

ORIGEN'S JOHANNINE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF LOVE

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Abstract

Origen is the first Christian who proposed a systematically Trinitarian theology of love. This has largely escaped the attention of theologians and remains underexplored. One notable consequence is that this has severely limited our appreciation of Origen as a significant interlocutor for contemporary theology since the Trinity as love is arguably the most significant theme that shaped the development of modern Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. This essay addresses this lacuna by offering a reconstruction of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love. What will emerge is a grammar of love that sets out the meaning of the term with reference to all three divine *hypostases*, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Origen's Trinitarian understanding of love is bound up with his vision of human deification understood as incorporation into the Triune fellowship of love. At the heart of Origen's approach is a crucial distinction from 1 John: the Father as *he agapē* (1 John 4:8) and the Son as *he agapē ek tou theou* (1 John 4:7). This distinction captures Origen's understanding of the Father-Son relation and emerges from close attention to the Johannine language of sonship as *ek tou theou*. This central observation urges a reassessment of subordinationism as a characterisation of Origen's Trinitarian thought. I argue that it is more appropriate instead to speak of Origen's *Johannine* theology of sonship.

Introduction

Origen is the first Christian who proposed a systematically Trinitarian theology of love. This has largely escaped the attention of theologians and remains underexplored, especially in comparison with the famous Augustinian approach that still preoccupies theological attention on this topic.¹ To be sure, Origen's Trinitarian understanding of God as love has received some previous attention.² But to my knowledge it has yet to be

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¹ See *De Trinitate*, Book 8-9, 15.17.27-31, 15.19.37; *In Iohannis Epistulam* 7. I will not have time to touch on Origen as a potential source for Augustine, though the following analysis certainly will have implications for that question. The secondary literature on Augustine is obviously vast but the discussions that I find most illuminating for comparative purposes are Roland Teske, "Augustine's Inversion of 1 John 4:8," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 49-60 and Lewis Ayres, "Augustine on God as Love and Love as God," *Pro Ecclesia* 5, no. 4 (1996): 470-87.

² See Henryk Pietras, *L'amore in Origene* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1988), ch.5.

systematically reconstructed. One notable consequence is that this has severely limited our appreciation of Origen as a significant interlocutor for contemporary theology since the Trinity as love is arguably the most significant theme that shaped the development of modern Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century. This essay addresses this lacuna by offering a reconstruction of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love. What will emerge is a grammar of love that sets out the meaning of the term in a fully Trinitarian manner, i.e. with reference to all three divine *hypostaseis*, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Origen's Trinitarian understanding of love is bound up with his vision of human deification understood as incorporation into the Triune fellowship of love. As I shall argue, Origen developed all this through close exegetical attention to the inner logic of the First Epistle of John. It is therefore apt to name the subject of this essay Origen's *Johannine* Trinitarian theology of love.

At the heart of Origen's approach is a crucial distinction from 1 John: the Father as *he agapē* and the Son (and as we shall see, the Holy Spirit) as *he agapē ek tou theou*. This expresses the famous Origenian distinction between the Father as source and the Son (and Holy Spirit) as derivative in terms of love.³ This distinction lies at the heart of Origen's Trinitarian understanding of love and furthermore shapes his understanding of human deification as *becoming love*. Since this distinction configures Origen's understanding of intra-Trinitarian relations, a study of his Trinitarian theology of love cannot avoid touching on the question of subordinationism. In the *Commentary on John (ComJn)*, Origen famously distinguishes the Father as *ho theos, the God*, from the Son as *theos, God* without the article. The careful choice of language in the opening of John's Gospel contains a mystery for Origen: the Father, *the God*, is the source of divinity, "very God" (John 17:3) and "the only true God" (*ton monon alēthinon theon*) whereas the Son is amongst those "besides the very God (*to para to autotheos*), which is made God by participation in his divinity".⁴ It is easy to see why this teaching exposes Origen to the accusation of subordinationism, the doctrine that the divinity of the Son of God is not fully equal to the divinity of the Father.⁵ For if the Son has need of participating in the Father for being divine, this seems to reduce his divinity as something less than the Father's.⁶ Did Origen teach subordinationism?

The modern debate on this question centres around the question whether Origen distinguishes between the Father and the Son ontologically, relationally, or

³ The Origenian distinction between source and derivative is most frequently dealt with in relation to his language of image. See Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956).

⁴ *ComJn* 2.17 (SC 120, 216-18). Translation from FoC 90.

⁵ It is difficult to determine exactly when this accusation first arose in the fourth century. But certainly, Origen's "subordinationism" has been controversial since Epiphanius' polemic against Origen in *Panarion* 64. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 90–91.

⁶ This has led scholars to debate whether Origen was a precursor to "Arian" theology which (according to its detractors) denigrated the status and rank of the Son to that of a mere creature, albeit the most excellent of all creatures. The literature on Origen's relation with Arianism is vast. See Rowan D. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 318–19, n.139 and also Williams' own discussion on 131–48. Williams traces a hint of this accusation early in the fourth century already in Marcellus of Ancyra (Eusebius, *Con. Marc.* I.4.19ff).

economically.⁷ While this debate has been fruitful for determining the metaphysical structure underlying Origen's Trinitarian thought, this essay will make a case for shifting the terms of this debate. Scholarship on Origen's subordinationism so far has paid little attention to the fact that besides the Johannine distinction between *ho theos* and *theos*, Origen uses a second Johannine distinction between *he agapē* and *he agapē ek tou theou*—the distinction at the heart of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love—to express the Father-Son relation. A close examination of this second distinction, as I will show, suggests that it is more illuminating to frame Origen's distinction as an attempt to mirror the Johannine language of sonship as *ek tou theou*, under which a limited sense of subordination has its place. In other words, the terminology of subordinationism is imprecise, if it is used as a general category to discuss Origen's understanding of intra-Trinitarian relations.⁸ I will also suggest at the end that the category of subordination unhelpfully disguises the theological architecture of Origen's understanding of the divine-human relation. Origen's Trinitarian theology of love thus urges a reassessment of his subordinationism as a *Johannine* account of sonship.

A final clarification on the role of the Holy Spirit in my argument is in order. In this essay, I will restrict myself to evaluating the significance of Origen's subordination of the Son and not of the Holy Spirit. While it is certainly possible to launch a similar argument for Origen's subordination of the Holy Spirit as a Johannine account of "spiration", in my view love (*agapē*) is not the best term for such a reconstruction.⁹ As we shall see, Origen certainly discusses the Holy Spirit as *agapē* when commenting on Rom. 5:5. But the extant Latin translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* (*ComRm*) by Rufinus has left us with little material on this theme. It is possible that Rufinus has only presented a truncated text of Origen's discussion of Rom. 5:5.¹⁰ In light of this, very often my exploration of the pneumatological dimension of love in Origen borders on the speculative. Hence, the reader should keep in mind that my primary focus concerns the Father-Son relationship, though I shall draw from the materials on the Holy Spirit to shed further light on this point.

⁷ For an overview of this debate, see Christoph Bruns, *Trinität und Kosmos: Zur Gotteslehre des Origenes* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2013), 111–22; Giovanni Hermanin de Reichenfeld, *The Spirit, the World and the Trinity: Origen's and Augustine's Understanding of the Gospel of John* (Leuven: Brepols, 2021), 31–33. Bruns' view is that Origen cannot be fitted neatly into one of these categories due to the scriptural shape of his theological language. Hermanin de Reichenfeld's view is that Origen's position is properly identified as an "ontological subordinationism of priority" in order to differentiate this with the Creator-creature distinction which consists of an "ontological subordination of superiority." My own approach in this essay leans towards Bruns' judgment. I do not necessarily disagree with Hermanin de Reichenfeld's distinction between two types of ontological subordinationism as illuminating, though I would prefer "hypostatic subordinationism of priority" as a description of Origen's account of the Father-Son/Father-Holy Spirit distinction.

⁸ The imprecision and ambiguity of "subordinationism" as a heresiological category is rightly highlighted by Mark Edwards, "Is Subordinationism a Heresy?," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 4, no. 2 (2020): 69–86.

⁹ To establish the Johannine pedigree of Origen's subordinationism of the Holy Spirit is much better accomplished based on the material in *ComIn*. On this, see Hermanin de Reichenfeld, *The Spirit, the World and the Trinity* and his contribution to this special issue.

¹⁰ Frustratingly, both the extant Tura fragments and the Ramsbotham fragments of *ComRm* on Rom. 5:5 add very little in this regard. See A. Ramsbotham, "The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans. III," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (o.s.), no. 1 (October 1912): 10–22; Jean Scherer, *Le commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III. 5 - V. 7: d'après les extraits du Papyrus no. 88748 du Musée du Caire et les fragments de la Philocalie et du Vaticanus Gr. 762: Essai de reconstitution du texte et de la pensée des tomes V et VI du "Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains"* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1957).

