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ORIGEN ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

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Being Koetschau's Text of the *De Principiis*
Translated into English, Together with an
Introduction and Notes

BY

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Introduction to the Torchbook edition

BY

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ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

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our subjection to Christ, implies the salvation, proceeding from Christ, of those who are subject; as David also said, 'Shall not my soul be subject to God? For of him cometh my salvation'.¹

2. Seeing, then, that such is the end, when 'all enemies shall have been subjected to Christ', when 'the last enemy shall be destroyed, that is, death', and when 'the kingdom shall be delivered up to God and the Father by Christ, to whom all things have been subjected',² let us, I say, from such an end as this, contemplate the beginning of things. For the end is always like the beginning; as therefore there is one end of all 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.³ I refer to all those who, by 'bending the knee in the name of Jesus',⁴ have through this very fact displayed the sign of their subjection. These are they who dwell 'in heaven and on earth and under the earth',⁵ the three terms indicating the entire universe, that is, all those beings who started from one beginning but were drawn in various directions by their own individual impulses and were distributed throughout the different ranks of existence in accordance with their merit; for in them goodness does not reside essentially, as it does in God and his Christ and in the Holy Spirit. For only in this Trinity, which is the source of all things, does goodness reside essentially. Others possess it as an accident, liable to be lost, and only then do they live in blessedness, when they participate in holiness and wisdom and in the divine nature itself.

GREEK

In the case of those who do not pay sleepless attention to themselves, changes of condition take place, more quickly or

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But if they are careless and indifferent about this participation, then each becomes the cause of his own lapse or fall,

¹ Ps. LXII. 1 (Sept. LXI. 1).

² See 1 Cor. XV. 24-27.

³ Again Rufinus has altered Origen, considerably weakening his precise statements. See Jerome *Ep. ad Avitum* 3. 'Once again a beginning arises from the end and an end from the beginning, and all things are so changed that one who is now a man may in another world become a daemon, while a daemon, if he lives negligently, may be bound to a grosser body, that is, may become a man. Thus,' continues Jerome, 'he mixes up everything, so that one may be changed from an archangel into a devil, and on the other hand a devil may turn into an angel.'

⁴ Phil. II. 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Frag. 11. Justinian, *Ep. ad Mennam* (Mansi IX. 528). A comparison of the two columns will show how freely Rufinus has dealt with Origen's work, omitting some passages and expanding others.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OR CONSUMMATION

1. An end or consummation is clearly an indication that things are perfected and consummated. This fact is a timely reminder to us, that if a man is seized with a desire to read and learn about these matters that are so hard and difficult to understand, he must bring with him a perfect and instructed mind. Otherwise, if he has had no experience in inquiries of this kind, they may perhaps appear to him to be vain and superfluous; or else, if he has a mind full of prejudice and preoccupations in other directions, he may think these inquiries are heretical and contrary to the faith of the Church, not so much because he is convinced by reason as because he decides according to his own prejudices. Now we ourselves speak on these subjects with great fear and caution, discussing and investigating rather than laying down fixed and certain conclusions. For we have previously pointed out what are the subjects on which clear doctrinal statements must be made, and such statements we made, I think, to the best of our ability, when speaking of the Trinity.¹ Now, however, we are dealing, as well as we can, with subjects that call for discussion rather than for definition.

The end of the world and the consummation will come when every soul shall be visited with the penalties due for its sins. This time, when everyone shall pay what he owes, is known to God alone. We believe, however, that the goodness of God through Christ will restore his entire creation to one end, even his enemies being conquered and subdued. For so says the holy scripture: 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet'.² And if it is not very evident what the prophetic language here means, let us learn from Paul the Apostle, who says more openly, 'Christ must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet'.³ But if even this clear declaration of the Apostle is not sufficient to inform us what is the meaning of 'putting enemies under his feet', hear further what he says in the words that follow: 'For all things must be made subject to him'.⁴ What then is this 'subjection', by which 'all things must be made subject' to Christ? In my opinion it is the same subjection by which we too desire to be subjected to him, and by which the apostles and all the saints who have followed Christ were subject to him. For the word subjection, when used of

¹ See Preface 3-10 (pp. 2-6).

² 1 Cor. XV. 25.

³ 1 Cor. XV. 27, 28.

⁴ 1 Cor. XV. 27, 28.

GREEK

more slowly, and to a greater or less extent, according to the individual fault. So, arising out of this fault, by a divine judgment corresponding to the better or worse movements of each and in accordance with merit, one will have in the future order of things the rank of angel; or the power of a ruler; or authority over certain beings; or a throne over subjects; or lordship over slaves.

