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# LESSONS FROM ALEXANDRIA: THE TRINITY, THE SOTERIOLOGICAL PROBLEM, AND THE RISE OF MODERN ADVENTIST ANTITRINITARIANISM

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Among the ancient schools of theology, Alexandria holds special prominence. The school began about 185 A.D. for the exclusive purpose of instructing converts from paganism to Christianity. Very quickly, and under the leadership of its principal theologians, Clement and Origen, it evolved into a major theological think-tank of ancient Christianity. On one hand, the school played an important role in spurring the development of many Christian doctrines, including the doctrines of God, Christ, the Trinity, and salvation. On the other, however, theological aberrations incontrovertibly present in the thought of the Alexandrian thinkers left a troubling legacy. These errors have never been completely eradicated from Christian theology, have persisted throughout the centuries, and continue to periodically resurface in various theological circles, including Adventism. In recent years, a version of an ancient error closely resembling Alexandrian subordinationism[1] has resurfaced within some factions of the Adventist community.

It is my belief that an understanding of the theological thinking of the Alexandrian school, however remote and seemingly irrelevant to believing Christians today, may aid in understanding the issues involved in modern-day trinitarian and soteriological debates, as well as protecting the community of believers from perpetuating the errors present in the Alexandrian thinking.[2] Let us begin with a brief overview of trinitarian developments up to the rise of Alexandrian thinking.

## *Pre-Alexandrian Solutions*

It goes without saying that the NT leaves its readers with a somewhat ambiguous picture regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

[1]Subordinationism teaches that, whether in heaven or on earth, Christ is eternally subordinate to God the Father. In this school of thought, the Holy Spirit is perceived as either the third person of the Trinity, eternally subordinated to God the Father and Christ, or the nonpersonal power of God.

[2]For a deeper study that may aid in understanding the issues presented in this paper, see Joseph Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998). In their groundbreaking *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh show how Alexandrian Christology eventually resulted in full-blown Arian heresy (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981, e.g., 108-111); see also Jerry Moon, John Reeve, and Woodrow Whidden, *The Trinity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), esp. 135-139.

On one hand, it is evident that the NT has no argument with the monotheistic tradition of the OT (see, e.g., Acts 17:22-31 and 1 Cor 8:4). On the other, it is also evident that the monotheistic *status quo* of the OT is challenged. While from the outset Christian believers saw themselves as continuators of the Jewish monotheistic tradition, they also presented themselves as believing in Jesus Christ, whom they described as having the characteristics that in the OT were decisively reserved for the deity (Luke 7:49; John 8:58; Phil 2:6; Col 2:9). Moreover, the Holy Spirit also received more attention and is presented in a different way from that found in the OT (John 14:16-18; Eph 4:20). It is not surprising, therefore, to find early postapostolic Christians grappling with the new vision of the divine and its implications for the salvation of humanity. While all recognized the special status of Christ (and the Holy Spirit), they nevertheless struggled to explain how this harmonized with the monotheistic conception of God and his function as the only redeemer of humanity. As a result, a variety of positions attempting to harmonize the OT monotheistic vision of the divine with the NT data developed, some inclined toward the extreme. Thus, at one end of the spectrum were those who tended to speak of Christ as an elevated human being, the Messiah, but not God.[3] The other extreme was populated by those who yearned to protect the unity of God and tended to identify Christ and the Holy Spirit with God.[4] The remainder of the early Christians found themselves somewhere between these two extreme positions.

Several things can be said of these early, pre-Nicaean[5] efforts to explain the relationship between God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. First, they all emphasized the unity of God and, second, they tended to place Christ and the Holy Spirit in some form of subordinate relationship to the supreme God of the OT.[6] Despite this, significant strides toward the recognition of Christ's

[3]Ebionism may be cited as an early movement that is representative of this view. Coming from a strong monotheistic position, this group could not reconcile the OT teachings on the deity with the Christian emphasis on the divinity of Christ. For a detailed description of the Ebionite heresy, see Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 42-44.

[4]While emphasizing the unity of God, the Christian heresy known as Modalistic Monarchianism rejected the separate existence of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Instead, it saw Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as different modes of the Father's existence. This heresy is also known as Patripassianism, or suffering of the Father (Erickson, 48-50). Both of these extremes (Ebionistic and Modalistic heresies), already considered deviant during the early Christian centuries, are still present within modern Christianity.

[5]"Pre-Nicaean" refers to the time in the history of Christianity prior to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

[6]This is well illustrated by Tertullian, who states: "Thus the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, in as much as He who begets is one, and

full divinity and coequality within the Trinity[7] were made during the second century by thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.[8] The work of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the chief thinkers of the Alexandrian school of theology, fits within this tradition of trinitarian thinking.

### *Clement of Alexandria (ca. 155-215 A.D.)*

Little is known of Titus Flavius Clemens, otherwise known as Clement of Alexandria. It appears that he was born in Athens, where he received his early education. He was a pagan convert to Christianity, who became the head of the Alexandrian school of theology upon the death of its founder, Pantaenus, and was the teacher of Origen.[9] Three extant works are attributed to him: the *Protreptikos* (*Exhortation to the Heathen*), in which he urges pagans to convert to Christianity; the *Paidagogos*, the purpose of which was to teach Christians

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He who is begotten is another; He, too, who sends is one, and He who is sent is another; and He, again, who makes is one, and He through whom the thing is made is another" (*Prax.* 9; *ANF* 3:604). Other early Christian fathers exhibited a similar tendency. Thus W. Marcus states: "It [subordinationism] is a characteristic tendency in much Christian teaching of the first three centuries, and is a marked feature of such otherwise orthodox Fathers such as St Justin and St Irenaeus" ("Subordinationism," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* [1997]: 1552).

[7]The very term "Trinity" also traces its origin to this era. Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 180 A.D.) was the first Christian thinker to use the Greek term τριάς (*Autol.* 2.15; *ANF* 2:101), while Tertullian was the first to introduce the Latin version of the term into Christian theology. Tarmo Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 62; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 66.