1. A Trinitarian Grammar of *Agapē*

In the Prologue of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*ComCC*), Origen sets out, to my knowledge, the first *Trinitarian* approach to the famous claim in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”¹¹ He offers his *Trinitarian* interpretation of 1 John 4:8 at the heart of his discussion on love that makes up the whole section two of the prologue. In this discussion, he sets out to clarify the *Christian* understanding of love for interpreting the meaning of the biblical book. Such a ground-clearing exercise is necessary because in Origen’s interpretation, the Song of Songs is primarily about love.¹² But to clarify what this Scriptural text means by love, one needs to consider the various terms one can use to speak of love and the respective meanings assigned to these terms. In Greek, several terms are used to denote the notion to which we refer by the single English word “love”: *agapē*, *erōs*, *philia*.¹³ Platonic philosophy examines love especially in relation to the term *erōs*, usually translated as “love” or “desire.”¹⁴ Origen was well aware of the discussion on *erōs* in Platonic dialogues, especially the *Symposium*.¹⁵ Yet, the Christian Scriptures use another important word alongside *erōs* to denote love: *agapē*. *Agapē*, unlike *erōs*, was not a term widely used in the philosophical context. Rather, it was primarily found in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint (LXX), and subsequently used in the New Testament. The observation that *erōs* and *agapē* were both used in the Christian Scriptures prompted Origen to raise the central question for his treatise on love: does *agapē* in Scripture have the same meaning as *erōs*?

¹¹ All quotations from *ComCC* are drawn from Alfons Fürst and Holger Strutwolf, trans., *Origenes: Der Kommentar zum Hohelied*, Origenes Werke 9/1 (Berlin : De Gruyter, 2016). All references to this edition will be abbreviated as GCS OW (Origenes Werke) 9/1. In each reference, I give the page number followed by the line numbers. All English translations are based on R. P. Lawson, trans., *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957). Given the nature of my argument, I frequently adjust Lawson’s translation in order to accentuate the philological issues in Rufinus’ Latin translation as well as my own hypothetical reconstruction of the sense of the original Greek in Origen’s text.

¹² *ComCC* ProL.2.8 (GCS OW 9/1, 60, 13-15).

¹³ In what follows, I shall restrict my discussion to *agapē* and *erōs*. But the term *philanthropia* is also central to Origen’s theology of love. See the important discussion in Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 7.

¹⁴ Scholars have noted that Rufinus’ text presents a minefield in terms of determining the exact correlation between the Latin terms in his translation of the *ComCC* and the Greek terms in the original. This issue has been addressed with scientific precision recently by Vito Limone, “I nomi dell’amore: Un’indagine sulla traduzione latina del Commento al Cantico dei Cantici di Origene,” *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum* 19, no. 3 (December, 2015): 407–29. Working from the extant Greek fragments of *ComCC*, Limone determines the following: (a) *agapē* = *dilectio/caritas*, sometimes also *amor*, (b) *erōs* = *amor/cupido*, (c) when *erōs* is used in *ComCC*, it always expresses a spiritual sense (even though the term is mostly used negatively in the rest of the Origenian corpus). Based on Limone’s framework, I make the following two methodological choices in this essay: (1) I use the English word “love” throughout and not “charity” for this respects Origen’s own understanding that *agapē* and *erōs* are synonymous in its “proper” (= spiritual) sense, (b) for emphasis, I consistently substitute *agapē* for *caritas* in the English quotations of *ComCC*. On the issue of translation, see also the complementary discussion in Pietras, *L’amore in Origene*, chs.2 and 4. Pietras helpfully remarks that while Origen argues that there is a common meaning shared by *agapē* and *erōs*, he nevertheless did not reduce the meaning of *erōs* to only its spiritual sense. Therefore, when Origen speaks of *agapē* as encompassing the meaning of *erōs* and can be replaced by it, we can take him to imply the spiritual sense of *erōs* when all carnal senses are emptied out (74f).

¹⁵ The *Symposium* as a key philosophical background of Origen’s *ComCC* has long been noted. See Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo, “La dimensione dell’amore nell’interpretazione origeniana del Cantico dei Cantici,” in *Paradoxos politeia: studi patristici in onore di Giuseppe Lazzati*, edited by Raniero Cantalamessa and Luigi Franco Pizzolato (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1979), 187–94: “È evidente, fin dall’inizio, il richiamo al Simposio di Platone, anche se non esplicitamente menzionato” (188).

Origen's answer rests upon the key conceptual distinction between a carnal sense and a spiritual sense of love. Whereas carnal love (*amor carnalis*) is directed towards corporeal and changeable realities, spiritual love (*amor spiritualis*) is directed towards incorporeal and unchangeable realities.¹⁶ Origen's whole argument builds upon the claim that we use the term *erōs* improperly to indicate carnal love and properly only when indicating spiritual love.¹⁷ This point escapes the *simpliciores*, the spiritually immature, who are subsequently endangered by the scriptural language of love as it can be read as an encouragement to pursue carnal pleasure rather than a life of virtue.¹⁸ This, however, raises the question: what then is spiritual love? According to Origen, scriptural terminologies by themselves will not help because there is no direct correspondence between the *conceptual* distinction between carnal and spiritual love, on the one hand, and the *terminological* distinction between *agapē* and *erōs*, on the other. As he painstakingly highlights, Scripture can use *agapē* (noun)/*agapan* (verb) to substitute for *erōs* (noun)/*eran* (verb) in contexts where there is a danger for the weak amongst the readers to fall into carnal sin. But Scripture is equally capable of using *erōs/eran* terminology to speak of a more elevated sense of love, one that is directed towards higher things.¹⁹ The conclusion we should draw from this is that the conceptual distinction between carnal and spiritual love is grounded on content and not on terminological difference. It is not that carnal love is *erōs* and spiritual love *agapē*; rather, both can be used to refer to spiritual love in Scripture. Thus, to discern the nature of spiritual love we need to go beyond terminologies to reach the content of love.

It is as part of this overall argument that Origen turns to what he thinks is not too much of a digression, namely, an exegesis of the famous proclamation in 1 John 4:8: "God is love" (ὁ θεὸς ἀγαπῆ ἐστίν). In this verse, since St. John names even God *agapē*, one might wonder if this would elevate *agapē* to a more supremely divine and spiritual level of love than *erōs*. As we shall see, Origen argues that even in the case of understanding the meaning of God as love, *agapē* and *erōs* can be interchangeable. What, then, did John mean by "God is love"? According to Origen:

... let us love one another, he [John] says, for *agapē* is of God (*caritas ex Deo est*); and a little later, God is *agapē* (*Deus caritas est*). In saying this, he shows us both that God himself is *agapē*, and that he who is of God also is *agapē*. For who is of God, save he who says: "I come forth from God and am come into this world?" (John 16:28)²⁰

To see what Origen is doing in this passage exegetically, it will be instructive to read it closely alongside the Greek text of 1 John 4:7-8:

¹⁶ *ComCC* Prol.2.16 (GCS OW 9/1, 70,9-15).

¹⁷ See *ComCC* Prol.2.33 (GCS OW 9/1, 80,7-11): Quod si quis dicat quia et pecuniam et meretricem et alia similiter mala eodem uocabulo, quod a caritate duci uidetur, diligere appellamur, sciendum est in his non proprie, sed abusue caritatem nominari. The argument is slightly more complex as Origen goes on to develop this point by saying that the most proper use of the term *erōs* is for designating the spiritual love that belongs most properly to the God (cf. 1 John 4:8).

¹⁸ *ComCC* Prol.2.2 (GCS OW 9/1, 56, 10-18), 2.14 (GCS OW 9/1, 68,25-70,4).

¹⁹ *ComCC* Prol.2.20-24 (GCS OW 9/1, 72,13-76,8).

²⁰ *ComCC*, Prol.2.26 (GCS OW 9/1, 76, 17-20): "Diligamus" inquit "inuicem, quia caritas ex Deo est" et post pauca: "Deus caritas est." In quo ostendit et ipsum Deum caritatem esse et iterum eum, qui ex Deo est, caritatem esse. Quis autem ex Deo est nisi ille, qui dicit: "Ego ex Deo exiui et ueni in hunc mundum"?

Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν. ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.

In these verses, John says “love is of God” (ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν) as well as “God is love” (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν). According to Origen, what this teaches is that God, as well as he who is of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), should be named *agapē*. This much is obvious, but the final step Origen makes is not obvious at all. He interprets the phrase ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ in 1 John 4:7 as referring not just to some generic love that identifies those who are of God but most supremely to Jesus Christ’s coming from the Father (John 16:28). The point is that Jesus Christ above all should be recognised as the one most worthy of being called “of God” (*ex Deo*/ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). Building on this logic, Origen thus interprets 1 John 4:7-8 as connected in a *binitarian* framework. “God is love” (1 John 4:8) concerns the Father whereas “love is of God” (1 John 4:7) concerns the Son. The Father is therefore ἡ ἀγάπη, the Son ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.²¹

Now if *the* God (ὁ θεός) is *agapē* and the Son who comes from God is also *agapē*, what is the relation between the two loves? Origen addresses this issue in a remarkable passage that affirms the unity of love between the Father and the Son:

If God the Father is *agapē*, and the Son is *agapē*, the *agapē* that each one is, is one and the same in every respect; it follows, therefore, that the Father and the Son are one and the same in every respect (*Quod si Deus Pater caritas est et Filius caritas est, caritas autem et caritas unum est et in nullo differt, consequenter ergo Pater et Filius unum est et in nullo differt*) ... And that is why the Scripture says that “if *agapē* abideth in you, God abideth in you” (1 John 4:16)—God, that is to say, the Father and the Son, who also come to him who has been perfected in *agapē*, according to the saying of our Lord and Saviour: “I and my Father will come to him and will make our abode with him” (John 14:23).²²

The exegetical argument here is once again complex so we need to carefully unpack its logic. Origen clearly thinks the Father and the Son are *one* (*unum*) with respect to *agapē*. He is emphatic in stressing that the *agapē* that the Father and the Son each possesses is one and the same. There is no possibility of greater or lesser between the Father as *agapē* and the Son as *agapē*.²³ This unity of love is what enables Origen to read 1 John 4:16 in conjunction with John 14:23 based on the following logic: when God abides in those who are perfected in love, it is the Father *and* the Son abiding in us, *since both are one and the same love*. Origen’s *binitarian* understanding of love in 1 John 4:16 thus enables him to interpret the indwelling of love in believers as

²¹ Since in the Latin *Deus* without the article cannot differentiate between *ho theos* and *theos*, from now on I will consistently translate *Deus* in Rufinus’ Latin version of Origen’s *ComCC* by “the God” (ὁ θεός) if it is clear from context that it refers to the Father or the subject of 1 John 4:8 which, as I have argued here, Origen takes to be the Father. I will consistently translate *Deus* by God (θεός) if it is clear from context that it refers to the love that is of God in 1 John 4:7 which, as I have argued here, Origen takes to be the Son.

