

PRIMARY SOURCE READINGS for UNIT IV

Apologists: Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria & Origen of Alexandria

- **Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heretics*** (excerpts)
- **Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?*** (excerpts)
- **Origen, *On Prayer*** (excerpts)

Irenæus, Bishop of Lyon (AD 130-200) *Against the Heretics*

St. Irenaeus was born in or near Smyrna c. 135-140. Polycarp was then bishop of that city, and from his childhood Irenaeus listened to his discourses and received his instructions. The profound impression made upon his mind proves that he was, if not a disciple, at least an assiduous and thoughtful listener of the aged Bishop, and he loved to appeal later on to his authority. Polycarp was not his only master, for Irenaeus often mentions Asiatic presbyters with whom he had conversed and whose teachings he relates.

We do not know the circumstances which led Irenaeus to leave Asia and go to Gaul, nor do we know when this transfer took place. What we have said only proves that at this time he had reached the age of manhood and his intellectual and religious formation was already completed. In 177 we find him in Lyons, as a priest in the church of which St. Pothinus was bishop. Afterwards, he was delegated by the martyrs of Lyons, most of whom were still in prison, to carry to Pope Eleutherius a letter concerning the Montanistic troubles. He was furnished with a letter of recommendation, in which the martyrs styled him "one zealous for the Testament of Christ." It was perhaps owing to this journey that Irenaeus escaped the fury of the persecutors.

In 177 or 178 he was made bishop of Lyons, succeeding St. Pothinus. Three circumstances relative to his activities as a bishop are known: he combatted the Gnostics, he labored in the evangelization of the country about Lyons, he interceded (c. 190-191) with Pope Victor I in the question of the Paschal observance, in order to preserve peace between the Church of Rome and the churches of Asia. It is commonly thought that he died in 202-203. The Church honors him as a martyr. St. Jerome is the first to give him this title in his commentary on Isaias, written between 408-410, and this is astonishing. However, the silence of ancient authors may be explained by the small notice which would be taken of the violent death of Irenaeus if he had been put to death under Septimus Severus in the general massacre of the Christians of Lyons.

Two complete works of St. Irenaeus have been preserved together with a few fragments of other writings that have disappeared. The first of these complete works is the treatise *Adversus Haereses*, whose proper title is *The Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis*. The greater part of the original Greek text is lost; but there exists a contemporary Latin version, which is, happily, literal to a fault, and also fragments of an Armenian and some Syriac translations. Of its five books, the first two were written and sent to their addressee first; then the third and fourth, and finally the fifth. In the third, Eleutherius is designated as "Bishop of Rome" (iii, 3, 3), and the Church is spoken of as enjoying peace, whence we conclude that the first three books were written between 180 and 189. The two other books may be more recent, i.e. written under the pontificate of Victor I (189-198), but it is equally probable that they were composed at some earlier date, before the death of Eleutherius.

Irenaeus wrote the *Adversus Haereses* at the request of a friend, perhaps a bishop, who desired an exposition of the errors of heretics with which he was not well acquainted. The author originally intended the work to be very short, but it seems to have grown larger as he wrote. The

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first book is devoted to the detection or exposure of the errors of the different Gnostic sects. The Bishop of Lyons seems to have in view particularly the system of Ptolemaeus. He then passes to the other forms of Valentinianism, and from Valentinianism to the other forms of the Gnosis. The second and fifth books are devoted to a refutation (anathrope) of these errors. In the second book, dialectics — philosophical arguments — are chiefly resorted to. Irenaeus shows the absurdity of his adversaries and of the arguments they adduce. In the third and most important book he lays special stress on tradition. He argues that the rule of faith is to be found in the teaching of the Apostles, as preserved in its integrity by the Church, and this teaching of the Church and the Apostles contradicts that of the Gnostics. In the fourth book, the argument is confirmed "by the words of Jesus Christ" (*per Domini sermones*), among which he includes also the teachings of the Old Testament, since it was always the Divine Logos who spoke through the sacred writers. In this book, Irenaeus proves the identity of origin of both Testaments against the Marcionites. No new arguments are used in the fifth book, but Irenaeus deals more especially with the question of our last end, which is neglected in the previous books. The work ends with a few lines on the harmony of the divine plan in humanity.