[8]Thus Justin Martyr wrote: "both Him and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things . . . ), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth" (*1 Apol.* 6; *ANF* 1:164); similarly, Irenaeus put forth his three famous articles of faith: "God, the Father, uncreated, beyond grasp, invisible, one God the maker of all; this is the first and foremost article of our faith. But the second article is the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . And the third article is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs were taught about God" (*Epid.* 6, trans. and ed. Joseph P. Smith [New York: Newman, 1952], 51); and, finally, Tertullian, with reference to Gen 1:26, wrote that "it was because He had already His Son close at His side, as a second Person, His own Word, and a third Person also, the Spirit in the Word, that He purposely adopted the plural phrase, 'Let *us* make;' and, 'in *our* image;' and, 'become as one *of us*'" (*Prax.* 12; *ANF* 3:606, emphasis original).

It must be noted, however, that while pointing the way toward the later development of belief in the coequality of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, none of these early pre-Nicaean thinkers fully embraced these concepts.

[9]Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1975), 146-147; cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 124-125.

the fundamentals of Christian conduct; and the *Stromateis* (*Miscellanies*), a collection of loosely organized notes dealing with various theological issues.[10] Clement left behind no systematic theology, a task later attempted by his most illustrious student, Origen.[11] He held strong beliefs that Greek philosophy, especially Middle Platonism,[12] was closely related to Christian theology, and he saw Christianity as the final development of Greek philosophical ideals. God, he argued, gave philosophy to the Greeks in much the same way he provided the Hebrews with the Law of Moses.[13] Believing that "all truth is God's truth wherever it may be found," a saying often attributed to him, Clement felt no restraints in using pagan Greek philosophy to explain the intricacies of the Christian faith, while at the same time making it more reasonable to the pagan mind.[14]

Clement's teachings on God and the Trinity began with his affirmation of the absolute transcendence of God, an idea clearly echoing the main characteristic of the Supreme Mind, or "the One," of Middle Platonism.[15]

[10]Walker, 73; Latourette, 147.

[11]Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 204; Walker, 74.

[12]Middle Platonism, sometimes referred to as pre-Neoplatonism, was an improvement on Platonic "good" and postulated the existence of the divine mind that could, at a stretch, be reminiscent of the Christian God. The Platonic "ideas," or "forms," thus existed in the mind of God. Middle Platonism was the form of Greek philosophy used and adapted by the Alexandrian theologians. For an extensive description of Middle Platonism, see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); cf. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 364-366.

[13]Clement, *Strom.* 7.2 (*ANF* 2:524-525); cf. Gonzalez, 193; and Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 89.

[14]Roger E. Olson and Adam C. English, *Pocket History of Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 20; Calvin Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 46-47.

[15]Henry Fiska Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155-159. Thus Clement wrote: "And if we give him a name, either we call him the One or the Good or Mind or Being or Father or God or the Demiurge or Lord, we do not do it in a correct way, and we do not talk as if conferring a name on him. But because of our helplessness, we use nice names so that our mind may have these things to lean upon and not wander at random. For one by one they do not contain information about God, but all together they are indicative of the power of the Almighty" (Clement, *Strom.* 5.82.1-2; Hägg, 156, translation his); cf. Robert McQueen Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 91. Roger Olson provides an apt description of the philosophical conception of God that goes back to Plato: "Clement's God was like the God of Greek philosophy—a bare unity without parts or passions that cannot even be described except negatively and who can only relate to the world of nature and history through an intermediate

As such, God was ineffable, timeless, and completely beyond the power of human comprehension. As a result, there was need for a mediator, the *Logos*.[16] This *Logos* was the source of all knowledge available to humanity, and, most especially, of the knowledge of God. It was the *Logos* who "gave philosophy to Greeks," prepared the way for Christianity, and which became *paidagogos (*or teacher or instructor), for Christian believers.[17]

Clement spoke highly of the *Logos*, whom he identified with the biblical Son of God. He wrote of the Son: "Now, O you, my children, our Instructor is like His Father God, whose Son He is, sinless, blameless, and with a soul devoid of passion; God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand, and with the form of God is God."[18] He further identified the Son as the wisdom of God, the "energy of the Father," the "cause of all good things," "the first efficient cause of motion," and "the first Administrator of the universe, who by the will of the Father directs the salvation of all."[19] Despite using such exalted language in speaking of the Son, endowing him with pre-existence, and even bestowing upon him the title "God," Clement hesitated to ascribe to him the supreme, underived divinity that would make the *Logos* equal with God. Thus, nowhere in his writings can one find such an identification made in clear, unequivocal terms.[20] Instead, we find in Clement statements such as "For the Son is the power of God, as being the Father's most ancient Word before the production of all things"; "the Son is . . . an energy of the Father"; "But the nature of the Son, which is nearest to Him who is alone the Almighty One, is the most perfect, and most holy."[21] A careful exegesis of Clement's writings by a scholar of antiquity, Alvan Lamson, prompted him to conclude that "none of the Platonizing Fathers before Origen have acknowledged the inferiority of the Son in more explicit terms than Clement."[22] Louis Berkhof concurred when he argued

being called Logos" (*The Story of Christian Theology* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 1999], 90).

[16]Clement, *Paed.* 3.1 (*ANF* 2:271). Hägg, 181; and John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 62, 90.

[17]Clement, *Strom.* 7.2; 6.5 (*ANF* 2:524, 489); cf. Gonzalez, 191-193.

[18]Clement, *Paed.* 1.2 (*ANF* 2:209-210).

[19]Clement, *Strom.* 7.2 (*ANF* 2:524-525).

[20]Alvan Lamson, *The Church of the First Three Centuries* (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Co.), 88-89; cf. Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 62-63; and Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford: Claredon, 1886), 67-68.

[21]Clement, *Strom.* 7.2 (*ANF* 2:524-525).