²² *ComCC*, Prol.2.26-27 (GCS OW 9/1, 76,20-78,4). The clarification *Deus ... id est Pater et Filius* seems to be an addition from Rufinus. But this matters little since the Latin captures the sense of Origen’s argument in this case because the reference to John 14:23 would not make sense if *Deus*/θεός in this instance does not refer to both the Father and the Son. Rufinus might have made explicit what was implicit in Origen’s original Greek, namely, the identification of both the Father and the Son as divine.

²³ See PA 1.3.7 (Behr, 1:78,186): *Porro autem nihil in trinitate maius minusue dicendum est ...*

the indwelling of *both* the Father and the Son in us. This can only make sense if the *agapē* that St. John names *the* God (1 John 4:8) is one and the same as the *agapē* St. John names the Son who is *ek tou theou* (1 John 4:7).

In a lost passage from Origen's *Commentary on Romans* (*ComRm*), preserved by Pamphilus' *Apology for Origen*, a more precise language is present that captures the relationship between the Father as love and the Son as love:

Perhaps someone may ask if the Son is love (*Filius caritas est*), especially because John has applied this word to God the Father, saying that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). But, on the other hand, we shall cite what he says in the same epistle of his: "Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God" (1 John 4:7). So then, he who said that "God is love" also teaches that "love is from God" (*caritatem esse ex Deo*). I believe that this love is none other than his only-begotten Son; just as God is procreated from God, so love is procreated from love (*sicut Deum ex Deo, ita caritatem ex caritate progenitum*).²⁴

Here, Origen considers a very pertinent question concerning *agapē* as a divine name. If John says "God is love," can we say that the "Son is love" (*Filius caritas est*)? In short, if *the* God (*ho theos*) is called love, can we call the Son love as well? What is at stake, then, is the question that led to the later Trinitarian controversy in the early fourth century: in what sense is the Son equal with the Father in his divinity? This passage in fact recapitulates the two points we have seen in *ComCC* concerning the Father as *he agapē* and the Son as *he agapē ek tou theou*. But it also adds an additional dimension that further nuances our understanding of Origen's binitarian exegesis of 1 John 4:7-8. On the one hand, it is unmistakable that Origen takes for granted the Father as the subject of "God is love" in 1 John 4:8. It is easy to see why he thinks so, if we note that in 1 John 4:8 the Greek article is attributed to the subject of the statement: ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. Since Origen systematically identifies ὁ θεὸς as the Father, he must have interpreted 1 John 4:8 as strictly about the Father. This also explains why there was a theological question in the first place concerning the theological appropriateness of the phrase "The Son is love." For if "God is love" is to be taken as referring to *both* the Father and the Son, then there would have been no theological question in the first place. But when we follow Origen to 1 John 4:8 as concerning solely the Father, there is then a genuine question whether it is also correct to say "The Son is love." On the other hand, the identification of the Father as the subject of "God is love" does not exclude for Origen the validity of asserting that the Son is love (*Filius caritas est*).²⁵ As he argues, repeating the point we have already seen in *ComCC*, the phrase ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν in 1 John 4:7 implies that the Son is also identified by John as *agapē*. What is new in this passage is how Origen captures the unity of the Father and the Son as love using the language of *procreation*: the Father is the *source* of love and the Son the love *procreated* from love. The mystery expressed in John's proclamation of "God is love" is therefore that the one procreated is one

²⁴ *Apol.* 89 (SC 464, 160,1-8). Translation from FoC 120.

²⁵ The double affirmation of *Deus caritas est* and *Filius caritas est* is also found in *HomNm* 14.4.4 (SC 442, 184, 292-99).

and the same with its source. The *agapē* that *the* God is, is one and the same as the *agapē* that is *ek tou theou* because one is perfectly procreated from the other.²⁶

Up to now, I have considered Origen's discussion of *agapē* without reference to the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, Rufinus' Latin text on Origen's treatment of 1 John 4 in the Prologue of *ComCC* has little to say about the Holy Spirit. The only place Origen mentions the Holy Spirit explicitly in the discussion of *agapē* as a divine name is at the end of section two of the Prologue.²⁷ In summing up the Trinitarian meaning of love, he highlights how the Father, the Son, and also the Holy Spirit have been called *agapē* in Scripture. He then turns to spell out what this means in terms of how we come to know *agapē*. Citing Jesus' words in Matt. 11:27, "no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him," so, Origen continues, no one can know love, that is, *ho theos* the Father, except the Son and through the Son. Conversely, in the same passage, "no one knoweth the Son except the Father," so likewise no one can know love, that is, *he agapē ek tou theou*, except the Father. But here Origen adds a third element into the mix. In a similar way, he argues, we should also affirm that since the Holy Spirit is also called *agapē* (2 Tim. 1:7), the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father "alone knows what is in God, just as the spirit of man knows what is in man."²⁸ The Holy Spirit alone knows the *agapē* that is in (*the?*) God. And it is the Holy Spirit's wish to search out souls worthy of divine *agapē* and reveal this to them. In short, the *agapē* that the Father is (1 John 4:8) is known and revealed by the Son and the Holy Spirit. As we shall see, Origen refers to both Son and Holy Spirit as *agapē ek tou theou*.

Little further trace is left (at least in Rufinus' text) of Origen's thinking on the pneumatological dimension of *agapē* in the Prologue of *ComCC*. But a more appropriate occasion for discussing the Holy Spirit as *agapē* arises in the context of Rom. 5:5, where Paul explicitly refers to the Holy Spirit as love of God (*he agapē tou theou*): ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς οὐ κατασχύνει, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν διὰ πνεύματος ἀγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν.

As we have seen in the context of 1 John 4:7, Origen interprets the phrase *he agapē ek tou theou* as referring to the Son of love. It is interesting, therefore, to see what Origen does with the same phrase in Rom. 5:5. Commenting on this phrase in *ComRm*, Origen raises an exegetical question.²⁹ By the phrase ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, is Paul referring to the love "by which we love God" (*qua nos diligimus Deum*) or "with which we are loved by God" (*qua diligimur a Deo*)? Or, putting this more technically: do we have an *objective genitive* or a *subjective genitive* here?³⁰ According to Origen, if we take "love of God" as an objective genitive, the meaning is obvious. God has given us the love with which we can love him. But it is the second option (the subjective genitive) that aroused Origen's interest. For if it is the "love with which we are loved by God" that Paul had

²⁶ I discuss in some detail Origen's understanding of the Son as perfect image of the Father since perfectly procreated from the Father in Pui Him Ip, *Origen and the Emergence of Divine Simplicity before Nicaea* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming 2022), ch. 7.

²⁷ *ComCC* Prol.2.47-48 (GCS OW 9/1, 88, 8-20).

²⁸ *ComCC* Prol.2.48 (GCS OW 9/1, 88, 16-18).

²⁹ *ComRm* 4.9.14 (SC 539, 314-6).

³⁰ Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter: die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer 1-11* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1956), 156. Schelkle has helpfully pointed out that, in general, early Christian writers are divided on this question. Origen, Apollinaris, and Chrysostom opted for the subjective genitive; Augustine, Theodoret and Photius the objective genitive.

in mind, we have a very profound mystery revealed here. The mystery is that the love with which God loves us has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. When we read Rom. 5:5 this way, Origen suggests, then we may understand why the love of God is the greatest gift we receive from the Holy Spirit. For it is through this gift, the love with which we are loved by God, that we are able to love God who is *agapē*. It is difficult to believe that Origen's interpretation of Rom 5:5 has not been shaped by the logic that permeates 1 John 4: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us (4:10) ... we love him, because he first loved us" (4:19).

