fear of God dwells in a pure desire." Also, we need to rid ourselves of all evil desires (which are the "daughters" of the devil) and clothe ourselves with good and holy ones. This way we can tame and control more easily those evil desires that come to us (mandate no. 12).

13. We need to trust and follow the spirit of righteousness. Doing this will allow us to live for God. On the other

https://publications.lst.edu/

> hand, we need to go against the spirit of wickedness. If not, we will not live for God and will experience death instead (mandate nos. 6 and 12).

2. Who is Origen? Why is he important in our historical overview of how discernment of spirits developed as a doctrine in the Church?

A good number of present-day writers, when making their (often short) historical presentation on discernment of spirits, take special note of Origen (c. 186–255 AD) and his significant contribution to the subject. For example, Joseph T. Lienhard asserts that "Origen has a distinctive place in his theological system for a doctrine of the discernment of spirits."[9] Hans Urs von Balthasar even devotes an entire section on discernment when presenting an anthology of Origen's writings.[10]

Most of what we know about Origen today can be drawn from Eusebius (c. 265–339), bishop of Caesarea, in his work *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 6). Origen was born of Christian parents in Alexandria, Egypt (then a center of Hellenistic learning). His father Leonides, a *Grammaticus* (i.e., a teacher of grammar and literature), personally tutored him, providing him with a high quality learning environment at home and exposing him to both Greek and the Scriptures. In 202, Leonides was martyred in the persecution of Emperor Septimus Severus (reigned 193–211), and the family's property was confiscated by the imperial authorities. As the eldest of seven sons, the responsibility of supporting the family fell to Origen. At the early age of eighteen, he became, like his father, a teacher of grammar and literature. In the

[9]Joseph T. Lienhard, "On 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 505–529. See also Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, trans. Michael Barry (London: Cassell Publishers Ltd., 1990), esp. 166–175.

[10]See Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire—A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 218–232.

https://publications.lst.edu/

meantime, his local bishop, Demetrius (bishop from 189–232), decided to place him in charge of instructing catechumens, thus inducting him "into the lower orders of the paid ministers of the church."[11] For some years, most likely up to his early twenties, Origen continued on with his twin teaching duties. After some time, however, probably when the financial situation of his family had improved, he decided to let go of his being a *Grammaticus* so that he could devote himself more to his work as a catechist. But then a time came when he realized that, as a Christian, there truly was great value in what he was doing before as a teacher of secular culture, grammar, and literature. This was because the work included particularly the learning of philosophy. It thus dawned on him that philosophy can indeed be an excellent instrument for gaining "a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning of the revealed sacred texts and the creed that the apostles left to the church."[12] This motivated Origen to go back to his being a *Grammaticus*, and in order to deepen his knowledge of philosophy, he went out of his way to study under Ammonius Saccas (175–242), regarded as the father of Neoplatonic thought.[13] In the end, Origen continued his task

[11]John Anthony McGuckin, "The Life of Origen," in John Anthony McGuckin, ed.,*The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 4.

[12]David T. Runia, "Philosophy," in John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 173.

[13]Neoplatonism "is closely associated with the name of Plotinus [205–270], its creator and most illustrious exponent." See Salvatore Lilla, "Neoplatonism," in Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 585–593. Plotinus also studied under Ammonius Saccas. Briefly, neoplatonism is a "philosophical school in the tradition of Plato, emphasizing mystical ascent to a vision of the divine; [it] significantly shaped early Christian thought." See "Neoplatonism," in Kelly Clark, Richard Lints, & James Smith, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 58–59. A short but excellent article on neoplatonism can be found in Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 612–614.

https://publications.lst.edu/

of preparing catechumens for Christian initiation while at the same time also building up a career as a philosopher-rhetorician.

As the young Origen gave himself more and more to the formal study of philosophy, his identity as a teacher of philosophy slowly emerged. He began to spend less and less time with his catechumens, eventually deciding to pass on his catechetical duties to a younger associate, Heraclas. In time, he started to regard himself as a professor or master of philosophy (a philosopher-*didaskalos*), but here "philosophy" referred more particularly to "Our Philosophy," "a term which had come to be increasingly used by Christian intellectuals to signify the entire Christian way of life."[14] As a dedicated *didaskalos*, he gave much of his attention to his more promising Christian students, without at all disregarding interested pagans and heretics.

Origen's reputation as a celebrated teacher (*didaskalos*) soon went beyond Alexandria. This allowed him to travel much and visit other cities outside of Egypt. In 212, he visited Rome. Jerome (c. 340–420) tells us that at that time Hippolytus (c. 170–236), the eminent Logos theologian, was giving lectures in the eternal city. Seeing Origen among those present in one of the lectures, Hippolytus called the attention of his audience to the esteemed presence of the well-known philosopher-*didaskalos* from Alexandria. Also, sometime shortly before the year 215, Origen went to Arabia (present day Jordan) on the personal invitation of the Roman governor there who was very much interested to "hear more of the Christian movement from one of its leading intellectuals."[15] This journey to Jordan likely brought him to the holy city of Jerusalem where he eventually met up with the local patriarch Alexander (d. 251), also recognized as a fine scholar and theologian. This initial meeting between the two later blossomed into a wonderful friendship, with Bishop Alexander becoming a most generous sponsor to Origen. Subsequently, too, Origen received an invitation to visit the city of Antioch from Empress Julia Mammaea (c. 182–235) herself, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus (emperor from 222–235).

[14]McGuckin, "The Life of Origen," 7.

[15]McGuckin, "The Life of Origen," 8.

https://publications.lst.edu/

She extended the invitation because she wanted to hear him speak in those debates which touched on various religious questions and which were organized in the city.

Another indication of Origen's growing reputation as a *didaskalos* and as an exceptional Christian scholar was his publications. No longer confining himself to tutoring an elite group of outstanding students, he started to write formally and exposed himself to a far wider audience. On the urging of a man named Ambrose—whom he had helped convert from Valentinianism (a widespread Gnostic sect in the second century founded by Valentinus) to orthodoxy and who was more than willing to extend much financial assistance to him—Origen ventured into this new career of writing. *On First Principles* (*De Principiis*) became his first grand work. Considered to be the first attempt at a "systematic theology"—i.e., at presenting the basic truths of the Christian faith in a coherent theological synthesis—this monumental work came to be the first major Christian effort at theological reflection, beginning with the canon of faith and drawing guidance from Scripture and reason. Given this approach of Origen to the Christian faith, we can see that he already had some notion of what development of dogma was all about, and that clarifying and expounding the creed of the Church with all its significance and implications was part and parcel of the responsibility and vocation of the theologian. As John Anthony McGuckin says, "[*On First Principles*] demonstrated one of Origen's basic principles, that the pursuit of reason (Logos) is a divine task."[16]

However, as Origen's fame as a *didaskalos* grew, so did the tension escalate between him and his patriarch, Bishop Demetrius. This tension became obvious when he went to visit Palestine around 216. Two leading churchmen of the place, Bishops Theoctistus of Caesarea and Alexander of Jerusalem, who admired Origen for his brilliance and widespread public esteem, requested him to give discourses in their respective dioceses. Whether they were more like academic discourses on the interpretation of the Scriptures or more like homilies

[16]McGuckin, "The Life of Origen," 8.

https://publications.lst.edu/

or sermons preached, the distinction between the two could be a subtle one. Whatever the case, it enraged Bishop Demetrius, who felt that it was most uncanonical and outrageous to allow a non-ordained person (no matter how talented he might be) to speak publicly on the Word of God, much more so in the very presence of bishops.