LATIN

one more quickly and another more slowly, one to a greater and another to a lesser extent, by the fault of his own personal slothfulness. Now, as we have said, the particular fall or lapse by which each one departs from its original state is capable of exhibiting the greatest diversity, corresponding to the movements of the mind and will, so that one recedes but slightly, another more seriously, to lower things. Here then we see the just judgment of God's providence, that diversity of conduct is taken into account and each is treated according to the deserts of his departure and defection from goodness. Certain of those, indeed, who have continued in that beginning which we have described as being like the end that is to come, have allotted to them in the ordering and arrangement of the world, the rank of angel, others that of powers, others that of principalities, others that of authorities (clearly in order to exercise authority over those who 'need to have authority above their head');¹ while others have the rank of thrones, the duty of judging and ruling those who need this, and others have lordship, doubtless over slaves. All these privileges the divine providence, by a fair and just judgment, has conferred upon them as a reward for their merit and for the progress they have made in imitating and participating in God.

¹ See 1 Cor. XI. 10.

GREEK

Others, however, who have not been utterly cast out, will have a subordinate position assigned them below those above mentioned. And thus, generally speaking, from among those who have been set under the rulers and authorities and thrones and lordships, even from these the human race will one day be constituted in the world in unity. . . .

LATIN

Those, however,¹ who have moved from their state of primal blessedness, yet not beyond the possibility of return, have been made subject to the rule and governance of those holy and blessed orders whom we have just described; and if they make use of the help of these and become reformed by their precepts and salutary discipline, they may return and be restored to their state of blessedness. It is probably from among these, so far as I am able to judge, that the order of our human race was constituted, in the hope of restoring it in the age to come, or in the ages beyond that, when there shall be the 'new heaven and new earth,'² of which Isaiah speaks, to that unity

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which the Lord Jesus promises when he prays to God the Father for his disciples, 'I pray not for these alone, but also for all who shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as I, Father, am in thee, and thou art in me, that so they may be one in us';³ and again when he says, 'That they may be one, as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they also may be perfected in one'.⁴ The Apostle Paul also confirms this when he says, 'Till we all come to the unity of the faith, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ';⁵ and the same apostle also exhorts us, who even now in the present life have been placed in the Church, in which we see an imitation of the future kingdom, to strive after the same pattern of unity, when he says, 'That ye all say the same things, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be

¹ Cp. Jerome *Ep. ad Avitum* 3. 'Those, however, who have descended, but whose movement has not involved them in utter ruin, will be made subject to the care and rule and governance of the principalities, powers, thrones and dominions; and perhaps out of these the human race will one day be constituted in one of the worlds that will be made when, as Isaiah says, there shall be a "new heaven and a new earth".'

² Is. LXV. 17.

³ St. John XVII. 22, 23.

⁴ St. John XVII. 22, 23.

⁵ Eph. IV. 13.

⁶ St. John XVII. 20, 21.

perfected in one and the same mind and in one and the same judgment'.¹

3. We must know, however, that some of those² who fell from that beginning of which we have spoken above, have given themselves over so completely to a life of unworthiness and wickedness, that they are not only regarded as unworthy of this instruction and training whereby through the flesh the human race, aided by the heavenly powers, is being instructed and trained, but on the contrary become adversaries and opponents of those who are being so trained and disciplined. The result is that all our mortal life is full of struggles and conflicts, since we are resisted and thwarted by those who can see no way back to the better state from which they fell, those, namely, who are called 'the devil and his angels',³ and other orders of wicked beings whom the apostle enumerates among the opposing powers.

GREEK

But⁴ I think that, from among those that have been made subject to the worse kind of rulers and authorities and world-powers, in each world or in certain worlds, there are some who, by reason of their good deeds and their desire to be transferred from these powers, will speedily attain manhood *

LATIN

But whether among those orders that live under the chieftainship of the devil and conform to his wickedness there are some who will one day in the ages to come succeed in turning to goodness

by reason of the power of free-will which is in them, or whether it be true that long-continued and deep-rooted wickedness turns

¹ 1 Cor. I. 10.

² See Jerome, *Ep. ad Avit.* 3. 'Those, however, who do not deserve to return to their former state by passing through a human life, will become the 'devil and his angels' and the worst kind of daemons, and will be appointed to different tasks in one of the many worlds according to their varying degrees of merit.'

³ See above p. 44 ff.