Origen's exegesis of Rom. 5:5 offers us a glimpse of how the Holy Spirit fits into his Trinitarian grammar of *agapē*. He insists that the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of love" (2 Tim. 1:7) in a way that parallels the Son as the "Son of love." As the "Spirit of love," the Holy Spirit bestows the love with which God loves us as his greatest gift to us and by which we may love God. As the revealer of this love, the Holy Spirit is the perfect love that proceeds from the same paternal source of love, the Father, just as the Son is also the perfect love *ek tou theou*:

For Paul himself names it "the Spirit of love" (2 Tim. 1:7), and God is called love (1 John 4:8), and Christ is designated "the Son of love" (Col. 1:13). Now if "the Spirit of love" and "the Son of love" and "the God of love" are found, it is certain that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are to be understood as springing from the one fount of paternal deity (*ex uno Paternae deitatis fonte*) ...³¹

This passage repeats the by now familiar point that it is the Father who is the subject, *ho theos*, of 1 John 4:8. As such, the Father is the *source* of love, the fount of paternal deity. The Son, denoted as the "Son of love" (*huios tēs agapēs*) and the Holy Spirit, denoted as the "Spirit of love" (*pneuma agapēs*) in 2 Tim. 1:7, are both love that is "of God" (*ek tou theou*), that is coming forth from one and the same paternal source (*ex uno paternae deitatis fonte*). This passage from *ComRm* thus reinforces the parallel between the Son and Holy Spirit as revealer of the Father as *agapē* we have seen previously in *ComCC*.

To sum up Origen's Trinitarian grammar of *agapē*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in no way differ with respect to *agapē*. Each is designated by one and the same perfect *agapē*. What distinguishes the Father as *agapē* from the Son and the Holy Spirit as *agapē* is the distinction between source and derivation. The Father himself is the source of *agapē*. The Son's *agapē* is perfectly procreated from this source and hence one and the same. Likewise, the Holy Spirit's *agapē* is perfectly derived insofar as his procession is from the same source, having perfectly searched out the *agapē* that is in the God.

2. Deification as Incorporation into the Triune Fellowship of *Agapē*

So far we have seen how Origen proposes a trinitarian understanding of *agapē* as a divine name. But if the Father is *he agapē* and the Son *he agapē ek tou theou*, and if the Father and the Son promise to abide in us (John 14:23), then what becomes of us, Origen asks?³² What is it that we receive in having *he agapē* and *he agapē ek tou theou* dwell in us?

³¹ *ComRm* 4.9.15 (SC 539, 316). Translation from FoC 103.

³² Origen poses this question in *ComCC* Prol. 2.28f primarily in a binitarian manner. But I will return later to how the Holy Spirit fits into his account of human deification.

Mindful of the indwelling divine love being taken in a carnal sense, clearly with the *simpliciores* in view, Origen returns to the central question in the second half of his discussion on *agapē* in section two of the Prologue in *ComCC*. How does the recognition of *agapē* as a divine name clarify that *erōs* and *agapē* are interchangeable in meaning? According to Origen, even in the case of God—where it is obvious that we should understand love in the spiritual sense—*agapē* and *erōs* are interchangeable. This is because divine *agapē* resembles the dynamics of a spiritual sense of *erōs*. This equivalence of *agapē* and (a spiritual sense of) *erōs* in the case of divine love becomes evident when we consider the nature of the love we receive from God in *Trinitarian* terms.³³ In unfolding this argument, Origen presents, to my knowledge for the first time in Christian thought, a vision of human deification expressed explicitly in terms of a Trinitarian grammar of love.

Origen sums up in a single sentence the nature of the love we receive from God: “We must recognize, therefore, that the *agapē* of God is always directed towards God, from whom also it takes its origin, and looks back towards the neighbour, with whom it is in kinship as being similarly created in incorruption.”³⁴ There are two equally important movements in the nature of love—love in the spiritual sense—that we receive from God. First, there is a movement towards the one who is the origin of love. Second, there is a movement towards our neighbour. Let us consider each of these movements in turn.

In the *Symposium*, Diotima famously defines love as desire to possess the good always.³⁵ *Erōs* arises in us because of our need for happiness. This happiness is promised by the possession of the good always, a state in which we will no longer need to desire anything. Hence *erōs*, Diotima further elaborates, is the desire to reach immortality. The reason why humans tend to confuse true love with carnal sexual *erōs* is because procreation, the result of sexual desire, actually has a deeper goal (*telos*) of extending our existence beyond death. Sexual procreation thus amounts to an expression of a deeper kind of *erōs*, a non-appetitive sort, which yearns for *immortality*. Deeply familiar with this Platonic understanding of *erōs*, Origen transposes this notion into a Christian key. According to him, when Scripture speaks about God as *agapē*, it is referring to none other than the one in whom *alone* is immortality. The God of 1 Tim. 6:16 is the same God of 1 John 4:8 who is love.³⁶ “For,” he writes, “because God, ‘who alone hath immortality and inhabiteth light inaccessible,’ is *agapē*, it is

³³ From this point on, I shall mostly stick with the English word “love” instead of leaving *agapē* and *erōs* in the original Greek. This choice seems apt in order to make evident Origen’s view that both terms can be used to express the same spiritual sense of love, that is, the sense attributed most primarily to God. Incidentally, Origen seems to have used *erōs* in *ComCC* largely in its spiritual, non-carnal sense, to the extent that this justifies somewhat Rufinus’ inconsistent translation of *agapē* by *amor* alongside the more common *dilectio/caritas* (see n.14 above). When I discuss a specific aspect of *agapē/erōs*, I shall return to my practice of leaving the word in its original Greek to avoid confusion.

³⁴ *ComCC* Prolog. 2.32 (GCS OW 9/1, 80,3-6): Igitur sciendum est Dei caritatem semper ad Deum tendere, a quo et originem ducit, et ad proximum respicere, cum quo participium gerit, utpote similiter creatum in incorruptione.

³⁵ *Symp.* 206a.

³⁶ Here I have interpreted Origen’s discussion of 1 Tim. 6:16 as specifically concerning the Father. This is not self-evident from the Latin text of *ComCC* Prolog. 2.28. Two reasons suffice to justify this interpretation. First, in this passage Origen unmistakably identifies the subject of 1 Tim. 6:16 as the subject of 1 John 4:8. As we have seen, it is certain that Origen takes 1 John 4:8 as referring to the Father and so my interpretation follows. Second, in *ComJn* 2.123-5 (SC 120, 288-90), Origen reads 1 Tim. 6:16 as teaching that only God the Father has absolutely unchangeable and immutable life. All others receive life from him, including those who are *with God* (*pros ton theon*, the only begotten Son included).

agapē alone that possesses immortality.³⁷ In other words, if *the* God who is love is also the one “who alone has immortality,” then this God, who is *agapē* in Scripture, is also truly the goal of *erōs*, that which will give lovers happiness. This is further confirmed in Scripture, Origen reminds us, by the famous Johannine theme of eternal life promised to believers. We read in John 17:2: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God [i.e. the Father], and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” It is the attainment of eternal life that is offered by faith in the Father who is love himself, and in the Son who is love *ek tou theou*. This is why Jesus replies to the Pharisees that the first and greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37; cf. Luke 10:27). For if *the* God alone has immortality, then the greatest commandment naturally flows from a Platonic understanding of *erōs* as desire for immortality, thereby transposing Platonic *erōs* into Christian *agapē*.

Hence, the love we receive from the indwelling of the Father and the Son is an *erōs* for *the* God who is love himself and source of eternal life. The first movement in the divine love we receive from God is therefore one that moves towards the *source* of love. But this is only half of the story. The love we receive is not only directed towards *the* God, for Origen has not forgotten the second greatest commandment, “love your neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:39) and John’s exhortation, “He that loves not does not know God” (1 John 4:8). It is in the very nature of the love we receive from God that a love is born in us that is directed towards our neighbours. Origen considers Christ as a perfect exemplar who models this double erotic movement to us. As his love is solely and purely directed towards the Father, so “our Saviour became neighbour to us, and when we were lying half-dead from the wounds the robbers had inflicted on us, He did not pass us by.”³⁸ Christ models for us how perfect love directed upward to the source of love, the Father, is by nature one that turns towards those in need of this love, our neighbours. In doing so, he demonstrates that the nature of divine love in him fully directs itself towards the neighbours. This love in Christ, furthermore, is nothing but the overflowing *agapē* that is poured out into each believer’s heart through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).³⁹ The upshot is that all who have received divine love through the indwelling of the Father and the Son poured out by the Holy Spirit into the human heart will imitate the outpouring of this love to their neighbours. For as Jesus Christ has demonstrated in his kenotic act of love, it is in accordance with the nature of divine love that it overflows towards the neighbour.

When viewed in this light, divine love begins to bear a close resemblance to what was described in the *Symposium* as pregnancy of the soul due to *erōs*. According to Diotima, while some seek immortality through desire of carnal procreation of children who can extend the memory of their existence, the philosophers instead seek immortality through desire of procreation of an incorporeal kind, one that produces offspring fitting for the *soul*, namely, “wisdom and the rest of virtue.”⁴⁰ The love that *the* God is, accord-

³⁷ ComCC Prol. 2.28 (GCS OW 9/1, 78, 8-10).

³⁸ ComCC Prol. 2.31 (GCS OW 9/1, 80,2-3).

³⁹ See ComRm 4.10.1-2 (SC 539, 318-22).

⁴⁰ *Symp.* 208e-209a.

ing to St. John, precisely mirrors this deeper, non-carnal, sense of *erōs*. For when a human person receives love from the indwelling of God, it begets in us a love of the neighbour that sums up the laws and the prophets, in short, the sum of all virtues. In this light, divine *agapē* once again begins to look very much like Platonic *erōs*, albeit transposed into a new Christian key.