[22]Lamson, 88; cf. Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 184.

that, although Clement came close to recognizing Christ's full divinity, he nevertheless could not escape the clutches of subordinationism. While he spoke of the *Logos*'s eternity, Clement defined "the phrase in such a way as to teach not merely an economic but an essential subordination of the Son to the Father."[23] Indeed, the Middle Platonic monistic understanding of the deity as simple and undivided would preclude any complexity in the nature of God, while, at the same time, welcome the existence of inferior intermediaries such as the *Logos*.[24]

How did the *Logos* become Christ, according to Clement? Prior to its generation, the *Logos* existed in the form of "wisdom" in the mind of God and as a potential being. In this way, Clement could boldly ascribe eternity to Christ.[25] In eternity past, the *Logos* issued forth ("emanated," or "generated") from the Father.[26] Clement described this process in terms closely resembling the bringing forth of the World Soul from the Supreme Mind of Middle Platonic philosophy.[27] Following this stage of his existence, when the *Logos* "was with God," the Word became incarnated in the human form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.[28] The life of Christ, as the incarnated *Logos*, was a

[23]Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), 72; cf. Chadwick, 128. Economic subordination versus essential subordination corresponds to the economic versus essential understanding of the Trinity. The former refers to the way in which the Godhead was revealed and related to humanity, i.e., the position that the Son has the same divine attributes as the Father, but voluntarily submitted himself to the Father while on earth. Essential Trinity is a view of the Godhead as it existed prior to incarnation and after the resurrection of Christ. The essential subordination position thus puts forth a view that Christ was subordinated to God not only while here on earth, but also throughout eternity.

[24]Middle Platonism and its influence upon Clement's thought is well documented by Hägg; see esp. 71-133, 143, 159, 181-185.

[25]Lamson, 78; cf. Harry Wolfson, "Clement of Alexandria on the Generation of the Logos," *Church History* 20 (June 1951): 75.

[26]By the time of Clement, the concept of "generation" already had a long philosophical history. Having its roots in Platonic and Aristotelian thought, the theory continued to be developed within various philosophical circles of antiquity. Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It Is the Spirit that Gives Life": A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 178-179. For the Gnostic Valentinian theologians of the second century A.D., generation, or emanation, denoted the procession of the Gnostic Savior. It was thus natural for Clement to avail himself of the long philosophical tradition to explain the *genesis* of the Christian Savior (Alastair H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2004], 33). For Clement, the "generation" of the Logos was absolutely necessary, as without it the ineffable and timeless God would not be able to communicate with creation (Hägg, 158-159, 181; Olson, 90).

[27]Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 202-204.

[28]Hägg, 187-188; Clement, *Strom.* 5.3 (*ANF* 2, 448).

continuation of the perfect union with God that he had had in his preexistent state.[29] Christ is thus perfectly positioned to become "our Instructor" and source of all true *gnosis* (in contrast to the false *gnosis* of the Gnostics).[30]

This knowledge was essential for Christians to enter upon a path of salvation[31] that would ultimately end in being "godlike," which Clement defines as being "impassible" or free from passion in all aspects of life.[32] Through this knowledge, Christ teaches believers to distinguish good from evil and "cures the unnatural passions of the soul by means of exhortations."[33]

But Christ is more than just a conduit of divine knowledge. He also serves as an example of virtuous living to believers.[34] A believer is to reproduce Christ's obedience to the commandments, even if it leads to martyrdom. Indeed, he who follows a path to martyrdom suffers out of love for God and "for his own salvation."[35] Thus, following the example of Christ by being obedient to the commandments was a sure way to eternal life. In Clement's own words, "Let us then aim at the fulfillment of the commandments by the works of the Lord; for the Word Himself also, having openly become flesh, exhibited the same virtue, both practical and contemplative. Wherefore let us regard the Word as law, and His commands and counsels as the short and straight paths to immortality."[36]

Unfortunately, such *hellenizing* exerted a heavy price on Clement's soteriology and took him on a path foreign to that of the NT. His emphasis on attainment of the true *gnosis*, on obedience, and on following the example of Christ led him to place more value on human achievement than on Christ's accomplishments on the cross. Indeed, the value of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary seems to be little more than an example of a "perfect work of love."[37] Instead, Clement appeared to be more interested in the "philosophical" accomplishments and qualities of the incarnated *Logos*, such as sinless

[29]Chadwick, 128.

[30]Clement, *Paed.* 1.7 (*ANF* 2:222-223); Clement, *Strom.* 6.9 (*ANF* 2:497); cf. 1.20 (*ANF* 2:323).

[31]In fact, Clement sees this knowledge as inseparable from salvation. "The knowledge of God [and] everlasting salvation . . . are entirely identical" (*Strom.* 4.22; *ANF* 2:434); idem, *Paed.* 1.2-3 (*ANF* 2:210-211); cf., Hägg, 143-144.

[32]Clement, *Strom.* 6.9 (*ANF* 2:496-497); cf. Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 234.

[33]Clement, *Paed.* 1.2 (*ANF* 2:210).

[34]"But having assumed sensitive flesh, He came to show man what was possible through obedience to the commandments" (Clement, *Strom.* 7.2; *ANF* 2:525).

[35]Ibid., 4.4, 7 (*ANF* 2:411, 417).

[36]Clement, *Paed.* 1.3 (*ANF* 2:211).

[37]Clement, *Strom.* 4.4 (*ANF* 2:411-412).

perfection and passionlessness.[38] In this, and in contrast to the writers of the NT, Clement followed the well-established trajectory of thought present in the various strands of Greek philosophy, where through special knowledge and self-sacrifice a person could become Godlike, sinless, devoid of passion, anger, and carnal desires.[39] "Abstinence from what is evil," Clement argued, "is a step to the highest perfection."[40] This, he believed, was the highest accomplishment of the apostles, who mastered such an attitude "through a steady condition of mind, not changing a whit [and] . . . ever continuing unvarying in a state of training after the resurrection of the Lord."[41]

It becomes clear, therefore, that Clement promoted "deification" or becoming "godlike"[42] as the mode of salvation.[43] Such an understanding of salvation requires a rather optimistic anthropology, in which human beings innately possess the ability to embark on the journey toward perfection.[44] In his classic of Clement's writings, G. W. Butterworth identifies five stages of deification. First, there is baptism, followed by enlightenment, sonship, perfection, and immortality. "Perfection and immortality," Butterworth notes, "are of course two prominent characteristics of God, and when man attains them he becomes like God."[45] What was the source of Clement's ideas on deification, i.e., becoming God-like while on this earth? Butterworth answers: "Certainly it was not in the Scriptures. There is nothing in either the Old Testament or the New Testament which by itself could even faintly suggest that man might practice being a god in this world." He lays the blame squarely at the feet of Greek philosophy, and especially Plato, who viewed the life of

[38]Thus Clement writes: "But He [Christ] was entirely impassible . . . inaccessible to any movement of feeling—either pleasure or pain" (ibid., 6.9; *ANF* 2:496).