The tension between Origen and his local bishop reached its point of no return sometime in 231, when Origen was asked by the bishops of Achaia to go to Athens to engage in disputations with certain heretical groups. Starting from Alexandria and with the intention to reach Greece (his real destination), he took a long detour, passing through Caesarea in Palestine. He did this almost surely to visit his two bishop friends Theoctistus and Alexander, and it was this visit that provided occasion for that particular event that was to close the door once and for all on the relationship of Origen with his own bishop Demetrius—namely, his ordination to the priesthood. Soon enough, after Origen was ordained, Demetrius responded by assembling a synod of Egyptian bishops and priests of Alexandria (231). In this synod, they declared Origen unfit to teach in the church of Alexandria and concluded that he was to be excluded from their diocese since he was ordained not by its bishop but by the bishop of Caesarea. But Demetrius did not stop here. In a second synod, with some of his Egyptian bishops, he also proclaimed Origen "deposed from the priesthood."[17] For his part, Origen responded by seeking refuge in Caesarea where he was welcomed warmly by his Church friends in that district. To his advantage, the sentence of Demetrius against him was simply set aside there as well as in so many other places in the East. Finding a new home in Caesarea, Origen continued his writing and teaching. In addition, he also founded a new school and established an important library.

It was during the persecution of Decius (250) when Origen was imprisoned and tortured in order to force him to apostatize. Successfully making an esteemed Christian figure like him give up

[17]Henri Crouzel, "Origen," in Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 619–623.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the faith would have had far-reaching consequences then for the early Church and her suffering members. But Origen never wavered in his faith, and he was released upon the death of Decius in 251. However, because of his terrible experience in the dungeon, he was never able to recover his health. He survived for only a few more years and soon died in 254. He was 69 years of age.

Origen was a most prolific writer.[18] It is unfortunate, though, that many of his works have been lost. The ones that survived (of which more than three-fourths are expositions of Scripture) have come to us today only in fragments or in Latin translations. The good news, however, is that some of his other writings have been (re)discovered in the past few decades.

We can classify Origen's works into four basic kinds: *scriptural, ascetical, apologetical*, and *theological*.[19] Many today consider Origen, first and foremost, a biblical scholar; not a few hold that he was one of the first textual critics of the Bible. His major work on the Holy Scriptures was the *Hexapla* (the Greek term meaning "sixfold"). An *opus* on biblical criticism, the *Hexapla* contained six versions of the Jewish Scriptures that were presented in parallel columns, starting with the Hebrew text, followed by a Greek transliteration of it, and then four Greek versions.[20] Origen meticulously designed the parallel layout in

[18]Different persons have made different claims regarding the number of works of Origen. For example, Epiphanius of Salamis says that Origen produced more than 6,000 works. Pamphilus asserts that he had about 2,000 works. Jerome reports that it is only around 800. See J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (United Kingdom: The Paternoster Press, 1974), 733.

[19]Rev. Frederick Crombie, in his translation of *On First Principles*, classifies Origen's works into five: *exegetical, critical, apologetical, dogmatic*, and *practical*; they are available at http://christianbookshelf.org/origen/origen_de_principiis/index.html (accessed October 16, 2012).

[20]These four Greek versions included those of Aquila of Sinope (the most literal among them), Symmachus the Ebionite, Theodotion of Ephesus, and a revised version of the Septuagint. For some other books of the OT, like the Psalms and Proverbs, two or three other Greek versions were added by Origen.

https://publications.lst.edu/

order to show a word-for-word comparison of these different versions of the OT and assist the more serious readers to a more precise and truthful reading of the sacred books. His other writings on the Bible include his numerous *scholia* (brief explanations of certain passages) and commentaries and homilies based on the different books of both the OT and NT. For him, any passage from Sacred Scripture can be read on three levels: *literal*, *moral*, and *spiritual* (or *allegorical*).[21]

Taking on more "ascetical" and "apologetical" themes, Origen also produced works like the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and *On Prayer*, both of which were well-received during his time. In addition to these, *Against Celsus* was his famous essay in defense of the Christian faith against pagan criticism. Here he addressed particularly Celsus, one formidable opponent of Christianity during this period. It was around the year 230 when Origen went out of his way to compose his *magnum opus*, *On First Principles*.[22] With all these scholarly works of his, it is not surprising at all why Origen has been looked upon by more recent Patristic scholars as "one of the most influential of the early church fathers" (Gary Wayne Barkley) and also as "one of the greatest teachers ever known in Christendom" (George Leonard Prestige).[23]

---

[21]Origen's homily on the Parable of the Good Samaritan is one clear example of an allegorical (or spiritual) reading of the Bible. Here he considers the Good Samaritan as Christ, the robbers as the devil and his minions, Jerusalem as paradise or heaven, Jericho as the world, and so on. See Riemer Roukema, "The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 58:1 (February 2004): 56–97.

[22]*On First Principles* contains four books. *Book I* deals mainly with the Trinity and creation, *Book II* with the physical world and the fall and redemption of humanity, *Book III* with the forces of good and evil and the freedom of the will, and *Book IV* with the interpretation of the Bible, including the literal, moral, and spiritual/allegorical reading of the Scriptures. All citations from here onwards that begin simply with "Book" refer to *On First Principles*.

[23]Gary Wayne Barkley, *The Fathers of the Church: Origen, Homilies of Leviticus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 4; George Leonard Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London: SPCK, 1968), 52.

https://publications.lst.edu/

It is in *On First Principles* where we see Origen discussing at length the topic of discernment (esp. in Book III, Chs. 2–4). In one other writing,[24] he lays the foundation for the need of a sifting of spirits:

> Two angels attend each human being. One is an angel of justice, the other an angel of iniquity. If good thoughts are present in our hearts and justice springs up in our souls, the angel of the Lord is undoubtedly speaking to us. But, if evil thoughts turn over in our hearts, the devil's angel is speaking to us.[25]

He goes back to this notion frequently enough. In another homily,[26] he writes: "two angels are present to every man: a wicked angel, who exhorts him to wrongdoing; and a good angel, who urges him to do everything good."[27] Without question, this is a teaching he had received from tradition. In his major composition *On First Principles*, he explicitly points to two earlier works, namely, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*.[28] As he says:

> [The] book of the Shepherd [i.e., Hermas (mandate no. 6, 2)] asserts the same thing, teaching that two angels attend each human being and saying that whenever good thoughts arise in our heart they are suggested by the good angel, and whenever thoughts of the opposite kind they are the inspiration of the bad angel. The same thing, too, is asserted by Barnabas in his epistle [Epistle of Barnabas, 18], where he says that there are two ways, one of light and the other of darkness, over which preside certain angels, the angels of God over the way of light and Satan's angels over the way of darkness.[29]

---

[24]Homily 12 on Lk. 2:8–11.