To summarise Origen's argument so far, it is true to say that *the* God is exclusively called *agapē* and not *erōs*, as 1 John 4:8 asserts. But even in the case of love worthy of the divine, *agapē* and a spiritual sense of *erōs* become interchangeable in meaning. As we have seen, a thoroughly Trinitarian account of the nature of divine *agapē* in the receiver reveals a double *erotic* movement. For *agapē* firstly indicates the true fountain of goodness and immortality, God the Father, towards whom all *erōs* is properly directed. This *erōs* towards God is itself supplied by the indwelling of the Father who is the origin of this love, and the Son, who is the love *ek tou theou*. *Agapē* and *erōs* are thus interchangeable as terms that indicate the love directed upward towards the source of immortality. Furthermore, the love of God the Father gives birth to a love of the neighbour in those who have received him, a love that sums up the whole of the law and the prophets—the totality of virtues. This is best exemplified by the “Son of love” in his self-giving who counted us as his neighbours when we were still sinners (Rom. 5:6). Like the *erōs* that impregnates the soul, the *agapē* that characterises the Father and the Son also brings wisdom and all the virtues in the person in whom they dwell. This is the reason why for Origen even God can be called *erōs*, insofar as he is the ultimate *telos* of our love and the source of the same love that brings about a virtuous life, framed in Christian terms as love of neighbour.⁴¹

In a nutshell then, Origen's argument is that in a proper theological understanding of divine love, *agapē* imparts in whosoever receives it two erotic movements closely bound up with each other: the love of *the* God and the love of neighbour. It then matters not whether we call the love we receive from God *agapē* or *erōs*, nor does it matter whether we identify God as *agapē* or *erōs*. For *agapē* is a spiritual *erōs*. This language of divine love in us, regardless of whether it should be called *agapē* or *erōs*, constitutes the master-key in Origen's vision of human deification. In this vision, love in its most elevated sense, attributed even to God by St. John, specifies the state human persons are destined to attain: *beloved lovers*. Each human person is called to partake in the one love shared by the Father and the Son:

And because God is *agapē*, and the Son likewise, who is of God (*ex Deo*), is *agapē*, He requires in us something like Himself; so that through this *agapē* which is in Christ Jesus, we may be allied to God who is *agapē*, as it were in a sort of blood relationship through this name of *agapē*; even as he, who was already united to Him, said:

⁴¹ Hence Origen can recite with approval Ignatius of Antioch's statement: “my *erōs* is crucified,” identifying *erōs* Christologically as the Son. See *ComCC* Prol. 2.36 (GCS OW 9/1, 82,11-16). It is not clear, however, whether Origen would be willing to call the Father *erōs*. Ignatius' statement clearly refers to the crucified Son as *erōs* and not the Father. And as we have seen, it is in the Son in whom we find the full display of the double erotic movement. There is a case to be made, though, that the double erotic movement in the Son can also be found in the Father. The first movement toward immortality can be framed in terms of the Father's engagement in self-contemplation: *ComJn* 32.350 (SC 385, 336-38). The second movement toward humanity can be framed in terms of Origen's famous doctrine of the *passio caritatis* suffered by the Father: *HomEz* 6.6 (SC 352, 228-30) and *HomPs77* 9.1 (GCS OW 13, 467,16-468,3). Thus, it is possible for Origen to extend his argument for *erōs* as a divine name to the Father.

"Who shall separate us from the *agapē* of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" (Rom. 8:39)⁴²

This passage recapitulates several key themes we have seen so far. Origen reaffirms that the Father and Son are *one* love; but now he goes further in declaring that this one and the same love, which St John identifies with both Father and the Son, is demanded of us. Because in Latin Rufinus' translation of *theos* by *deus* cannot retain Origen's precise use of the definite article, we will have to conjecture what Origen's original thought might have been. It seems to me that a most plausible reconstruction is as follows:

And because *the* God is *agapē*, and the Son likewise, who is of God (*ex Deo*), is *agapē*, the Father requires in us something like himself; so that through this *agapē* which is in Christ Jesus, we may be allied (*sociemur*) to *the* God who is *agapē* (*Deo, qui est caritas*), as it were in a sort of blood relationship through this name of *agapē*.⁴³

This reading makes good sense because we have already seen how Origen identifies the Father as the subject of 1 John 4:8. The dative indirect object of the verb *sociemur* therefore must be the Father. Moreover, we know that the Son is the love *ek tou theou* through whom we come to receive the *agapē* that is the Father. So what Origen is likely speaking about in this passage concerns our union with *the* God, the Father, through the *agapē ek tou theou*, Jesus Christ. A fragment of Origen's *ComRm* on Rom. 5:5 adds further support to my conjectural reading. When we were still sinners, Origen writes,

... love is not in us, for we love all things more than we love God. But when, while we were in this manner, Christ died for us, then the love of *the* God (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγάπη) was established and subsisted in us, as we were liberated by the death of Christ from every obstacle to the alliance of the love of *the* God in us (τῆ συστάσει τῆς εἰς ἡμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγάπης). On this account then, we must understand by "established" (συνίστησι, cf. Rom. 5:8), that *the* God has established and subsisted his own love in us, which is properly obtained from nothing else but *the* God himself (συστάντος καὶ ὑφιστάντος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην, τὴν οὐδενὸς ἐτέρου κυρίως ἢ αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τυγχάνουσα).⁴⁴

⁴² *ComCC* Prol.2.29 (GCS OW 9/1, 14-19): Et quia Deus caritas est et Filius, qui ex Deo est, caritas est, sui simile aliquid requirit in nobis, ut per hanc caritatem, quae est in Christo Iesu, Deo, qui est caritas, uelut cognata quadam per caritatis nomen affinitate sociemur, sicut et ille, qui iam coniunctus ei dicebat: "Quis nos separabit a caritate Dei, quae est in Christo Iesu Domino nostro?"

⁴³ Though this is not immediately apparent, the appearance of the verb *socio* alludes to the importance of "fellowship" (*koinonia/societas*) as a concept in Origen's understanding of deification highlighted more explicitly elsewhere in *HomLv* 4.4 (SC 286, 168f). Commenting on the meaning of *koinonia* in Lev. 5:21 (LXX), Origen invokes several major New Testament uses of *koinonia* (Phil. 2:1-2, 1 John 1:3, 2 Pet. 1:4, 2 Cor. 6:14) in order to explain its spiritual meaning: it refers to the "*koinonia* of the Spirit" into which we are incorporated through love. Subsequently, Origen uses Lev. 5:21 as an exhortation to his hearers to "watch lest we negate this holy and divine fellowship" by sinning. This "*koinonia* of the Spirit" is nothing other than the Triune fellowship of *agapē* that Origen speaks of in this passage in *ComCC*.

⁴⁴ Fr.28 in Ramsbotham, "The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans. III," 363. I thank Isidoros Katsos and Sotiris Mitralaxis for helping me with translating this text.

This fragment confirms two aspects of my conjectural reading: (a) it is the Father, God with the article, with whom we are united in love through a newformed alliance of love and (b) it is through the love of the Son that the love of *the* God, which unites us with him, has been established in us.⁴⁵

It is in the discussion of Rom. 5:5 in *ComRm* once again where we get a glimpse of how Origen may have integrated the Holy Spirit into his vision of deification:

From the fullness of the Spirit, the fullness of love is infused into the hearts of the saints (Rom. 5:5) in order to receive participation in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), as the apostle Peter has taught, so that through this gift of the Holy Spirit, the word which the Lord said might be fulfilled, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us” (John 17:21). This is, of course, to be sharers of the divine nature by the fullness of love furnished through the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

Here, Origen combines Pauline, Johannine, and Petrine language and weaves them into a single whole. The Holy Spirit’s unique role is to pour forth the fullness of love into our hearts so that we may become participants of the divine nature that is love. But as we have seen, what is poured forth into our hearts is simply the love with which *the* God loves us. Whilst Origen does not say so explicitly in *ComRm*, in *ComCC* he goes further by suggesting that the love of God poured forth by the Holy Spirit in Rom. 5:5—the love with which *the* God loves us—comes to us through the love we receive from the Son. There he speaks of this process of deification through divine *agapē* in terms of the marital union of the Church/souls with the bridegroom.⁴⁷ The Song of Songs, according to Origen, was written to kindle a love for the “Son of love” in us so as to suffer a “wound of love” from him who is the “chosen dart” (Isaiah 49:2) appointed by *the* God to lure us back to him.⁴⁸ “Wounded by love” is the sure way towards union with the Father who is love. But how do we suffer this wound from the “Son of love”? It is precisely the Holy Spirit who directs souls worthy of divine *agape* towards the *Logos* who strikes this “wound of love” in us:

The Scripture before us therefore speaks of this love with which the blessed soul is kindled and inflamed towards the *Logos* of God; it [i.e. this Scripture] sings *by the Spirit* the song of the marriage (*epithalamii carmen per Spiritum canit*) whereby the Church is joined and allied to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom, desiring to be united to Him through the *Logos*, so that she may conceive by Him and be saved through this chaste begetting of children, when they—conceived as they are indeed

⁴⁵ See *FrComRm* 6.8 (Scherer, 226,6-9) for further evidence that Origen consistently envisions deification as union with the Father. Commenting on Rom. 5:2, he says that one sense of the glory hoped for by those who have peace with God is the attainment of Moses’s glory, which amounts to communion (κοινωνίαν) with *the Father* and a vision of his uncreated and transcendent nature (ἡ ἀγέννητος καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντα τοῦ Θεοῦ φύσις). Elsewhere, in the Latin text of *ComMt* 17.19 (GCS 40, 640,5-7), he speaks of this vision as the moment when “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2) which amounts to seeing *the Father* as light and love (though the Greek version of *ComMt* only contains “light” and not “love”).