From a theological point of view, the *Adversus Haereses* is a work of the first order and goes beyond the needs of the particular question of Gnosticism. It may even be said that, by the principles which he establishes concerning the doctrinal authority of the Church, and of the Church of Rome especially, St. Irenaeus has refuted in advance all future heresies. In his exposition of the Gnostic systems he proves to be sincere and well informed, although he does not always take into account the exact age of his documents. In refutation his dialectic is both strong and flexible. Of a clear and precise mind, he was never overawed by the pretentious abstractions of his opponents and even took a malicious pleasure in exposing their follies. His style is simple and easy and appears diffuse and awkward in the Latin translation only because the latter is literal to a fault. In the introduction to his work (i, Pref., 3), the Bishop of Lyons expresses the fear that his habit of speaking Celtic may influence his Greek style. This fear seems to have been groundless. The second treatise of St. Irenaeus, entirely preserved, is the Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching, discovered recently in a literal Armenian translation of the seventh or eighth century. The work was composed after the *Adversus Haereses* and was addressed to a friend, whom the author calls Marcian. It contains, first, an exposition of the principal Christian dogmas; secondly, a demonstration of the truth of these dogmas from the prophecies. It was meant to be a small apology to be placed in the hands of the faithful. St. Irenaeus does not go beyond the ideas he has developed in the *Adversus Haereses*.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

The apostles did not commence to preach the Gospel, or to place anything on record until they were endowed with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. They preached one God alone, Maker of heaven and earth.

1. WE HAVE LEARNED FROM NONE OTHERS THE PLAN OF OUR salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge," as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the

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apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

2. These have all declared to us that there is one God, Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the law and the prophets; and one Christ the Son of God. If any one do not agree to these truths, he despises the companions of the Lord; nay more, he despises Christ Himself the Lord; yea, he despises the Father also, and stands self-condemned, resisting and opposing his own salvation, as is the case with all heretics.

CHAPTER II. THE HERETICS FOLLOW NEITHER SCRIPTURE NOR TRADITION

1. When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and [assert] that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For [they allege] that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but viva voce: wherefore also Paul declared, "But we speak wisdom among those that are perfect, but not the wisdom of this world." And this wisdom each one of them alleges to be the fiction of his own inventing, forsooth; so that, according to their idea, the truth properly resides at one time in Valentinus, at another in Marcion, at another in Cerinthus, then afterwards in Basilides, or has even been indifferently in any other opponent, who could speak nothing pertaining to salvation. For every one of these men, being altogether of a perverse disposition, depraving the system of truth, is not ashamed to preach himself.

2. But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. For [they maintain] that the apostles intermingled the things of the law with the words of the Saviour; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord Himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, indubitably, unsulliedly, and purely, have knowledge of the hidden mystery: this is, indeed, to blaspheme their Creator after a most impudent manner! It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition.

3. Such are the adversaries with whom we have to deal, my very dear friend, endeavouring like slippery serpents to escape at all points. Wherefore they must be opposed at all points, if perchance, by cutting off their retreat, we may succeed in turning them back to the truth. For, though it is not an easy thing for a soul under the influence of error to repent, yet, on the other hand, it is not altogether impossible to escape from error when the truth is brought alongside it.

CHAPTER III. A REFUTATION OF THE HERETICS, FROM THE FACT THAT, IN THE VARIOUS CHURCHES, A PERPETUAL SUCCESSION OF BISHOPS WAS KEPT UP

1. It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to “the perfect” apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men; which men, if they discharged their functions honestly, would be a great boon [to the Church], but if they should fall away, the direst calamity.

2. Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre- eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.

3. The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome despatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God, omnipotent, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Creator of man, who brought on the deluge, and called Abraham, who led the people from the land of Egypt, spake with Moses, set forth the law, sent the prophets, and who has prepared fire for the devil and his angels. From this document, whosoever chooses to do so, may learn that He, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was preached by the Churches, and may also understand the apostolical tradition of the Church, since this Epistle is of older date than these men who are now propagating falsehood, and who conjure into existence another god beyond the Creator and the Maker of all existing things. To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telesphorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us.

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And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.

4. But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,—a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles,—that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.” And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, “Dost thou know me?” “I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103301.htm>

Translated by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

Introductory notes excerpted from <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/tixeront/section1-4.html#irenaeus>

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD)

Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?

St. Clement was an early Greek theologian and head of the catechetical school of Alexandria. Athens is given as the starting-point of his journeyings, and was probably his birthplace. He became a convert to the Faith and travelled from place to place in search of higher instruction, attaching himself successively to different masters:...at last he met Pantænus in Alexandria, and in his teaching “found rest.”