[25]*Origen: Homilies on Luke,* trans. Joseph Lienhard, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 94 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 49–50.

[26]Homily 35 on Lk. 12:57–59.

[27]*Origen: Homilies on Luke*, 143.

[28]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4.

[29]See *Origen: On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 217. For Origen, there are four major kinds of *rational*

https://publications.lst.edu/

From this teaching of Origen about the two kinds of angels or spirits and his warning against its misinterpretation, we learn that the thoughts and inner movements we experience can come from different sources. These sources are 1) ourselves, i.e., our "natural" impulses and instincts or "natural desires" and "natural emotions";[30] 2) from the devil and his angels; and 3) from the good angels. Later on, however, Origen gives a more complete enumeration of the sources of the "thoughts which proceed out of the heart" (Mt. 15:18–19; Mk. 7:21). He says that they "proceed sometimes from *ourselves*, sometimes are aroused by the *opposing powers*, and occasionally also are implanted in us by *God* or by the *holy angels*."[31]

Given such diverse influences from various sources, it is only through "the gift of the discernment of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10) that we are empowered "to put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God" (1 Jn. 4:1).[32] And here lies precisely the true value of Origen with respect to discernment and its doctrinal development in the Church. For one, it is he who plainly adopts and employs the exact scriptural, Pauline expression "discernment of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10) in his writings

---

creatures, namely: the angels, the powers of wickedness, the animating spirits of the heavenly bodies (like the sun, moon, and stars), and human souls (see Book I, Ch. 5, nos. 1–3; Ch. 7, nos. 2–3). In *On First Principles* (Book I, Ch. 8, no. 1), he explains how this came about. He says that "before the aeons existed," all creatures were spirits (demons, human souls, and angels) and they were all pure. Possessing free will, the devil chose to resist God. All the other spiritual creatures followed, and so they too decided to turn away from God. With all these spirits originally having the same nature now going against the divine in varying ways, God responded by making "some of them demons, some angels and some men." Thus, in the end, each spiritual creature received the kind of recompense according to each one's individual sinning. See *Origen: On First Principles*, 67. See also Jean Danielou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchell (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 214–215.

[30]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2.

[31]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4 (italics mine).

[32]See excerpt from Origen's homily on Exodus 3, 1–2, in Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 548 (222–223).

https://publications.lst.edu/

(which other earlier and notable works like the *Didache*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* somehow overlooked).[33] However, more than this, it is Origen who is one of the first Christian authors to tackle directly the actual *subjective* process of discernment itself. He does this by taking on the *discerner's* perspective and particularly touching more on the "what" and "how" of testing the *Two Ways* (i.e., the way of life and virtue *and* the way of death and evil) which are at the core of this gift of sifting the spirits.[34] This explains why one significant contribution of Origen to discernment is his marking out some of the most important *characteristics* of both the good and evil spirits and their primary *effects* in our souls. Examples of these chief effects in us would be our minds staying *calm* and our wills remaining *free* (as in the case of the good spirit) or our souls becoming *confused, disturbed*, and *sad* (as in the case of the evil spirit).[35]

In discussing this theme of discernment of spirits, one dominant metaphor Origen uses is that of a *spiritual battle*. Evidently, he borrows much from his favorite source, the Sacred Scripture. Utilizing biblical images like "armour" (Eph. 6:13),[36] or "enemies encamping" (Ps. 27),[37] or "fiery darts [or arrows]," or "shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16),[38] or "leader of our army [and soldiers]" (Judg. 7:3),[39] he underlines the point that

[33]Examples where we can see Origen using the term "discernment of spirits" (from 1 Cor. 12:10) would be in his homilies on Exodus III, 2 (see *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus,* trans. Ronald Heine [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982], 250); on Ezechiel 2, 2 (*Origen: Homilies 1–14 on Ezechiel*, trans. Thomas Scheck [New Jersey: Newman Press, 2010], 48); and on Luke 1, 1 (*Origen: Homilies on Luke*, 5).

[34]See Lienhard, "On 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church," 512.

[35]See Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, nos. 563 and 566 (226).

[36]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 1.

[37]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 5.

[38]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4.

[39]Homily on Judges 9, 1.

https://publications.lst.edu/

"the interior life is a battle which the soul wages for God against the devil."[40] A great part of this spiritual warfare has to do with our very soul, our *anima* taking on more and more either the image of our Lord or the likeness of Satan himself.[41] But then, much more than just our own personal relationship with Christ and our own one-on-one fight against the Evil One, this spiritual battle is on a far larger scale. This is because it involves essentially this "great, cosmic battle which Christ our field marshal wages against the kingdom of darkness."[42] And the more we examine discernment from this vantage point of "cosmic battle," the more we will realize that what really is at stake here is our very salvation.[43]

At the heart of Origen's discussion on discernment is his notion of *free will*. For him, no matter how powerful the influence of these

[40]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, 223.

[41]See Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, 223–224 (esp. no. 554). This understanding of the growth of either Christ's or Satan's image and likeness in our souls can be seen in Origen's Homily 8 on Lk. 1:46–52. See *Origen: Homilies on Luke*, 33–36.

[42]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, 223. In another work (Homily on Joshua 15, 5), Origen writes,

> … there is not just one principality among the "contrary powers," but several, against which … all of us have to do battle. But I think that all these have a prince, one so to speak more prominent in evil and more accomplished in vice who, as the sole leader of all the princes, and as master of all this wicked warfare, makes war on the whole world. Meanwhile, each of them in his own way tries to entice us to particular individual sins.

Cf. Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 558 (225).

[43]Writing on the theme of *salvation*, Origen, in his Homily on Ps. 36, 5–7, declared, "Our salvation can never be more secure than when it is from the Lord. May he be my ground, he my house, he my mansion, he my repose, and may he be the place I dwell." Taken from Richard H. Schmidt, *God Seekers—20 Centuries of Christian Spiritualities* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 20.

https://publications.lst.edu/

spirits may be (either tempting us to do evil, as in the case of the Evil One, or moving us to do good, as in the case of God and his angels), the human person always has ample capability to do two things: 1) distinguish truthfully the good prompting from the wicked one (due to our "reasoning power"), and 2) choose freely our individual preferred alternative (due to our free will).[44] This "reasoning power" in us, which in itself is a *gift*, does not guarantee, however, that we always will choose the good option over the evil one. It is true, as Origen argues, that "we have it in our power, when the evil force begins to entice us to evil, to drive away the base suggestions and resist the wicked enticements and commit no guilty act whatsoever."[45] The difficulty though is that we do not always choose and act as we *ought*. Therefore, despite this "empowerment" (since it is a *gift* in the first place) and "free will," we are very often not able to overcome temptations that come to us frequently.[46] It is in this sense that our freedom is never absolute, and yet the choice to do good or evil is

[44]Book I, Preface, no. 5; Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 4; no. 4, par. 3. See also Book III, Ch. 3, no. 5, par. 2. For a discussion on Origen's understanding of this "power" in us, cf. Pamela Gebauer, "The Notion of Spiritual Discernment Found in the Writings of Origen, Antony of Egypt, and Ignatius of Loyola—A Comparative Study," M.A. Thesis (Concordia University), 10, available at http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/1316/1/MQ59266.pdf (accessed October 25, 2012).