[39]Ibid., 4.22 (*ANF* 2:435); 6.9 (*ANF* 2:496-497).

[40]Ibid., 4.22 (*ANF* 2:434).

[41]Ibid., 6.9 (*ANF* 2:496); cf. idem, 4.21 and 22 (*ANF* 2:434-435).

[42]Clement, *Strom.* 6.9 (*ANF* 2:497). Clement was one of the earliest Christian theologians to use the term *theopoieo*, "being made like God." This term is closely associated with the concept of *theosis* (usually translated as "divinization," "deification," "being made divine"), which became the hallmark of pre-Nicaean Eastern Christian theology. G. W. Butterworth notes that while there are slight differences among the early Christian theologians who wrote in Greek, all are essentially in agreement with Clement's views on deification ("The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria," *JTS* (Old series) 17 (1916): 162; cf. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 234.

[43]"To the likeness of God, then, he that is introduced into adoption and the friendship of God . . . if he be perfected, according to the Gospel, as the Lord Himself taught" (Clement, *Strom.* 6.14; *ANF* 2:506); cf. 6.9 (*ANF* 2:497).

[44]Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria,* 234; cf. Clement, *Strom.* 4:23 (*ANF* 2:436-437). It must be noted that most of the pre-Nicaean Greek-speaking theologians shared Clement's optimistic view of human nature.

[45]Butterworth, 160.

an enlightened human being as a gradual ascent toward sinless perfection, and thus divinity.[46]

In view of the heavy influence of Middle Platonism upon Clement's understanding of God and the *Logos*, the mediator and the transmitter of the true *gnosis*, it is not surprising that his Christ was not, and indeed could not be, coequal with the Almighty God. The Middle Platonic influence upon his thought would clearly preclude such a possibility. Instead, like a Greek philosopher of a higher order, Christ is the medium as well as the "teacher" who imparts true divine *gnosis* and who provides an example of an enlightened life. If this is the mode of salvation, then there is no logical requirement for Christ to be coequal in all attributes to God the Father.

How does the Holy Spirit fit into Clement's theology? There appears to be scholarly agreement that Clement's writings on the Holy Spirit tend to be vague and contradictory, with no clear explanation as to the Spirit's exact nature or relationship to the Father and the Son.[47] In fact, as R. B. Tollington noted, there appears to be little room in Clement's theological system for the Holy Spirit, as all the functions assigned by the NT to the Spirit are fulfilled by the *Logos*. Thus he states,

> If Christian theology had developed on Clement's lines, it would have resulted in a different conception of the Trinity from that which the Church eventually adopted. It would have given us a transcendent Father, an all-pervading Logos or Spirit, a supreme historic manifestation at the Incarnation. And the last named would have been so purely a mode or limitation of the universal Logos, that a Duality rather than a Trinity would have been the result.[48]

Despite leaving questions regarding the exact nature of the *Logos* and the Holy Spirit as well as their relationship to God unanswered, Clement did, at times, speak of the triune nature of God, while the trinitarian formulas are found throughout his works.[49] Unquestionably clothed in Christian

[46]Ibid., 163.

[47]Latourette, 148. William G. Rusch writes that Clement viewed the Spirit as the power that emanates from the Word and is diffused through creation in order to attract human beings to God (*The Trinitarian Controversy* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 12).

[48]R. B. Tollington, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 1:359-360. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur came to a similar conclusion. He thus writes: "Clement illustrates a widespread phenomenon in early Christian thought, namely the lack of careful distinction between 'Logos' and 'Spirit.' Whenever he offers his own theological reflection (as opposed to simply passing on traditional formulas of faith), Clement feels free to use 'Logos' and 'Pneuma' as synonyms by shifting between them repeatedly and without much explanation" (*Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 75).

[49]See, e.g., Clement, *Paed.* 3.12 (*ANF* 2:295), in which Clement provides this

terminology; however, his descriptions of the Deity are heavily influenced by the models of the divine and of salvation (i.e., acquirement of the true *gnosis*) found in the prevailing philosophy of the age in which he lived.[50] While his subordinationistic views were more tacit than pronounced, Clement's most eminent student, Origen, took his teacher's theology and developed it in a more systematic way.

### *Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254 A.D.)*

Recognized for his brilliance, Origen was chosen by Clement to take over the leadership of the catechetical school in Alexandria, a position the latter held until at least 231 A.D. Unlike Clement, Origen was born into a Christian family and from an early age was exposed to the teachings of the Bible and the early church fathers. As a student, and later as the head of the catechetical school, he distinguished himself by careful scholarship and a successful writing career. With regard to the scope of his work, Origen is often compared to Augustine, and it is estimated that he produced over six thousand scrolls containing various theological discourses.[51] Known as the systematic theologian of the Alexandrian school, he surpassed Clement in constructing a theological system in which he sought to harmonize the emerging Neoplatonism with Christianity.[52] Unlike many other church fathers, and notwithstanding his extraordinary contributions to theology, Origen was never canonized as a saint, as posterity was unable to decide if he was an orthodox or a heretic.[53] On one hand, his work led many pagan thinkers to take Christianity seriously. On the other, his syncretistic approach to theology created confusion and much heartache to future generations of theologians.[54] His theological legacy

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remarkable trinitarian formula: "and giving thanks may praise, and praising thank the [*sic*] Alone Father and Son, Son and Father, the Son, Instructor and Teacher, with the Holy Spirit, all in One, in whom is all, for whom all is One" (Clement, *Strom.* 4.26; *ANF* 2:439).