⁴⁶ *ComRm* 4.9.15 (SC 539, 316,5-12). Translation from FoC 103.

⁴⁷ According to Origen, to be made one with God is to be known by God and to know him. The sense of union through love in deification therefore involves the kind of “knowing” in marital union. See *ComJn* 19.21-25.

⁴⁸ *ComCC* Prol. 2.16-17 (GCS OW 9/1, 70,9-24). For Origen, all “good things” required for the soul’s purification come from her marital union with the Word of God: *HomEz* 8.3 (SC 352, 290,27-9).

of the seed of the Word of God, and born and brought forth by the spotless Church, or by the souls that seek nothing bodily, nothing material, but are aflame with the single love of the Word of God—shall have persevered in faith and holiness with sobriety.⁴⁹

The love of God that a human person receives in order to be deified is the love of the Father, mediated through the love of the Son whose love strikes its target, the beloved, facilitated by the song of the Holy Spirit. The language in this passage illustrates how Origen completes his transposition of Diotima's language of the pregnancy of the soul into a Christian idiom: the Church conceives by the seed of the Logos, through the marriage Song sung by the Holy Spirit, so that she may be saved through the "chaste begetting" of spiritual children, i.e. a life of holiness and virtue. The marital union between the Church and Christ, which transforms humanity into a fellowship of love and thereby incorporates humanity into the Triune fellowship of love, is enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is thus subtly integrated into Origen's account of deification as the *facilitator* of our reception of the love of *the* God through encountering it in the Son of love.

Origen's vision of deification flows out of the conviction that love in its most fundamental and primary sense belongs to the Triune God. Our "very power of loving" comes from God.⁵⁰ Deification spells out how this process occurs—namely, how humans become lovers by acquiring a love derived from God. We become deified through union with *he agapē*, that is *ho theos* the Father, through union with *he agapē ek tou theou*, that is, *theos* the only-begotten Son, facilitated by *he agapē ek tou theou*, that is, *theos* the Holy Spirit. In the economy of salvation, God the Father, who is *agapē* (1 John 4:8), intends all of us to suffer the love that comes from him, his only-begotten Son who is *he agapē ek tou theou* (1 John 4:7), which is poured out as a gift of love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is also love *ek tou theou*, so that through becoming beloved we may be deified through adoption into the Triune fellowship of love. Having gazed at this Triune love, we enter as beloved into the divine fellowship of love by becoming lovers ourselves, redirecting the love of God towards others. As Origen puts it elsewhere, "love joins us to God."⁵¹ Our deification is conceived as incorporation into the sharing of one love between the Father and the Son. As we have seen in *ComRm*, this sharing of one love is precisely the meaning of Jesus' prayer that "as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us" (John 17:21). A person who has joined the divine fellowship of love can be rightly described as sharing the one love between the Father and the Son since it is one and the same love that indwells this person. For the result of the indwelling of divine love leads a human person to become a lover who loves with the same twofold erotic movement that characterises divine *agapē*. A deified person directs love towards the Father, the origin of love, and outpours this love towards his neighbours. In so doing, a human person imitates the love that is *ek tou theou*, the Son, and through him becomes a lover in imitation of *the* God who is love. And in every step of the way of becoming lovers, we are aided by the work of Holy Spirit who first initiates our deification by making

⁴⁹ *ComCC* Prol.2.46 (GCS OW 9/1, 86,33-88,7). Translation from ACW 26, slightly modified.

⁵⁰ *ComCC* Prol. 2.35 (GCS OW 9/1, 82, 1-4).

⁵¹ See *HomJer* 5.2 (GCS OW 11, 180,22-27).

us the *beloved*—through pouring out into our hearts the love with which the God loves us.

3. Re-thinking Origen's Subordinationism through his Trinitarian Theology of Love

It should be clear by now that the distinction between the Father as *he agapē* and the Son as *he agapē ek tou theou* shapes everything Origen has to say about love. How should we characterise this central element in his Trinitarian theology of love? I suggest that we should frame this distinction not as subordination but as a serious attempt at systematising the *Johannine* language of sonship. Four aspects of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love will suffice to substantiate this point.

Johannine Fatherhood and Limited Subordination in Johannine Sonship

Origen's understanding of sonship as implying a sense of dependence on, and participation in, the Father is deeply Johannine. As we have seen, it is the Father alone, *the God*, who is the ultimate *telos* of human deification. The Father is the source of love and the Son's love has its origin in the Father. Hence the Father is *he agapē* and the Son *he agapē ek tou theou*. This relation captures a theme that permeates the whole Johannine corpus, namely, that everything the Son is, has, and does, are *from* the Father (cf. John 3:34-35, 4:34, 5:19-22, 31-32, 36-38, 6:37-38, 7:28, 8:28, 10:18, 37-38, 13:3, 14:10, 31, 15:10, 15, 17:1-2, etc.). The distinction between the Father as *he agapē* and the Son as *he agapē ek tou theou* thus captures the Johannine insistence of the Father as the *telos* to whom all things return, and the Son as the one sent from the Father *through whom* all things can return to him.

Intrinsic to this Johannine understanding of Fatherhood is a limited sense of subordination entailed in sonship. Throughout Origen's corpus, he insists that the Son will subordinate himself under the Father on the day when he returns to the Father all those whom the Father subjects under him, as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:28: "And when all things shall be subject unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him [i.e. the Father] that put all things under him, that *the God* may be all in all."⁵² The sense of subordination, associated with the verb ὑποτάσσω which appears three times in this verse, contains the sense of the Son subordinating himself under the authority of the Father. In *HomPs36* 2.1, Origen explains that Christ desires to one day subordinate himself under the Father when finally all those whom the Father has subordinated under the Son have indeed been subordinated. Then, the Son "will count himself among those subordinated and be bold to say, 'I am subordinated to God,' (Ps. 36:1) when all things prove to be subordinated to the *logos*."⁵³ This limited sense of subordination in Origen, however, once again derives from a Johannine insistence on the difference between the Father as the *telos* of all things and the Son as the one *through whom* all things participate in this *telos* (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). Origen's commitment to a limited subordination is thus part and parcel of his Johannine understanding of sonship.

Unity of Love between Father and Son

Origen's understanding of sonship as possessing a perfect unity of love with the Father also springs from close attention to the features of Johannine language. I have hinted

⁵² For further details, see Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Origen's Anti-Subordinationism and Its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line," *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 1 (2011): 21-49.

⁵³ *HomPs36* 2.1 (GCS OW 13, 128, 17-19).

above that Rufinus' Latin translation might well have retained Origen's understanding of the unity of love between the Father and the Son. Scholars are rightly entitled to be suspicious: given Origen's distinction between the Father and the Son, can he really say, as we read in Rufinus' Latin, that "the Father and the Son are one and the same in every respect" because both are called *agapē*?⁵⁴ Although it is difficult to reach a conclusive judgment, I am persuaded that 1 John 4 allows Origen to maintain, on the one hand, the distinction between the love that *the* God is and the love *ek tou theou*, and, on the other, the identity of the love in the Father and the Son. The key is found in the Greek text of 1 John 4. Throughout the chapter, it is *the* God—with the article—who is identified as *he agapē*. This is especially evident from 1 John 4:16, where we read, "And we have known and have believed *the* love which *ho theos* has in us. *Ho theos* is love, and he who remains in *the* love remains in *the* God and *the* God remains in him."⁵⁵ This allows one to assume that 1 John 4:8 and 16 can be interpreted like John 1:1, that is, *the* God is considered as the origin and source of *agapē* just as he is the origin and source of divinity. But crucially in 1 John 4:7, *agapē*—with the article—is also identified as *ek tou theou*. And this is supposed to explain why "he who loves is born of *the* God (*ho agapōn ek tou theou gegennētai*) and knows *the* God." If we read this verse according to Origen's logic, St. John is saying that the one who loves like *the* God becomes *he agapē ek tou theou*, that is, one who is *agapē* in the same sense as *the* God is *agapē*. It seems to me hardly likely that the article appearing in verse 7 could have escaped Origen's notice. If this is the case, then it is possible that he did consider *he agapē ek tou theou* in verse 7 to be one and the same as *he agapē* identified with *ho theos* throughout the chapter. The difference between the two is purely contained in the *ek tou theou*, namely, one is source and the other begotten. If my reading is right, then perhaps it is precisely the Johannine language of sonship in 1 John 4 that led Origen to maintain that the Father and the Son are one and the same *agapē* in a way that John 1 would not allow him to maintain that the Father and the Son are one and the same divinity.⁵⁶

The Johannine *Ek tou theou*: The Son and sons of God

While Origen considers deification in fully Trinitarian terms, following Johannine language he discerns the role of the Son as the specific entry point for humanity to be incorporated into the life of the Trinity. Humans are not incorporated into the Triune fellowship of love by becoming divine in general or even becoming the Father or the Holy Spirit in particular, but in the specific sense of becoming sons of God in perfect imitation of the "firstborn" Son of God. As we have seen, human deification

⁵⁴ Rufinus' unreliability when it comes to translating Origen's Trinitarian theology is well documented. See Ronald E. Heine, trans., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 30–39.