[45]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 564 (226). See also Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4. Origen refers to this "power" in us to drive away the devil and resist his enticements. Yet, at the same time, he also says that "there is a certain limit to the powers of human nature" and thus, "[if] left to itself, I do not think that human nature could do battle against [wicked] angels'" (Book III, Ch. 2, no. 5).

[46]In this regard, Origen says that

> … this power which is given us to enable us to conquer may be used, according to our faculty of free-will, either in a diligent manner, and then we prove victorious, or in a slothful manner, and then we are defeated. For if such a power were wholly given us as that we must by all means prove victorious, and never be defeated, what further reason for a struggle could remain to him who cannot be overcome? (Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3)

https://publications.lst.edu/

always before us. And learning to constantly choose virtue over sin, goodness over wickedness, already is a reliable indicator that we indeed are undergoing true reconciliation with Christ, and thus experiencing some genuine growth in our life in the Spirit. Still and all, in the end, it is our choice and our choice alone, and no one, not even God himself who is the source of all our blessings, can force us to do something against our own will.[47]

Due to some of Origen's teachings, particularly the ones on the pre-existence of the human soul (see footnote no. 17 above) and on his *apocatastasis* (i.e., salvation for all, including Satan himself), he was denounced by many Church leaders and theologians. This started within 200 years of his death, sometime at the end of the fourth century. However, some significant changes came in the mid-1900s in terms of the (re)interpretation many had of Origen's character and writings. This brought about growth in affection for him, especially both for his brilliance as a writer and for his spirituality. Today, he is widely recognized "as the first Christian exegetical giant, the first 'systematic' theologian, and the first ascetical-mystical theologian."[48] Yes, this is Origen of Alexandria, the Christian genius who had desired deeply "to be a man of the Church, not the founder of heresy."[49]

3. What practical lessons can we draw from Origen and his teaching on discernment of spirits?

Here I would like to focus on just *two* of Origen's important teachings on discernment: 1) his notion of *free will*, and 2) his understanding of the *evil spirits*, their ways of leading people into temptation, and how we can go against them.

---

[47]See Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 602 (232). Origen's view of human freedom seems to be at variance with *The Shepherd of Hermas*. See Q. 9, footnote no. 7, above.

[48]See Harvey Egan, *Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 13.

[49]Homily 16 on Lk. 2:33–34.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Origen was a firm believer of human freedom. He held that neither Satan nor the Lord himself could coerce anyone to do anything against his or her own will. He was convinced that the human person does possess considerable freedom and "empowerment" to either drive away temptations coming from the evil spirit or to welcome inspirations coming from the good spirit.[50]

Regarding our freedom and power to drive away the temptations of the enemy, the crux of the matter evidently lies in our quality of *temperance* or *intemperance*. It is this virtue of temperance or the lack of it that will largely determine the quality of spiritual life we will be having.

In presenting the matter of temperance or intemperance and human free will, Origen takes up the subject of the devil and his minions, and the fact that they are engaged in this struggle with us human beings. As our enemies, these evil spirits provoke and incite us to sin.[51] However, Origen warns that the tradition concerning the bad and good angels and their influence on our hearts and thoughts should not lead us to hold, as "the simpler sort of believers in Christ … suppose[,] that all the sins that [humans] have committed come from the persistent influence of the contrary powers on the sinners' minds."[52] He explains that if

---

[50]Here Origen states:

> It is possible for us, when an evil power has begun to urge us on to a deed of evil, to cast away the wicked suggestions and to resist the low enticements and to do absolutely nothing worthy of blame; and it is possible on the other hand when a divine power has urged us on to better things not to follow its guidance, since our faculty of free will is preserved to us in either case.

See *Origen: On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4, par. 3 (217). All the quotations here from *On First Principles* are taken from Butterworth's translation. Much of our discussion on this topic of *free will* is taken from *Origen: On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 2, nos. 2–4 (213–218).

[51]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 1, par. 1.

[52]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 1, par. 4.

https://publications.lst.edu/

we ponder more carefully about the truthfulness of this claim, we will see that this is not actually the case, "especially when we consider the acts which arise clearly from the necessities of our body."[53] For example, it would certainly *not* be valid to insist that "the devil is the cause of our being hungry or thirsty."[54] This is the case because our going hungry or thirsty simply proceeds "from a natural instinct" as this is how we have been created by God.[55] And "even if there were no impulse from the devil to urge [us] on," Origen doubted that we "could possibly employ such great self-control in partaking of food as absolutely never" to go "astray in the observance of … moderation in [our] food … not at any rate before [we] had learned this lesson by long practice and experience."[56] In other words, Origen is convinced that even without the devil tempting us, no human person can be completely temperate and always in control of his or her eating and drinking *until,* through God's grace, he or she has learned to become so by extensive practice and diligence.

Moving on from this point regarding food, Origen takes a step further. This time he raises the issue of *human sexual urges*, and asks, "what of that condition when an individual has attained to the age of puberty and this period has called forth the exciting movements of the natural heat?"[57] He replies by saying that truly the devil is *not* the cause "of that impulse which is naturally called forth at the time of maturity, that is, of the desire for sexual intercourse."[58] In asserting this, he once again inquires if

> in regard to foods and drink it would be possible for us to go wrong even apart from the instigation of the devil, if we happened to be

[53]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 1.

[54]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 1.

[55]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 2.

[56]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 2.

[57]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 1.

[58]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 1.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> caught at an intemperate or careless moment … are we to suppose that in regard to the sexual appetite and the natural desires we should not be affected in a similar way?[59]

Here his clear answer is "No." Surely, he says, we would be affected in a similar way. Origen adds that he believes "the same process of reasoning can be applied to the rest of the natural emotions, such as covetousness, anger, sorrow or any others whatever, which by the fault of intemperance exceed the limits of their natural measure."[60]

By speaking here of "the fault of intemperance," Origen is implying that in all these instances of human natural emotions we, because of *free will*, do possess the power "to offer … resistance to the first movements towards intemperance."[61] If we did not possess this power, then intemperance could not be considered a "fault" or an "offense" in the first place. From this situation, Origen concludes that just as in the case of actions "that are good, [where] the mere human will is by itself incapable of completing the good act—for this is in all cases brought to perfection by divine help,"[62] it is likewise in the case of bad actions where we draw "what we may call seeds of sin from those desires which are given to us naturally for our use."[63] However, when we use these natural desires or instincts *intemperately* and

> offer no resistance to the first movements towards intemperance, then [the devil,] seizing the opportunity of the first offense[,] incites and urges us on in every way … so that while we [humans] supply the occasions and beginnings of our sins, the hostile powers spread them far and wide and if possible endlessly.[64]

[59]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 2.

[60]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 2.

[61]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 3.

[62]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 3.

[63]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 3.