[50]Rusch, 12.

[51]Gonzalez, 205; Chadwick, 135; Olson, *The Story of Christian Faith*, 99.

[52]Neoplatonism was a philosophical system that originated with Plotinus (ca. 205-270 A.D.). It emerged in the footsteps of Middle Platonism at the time of Origen (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* [1997], sv "Neoplatonism").

[53]While many theologians of the early church were deeply influenced by Origen, and his views were considered influential for formulation of trinitarian doctrines in the fourth century, some of his views were condemned during the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. For a carefully nuanced discussion on Origen, see the excellent volume by Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[54]Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 102. One such heartache was caused by Origen's universalistic views of salvation. For a recent analysis of Origen's universalism,

is thus ambiguous. His greatest works on theology are *Contra Celsum* (*Against Celsus*) and *De Principiis* (*On First Principles*). Despite his fame, he lived a simple, ascetic life.[55]

The entire trinitarian theology of Origen is governed by three *a priori* principles that he considered as self-evident teachings of the NT: first, there is one God who is the Father of Jesus Christ; second, Jesus Christ was born of the Father before all creatures; and, third, "the Holy Spirit was associated in honour and dignity with the Father and the Son."[56] Origen's theology of the Trinity also began with the person of God and his nature and, like Clement, he tended to describe God in monistic terms. God the Father, he insisted, was "altogether Μονάς [*Monad*], and so to speak, Ενάς [*Henad*]."[57] In philosophical language, both of these terms referred to an indivisible, hence ultimately simple and unknowable entity, the latter even more strongly conveying these qualities.[58] God was thus incomprehensible; transcendent; perfect in every way; without body, parts, or passion; the Absolute One, nothing of whom could possibly be known.[59] No other form of existence could ever assume its place. For this, Origen found support in Jesus' statement that the Father is "the only true God" (John 17:3). Thus, Jesus' Father alone was ingenerate, having no explanation for his existence.[60] Those who attempted to explain God in terms of complexity endangered his absolute unity and eternal existence. Origen explained: "But God, who is the beginning of all things, is not to be regarded as a composite [or complex] being, lest perchance there should be found to exist elements prior to the beginning itself, out of which everything is composed, whatever that be which is called composite."[61] This being alone, the uncreated Creator, Sustainer of the universe, was the ultimate source of all existence.[62] In spite of Origen's frequent use of NT language, his "God" thus had more in common with the Platonic conception of the deity than with the God of the Bible.

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see Mark S. M. Scott, "Guarding the Mysteries of Salvation: The Pastoral Pedagogy of Origen's Universalism," *JECS* 18 (Fall 2010): 347-368.

[55]Trigg, 14.

[56]Origen, *Princ.* "Introduction" 4 (*ANF* 4:240); cf. Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 46.

[57]Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.6 (*ANF* 4:243).

[58]J. Hirschberger, "Monad," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), 9:1018.

[59]Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.1 (*ANF* 4:242-243).

[60]Ibid., 1.2.4 (ANF 4:247-248); cf. Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 12; and Peter McEnhill and G. M. Newlands, *Fifty Key Christian Thinkers* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2002), 172.

[61]Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.6 (*ANF* 4:244).

[62]Ibid., (*ANF* 4:243-244).

Since Origen conceived his God in terms of perfect goodness and power, he claimed that there must have always existed the object toward which he could exercise his goodness and power. Origen thus posited the existence of a timeless and eternal universe inhabited by spiritual beings (or souls), which existed in coeternal relationship with him but which were always subordinate.[63] The unity of God and the multiplicity of the universe, however, were incompatible. To bring together the absolute divine unity with the multiplicity of spiritual beings, Origen argued for the eternal existence of a mediator, the eternal *Logos*. But where did the *Logos* come from? To explain the existence of the *Logos*, Origen turned to Neoplatonism, which posited the existence of subordinate beings in terms of generation, procession, or emanation rather than in the language of creation. Neoplatonic teachers taught that out of the "Absolute One" there proceeds (emanates) the Mind (*nous*). This Mind, they insisted, was not created and thus has no beginning.[64] While Clement appeared to be somewhat ambivalent with regard to the concept of Middle Platonic generation, the genius of Origen lies in the fact that he embraced the idea of generation wholeheartedly and thus explained the relationship between the Father and the Son (the *Logos*).[65] Notwithstanding the danger of oversimplification, the concept of "eternal generation" can be made intelligible by comparing it to the process of yeast reproduction. Yeasts are unicellular organisms, which reproduce asexually through a process known as budding. When yeasts reproduce, the end result is a clone equal to and separate from the original; however, in the case of eternal generation, as understood by Origen, the primary cell would always remain primary and the secondary cell always secondary. The process of "generation," moreover, is suspended in eternity in such a way that the secondary cell never separates from its originator. Another useful metaphor that may help to explain the concept of generation, and perhaps one closer to Origen's own thought, might be that of the will's emergence from the mind.[66] Explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son in terms of eternal generation allowed Origen to speak unabashedly of Christ as sharing coeternal existence with the Father and thus participating in his nature.[67] Thus, we can see in Origen a

[63]Thus Origen wrote: "As no one can be a father without having a son, nor a master without possessing a servant, so even God cannot be called omnipotent unless there exist those over whom He may exercise His power" (*Princ.* 1.2.10; *ANF* 4:249-250).

[64]Ferguson, 368.

[65]Origen, *Princ.* 1.2.6 (*ANF* 4:248).

[66]Ibid., (*ANF* 4:247-248); cf. Rusch, 13.