The place itself was well chosen. It was natural that Christian speculation should have a home at Alexandria. This great city was at the time a centre of culture as well as of trade. A great university had grown up under the long-continued patronage of the State. The intellectual temper was broad and tolerant, as became a city where so many races mingled. The philosophers were critics or eclectics, and Plato was the most favoured of the old masters. Neo-Platonism, the philosophy of the new pagan renaissance, had a prophet at Alexandria in the person of Ammonius Saccas. The Jews, too, who were there in very large numbers breathed its liberal atmosphere, and had assimilated secular culture. They there formed the most enlightened colony of the Dispersion. Having lost the use of Hebrew, they found it necessary to translate the Scriptures into the more familiar Greek. Philo, their foremost thinker, became a sort of Jewish Plato. Alexandria was, in addition, one of the chief seats of that peculiar mixed pagan and Christian speculation known as Gnosticism. Basilides and Valentinus taught there. It is no matter of surprise, therefore, to find some of the Christians affected in turn by the scientific spirit. At an uncertain date, in the latter half of the second century, “a school of oral instruction” was founded. Lectures were given to which pagan hearers were admitted, and advanced teaching to Christians separately. It was an official institution of the Church. Pantænus is the earliest teacher whose name has been preserved. Clement first assisted and then succeeded Pantænus in the direction of the school, about A.D. 190. He was already known as a Christian writer before the days of Pope Victor (188-199).

About this time he may have composed the “Hortatory Discourse to the Greeks” (*Protreptikos pros Ellenas*) It is a persuasive appeal for the Faith, written in a lofty strain....He contrasts Christianity with the vileness of pagan rites and with the faint hope of pagan poetry and philosophers. Man is born for God. The Word calls men to Himself. The full truth is found in Christ alone. The work ends with a description of the God-fearing Christian. He answers those who urge that it is wrong to desert one's ancestral religion.

The work entitled “Outlines” (*Hypotyposes*) is likewise believed to be a production of the early activity of Clement. It was translated into Latin by Rufinus under the title *Dispositiones*....an abridged commentary, with doctrinal and historical remarks on the entire Bible and on the non-canonical “Epistle of Barnabas” and “Apocalypse of Peter.” Other works of his are the “Miscellanies” (*Stromateis*) and “The Tutor” (*Paidagogos*)....[In the “Miscellanies” [h]e starts with the importance of philosophy for the pursuit of Christian knowledge. Here he is perhaps defending his own scientific labours from local criticism of conservative brethren. He shows how faith is related to knowledge, and emphasizes the superiority of revelation to philosophy. God's truth is to be found in revelation, another portion of it in philosophy. It is the duty of the Christian to neglect neither. Religious science, drawn from his twofold source, is even an element of perfection, the instructed Christian — “the true Gnostic” is the perfect Christian. He who has risen

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to this height is far from the disturbance of passion; he is united to God, and in a mysterious sense is one with Him. Such is the line of thought indicated in the work, which is full of digressions. "The Tutor" is a practical treatise in three books. Its purpose is to fit the ordinary Christian by a disciplined life to become an instructed Christian.

In ancient times the paedagogus was the slave who had constant charge of a boy, his companion at all times. On him depended the formation of the boy's character. Such is the office of the Word Incarnate towards men. He first summons them to be His, then He trains them in His ways. His ways are temperate, orderly, calm, and simple. Nothing is too common or trivial for the Tutor's care. His influence tells on the minute details of life, on one's manner of eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, taking recreation, etc. The moral tone of this work is kindly; very beautiful is the ideal of a transfigured life described at the close....

Besides these more important works, he wrote the beautiful tract, "Who is the rich man who shall be saved?" (*Tis ho sozomenos plousios*). It is an exposition of St. Mark, x, 17-31, wherein Clement shows that wealth is not condemned by the Gospel as intrinsically evil; its morality depends on the good or ill use made of it. The work concludes with the narrative of the young man who was baptized, lost, and again won by the Apostle St. John. The date of the composition cannot be fixed. We have the work almost in its entirety. Clement wrote homilies on fasting and on evil speaking, and he also used his pen in the controversy on the Paschal question....

The special field which Clement cultivated led him to insist on the difference between the faith of the ordinary Christian and the science of the perfect, and his teaching on this point is most characteristic of him. The perfect Christian has an insight into "the great mysteries" of man, of nature, of virtue — which the ordinary Christian accepts without clear insight. Clement has seemed to some to exaggerate the moral worth of religious knowledge; it must however be remembered that he praises not mere sterile knowledge, but knowledge which turns to love. It is Christian perfection that he extols. The perfect Christian — the true Gnostic whom Clement loves to describe — leads a life of unalterable calm. And here Clement's teaching is undoubtedly colored by Stoicism. He is really describing not so much the Christian with his sensitive feelings and desires under due control, but the ideal Stoic who has deadened his feelings altogether. The perfect Christian leads a life of utter devotion the love in his heart prompts him to live always in closest union with God by prayer, to labour for the conversion of souls, to love his enemies, and even to endure martyrdom itself.