[64]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 3.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Simply put, once we choose to become less cautious with these natural instincts of ours and start to indulge excessively in them, going beyond what is proper, it is then that the evil spirit begins to make his move and enter into our hearts and greatly afflict us with his temptations.[65] To illustrate his point further, Origen gives an example. He says that in this way

> the fall to avarice at last takes place, [people] first longing for a little money, and then increasingly in greed as the vice grows. Afterwards their passion is succeeded by a mental blindness and with the hostile powers stimulating and urging them on, money is now not only longed for but even seized by force or acquired by the shedding of human blood.[66]

Despite this action of the evil spirits inciting and urging us human beings to increase the excessive use of our natural desires, our situation is not hopeless. Origen refers to St. Paul who affirmed that "God is faithful, who will not suffer [us] to be tempted beyond [our] strength" (1 Cor. 10:13).[67] He explains that each of us "is tempted in proportion to the degree and possibilities of the strength [we possess]."[68] This does not mean though, he adds, that "the tempted [individual] ought therefore by all means to be victorious."[69] For it is *not* written that

> in temptation God will also make a way to escape from bearing it, but a way to escape that we may be able to bear it. And this possibility that

---

[65]In Homily 27 on Numbers 33, Origen insists that there are some specific sins that we humans could not commit on our own, despite human frailty. For sure, the demon would have to be behind them. Examples of such sins are: adultery, excessive anger, "[plundering] someone else's goods," "[putting] a stumble block in the way of his mother's son." See *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. & intro. Rowan Greer (New York: Paulist Press, Inc., 1979), 257.

[66]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 2, par. 3.

[67]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 2.

[68]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 2.

[69]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 3.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> he has given us … is in our hand to utilize either vigorously or feebly. There is no doubt that in every temptation we are given a power of bearing it, if only we use to the full the power thus granted.[70]

And precisely here is where our *free will* (again) comes in. With the devil now tempting us, we can still freely choose. This time the choice is whether to fight such seductions in a diligent and persevering way *or* in a half-hearted and slothful way. Choosing the former over the latter then gives us a much greater chance, through grace, to be victorious over the devil and conquer sin in our lives. As Origen notes, "this strength … which is given to us in order that we may be able to conquer, we by the exercise of our *free will* either use diligently and conquer or feebly and suffer defeat."[71] Hence, in the end, Origen thinks that "it is clearly apparent that there are some offenses which we commit quite apart from the influence of the evil powers, and others which are carried to excessive and immoderate lengths at their instigation."[72]

Linking now Origen's notion of *free will* to our theme of discernment, one practical lesson plainly stands out, and it is this: to proactively pursue the values of moderation and balance in all things, learning to avoid intemperance or overindulgence in our lives and courageously standing up against temptations when they do come into our lives.

One impression we may get when reading Origen is that when it comes to discernment, almost everything seems to begin with our own sense of temperance or intemperance. In this way, given our natural desires, the more we decide to practice *temperance*, the more grace becomes operative in our lives, and the more we can choose virtue over sin, life over death. Conversely, the more we choose to practice *intemperance*, the more room we give the devil to prowl in our hearts, and the more we become vulnerable to the opposing powers and allow evil to build on our natural appetites and already existing vices. Thus, the long and short of it all is this: we can be our worst enemy. To tame

[70]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 3.

[71]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 4 (emphasis mine).

[72]Book III, Ch. 2, no. 3, par. 4.

https://publications.lst.edu/

this "enemy" in us, we need to know exactly when to say "enough is enough." This demands never going too far in all the things that we do. In case we do fall into intemperance, we can still choose to fight the Evil One, putting our foot down and trusting that the devil is only as strong as we make him to be. In the words of Origen:

> The enemy [the devil] would not grow strong against us, nor would [he] himself be able to do anything in us unless we gave him strength by our vices. [Satan] our enemy would be quite weak against us if we did not make him strong by sinning, and if he did not find through our sins a place to enter and take over.[73]

One image Origen uses to describe the Evil One is that of a *roaring lion*.[74] Like a ferocious beast, the devil "prowls and looks for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). If not on a hunt, he walks with us tirelessly, "never [leaving] us alone in his search for an opportunity to trap us and bring us down."[75] As our adversary, he utilizes a *twofold mode of operation*. The *first mode* is what Origen refers to as "possession." When utilizing this mode, the devil takes "whole and entire possession of the [person's] mind, so that [he allows the person in his] power neither to understand nor to think."[76] When this happens, the person appears to "be demented and insane."[77] The *second mode* which is more common has to do with "wicked suggestions." Origen presents the classic example of Judas Iscariot who fell when he was induced by Satan to do evil.

---

[73]Homily on Judges 4. Quoted from Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 551 (224).

[74]Book III, Ch. 3, no. 6, par. 1.

[75]Homily 35 on Lk. 12:57–59. Cf. Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire,* no. 565 (226). See also *Origen: Homilies on Luke*, 145.

[76]Book III, Ch. 3, no. 4, par. 2.

[77]Book III, Ch. 3, no. 4, par. 2. When explaining this mode of "possession," Origen adds this: "such as the men who are related in the Gospel to have been healed by the Savior" (Book III, Ch. 3, no. 4, par. 2). One Gospel example of this kind of "possession" can be seen in Lk. 8:26–39 (or in Mk. 5:1–20).

https://publications.lst.edu/

As John's Gospel tells us, "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray [Christ]" (Jn. 13:2).[78]

We can identify from Origen at least *three ways* by which the devil carries out these "wicked suggestions," ungodly thoughts to lure us to sin: 1) by his *hidden presence*, 2) by *exaggerating*, and 3) by *deceiving*.

The way of *hidden presence* is not unrelated to *free will* which we discussed above. Here Origen uses the image of a serpent. He says that

> in the hearts of sinners where there are anguished places, since they have given room to the devil (Eph. 4:27) to enter, he does indeed enter … to lie hidden, as in a cave …. In this way … the unfortunate soul, which has this evil serpent occupying it, grows still with serpentine cold. It contracts and is compressed and is driven into extreme anguish.[79]

As we said earlier, the more *room* we give the devil to prowl in our hearts by way of our *intemperance* (or *negligence* or *vices* or *slothfulness*), the more vulnerable we become to his paralyzing influence. Evidently enough, our decision "to give [or not to give] room" to the evil spirit in our hearts seems to be a pivotal point in Origen's understanding of Satan and his style of tempting us.[80]

To use another related image of Origen, every time we *make room* for the bad spirit to lurk in us, we stupidly set ourselves up for an easy holdup.[81] The devil simply lies in wait for us to commit a dumb mistake.

---

[78]Book III, Ch. 3, no. 4, par. 2.

[79]See *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 103, trans. Thomas Scheck (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 122. See also Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 583 (229).

[80]For examples in Origen's writings where he brings up this idea of *making* (or *not making*) *room* for the bad spirit to enter in us, see Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 551 (224 [Homily on Judges 4]), no. 583 (229 [from Commentary on Romans, Book 2, Ch. 6]), and no. 597 (231 [Homily on Numbers 6, 2]). See also *On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 3, no. 5.