[67]James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 84. It is often stated in scholarly circles that to support his thesis, Origen introduced a well-known philosophical expression *homoousios* (of the same substance) into Christian theology,

strong tendency to underline the full divinity of Christ; however, despite such forceful emphasis on Christ's "full" divinity, all of Origen's trinitarian theology was nevertheless marked by an unrelenting bent toward subordinationism.[68] This is understandable, considering the fact that he was a strong opponent of a heresy known as Modalistic Monarchianism, which, in the name of the unity of God, identified Christ with the Father.[69] To counter this, Origen was forced to find terminology that would point to the distinctions among the three beings within the Godhead. To accomplish this, he introduced another complicated Neoplatonic term, *hypostasis*, which carried strong connotations of distinct personalities.[70] While the Father was considered by Origen to be the absolute God, and thus a special or unique category of *hypostasis*, the *Logos* could not possibly fulfill such a function and, in the end, had to be subordinated to the Father. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Origen referring to Christ as the *theos deuteros* (second God).[71]

Origen's subordinationism was most clearly asserted in his *Commentary on John*, in which he argued against those who tended to exalt the Son excessively. "This is why we say the Savior and the Holy Spirit transcend all created beings, not by comparison, but by their exceeding pre-eminence. The Father exceeds the Savior as much (or even more) as the Savior himself . . . exceed[s] the rest."[72] In another place in the same volume, he stated that the Son "would not remain God if he did not continue in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father."[73] Thus, it can be stated, in agreement with William Rusch, that in Origen we find the Son whose "deity is derived from the fountainhead, the Father. . . . In spite of the fact that the Word is one with the Father, he stands on a lower level in the hierarchy."[74]

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the first Christian theologian who appeared to do so. See, e.g., Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24; McKim, 12; and John Behr, *The Way to Nicea* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 188. In recent years, however, M. J. Edwards challenged this theory in his article, "Did Origen Apply the Word *Homousios* to the Son?" (*JTS* 49 [Autumn 1998]: 658-670).

[68]See, e.g., Origen, *Cels.* 5.39 (*ANF* 4:561), in which Origen speaks of Christ as a "second" God.

[69]Gonzalez, 219.

[70]Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.4 (*ANF* 4:248); cf. Trigg, 23; M. J. Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 65; and Ayres, 25.

[71]Origen, *Cels.* 5.39 (*ANF* 4:561).

[72]Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 13.151, in *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 13–32*, ed. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 100.

[73]Ibid., 99.

[74]Rusch, 14.

But what of the Holy Spirit? Here Origen went beyond Neoplatonism and Clement. While discussing the nature of the Father, the Son, and their intricate relationship, he utilized the subtleties of Greek philosophical language; however, in his discourse on the Holy Spirit, he tended to rely primarily on the testimony of the Scriptures.[75] As with the Father and the Son, he described the Holy Spirit in *hypostatic* language, i.e., as a being that had a separate, divine personality. The scriptural evidence was so obvious to him that he wondered how anyone could ever question the existence of the third person of the Trinity. The "authority and dignity" of the Holy Spirit was of such magnitude "that saving baptism was not complete except by the authority of the most excellent Trinity of them all, i.e., by the naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[76] The Spirit, he further argued in his *Commentarii in Romanos*, "is always with the Father and the Son; and he always is, was, and shall be, just like the Father and the Son."[77] Origen thus strongly affirmed the coeternity of the Spirit.

How then is the Holy Spirit related to the Father and the Son? Consistent with his subordinationist tendencies, Origen ranked the Holy Spirit below the Father and the Son. The Spirit was the highest of all beings that proceeded, or was eternally generated, from the Father and from the Son. Accordingly, he wrote, "The Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son ministering to his hypostasis, not only for it to exist, but also for it to be wise, and rational, and just, and whatever other thing we ought to understand it to be by participation in the aspects of Christ."[78] The role of the Spirit appears to be limited, however, to supplying believers with God's gifts, thus enabling the church to function as the body of Christ.[79]

In Origen, then, we find two seemingly conflicting trends of trinitarian thinking. On one hand, he came closer than any other contemporary church father to the orthodox trinitarian expression of the Christian faith. None of the early Christian thinkers exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit more than he did. On the other, his philosophical presuppositions apparently rendered him unable, or perhaps unwilling, to shake off the strong undercurrent of subordinationism that typified his theological thinking.

[75]Origen, *Princ.* 1.3 (*ANF* 4:251-254).

[76]Ibid., 1.3.2 (*ANF* 4:252).

[77]Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.7.19, in *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, ed. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 29; cf. Tarmo Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 68.

[78]Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.76, in *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10*, ed. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 114.

[79]Ibid.

Origen's subordinationism clearly went hand in hand with his soteriology. Like the rest of his theology, his soteriology was deeply marked by Greek philosophy. As seen above, Origen posited the coeternal existence of the universe inhabited by spiritual beings, or souls, toward whom God exercised his perfect power and goodness and who were endowed with free will. At one point in the past, some of these beings turned away from God. The physical world was created in order to accommodate and reform these fallen beings, who now, joined with earthly bodies, had to be saved, or restored, by God.[80] The salvation of these lost souls was the primary reason for the incarnation of the *Logos*, who united himself with a soul that had not sinned in a previous existence.[81] Through becoming a man, the *Logos* became a mediator between the philosophical God—"simple, immutable, impassible, and unable to be disturbed by time or emotion"[82]—and humanity.[83]

While on earth, Christ was both God and man[84] and the main purpose of his incarnation was to show humanity the pathway to eternal life,[85] i.e., reaching the state of perfection, which clearly is an attribute of God. Human beings, Origen believed, are completely free and are by nature "capable alike of virtue and of wickedness."[86] Following the example of the incarnated Christ, therefore, they could, if they chose to, embark on the journey toward becoming divine.[87] What began with Christ, i.e., "the union of the divine with the human nature," Origen argued, may also become a reality for humans, who "by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine."[88] All they needed to do was to "enter upon the life which Jesus taught."[89] The end result of this process was being "changed into God," [90] otherwise referred to in theological

[80]Origen, *Princ.* 1.8.1, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 67-68.

