

Theologiegeschichte

Jacobsen, Anders-Christian: **Christ – The Teacher of Salvation**. A Study on Origen's Christology and Soteriology. – Münster: Aschendorff 2015. 372 S. (Adamantina, 6), geb. € 52,00 ISBN: 978-3-402-13718-5

The contents of the presented book correspond exactly to its title (something that today is less normal than expected). This monograph considers the whole work of Origen and offers an extensive study on his Christology and Soteriology.

The structure of the Study is very clear. The "Introduction" (13–17) explains the methodological approach of the monograph and affirms the author's conviction that, in Origen's Christology and soteriology, "behind the diversity there is a unity" (15; cf. 336). Then, the work is divided in three parts. The first part, "Introductory Questions and Methodology" (19–102), reviews the history of scholarship on Origen's Christology and soteriology, from the Hal Koch's work (1932) up to the study of Michel Pédou (1995). Subsequently, Anders-Christian Jacobsen gives an overview of the chronology of the origenian works (chap. 3), later on glances at the different textual types and audiences of Origen's works (chap. 4) and, finally, an explanation on the different hermeneutical levels of the Scripture (chap. 6). This overview is important because, following his own method, the author tries to show the diversity of contexts in Origen's works, that is, among others, the difference between Alexandria and Caesarea or between a homily and a commentary, etc. Chap. 5 deals with the difficulty in the transmission of Origen's works. The second Part, "Interpretation of Individual writings" (103–257), studies the Christology and soteriology of eleven of Origen's works. This study offers an overview "of all the relevant Christological and soteriological expressions in most of the relevant texts and in all textual types" (104). The chosen works are: *On First Principles*; *Dialogue with Heraclides*; *Commentary on John*; *Commentary on Song of Songs*; *Commentary on Romans*; *Commentary on Matthew*; *Homilies on Luke*; *Homilies on Song of Songs*; *Homilies on Jeremiah*; *Homilies on the book of Joshua* and *Against Celsus*. In the third Part, "A systematic presentation of Origen's Christology and soteriology" (259–335), J. has the courage to offer a systematic view of the main topic. For that purpose, the author justifies, in a very balanced way, the so long discussed systematic character of Origen's thought and, what is very relevant, clarifies that he understands the word "systematic" primarily as "an expression of the unity which is established when the parts are connected, and secondly as an expression of the systematic principles that lie behind this connection of the parts to a unity" (260). Later on, after analyzing the titles, the monograph develops, in chap. 19, the different topics of Christology and soteriology, within a *heilsgeschichtlich* frame and with the structure of the twofold relation of Christ, namely, to God the Father, on one hand, and to humanity, on the other. After a short and inspiring conclusion (336–339), the book offers a selected bibliography and the indices: "1. The Bible", "2. Origen's works", "3. Other ancient sources" and "4. Names and subjects" (340–372). The study uses essential and solid bibliography, and most of the assertions are based in Origen's texts.

The main purpose of this book is a very difficult one, because there is a tension between the two key assumptions of the monograph, namely, that the diversity of audiences has a theological relevance, and that, in Origen's thought, there is a unity behind the diversity. On one hand, the interpretation of individual writings (Part II) puts the emphasis on the diversity (types, audiences, chronology etc.); on the other hand, the systematic presentation (Part III) highlights the unity of Origen's teaching. In addition to this, the topic of the book is not a marginal but a central one, and it deals with the *core* of Origen's theology. J., in a very perceptive way, manages to combine a historical approach with a systematical one. Because of this twofold methodological approach – historical and systematical –, this book is a significant contribution to bridge the gap between Early Christian Studies and Systematic Theology. Therefore, this study is useful not only for historians, as many works on Patristic Studies, but also for theologians.

Obviously, in a study concerning one of the central points of such a complex author as Origen, one could make some critical remarks: for example, it is not easy to justify the choice of eleven works as the most relevant texts and not to include a specific study of the *Homilies on Genesis*, which are so important to Origen's anthropology and soteriology; some sections lack the polemical context of Origen's words, for instance, the anti-docetic, anti-monarchian and anti-gnostic background of some of his ideas, which often gives the key to understand Origen's teaching historically; the expression "independent being" to speak about the subsistence of the only-begotten Son does not fit well with the Son's eternal relation to the Father, a crucial concept of Origen's Christology (108); sometimes the study is too much centered in the human beings' salvation, and it pays less attention to angels and devils, who are also to be saved by the Son of God; finally, I think that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* would require a more specific treatment in chap. 19.

This book shows the beauty of Origen's Christology of accommodation and its soteriological meaning: according to this doctrine, it is not

God, but "the fallen human beings who determine what Christ must be in order to save them" (310). As J. rightly affirms, "[t]he goal of salvation is thus, according to Origen, to be like Christ or even to participate in Christ", and precisely because of this centrality of Christ all the different aspects of Origen's soteriology, developed in the monograph, "fit into a coherent system" (335). That is why the choice to study together Christology and soteriology corresponds perfectly to Origen's mind. Actually, it is not possible to understand Origen's Christology without a soteriological perspective, and it is also impossible to describe his soteriology without dealing with Christology. In summary, J.'s monograph is an important book. It faces a central theme of Origen's doctrine and it studies almost all of the significant works of the master of Alexandria. And so, beyond its specific topic, this book, because of its methodological clearness and because of the centrality of its argument, could be considered a very rich and balanced introduction to Origen.

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