[81]Book III, Ch. 3, no. 6, par. 1.

https://publications.lst.edu/

This bandit *cannot* launch an ambush unless we first make our false move. It is only when we make our anticipated blooper that he can carry out his planned assault. Like a merciless brigand, the devil waits with much patience and anticipation. Oftentimes he cannot act and attack unless we first provide him with some opening in our hearts in terms of some intemperance or excess. In the end, the most discreet response that we can make when the wicked spirit does apply this *mode of hidden presence* is always to keep our guard up and maximize our spiritual defenses. This can mean, for example, doing more prayerful and honest self-examination and going out of our way to understand well the nature of our vices—what they are, how they work, where we are weakest and most vulnerable in terms of temptations, and their usual unfolding patterns in us. By building up our spiritual defenses and not giving in to excess or negligence or sloth through grace, we are able somehow to effectively restrain the devil's attacks against us and not simply become easy prey against his wicked suggestions.

Exaggerating is the next way by which the devil makes "wicked suggestions." As in the first way (the way of *hidden presence*), the role of *intemperance* or overindulgence once again is given emphasis. This time, however, the concern is *not* about our own personal sin of intemperance in dealing with our own vices, natural appetites, or base passions. Here the main concern is about our human *emotions* and *affections* like grief, sadness, sorrow, and even repentance. Therefore, in this case, the one exaggerating is not us but the devil, for Origen believes that the wicked spirit can take these different feelings of ours and exaggerate them to the point of overwhelming us. Writing once on the themes of sinfulness and repentance, he gave this example:

> [the man] repented … and grieved for it "with a godly grief," such a grief as "[producing] a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:9). But after he had become sad in this way, the devil … [tried] to exaggerate this sadness beyond measure so that the sadness itself would no longer be "godly" … and Satan could overwhelm him in excessive sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7).[82]

[82]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 582 (228).

https://publications.lst.edu/

Cautioning us to be careful not to overindulge in our contrition and repentance for our sins, Origen also wrote that "it is not desirable that the grief of repentance towards God be active in everyone at all times … and it must be practiced with moderation and not excessively."[83] All in all, the main consideration here is to see that, indeed, the demon is a *master of exaggeration*, especially when it comes to our feelings of grief, sadness, sorrow, repentance, remorse, and the like. And the more we allow him to magnify these feelings in us, the more he can manipulate us and bring about utter discouragement and despair in our hearts.

Deceiving is the third and last way by which the devil carries out his "wicked suggestions." Linked to this style of deceiving (or lying or confusing) is the biblical image of the evil spirit who "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). Origen adopts this well-known Pauline metaphor for Satan. He says that the devil (who even tried to *deceive* Christ himself)[84] "fills the hearts of the sinners with a false light so that what is really passing and subject to decay might seem good and valuable."[85] In other words, by making people lose their truthful perspective of life's real meaning, the bad spirit makes *temporal* realities appear *eternal* and *absolute*, and *eternal* realities appear *temporal* and *relative*. As one who deceives, "the devil has opened the mouth of the man who speaks falsehood to speak falsehood."[86] Likewise, he opens the mouth of "those who 'speak iniquity against the Most High' (Ps. 72:8), 'who

[83]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 585 (229). See also *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Books 13–32*, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 89, trans. Ronald Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 297.

[84]See *Origen: Homilies on Luke*, 165.

[85]Homily on Judges 1, 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 562 (226). See also *Origen: Homilies on Judges*, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 119, trans. Elizabeth Ann DivelyLauro (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2010), 42–43.

[86]Homilies on Exodus III; *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 249.

https://publications.lst.edu/

deny that [our] Lord Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7), or 'who blaspheme the Holy Spirit' (Lk. 12:10; Mt. 12:31)."[87]

On top of all this, part of the devil's demonic manner of deceiving or confusing is setting up different snares to trap or overwhelm people. These snares can come in different forms, ranging from worldly luxury to our lust, our vices and passions, our sadness, our ignorance, our arrogance, our hypocrisy, and the hardening of our hearts and others. On this issue concerning the "hardening of our hearts," Origen comments that it is "the ice of iniquity" that makes our hearts hard, and, as a result, we "no longer [accept] the seal of the divine image."[88] In the end, the evil spirit has a trap on hand, ready for use, for any and every type of soul he encounters, whether it is with highly evil and immoral individuals, or with plainly good and sincere ones. Seeing this to be consistent with his own personal experience of the reality of evil, Origen makes this remark: "The devil fights with different kinds of snares to bring a poor human being to ruin; he gives a good life to evil people to deceive observers, and stirs up a bad conscience in good people."[89]

To conclude, for Origen, when it comes to our interior life and discernment of good and bad spirits, almost everything, it seems, starts with our own practice of temperance *or* intemperance. When going against the devil and his temptations, we must realize that we are not as weak as we may imagine ourselves to be. As Origen insisted, "the ability to choose good or evil is within the immediate reach of all."[90] Therefore, in this battle with the opposing powers, we must always have confidence

[87]Homilies on Exodus III; *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 249–250.

[88]See Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 588 (230). See also *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, 106.

[89]Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 406a (164).

[90]Book II, Ch. 6, no. 5, par. 1.

https://publications.lst.edu/

that, with our Lord and his grace always available to us, "there really is nothing difficult, nothing arduous or impossible in it."[91]

4. According to Origen, what are some indicators of the different effects and fruits of these spirits in us?

These *indicators* (or signs) are what we really need to look for, name, examine, interpret, and discern. Aside from the eventual *direction* and *end* of our interior experiences, it is these actual *effects* and *fruits* of these spirits in us that are the "raw materials" when discerning. Without these three (i.e., *direction*, *end/terminus*, and *interior effects* in us), no genuine discernment is possible. Without our truthful sensing and reading of them, our discernment may be limited simply to guesswork. However, with their emergence and manifestations in us and/or in others, and with our extra sensitivity to them, the difficult art of discernment can be made less complicated.

For Origen, the following are some of the leading *indicators* (or criteria) that will help us determine what kind of spirits are present and at work in our souls:[92]

[91]Homily on Judges 9, 1; *Origen: Homilies on Judges*, 113.

[92]Though Origen wrote on discernment of spirits, he never really had an ordered, systematic presentation of his "rules for discernment." In making our list of *indicators* here, we depend much on Hans Urs von Balthasar's section on "The Nature and Discernment of Spirits" where he collects various texts from Origen's writings related to the theme of discernment. See Balthasar's work, *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, 225–232 (italics here in Q.4 are mine).

https://publications.lst.edu/

God and his angels	The Evil One and his devils
when there are "*good thoughts* in our heart and the *spirit of justice* is flourishing"[93]	when "*evil thoughts* are harbored in our heart"[94]
when our soul is "'*enlightened with*' *Christ,* '*the true light*' [together with his *Gospel values*] … which never goes out";[95] or when, like a traveler sailing on a ship in a favorable wind, we "pass by in the senses all these visible things because they are *temporal,* and [we] gaze upon those which are *eternal*"[96]	when our soul is "*illumined* by a *temporal* and *extinguishable light* … [filling our hearts] with a *false light* so that what [are] really *passing* and subject to *decay* … *seem good* and *valuable*"[97]
when we enjoy "the sun of *righteousness*" and have "some spiritual days … illumined by the brilliance of *truth* and lamp of *wisdom*"[98]	when we feel surrounded by *darkness* and *hidden by walls*; when *impure desires* enter our hearts and *disturb* us[99]

[93]Homily on Luke 12, 4; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 561 (226).