[81]Ibid., 2.6.5 (Butterworth, 112); cf. Donald Fairbrain, "Patristic Soteriology: Three Trajectories," *JETS* 50 (June 2007): 298.

[82]Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 111.

[83]"This soul, then, acting as a medium between God and the flesh (for it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body apart from some medium), there is born, as we said, the God-man, the medium being that existence to whose nature it was not contrary to assume a body" (Origen, *Princ.* 2.6.3; Butterworth, 110).

[84]Ibid., 2.6.3-4 (Butterworth, 110-112); idem, *Cels.* 3.41 (*ANF* 4:480).

[85]Origen, *Cels.* 3.28 (*ANF* 4:475).

[86]Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.8 (Butterworth, 38). Origen followed Clement, and Eastern Christianity in general, in subscribing to optimistic anthropology.

[87]Origen, *Cels.* 3.41 (*ANF* 4:480).

[88]Ibid., 3.28 (*ANF* 4:475).

[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid., 3.41, 3:28 (*ANF* 4: 480, 475).

literature as "deification," or *theosis*.[91] The following passage from Origen's *On the First Principles* clearly delineates this point:

> Through participation in Christ in his character and wisdom and knowledge and sanctification [each believer] advances and comes to higher degrees of perfection; and when a man, by being sanctified through participation in the Holy Spirit, is made purer and holier, he becomes more worthy to receive the grace of wisdom and knowledge, in order that all stains of pollution and ignorance may be purged and removed and that he may make so great an advance in holiness and purity that the life which he received from God shall be such as is worthy of God.[92]

Thus, in Origen's system, salvation was the responsibility of individual believers who, being completely free and having the inborn ability to choose between good and evil, were exhorted by Christ and the Holy Spirit to go through the stages of improvement until they were made perfect. Such soteriology, notes Donald Fairbrain, "bears an unmistakable resemblance to the Middle Platonic philosophy that had seeped into second-century Alexandrian Christianity through Philo and Clement."[93]

What of the NT teaching that salvation is to be obtained through the blood of Christ on the cross? Williston Walker wrote that Origen "more than any theologian since Paul, emphasized the sacrificial character of Christ's death." Origen, however, did not consider this death as substitutionary, i.e., that Christ died on the cross in place of sinners. While Christ indeed suffered and died on the cross, the primary value of his death lay in the fact that he provided an example of "death endured for the sake of piety" and "for the good of the human race."[94] Secondarily, his death served as "the first blow

[91]See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1997), sv "Deification." While Origen does not appear to use the word *theosis*, his writings are permeated with the concept. Cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.19, 32.338 (trans. Ronald E. Heine, [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993], 99-100, 406); idem, *Princ.* 1.3.4, 1.3.8, 2.3.1-2, 4.4.9-10 (Butterworth, 31-32; 38; 83-85; 325-328); idem, *Cels.* 6.13 (*ANF* 4:579).

[92]Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.8 (Butterworth, 38).

[93]Fairbrain, 298.

[94]Origen, *Cels.* 7.16 (*ANF* 4:617). Thus Eugene De Fay and Fred Rothwell wrote: "[The] work of the Logos Jesus is adapted to the different categories of mankind. He transmits divine life to 'gods,' to 'thrones,' to 'angels,' as he does to men. To simple believers, he is the Saviour *qua* the crucified one; to the more advanced, he is the lightgiver who brings them into direct contact with the Father. In a word, the Christ or Logos Jesus is the great intermediary, the dispenser of all light and life, the evolver of mind and spirit, the mystagogue who introduces men to the transcendent world, the initiator into the supreme Gnosis" (*Origen and His Work* [Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004], 109); cf. Otto Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 1:121; and Walker, 77.

in the conflict which is to overthrow the power of that evil spirit the devil," who stood in the way of humanity toward perfect sanctification.[95] Origen's hellenizing as well as his emphasis upon human achievement in the process of salvation left little room for the sacrificial/substitutionary understanding of Christ's death so noticeable in the Pauline writings. Such ideas, he would suggest, belong to the sphere of "simple man," who has not yet reached a state of enlightenment.[96]

While rejecting his soteriology and other elements of his teachings, many Christian theologians who came after Origen acknowledged his theological genius and attempted to refine his trinitarian thinking. Some moved toward full trinitarianism and affirmed the unity and equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Others, like Arius, brought Origen's subordinationist views to their ultimate conclusions and rendered Christ as a creature. These conflicting points of view clashed during the first ecumenical council of the church of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

### *The Importance of the Findings and Conclusion*

The impact of the Alexandrian school of theology on ancient Christianity was of such magnitude that no theologian who came after Origen could ignore its speculations. To this day, church historians and theologians alike consider the theological synthesis of Origen as one of the greatest theological achievements of ante-Nicaean antiquity. Yet the Alexandrian school left behind a dubious legacy. On one hand, its principal thinkers came closer than any other contemporary thinkers to defining the nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit as fully divine and coeternal with that of the Father himself. On the other, their insatiable thirst for the philosophical wisdom of the age and their desire to harmonize it with a NT faith resulted in a creeping syncretism that threatened the core of the Christian faith. As a result of their lasting influence, even the pillars of Christian orthodoxy, namely, the trinitarian creeds of the Patristic era, are not free from philosophical contaminants. Encouraged by their example, Catholic thinkers began to refer to philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*, the "handmaid of theology," thus facilitating a departure from true biblical Christianity.[97]

It appears, however, that Christian theology's infatuation with philosophy had another, even more sinister, outcome, for it affected Christian soteriology for generations to come. In this context, crucial questions relating to the relationship between subordinationism and deification, or *theosis*, must be asked. Was it coincidental that most pre-Nicaean church fathers were subordinationists who believed in *theosis* as the mode of salvation? Or was

[95]Origen, *Cels.* 7.16 (*ANF* 4:617).

[96]Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.4-5 (Butterworth, 275-276).

[97]Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), xxii-xv.

it an integral part of their Christology, in which the emphasis was on the achievements of the man-Christ, who, while on earth, attained a divinized status by his own efforts? Would that be the primary reason why, in Clement's and Origen's writings, Christ's sacrifice on the cross is deemphasized in favor of following the example of Christ toward perfect sanctification?

