

Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit

Micah M. Miller. *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. 208pp. \$100. Hardcover. 9780198895749.

Micah M. Miller gives us one of the first book-length studies of Origen's view of the Holy Spirit, in this volume in the Oxford Early Christian Studies series. Better still, Miller has written a carefully argued study with copious references to and interaction with Origen's extant work. Miller claims previous shorter studies have generally placed Origen not within his context but within later contexts and controversies that Origen himself does not address. Miller, then, hopes to understand Origen's view of the Holy Spirit from Origen's context, while avoiding anachronistic readings of Origen.

Chapter 1 is likely the most critical for setting up Miller's arguments regarding Origen's view of the relation between the Father's *auto-X* properties and the Son's participation in the Father's divinity via participation in those *auto-X* properties. The first chapter consists of a review and summary of the *auto-X* properties, to build Miller's case for the Holy Spirit's deriving the Spirit's attributes first from the Father and then from the Son via participation in the Father and the Son. This also feeds into a hierarchical reading of Origen's account of the Son and the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father. Later language regarding equality among the Father, Son, and Spirit should be avoided when reading Origen, according to Miller—which is one of Miller's emphases throughout the rest of the book (4).

In chapter 2, Miller argues for a particular mode of generation of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. He divides this chapter into three sections of discussion: the hierarchy, the mode of the generation of the Holy Spirit, and the origin of the attributes of the Spirit. He builds from his reading of Origen's writings regarding the sharing of *auto-X* properties between the Father and the Son to argue for a sharing of attributes from the Father through the Son and to the Holy Spirit (44). Where Origen is unclear on the matter of the eternity of the Spirit, Miller seems willing to live with ambiguity but also comes down on what he thinks is the more likely answer to the question. On the question itself, Miller suggests it is more likely that the Holy Spirit is thought by Origen to eternally be in contemplation of the Father through which the Spirit receives those attributes from the Father and the Son (75). Miller would, however, deny that the three share the same substance. According to Miller, Origen clearly indicates a different substance, possibly due to his concern regarding Monarchianism (60).

In chapter 3, Miller discusses the concept of the seven-ness and unity in Origen's writings of the Holy Spirit in Origen's writings. Miller initially interacts with Bogdan Bucur's work on angelomorphic pneumatology and finds himself in some agreement with Bucur on Origen, namely in that Origen departs from Clement of Alexandria in terms of the Holy Spirit's role and power. However, Origen does not seem to depart from Clement in thinking of the Holy Spirit as both one and seven, even if he "emphasizes the unity of the Holy Spirit to a greater extent than *Shepherd* and Clement (88)." Miller uses Plato and the Hippocratics to assert that Origen views the Holy Spirit as made up of seven powers that are all in unity (93–94). The Holy Spirit, for Origen, is one substance, although unified as seven powers. Believers can be said to participate in these powers and so receive some measure of them. These powers are received as gifts, with seven "designating multiplicity, rather than a literal list of seven gifts" (99).

Miller discusses the activity of and gifting by the Holy Spirit, in chapter 4. He argues against confusion on the part of Origen when Origen attributes the same activity to the Father and the Son that he attributes to the Spirit (119). This ambiguity occurs because Origen holds to a hierarchical and participatory account of the Father, Son, and Spirit, so he is able to think activities of the Spirit are ultimately sourced in the Son and the Father. Origen is, then, understood to be holding to an account of the Spirit wherein works that can be predicated of the Spirit can also be predicated of the Son and the Father without any confusion of the three, because all three persons take part in the activity (such as with gift-giving).

Miller locates holiness as the primary attribute of the Holy Spirit as identified by Origen, but not the only gift the Spirit gives through the Father and the Son (111–112). According to Miller, Origen also understands intercession of the Holy Spirit “to be a common operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (123). This is so, even as it is also an activity explicitly predicated of the Holy Spirit. These and other operations can be activities of the Holy Spirit as well as the Father and the Son, precisely because of the Spirit’s participation in the Father and the Son.

In chapter 5, Miller considers the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of humans. He does this in two ways: First, he examines the role of the Holy Spirit in cooperating with Christ in salvation. Second, he considers the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing Christians to perfection. Miller convincingly argues that Origen thought the Holy Spirit could be received only by a person worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Miller points out that Origen is ambiguous about what it might mean to be worthy, as the Holy Spirit seems in some instances to provide the needed sanctification, which seems to be received only after repentance from sins (143). Miller suggests that Origen’s view is that of a reception that most commonly occurs at baptism but that a believer may not be worthy of the Holy Spirit at baptism, so this means reception may also come later (141–142). This also means a believer may receive the Holy Spirit prior to their baptism. Miller also suggests Origen’s writings indicate the potential loss of the Holy Spirit may not lead to a loss of salvation (144–145). Rather, Origen seems to suggest that baptism with fire, while not preferable, still leads to salvation in the event a believer sins and loses the Holy Spirit.

Miller also considers the immateriality of the material, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit imparted to believers by the Holy Spirit. Miller asserts that Origen thinks of these gifts as immaterial even while using a word that could denote a material (148–149). Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit indwells everyone who receives this gift. This is also a kind of participation in the Holy Spirit, leading to a putting to death of sin and resulting in greater participation until perfection is reached (152–153). Miller emphasizes that, for Origen, this is also the work of the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit and not a work of the Holy Spirit alone.

In his conclusion, Miller manages to include a relatively short section interacting with Origen’s perceived impact on fourth-century theologians as they interpret Scripture in ways that seem to build off Origen’s readings of various texts, which range from Eunomius of Cyzicus to Eusebius to Cyril of Jerusalem to Didymus the Blind to Basil of Caesarea. If a reader were to follow Miller’s view of Origen and the Holy Spirit, this portion of the book’s conclusion could provide a fruitful path forward to explore how Origen affects later development in the theology of the Holy Spirit.

While not every reader will agree with Miller in his conclusions—the subordinate role of the Holy Spirit in a participation schema involving the Son participating in the Father and the Holy Spirit participating in both—Miller’s arguments for his positions are cogent and well thought out. Some may also disagree with Miller’s somewhat more sanguine approach to Latin translations of Origen’s work as well as the ability to correctly differentiate between Origen’s thoughts regarding the Holy

Spirit and the thoughts of an admirer's attempt to make Origen sound more orthodox. However, Miller is extremely clear in his writing. Although this is a technical work with appropriate jargon, it is not so overfilled with jargon as to render it unreadable or meaningless. Another positive note regarding the book is that the sheer breadth of Origen's work with which Miller interacts is impressive and helpful. Miller frequently interacts with long quotes from Origen for readings that are important to the points Miller makes regarding the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in Origen's thought. Unfortunately, the cost of this book will keep it out of many students' hands, but one can hope theological librarians will consider purchasing this volume for their collections. This is a valuable book for any theological library and a welcome addition to the secondary literature regarding Origen and his take on pneumatology.

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