[94]Homily on Luke 12, 4; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 561 (226).

[95]Homily on Judges 1, 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 562 (226).

[96]Homily on Ps. 36, 5, 5; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 576 (228).

[97]Homily on Judges 1, 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 562 (226).

[98]Homily on Joshua 16, 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 579 (228).

[99]Commentary on the Psalms 118, 55; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 577 (228).

https://publications.lst.edu/

when we remain *open* and *not closed* off and *do not allow our passions* to impede our sight, allowing God to *illumine* us to a *knowledge of spiritual things*[100]	
when the soul experiences *delight*, and has this *fullness of peace*, i.e., "the *quiet* of the soul together with its vision into *the true nature of things*"[101]	
when in the depths of our hearts "*calmness*, *serenity*, and *peace* bring forth their fruit";[102] or there is a great *calm* in our hearts, like the calm which followed Christ's command of the wind and sea and which enabled the sailors to reach the shore toward which they were pressing[103]	when our soul is "*confused by sins, vices, sadness, anger, desires* and *greed*"[104]

[100]Commentary on the Psalms 4, 7; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 596 (230).

[101]Commentary on the Psalms, fragments 36, 11; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 573 (227).

[102]Homilies on Ezechiel 15, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 563 (226).

[103]Commentary on the Psalms 88, 13; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 575 (227).

[104]Homilies on Ezechiel 15, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 563 (226).

https://publications.lst.edu/

when one is "*moved* and *called* to *good things* and *inspired* to *heavenly* or *divine things* … in such a way, of course, that it remains up to the person's free will and judgment whether to follow or not to follow." And "when it *suffers not the least disturbance or sadness of spirit* from what is being breathed into it."[105]	when our heart "has touched the *vice of concupiscence* and [our] soul has become *impure* … *lusting* after [someone] or by being *greedy* for *money* or by any other *sin of desire*"[106]
when we possess a *truthful* perspective of our real ultimate end, having *no sense* of *alarm* and *not driven to confusion* or *doubt* despite the upheavals we experience; when we are *not upset*, but more *settled down* and *established in peace* and are *without fear* knowing that "we can move to the peaceful end that lies beyond all this"[107]	when we possess a too *narrow perspective of life*, easily *alarmed* and driven to *confusion* or *doubt* due to the upheavals that come our way; when we are *upset* and *fearful*, *lacking in peace*, *insecure* if we can ever move to the peaceful end that we seek that lies beyond all this[108]

[105]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 2, no. 4, par. 3; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 566 (226).

[106]Homilies on Leviticus 3, 3; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 678 (250).

[107]Latin translation of the Commentary on Matthew 35; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 568 (227).

[108]Latin translation of the Commentary on Matthew 35; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 568 (227).

https://publications.lst.edu/

when our spirit "*still desires to be a disciple of the Holy Spirit*," even if it becomes "upset by the attacks of the flesh and [does] not know how or what to pray"; when the Holy Spirit "*himself utters groans which will teach our spirit to groan in order to reconcile itself with God*"[109]	
when we are led to *purify our* souls *from sin* so that there is *purity of heart* and *integrity of mind*, the *Holy Spirit will rest on us* and immediately set to work wherever he finds material he can work with[110]	when we *subject ourselves to sin* and we *give room to the evil spirit* in us by way of our *bad thoughts* and *evil desires,* the *Holy Spirit flees* from us[111]
	when human beings are *unpurified* they suffer the following contradictions (contradicting conditions): "they are *fearful* and *bold*, they practice *polytheism* and are *godless*, they *love without modesty* and they *hate immediately* afterwards"[112]

[109]Commentary on Romans Book 7, Ch. 6; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 574 (227).

[110]Homily on Numbers 6, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 597 (231).

[111]Homily on Numbers 6, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 597 (231).

[112]Commentary on the Psalms 65, 12; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 567 (226–227).

https://publications.lst.edu/

let "those who suffer tribulation and are still not reduced" be *confident* "that they are to be freed from their tribulation and led to the holy spaciousness of God" … as it is written: "You have given me room" (Ps. 4:1);[113] the soul *knows* that "God does not only dwell in this breadth of heart … he also walks therein"[114]	when we have fallen into sin and our hearts have become narrow, "the devil[,] because [we] have made room for him, indeed enters but not to dwell or to walk" in them because there is no room there, "but to lie hidden, as in a cave, for he is a serpent"[115]
when after doing evil we feel *sad* and *repent of the sin* and *grieve* "with a *godly grief*" that "*produces a repentance that leads to salvation*";[116] this *grief of repentance* is to be practiced (and expressed) "with *moderation* and *not* excessively"[117]	when after doing evil we feel *sad* and *repent* and *grieve* "with a godly grief"; but then after a while this *sadness* becomes *exaggerated* and eventually we are *overwhelmed* with *excessive sorrow* to the point that our *grieving* or *sadness* is *no longer* "*godly*"[118]

[113]Commentary on the Psalms 17, 19, 20; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 578 (228).

[114]Commentary on Romans Book 2, Ch. 6; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 583 (229).

[115]Commentary on Romans Book 2, Ch. 6; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 583 (229).

[116]Ancient Latin translation of the Commentary on Matthew 117; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 582 (228).

[117]Commentary on John 28, 4; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 585 (229).

[118]Ancient Latin translation of the Commentary on Matthew 117; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, nos. 582 and 583 (228–229). See also Commentary on John 28, 4.

https://publications.lst.edu/

when human nature "*senses the Lord* present and dwelling within it, *confident* of God's help, it will say: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation …'";[119] with these inner senses, we have what is described in Hebrews as "faculties trained by practice to *distinguish good from evil*" (Heb. 5:14)[120]	when we *lose the spiritual senses* in our soul and because of this we are *not able* to sense (i.e., see, hear, smell, taste, touch) God and his Word[121]
when the Lord teaches us the grace of *discernment of spirits* (1 Cor. 12:9–10), and "testing all things [we] hold on to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21); when we are able to distinguish the *good spirits* from the *wicked ones,* like "well-trained money-changers" who are able to tell which money or silver is "counterfeit" and which one is "genuine"[122]	

[119]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 2, no. 5, par. 3; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 592 (230).

[120]Ancient Latin translation of the Commentary on Matthew 6; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, nos. 542 and 547 (221).

[121]Commentary on Romans, Book 4, Ch. 5; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 546 (221).

