

Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* (220-230 CE)

Preface.8. Then, finally, that the Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have a meaning, not such only as is apparent at first sight, but also another, which escapes the notice of most. For those (words) which are written are the forms of certain mysteries, and the images of divine things. Respecting which there is one opinion throughout the whole Church, that the whole law is indeed spiritual; but that the spiritual meaning which the law conveys is not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the word of wisdom and knowledge.

I.i.1 “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” Truly He is that light which illuminates the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth, as is said in the [thirty-sixth Psalm](#), “In Thy light we shall see light.” For what other light of God can be named, “in which any one sees light,” save an influence of God, by which a man, being enlightened, either thoroughly sees the truth of all things, or comes to know God Himself?

5. Having refuted, then, as well as we could, every notion which might suggest that we were to think of God as in any degree corporeal, we go on to say that, according to strict truth, God is incomprehensible, and incapable of being measured. For whatever be the knowledge which we are able to obtain of God, either by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that He is by many degrees far better than what we perceive Him to be.

6. Our eyes frequently cannot look upon the nature of the light itself—that is, upon the substance of the sun; but when we behold his splendour or his rays pouring in, perhaps, through windows or some small openings to admit the light, we can reflect how great is the supply and source of the light of the body. So, in like manner, the works of Divine Providence and the plan of this whole world are a sort of rays, as it were, of the nature of God, in comparison with His real substance and being. As, therefore, our understanding is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is, it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures. God, therefore, is an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts *Μονάς* [a singular reality], and, so to speak, *Ἐνάς* [One], and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning.

II.ix.6 Now when ‘in the beginning’ he created what he wished to create, that is rational beings, he had no other reason for creating them except himself, that is, his goodness. As therefore he himself, in whom was neither variation nor change nor lack of power, was the cause of all that was to be created, he created all his creatures equal and alike, for the simple reason that there was in him no cause that could give rise to variety and diversity.

I.vi.2 For the end is always like the beginning; and as there is one end of things, so we must understand that there is one beginning of all things, and as there is one end of many things, so from one beginning arise many differences and varieties, which in their turn are restored, through God’s goodness, through their subjection to Christ and their unity with the Holy Spirit, to one end, which is like the beginning [namely, when “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28)].

III.vi.1 The purpose of this was that man should acquire [perfection] for himself by his own earnest efforts to imitate God, so that while the possibility of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning through the honour of the 'image', he should in the end through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect 'likeness.'

II.vi.3 For since he is the invisible 'image' of the 'invisible God', he granted invisibly to all rational natures whatsoever a participation in himself, in such a way that each obtained a degree of participation proportionate to the loving affection with which he clung to him.

II.i.1 If our argument there is admitted to be sound, what other cause can we imagine to account for the great diversity of this world except the variety and diversity of the motions and declensions of those who fell away from that original unity and harmony in which they were at first created by God?

II.ix.6 But since these rational creatures . . . were endowed with the power of free will, it was this freedom which induced each one by its own voluntary choice either to make progress through the imitation of God or to deteriorate through negligence. . . . For this reason the Creator will not appear to have been unjust when, according to the above principles, he placed everyone in a position proportionate to his merit; nor will the happiness or unhappiness of anyone's birth, or any condition whatever that may fall to his lot, be supposed to be due to chance; nor will it be believed that there are different creators of souls that are diverse by nature.

II.iv.7 For all things were created by the Word of God and by his wisdom, and were set in order through the operation of his righteousness; and in his gracious compassion he provides for all and exhorts all to be cured by whatever remedies they may, and incites them to salvation.

II.v.3 [T]he truth is that those who have sinned need severer remedies for their cure, and it is for this reason that he brings upon them the afflictions which, though aiming at improvement, seem at the moment to convey a sense of pain. . . . And when God afflicts those who deserve punishment, how else is it except for their good?

II.vi.3 Moreover, what could more appropriately be 'one spirit' with God than this soul, which joined itself so firmly in love to God to be worthy of being called 'one spirit' with him?

II.vi.6 In this manner, then, that soul which, like a piece of iron in the fire, was forever placed in the word, forever in the wisdom, forever in God, is God in all its acts and feelings and thoughts; and therefore it cannot be called changeable or alterable, since by being ceaselessly kindled it came to possess unchangeability through its unity with the word of God.

IV.iv.4 This is why Christ is set forth as an example to all believers, because as he ever chose the good, even before he knew the evil at all, and loved righteousness and hated iniquity, wherefore God anointed him with the oil of gladness; so, too, should each one of us, after a fall or a transgression, cleanse himself from stains by the example set before him, and taking a leader for the journey proceed along the steep path of virtue, that so perchance by this means we may as far as possible become, through our imitation of him, partakers of the divine nature; as it is written, 'He who saith he believeth in Christ ought himself to walk even as he walked.'