⁴ Frag. 12 (Koetschau) from Justinian, *Ep. ad Mennam* (Mansi IX. 52c) Rufinus has shortened the original. There is another paraphrase of this passage of Origen in Jerome, *Ep. ad Avitum* 3: 'the daemons themselves and the rulers of the darkness in any world or worlds, if they desire to turn to better things, become men and so revert to their original condition, in order that being disciplined by the punishments and torments which they endure for a long or short period while in the bodies of men they may in time reach the exalted rank of the angels. It follows logically from this that any rational creature can develop out of any other, not once or suddenly but over and over again; that we may become angels or, if we live carelessly, daemons, and on the other hand daemons, if they desire to possess virtue, may attain the dignity of angels.' No opinion of Origen's was more vehemently opposed than this one which gave daemons and lost men a chance of restoration. See Rufinus *Apol.* I. 10 and Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* XXI, 17; also pp. 40-41 above.

at last from a habit into a kind of nature, you, reader, must judge; whether, that is, this portion of the creation shall be utterly and entirely out of harmony even with that final unity and concord, both in the ages that are 'seen' and 'temporal' and in those that are 'not seen' and eternal.¹ But in the meantime, alike in these ages that are 'seen' and 'temporal' and in those that are 'not seen' and 'eternal',² all those beings are arranged in a definite order proportionate to the degree and excellence of their merits. And so it happens that some in the first, others in the second, and others even in the last times, through their endurance of greater and more severe punishments of long duration, extending, if I may say so, over many ages, are by these very stern methods of correction renewed and restored, first by the instruction of angels and afterwards by that of powers yet higher in rank, so that they advance through each grade to a higher one, until at length they reach the things that are 'invisible' and 'eternal', having traversed in turn, by some form of instruction, every single office of the heavenly powers. It appears to follow from this, in my opinion, that every rational nature can, in the process of passing from one order to another, travel through each order to all the rest, and from all to each, while undergoing the various movements of progress or the reverse in accordance with its own actions and endeavours and with the use of its power of free will.

4. Now Paul says that there are some things that are 'seen' and 'temporal', while besides these there are others that are 'not seen' and 'eternal'. We ask therefore in what sense those that are 'seen' are 'temporal'? Does it mean that in all those periods and ages to come, in which the dispersion and division of the one beginning is to be restored to one and the same end and likeness, there will exist nothing whatever corresponding to this present world? Or is it rather that while the form of the things that are 'seen' passes away, their substance is by no means destroyed? Now Paul seems to confirm the latter explanation when he says; 'the form of this world shall pass away'.³ Moreover David seems to indicate the same truth when he says; 'The heavens shall perish, but thou shalt remain; and they all shall grow old as a garment, and as a cloak thou shalt change them, as a garment they shall be changed'.⁴ For if the heavens shall be 'changed', certainly that which is 'changed' does not perish; and if 'the form of this world passes away', it is not by any means an annihilation or destruction of the material

¹ Rufinus leaves the salvation of the devil and his angels an open question, though Origen had asserted it as a fact. See Jerome *Ep. ad Pammi. et Ocean.* 7 (Origen teaches that) 'after many ages and the one restoration of all things Gabriel will be in the same state as the devil, Paul as Caiaphas and virgins as prostitutes.'

² See 2 Cor. IV. 18. ³ 1 Cor. VII. 31.

⁴ Ps. CII. 26.

substance that is indicated, but the occurrence of a certain change of quality and an alteration of the outward form.

Isaiah too, when he says in prophecy that 'there shall be a new heaven and a new earth',¹ undoubtedly suggests a similar thought. For the renewal of 'heaven and earth' and the transmutation of the 'form of this world' and the alteration of the 'heavens' will undoubtedly be accomplished in readiness for those who are journeying along the way which we have indicated above,² making for that end, namely, blessedness, to which we are told that even God's enemies themselves are to be subjected, the end in which God is said to be 'all' and 'in all'.³ And if anyone thinks that in this 'end' material or bodily nature will utterly perish, he can provide no answer whatever to my difficulty, how beings so numerous and mighty can exist and live their life without bodies; since we believe that to exist without material substance and apart from any association with a bodily element is a thing that belongs only to the nature of God, that is, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Perhaps somebody else will say that in the end every bodily substance will be so pure and refined that we must think of it as being like the ether, as it were of a heavenly purity and clearness.⁴ But exactly how it will be is known to God alone, and to those who through Christ and the Holy Spirit are the 'friends'⁵ of God.

¹ Is. LXV. 17.

² See p. 57. ³ See 1 Cor. XV. 24, 25, 28.

⁴ Jerome's version of this is as follows (*Ep. ad Avitum* 4). 'Bodily substances will utterly disappear, or at any rate in the end of all things bodies will be similar to our air and sky or to any clearer and purer body that can be conceived.'

⁵ St. John XV. 15; St. James II. 23.