[122]Homily on Leviticus 3. Cf. *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus*, Fathers of the Church Vol. 83, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 68.

https://publications.lst.edu/

when "the soul … [is] dominated by the flesh … it sometimes becomes as it were so *surfeited* and *satiated* and *wearied by the awful burdens of luxury* and *lust* that it can more easily and quickly be converted from material filth to *spiritual grace* and *a desire for heavenly things*"[123]	when the soul is not dominated by the flesh and "[remains] in the control of its own will," in this kind of condition the soul is "*neither hot nor cold*" (Rev. 3:15) but is "stuck in a kind of *tepid* middle state in which it could *find conversion to be a slow* and *quite difficult process*"[124]
when we *hope* in no human being (though they seem to be friends of ours), but in our Lord, Jesus Christ, "to whom is the glory and the power for the ages of ages"[125]	when we are driven "to *excess of anger* or *sorrow*, or to the last pitch of *despair*"; or when we are "*forced*, when *fatigued* and *overcome by any annoyances*, to make *complaints* against God, as one who does not administer human life justly and equitably; the consequence of which is, that *our faith may be weakened*, or *our hopes disappointed*, or we may be compelled to *give up the truth of our opinions*, or be led to *entertain irreligious sentiments regarding God*"[126]

[123]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 4, no. 3, par. 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 587 (229–230).

[124]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 4, no. 3, par. 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 587 (229–230).

[125]Homily on Jeremiah 15, 6; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 352 (145).

[126]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 2, no. 6, par. 1. Cf. also Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 582 (228).

https://publications.lst.edu/

"when our heart is *not hardened*, it is made to rise like incense before the Lord";[127] when our soul "*magnifies* the Lord through the greatness of its life and spirit" and we *take on the image of Christ*, the image of the Word, the images of *wisdom, justice,* and other *virtues*[128]	"A 'hard heart' (Rom. 2:5) seems to be spoken of in scripture when the human mind, like wax, *hardened by the ice of iniquity, no longer accepts the seal* of the *divine image*"[129]
when our spirits "burn with an unspeakable *longing to know* the why and wherefore of the works of God which we see"; when we have this *longing*, this *love* and "*desire to know God's truth* and the *causes of things*";[130] when our hearts are *enkindled* and "*ignited* to *faith*, *warmed* to *love* and *fired up* to *mercy*";[131] "when something said by the Lord sets [us] on *fire* so that [we] become *a lover of wisdom* because of it and *burn with eagerness for all that is beautiful*"[132]	when our soul is *unhappy* because the "fire of faith is *extinguished* [and the] warmth of love is *cooling*";[133] when we have feelings of "*listlessness … irritation and desire*, a *dissatisfaction* with the present and *a longing for what is not there*"; "when *drowsiness* prevails because of our spirit's *neglect of the* virtues and of the *knowledge of God*"; when our soul is *asleep* due to its "voluntary separation … from real life"[134]

[127]Homily on Jeremiah 18, 10; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 591 (230).

[128]Homily on Luke 8; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 554 (224).

[129]Commentary on Romans Book 2, Ch. 4; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 588 (230).

[130]*On First Principles*, Book II, Ch. 11, no. 4, par. 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 13 (37).

[131]Homily on Leviticus 9, 9; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 814 (292).

[132]Commentary on the Psalms 104, 19; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 187 (95).

[133]Homily on Leviticus 9, 9; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 814 (292).

[134]Commentary on the Psalms 118, 28; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 570 (227).

https://publications.lst.edu/

when our "soul has *united itself with the Word of God*," *not doubting* that it will "have enemies and that the friends it used to have will be turned into enemies which includes the contrary powers and the spirits of evil"[135]	when our souls *pull back* and *separate themselves from the Word of God* and as a result we are *not enkindled* and *fired up* by the words of the Holy Spirit[136]
when the soul is moved to "*put aside all arrogance* and put on the *humility of Christ*"[137]	when I am drawn to "the *sin of the devil* … the sin greater than all others," the sin of *haughtiness, pride, arrogance, built on wealth, rank,* and *worldly glory*[138]
when we are *not afraid* to "suffer the bitterness of this life in various temptations, knowing that in the end this bitterness gains the *sweetness of salvation* for our soul"[139]	when we forget that "the end of the sweetness found in physical pleasure yields *a bitter end* in the inferno of punishments" (as we see in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus [Lk. 16:19–31])[140]

[135]Homily on Joshua 11, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 555 (224). Cf. also *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 105, trans. Barbara Bruce, ed. Cynthia White (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 116.

[136]Homily on Leviticus 9, 9; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 814 (292).

[137]Homily on Joshua 5, 1; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 107 (66). Cf. also *Origen: Homilies on Joshua*, 59.

[138]Homily on Ezechiel 9, 2; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 406a (166); *Origen: Homilies 1–14 on Ezechiel*, 119.

[139]Homily on Numbers 27, 10.3; *Ancient Christian Texts, Homilies on Numbers*, trans. Thomas Scheck, ed. Christopher Hall (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 177.

[140]Homily on Numbers 27, 10.3; *Ancient Christian Texts, Homilies on Numbers*, 177.

https://publications.lst.edu/

when we "[put] to death the deeds of the flesh, through the Spirit in the following manner": *love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, self-control*, and *chastity*; when we hold that "whoever puts to death the deeds of the flesh through the Spirit in this manner will live"[141]	when we live according to the flesh in the following manner: *hatred, "the sorrow of this world," dissension and discord, impatience*, *malice, ferocity, immoderation*, and *unchastity*; when we engage in these despite knowing that all of them lead us to the death of sin[142]
when we become "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (since "no one may live to God except in Christ Jesus") and thus become "alive to God in *wisdom*, in *peace*, in *righteousness*, in *sanctification*, all of which are Christ"[143]	when we allow our soul to die through sin (since "the soul which sins will die") and, as a consequence, we cannot be "alive to God [being] *without righteousness, without peace, without sanctification, without the rest of the virtues*"[144]

[141]Commentary on Romans Book 6, Ch. 14. See *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, Fathers of the Church Vol. 104, trans. Thomas Scheck (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 58–59, also 195, 274–276.

[142]Commentary on Romans Book 6, Ch. 14. See *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, *Books 6–10*, 58–59.

[143]Commentary on Romans Book 5, Ch. 10; *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, *Books 1–5*, 378.

[144]Commentary on Romans Book 5, Ch. 10; *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, *Books 1–5*, 378.

https://publications.lst.edu/

when we experience *divine consolation*, *not fearful* of our sufferings since we know that "just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our *consolation abounds*" (2 Cor. 1:5);[145] when we feel we are with our "*God of [patience and] consolation* [and we] receive the *consolation* of the Spirit out of the Holy Scriptures through spiritual *understanding*"[146]	when the *divine fire dies out* in us;[147] when we allow the *sin, wickedness*, and *desolation* of the devil (who himself is a *desolation* and "whose dominion is *burdensome*") to rule our souls;[148] this way, he "[depraves] the soul, while it still thinks and understands, through *harmful suggestion* by means of different kinds of thoughts and *evil inducements*"[149]

[145]Commentary on Romans Vol. 2, Book 7, Ch. 4; *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, 67.

[146]Commentary on Romans Vol. 2, Book 10, Ch. 7; *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, 269.

[147]Homily on Genesis 15, 3; Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, no. 40 (47).

[148]Commentary on Romans Book 5, Ch. 7; *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, 348–349.

[149]*On First Principles*, Book III, Ch. 3, no. 4, par. 2.

https://publications.lst.edu/