⁵⁵ ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει.

⁵⁶ These two emphases are not contradictory due to Origen's use of the preposition "in" (*ἐν*) in his Trinitarian metaphysics, which allows him to hold unity and distinction together. This is beautifully illustrated in *HomLk* 25.7–8 (SC 87, 334–36) in which Origen asks whether the greatest commandment to love God (= the Father) "with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with all your strength" forbids one to love Christ too. His answer is that one should "love the Lord your God *in* Christ" (*Dilige Dominum Deum tuum in Christo*) since one cannot have a different love of the Father than that of the Son. The love of the Father includes love of the Son and vice versa because the Father is *in* the Son and the Son *in* the Father (cf. John 14:9–11). This is how Origen can hold together (a) the greatest commandment that indeed commands us to love the Father and not the Son, and (b) the claim that the love of God (= the Father) is *in* the love of the Son (cf. Rom. 8:39). The same point is expressed differently in *ComCC* ProL.2.35 (GCS OW 9/1, 82,4–7): *unum enim atque idem est diligere Deum et diligere bona*. This is the same point because the many "good things" (*bona* = τὰ ἀγαθὰ cf. Isaiah 52:7 *apud* Rom. 10.15) were understood by Origen as referring to the person of Jesus Christ. See *ComJn* 1.52–62 (SC 120, 88–92), especially 1.52 and 1.62.

is conceived by Origen in terms of the double erotic movement that recapitulates the two greatest commandments. But to participate in this double erotic movement is to become a perfect son (child) of God, i.e. to participate in the double erotic movement of the “firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). Cast in the language of the Song of Songs, as Origen did in the Prologue of *ComCC*: if we are in love with the bridegroom, then we would be in love with what he desires us to be.⁵⁷ The bridegroom desires nothing more than loving his Father, *the* God, and giving himself for his neighbour. For this account to make sense, the Son—whom we imitate in order to become deified—must also share with us the same double erotic movement towards the Father and the neighbour. Sonship then must entail a sense of dependence or “need” if our total identification with Christ is to be possible. As Origen explains in *HomPs15* 1.3, Christ can teach us to pray the words of Ps. 15, “protect me, Lord, because I have hoped in you”, only if “he is in want of the Father and because only the God of the Universe wants not and needs no one else (ἐπεὶ ὁ σωτὴρ ἐνδεὴς τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μόνος ὁ θεὸς τῶν ὅλων ἀνευδεὴς καὶ οὐδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχει).”⁵⁸ He immediately clarifies that the Saviour is “in want” in a special sense different from us, namely, that he is only in want of the Father and depends on him alone, whereas we are in want of the Father as well as of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the angels, of the Apostles, and so on. Nevertheless, the point remains that to be son (child) is to be “in want of God and Father.” A sense of dependence is therefore key to sonship, and crucial for Origen’s account of deification as becoming sons of God.

This language of sonship and deification is deeply Johannine, derived from a close reading of 1 John. For Origen’s theology of sonship rests upon the Johannine use of *ek tou theou* as referring to Christ (the “firstborn”) as well as all those who become sons through Christ.⁵⁹ Origen’s refusal to separate the two indicates his faithfulness to a Johannine understanding of sonship. Throughout this epistle, we find the following logic which seems to be the true source of Origen’s theology of sonship: (a) *the* God is *he agapē* (1 John 4:8), source of love; (b) a person who loves is like *the* God since he does what is in accordance with who *the* God is, namely, *agapē*; (c) if a person loves like *the* God, such a person is said to be born of God (*ek tou theou gegennētai*) and *he agapē ek tou theou*. The genius of Origen is that he sees this Johannine logic as applicable to both the Son of God, who becomes *he agapē ek tou theou eternally* through imitating the Father, and other adopted sons of God who become *he agapē ek tou theou* through imitating the firstborn, Jesus Christ. This parallel is furthermore deeply rooted in the Johannine insistence on the connection between what sons of God *do* (*poiein*), and who sons of God *are* (*einai*).⁶⁰ Origen’s theology of sonship thus derives from a deep attention to the Johannine parallel between the Son who *is* divine because he always *loves* perfectly in imitation of his Father, and the rest of humanity who become divine through perfecting the divine act of loving in imitation of the Son.

⁵⁷ *ComCC* Prol.2.43 (GCS OW 9/1, 86,6-17).

⁵⁸ *HomPs15* 1.3 (GCS OW 13, 76, 17-18).

⁵⁹ See *ComRm* 7.5.2 (SC 543, 302, 18-22). Only those who are “called according to purpose” (Rom. 8:28-29) can be “established amongst the many brothers of whom the Son of love is the first-born, and the ‘image of the invisible God’ and ‘the first-born of all creation’ (Col. 1:15).”

⁶⁰ See 1 John 3:8: “He who does righteousness is righteous, just as he [that is, Jesus Christ the firstborn] is righteous.” Likewise, the one who loves perfectly becomes love in imitation of *the* God who is love (1 John 4:7-8). This idea of divine sonship as conditioned upon the love of the firstborn Son, Jesus Christ, is evident in *ComJn* 20.64-65 (SC 290, 186f) and 20.135-51 (SC 290, 222f). This is why love of *the* God (= the Father) is inseparable from love of Jesus Christ: *HomLk* 25.7-8 (SC 87, 334-36).

Johannine Sonship and Spiration: Linear vs. Triangular and Double vs. Single Mediation

Origen's language of spiration offers a final illustration of how the internal logic of his Trinitarian theology of love mirrors the dynamics within the Johannine idiom of sonship. Origen's discussion of the Holy Spirit as love brings up a point made long ago by Manlio Simonetti, namely that the Alexandrian's Trinitarian theology oscillates between what he calls the "linear model" and the "triangular" model of the Trinity.⁶¹ On the one hand, from the discussion of Rom. 5:5 in *ComRm*, Origen is explicit about the Son and the Holy Spirit as both *he agapē ek tou theou*. The love of the Son and the love of the Holy Spirit are both derivative from one and the same source, the Father. This certainly suggests a "triangular" rather than a "linear" model of the Trinity. On the other hand, as we have seen in *ComCC*, Origen can also align the three persons in a linear fashion: the Father is the source of love revealed by the Son (love *ek tou theou*), which is then poured out into believers' hearts through the Holy Spirit (also love *ek tou theou*). The tension between Simonetti's two models is thus in full display in Origen's Trinitarian theology of love. This tension creates a serious ambiguity in determining the sense of being *derivative*, which is central not only for understanding the meaning of sonship (and distinguishing it from fatherhood) but also for distinguishing sonship from spiration. As we have seen, through the phrase *ek tou theou* Origen attributes a sense of being derivative to both being son and being the Holy Spirit. Given Origen's oscillation between the "linear" and "triangular" model, it is then difficult to determine whether the sense of *ek tou theou* denoting Johannine sonship coincides with the sense of *ek tou theou* denoting the Johannine spiration, i.e. both the Son and the Holy Spirit are derived from the Father as origin. Or would it be better to differentiate the sense of *ek tou theou* in sonship from the sense in spiration?⁶² In line with the second option, Giovanni Hermanin de Reichenfeld has recently defended a distinction between the Son's "ontological subordination of priority" and the Holy Spirit's "ontological double subordination of priority," evidently grounded in the "linear" model evident in *ComJn* 2.74f.⁶³

⁶¹ See Manlio Simonetti, "Sulla teologia trinitaria di Origene," in *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1993), 109–44, sec III. I thank Stefano Salemi for helping me with translating Simonetti's essay.

⁶² This is by no means a trivial ambiguity. It has significant implications for the theological content of Origen's Trinitarian account of deification. As he says in *HomPs15* 1.3, the difference between the firstborn Son of God and the rest of humanity (i.e. adopted sons) is that Christ is "in want only of the God of the Universe" whereas the rest of humanity is "in want of God, of Christ, of Holy Spirit ..." and so on. Putting this back into the language of love, we can say Christ's union with the Father through love is unmediated and direct whereas our union with the Father through love is indirect and mediated through the Son, the Holy Spirit, prophets, apostles, and so on. But this raises a question: is Christ's union with the Father mediated by the Holy Spirit at all? The answer depends on whether one responds in terms of Origen's "linear" or "triangular" model. In his more linear moments (like in *HomPs15* above), Origen gives the impression that Christ's union with the Father is unmediated. But it is clear elsewhere that the situation is more complicated, as he writes in *PA* 2.6.4. The emerging picture here is that in the one Christ the union with the divine Logos was granted as a reward to the human soul of Jesus for his perfect love *through the mediation of the Holy Spirit*. The human soul of Jesus' union with the Father is thus mediated through the Holy Spirit, though it is unclear whether the Logos' union with the Father is so as a result. Now if from eternity to eternity the Logos is united with the human soul of Jesus in one spirit through love (as suggested by Origen), then perhaps *PA* 2.6.4 can be read as evidence that he did think of the Godman Christ's union with the Father as mediated through the Holy Spirit. The question of mediation in Christ's union with the Father highlights the theological significance of the ambiguity in Origen's *ek tou theou* language.