By arguing for the full divinity of Christ, the Catholicism of the fourth century rejected the soteriological implications of Alexandrian Christology. Instead, under the influence of Cyprian and likeminded theologians, the church became a salvation-bearing organization, in which the emphasis was on the teaching that there was little or no possibility of salvation outside of the church.[98] The desire for *theosis*, or perfect sanctification, however, was never entirely extinguished, and manifested itself in the monastic movement and various self-mortification activities of medieval Catholicism.

Only with the advent of the Reformation was the idea of salvation via *theosis*, or salvation *via* sanctification,[99] dealt a serious blow, as the focus moved from human achievements to Christ's achievements on the cross. Both Luther and Calvin denied the possibility of human-divine cooperation with regard to salvation.[100] Human beings, they charged, were too damaged by sin to even respond to God's initiative. God, they claimed, being the sovereign ruler of the universe, was completely in charge of human salvation. This is understandable. When salvation is placed entirely within the predestinarian framework, and thus based entirely on God's eternal decrees, any human action/response is redundant.[101] A sanctified life might be the desired result of election, but its presence or lack thereof does not serve as an indication as to whether a person is actually saved. Calvin and Luther, therefore, stand on the opposite extreme of soteriological thinking to that of the early Christian theologians, such as Clement or Origen.

Luther and Calvin's position was challenged during the seventeenth century by the German Pietists and the Remonstrants (Arminians), respectively.[102]

[98]Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 117; Lohse, 97.

[99]This is not to say that both Luther and Calvin denied the possibility of *theosis*. Sanctification was still possible for these reformers, but *not as a mode of salvation*. For more information, see Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 189-218, and Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

[100]Lohse, 162, 187.

[101]It must be noted that while Calvin's name is more readily associated with "predestination," Luther was no less Augustinian in his predestinarianism than the Genevan reformer. Lohse, 187.

[102]See Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 454-472, 473-492; cf. Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2006).

The thinkers of both movements argued that the human response to God's initiative did matter and that a saved person's life would always show signs of sanctification. Human decisions thus played an important role in the process of salvation. Methodism, and later Adventism, was born out of these two movements. These theologies tended to set sanctification in a proper relationship to salvation (or justification): that of the necessary fruit of salvation.

Within modern Adventism, we are currently witnessing a resurgence of a version of Alexandrian thinking with reference to both Christ's divinity and the resultant soteriology. On one hand, few contemporary Adventist antitrinitarians agree with Uriah Smith and other early Adventist pioneers, who claimed that Christ was created. On the other hand, however, neither are they willing to accept the trinitarian teaching of Christ's coeternal, fully equal divinity. Thus, their only option is Clement and Origen's concept of generation (or begetting), which, they believe, happened so far in the past before there was time, that for all practical purposes Christ could be considered coeternal. They, like Clement and Origen, may thus be classified as subordinationists, or, as some refer to themselves, "Fountarians." Does their subordinationism/fountarianism have any effect on their soteriology? I believe it does. A careful study of antitrinitarian Adventist literature (mostly self-published) reveals an interesting trend: the centerpiece of their soteriology appears to be the life of Christ on earth and the example he provided for believers.[103] While the death

[103]See, e.g., an unpublished paper by Australian author Adrian Ebens, "Return of Elijah, submitted for evaluation to the South Pacific Biblical Research Committee in 2007. In his document of about 200 pages, Ebens spends considerable effort arguing that Jesus is not coequal with the Father in terms of authority and power and that the Father alone is the fount of all life, including that of Christ. At the same time, Ebens links his argumentation against the trinitarian position with his view that, during his incarnation, Christ adopted the postfallen nature of humanity, positions taught by E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, and which he believes was the "essence of the 1888 message." He thus correctly and incisively argues that "the Doctrine of the Trinity is logically inconsistent with Christ taking our fallen nature" and with "traditional" Adventist teachings such as, e.g., character perfection. It is interesting to note that, while keeping the commandments and character perfection receive a fair amount of attention, an emphasis on Christ's accomplishment on the cross on behalf of humanity is entirely missing in this work. As a result, a reader receives a clear impression that, for Ebens, salvation is a result of a person's submissive relationship with God and Christ (the Holy Spirit is considered as a "power" rather than a being) and following the example of Christ. He thus writes: "Our submission to His request to keep the Sabbath, connects us to God in an obedient relationship. In the same manner our submission to the Son of God . . . connects us directly to God in an obedient relationship. It is the submission in obedience that opens to us the flow of the Father's blessing" (Unpublished paper, 101-105). While obedience and submission do play a role in the process of salvation, they are always a response to what Christ

of Christ on the cross and its implications are occasionally mentioned, the writers (like Origen and Clement) focus mainly on Christ's accomplishments on earth and his subordination to God the Father.[104] While the example of Jesus must not be ignored in the daily life of a believer, the above analysis shows that a soteriology that focuses almost exclusively on the life of Jesus has its roots directly in the pre-Nicaean teachings of the early church fathers and especially those connected to the Alexandrian school of theology. In fact, I believe that the ultimate roots of a soteriology of perfectionism lie in Greek philosophy.

Adventist soteriology values sanctification and the example Christ left for his followers. But sanctification has its proper place in relation to justification. The latter comes first and was accomplished for believers through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. Only then, and through a voluntary acceptance of Christ's accomplishments on the cross, God, through his Holy Spirit, works in the life of the believer "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13; Heb 13:20-21). A reversal of this sequence, that is, an exaltation of sanctification to being the mode of salvation, leads directly to a return to the high philosophical ideals of the ancient Greeks.

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accomplished on the cross. With this emphasis missing, Eben's teachings are simply a return to Clement's and Origen's points of view. For similar positions, see also the self-published antitrinitarian work by Allen Stump, *The Foundation of Our Faith: Over 150 Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology* (Welch WV: Smyrna Gospel Ministries, n.d.).

[104]Ibid.