⁶³ Hermanin de Reichenfeld, *The Spirit, the World and the Trinity*, 48–58.

I suggest a preferable solution, which is to recognise that Origen has no intention to resolve this ambiguity because it is present in Johannine language. The phrase *ek tou theou* is used throughout 1 John 4 to speak of the Spirit that comes from God (1 John 4:1-3) as well as sons who love in imitation of *the* God (1 John 4:4, 6, 7-8). Furthermore, the ambiguity arguably is also already there in the Gospel of John. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26) and Jesus prays that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples (John 14:26). On the other hand, the Son also says he will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples from the Father (John 15:26), suggesting that the Holy Spirit is sent *from* the Father *through* the Son. The ambiguity between sonship and spiration in Origen's trinitarian theology of love is thus already present in the Johannine corpus. Given the Johannine shape of Origen's Trinitarian thought, it is perhaps more plausible to explain the ambiguity in his use of the phrase *ek tou theou* as arising from his insistence on mirroring the Johannine language. In other words, by imitating Johannine language, Origen inherits the ambiguity within it. His distinction between the Father as *he agapē* and the Son/Holy Spirit as *he agapē ek tou theou* preserves the similarities, differences, as well as the ambiguity that exists, between sonship and spiration within the Johannine corpus. If my reading is on the right track, then the pneumatological dimension of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love further substantiates the point that the sense of derivation central to his use of *ek tou theou* to differentiate the Son from the Father has its origin in the *Johannine* language of sonship itself.

Conclusion

The foregoing reconstruction urges a reassessment of Origen as a foundational source, if not the fountainhead, of a long tradition of pursuing a Trinitarian understanding of love in Christian theology. The materials examined here open up multiple avenues for re-evaluating the legacy of Origen on this important theme. Was Origen a forerunner of Augustine's famous exploration of this theme, perhaps via his exegesis of 1 John and Rom. 5:5? How much can the differences between Origen's and Augustine's approach be explained due to the lack of the article in Latin when speaking of God?⁶⁴ Did Origen's Trinitarian theology of love leave a legacy in the Victorines—especially Richard St. Victor whose approach has shaped modern trinitarian theology—since the Alexandrian was widely read amongst them?⁶⁵ To what extent did Origen anticipate aspects of the Trinitarian analysis of “God is love” so central in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian religious thought?⁶⁶ Each of these lines of inquiry promises to reconfigure our

⁶⁴ For instance, Origen could hardly make the famous Augustinian inversion from “God is love” to “love is God” as this move only makes sense in Latin (*deus caritas est*).

⁶⁵ The link is especially intriguing given the centrality of Origen in the reading cycle of the Victorine community. See Grover A. Zinn, Jr., “The Influence of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* upon the writings of Hugh of St. Victor,” in *Reading and Wisdom: The De Doctrina Christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 48–60, at 49–50.

⁶⁶ See Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology: The Love Paradigm and the Retrieval of Western Medieval Love for Mysticism in Modern Russian Trinitarian Thought (from Solovyov to Bulgakov)* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1998); Johannes Miroslav Oravec, *God as Love: The Concept and Spiritual Aspects of Agapē in Modern Russian Religious Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014). Though direct influence is unlikely, an interesting question to pose is whether an “Origenian-shaped” understanding of Trinitarian love could have been inherited by the Russians through their direct reception of medieval mysticism (which was certainly shaped in a significant way by Origen). Origen's relation with Solovyov, Florensky, Karsavin, and Bulgakov especially warrants further investigation.

understanding of Origen's place in the history of Trinitarian theology and thus deserves further exploration.

Origen's Trinitarian theology of love also offers new grounds for questioning subordinationism as a characterisation of his thought. I have argued that what scholars tend to identify as Origen's subordinationism has its source in a Johannine understanding of sonship and should therefore be aptly renamed as such. It is sonship, understood as *he agapē ek tou theou*, that constitutes the heartbeat of Origen's Trinitarian grammar of love and his vision of human deification. Finally, the shift to speaking of Origen's Johannine theology of sonship suggested in this essay clarifies a new insight into the architecture of his thought, one that is unavailable when viewing his Trinitarian theology through the lens of subordinationism. As we have seen, at the heart of Origen's Trinitarian theology of love is the language of sonship bound up with the phrase *ek tou theou*. But it is no coincidence that Origen speaks of sonship without stressing the difference between divine and human sonship. This ambiguity reflects his conviction that the Son is in fact the archetypal Son of God in whom the rest of humanity may participate in the Trinitarian fellowship of love. We become gods by sharing the sense in which the Son is love, that is, *he agapē ek tou theou*. Deification means becoming perfect images of the perfect image of *the God*; hence we pray *with* and not *to* the firstborn Son of God since we pray with him to *the God* with the words, "our Father." In doing so, we assume the firstborn Son's relation with *the God* as our own.⁶⁷ Intrinsic to Origen's vision of deification, therefore, is the role of sonship as the "middle" between *the God* and the rest of humanity.⁶⁸ Sonship constitutes the distinctive role in the life of the Trinity that is capable of being assumed by all human beings through adoption.⁶⁹

The Johannine language of sonship as the "middle" between *the God* and humanity reveals a parallel between the logic of deification and the logic of the Incarnation in Origen's thought: they are complementary theological considerations that drove Origen to the concept of the *godman* (*theanthropos/deus homo*) as the "middle."⁷⁰ In deification, the question addressed by the middle is "how can humanity become divine"? The middle is required because it is necessary to conceive a distinctive mode of divine existence which all deified human persons can assume. As I have shown, this divine mode of existence is sonship or godmanhood (though Origen never

⁶⁷ *PEuch* 15.1-4 (GCS OW 21, 158f).

⁶⁸ Though there is a complication here, as highlighted by Pietras, *L'amore in Origene*, 79–81. Is it the human soul of Jesus which we can properly speak of as the "middle"? Or is it the *hypostasis* of Jesus Christ, the Godman, consisting in the union of Wisdom and Logos with the human soul of Jesus? It would require another essay to address to extent to which the force of Johannine sonship as the "middle" is strictly attributed by Origen only to the human soul of Jesus or not.

⁶⁹ Origen does differentiate between Jesus Christ and adopted sons of God. The natural distinction which emerges from his Johannine understanding of sonship as "middle" is one that lies in the degree of mediation required in one's union with the God, the Father. The Son of God, the "firstborn of all creation," is Son eternally and is in need of no other mediator in his union with the Father (though see the complication in n.62 above). Other sons of God are in need of mediators in their union with the Father. Pietras has drawn attention to a fragment of Origen's commentary on John 3:35 ("The Father loves the Son") in which he makes the distinction between the love the Father has for the world (he loves insofar as he is God) and the specific love he has for the Son (he loves insofar as he is Father). See Pietras, *L'amore in Origene*, 21. This distinction may suggest that Origen identifies an absolutely unique sense in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is loved by the Father that is not shared by other sons of God. This seems to be Pietras' position. But without further context, one can easily imagine that the "Fatherly love" that Origen speaks of in this fragment may well be one that equally applies to all sons. My pushback against Pietras' categorisation of love is that he does not differentiate between the love God has for deified sons of God and the love God has in general for the world. These two categories are obviously distinct in the Johannine corpus.

⁷⁰ *PA* 2.6.3 (Behr, 2:206).

speaks of this in the generic sense but the specific *hypostasis* of the *theanthropos*). This is why I have emphasised that, for Origen, deification is not to become *the* God (= the Father) or the Holy Spirit but to become children of God like the Son. In the Incarnation, the question posed is reversed: “how can divinity become human”? The “middle” is likewise required because it is necessary in order to conceive of a distinctive mode of divine existence which can assume a body. This divine mode of existence is the *hypostasis* of the Son as *theanthropos*. Here, once again, Origen did not envisage a generic understanding of the divine becoming human or the specific person of the Father or the Holy Spirit becoming human. It is specifically the Son who assumes a body. The Johannine logic of deification as becoming sons and the assumption of humanity in the Incarnation are thus two sides of the same coin in Origen’s thought, namely, how the “middle,” the *hypostasis* of the *theanthropos*, bridges divinity and humanity. This parallel between the logic of deification (as becoming sons) and the logic of Incarnation is disguised if we speak of subordination in Origen. For the language of subordination suggests too rigid a distinction between divinity and humanity, which leaves little space for the “middle” that Origen recognises as integral to the inner dynamics of Johannine sonship as *ek tou theou*. The language of subordination forces one to interpret Origen as either teaching that the Son is divine, in the sense of being source (thus blurring the logic that it is the “sonship mode of divinity” that we become and assumes humanity), or teaching that the Son is a mere creature (thus neglecting the fact that to be born of God—*ek tou theou gegennētai*—is to be fully capable of being fully divine through the unity of love as in 1 John 4:7-8). Imposing such a binary does violence to Origen’s way of thinking since a “middle” is fundamental to the basic Johannine shape of his Trinitarian theology. It is therefore unsurprising that as the creator-creature distinction becomes increasingly sharp in the fourth century,⁷¹ inevitably Origen’s Trinitarian theology becomes more and more incomprehensible within such an intellectual framework. If this brief analysis is on the right track, then Origen’s Trinitarian theology of love offers new resources to clarify the architecture of his account of the relation between divinity and humanity.

⁷¹ Most notably in Athanasius. See Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998).