IV. May the Saviour then grant to us that, having begun the subject from this point, we may contribute to the brethren what is true, and suitable, and saving, first touching the hope itself, and, second, touching the access to the hope. He indeed grants to those who beg, and teaches those who ask, and dissipates ignorance and dispels despair, by introducing again the same words about the rich, which become their own interpreters and infallible expounders. For there is nothing like listening again to the very same statements, which till now in the Gospels were distressing you, hearing them as you did without examination, and erroneously through puerility:

And going forth into the way, one approached and kneeled, saying, Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit everlasting life? And Jesus says, Why do you call Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour your father and your mother. And he

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answering says to Him, All these have I observed. And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him, and said, One thing you lack. If you would be perfect, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he was rich, having great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and says to His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answers again, and says unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! More easily shall a camel enter through the eye of a needle than a rich man into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, and said, Who then can be saved? And He, looking upon them, said, What is impossible with men is possible with God. For with God all things are possible. Peter began to say to Him, Lo, we have left all and followed You. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall leave what is his own, parents, and brethren, and possessions, for My sake and the Gospel's, shall receive an hundred-fold now in this world, lands, and possessions, and house, and brethren, with persecutions; and in the world to come is life everlasting. But many that are first shall be last, and the last first.

V. These things are written in the Gospel according to Mark; and in all the rest correspondingly; although perchance the expressions vary slightly in each, yet all show identical agreement in meaning. But well knowing that the Saviour teaches nothing in a merely human way, but teaches all things to His own with divine and mystic wisdom, we must not listen to His utterances carnally; but with due investigation and intelligence must search out and learn the meaning hidden in them. For even those things which seem to have been simplified to the disciples by the Lord Himself are found to require not less, even more, attention than what is expressed enigmatically, from the surpassing superabundance of wisdom in them. And whereas the things which are thought to have been explained by Him to those within — those called by Him the children of the kingdom — require still more consideration than the things which seemed to have been expressed simply, and respecting which therefore no questions were asked by those who heard them, but which, pertaining to the entire design of salvation, and to be contemplated with admirable and supercelestial depth of mind, we must not receive superficially with our ears, but with application of the mind to the very spirit of the Saviour, and the unuttered meaning of the declaration.

VI. For our Lord and Saviour was asked pleasantly a question most appropriate for Him — the Life respecting life, the Saviour respecting salvation, the Teacher respecting the chief doctrines taught, the Truth respecting the true immortality, the Word respecting the word of the Father, the Perfect respecting the perfect rest, the Immortal respecting the sure immortality. He was asked respecting those things on account of which He descended, which He inculcates, which He teaches, which He offers, in order to show the essence of the Gospel, that it is the gift of eternal life. For He foresaw as God, both what He would be asked, and what each one would answer Him. For who should do this more than the Prophet of prophets, and the Lord of every prophetic spirit? And having been called good, and taking the starting note from this first expression, He commences His teaching with this, turning the pupil to God, the good, and first and only dispenser of eternal life, which the Son, who received it of Him, gives to us.

VII. Wherefore the greatest and chiefest point of the instructions which relate to life must be implanted in the soul from the beginning — to know the eternal God, the giver of what is eternal, and by knowledge and comprehension to possess God, who is first, and highest, and one, and good. For this is the immutable and immoveable source and support of life, the knowledge of God, who really is, and who bestows the things which really are, that is, those which are eternal, from whom both being and the continuance of it are derived to other beings. For ignorance of

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Him is death; but the knowledge and appropriation of Him, and love and likeness to Him, are the only life.

VIII. He then who would live the true life is enjoined first to know Him whom no one knows, except the Son reveal (Him). **Matthew 11:27** Next is to be learned the greatness of the Saviour after Him, and the newness of grace; for, according to the apostle, the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; **John 1:17** and the gifts granted through a faithful servant are not equal to those bestowed by the true Son. If then the law of Moses had been sufficient to confer eternal life, it were to no purpose for the Saviour Himself to come and suffer for us, accomplishing the course of human life from His birth to His cross; and to no purpose for him who had done all the commandments of the law from his youth to fall on his knees and beg from another immortality. For he had not only fulfilled the law, but had begun to do so from his very earliest youth. For what is there great or pre-eminently illustrious in an old age which is unproductive of faults? But if one in juvenile frolicsomeness and the fire of youth shows a mature judgment older than his years, this is a champion admirable and distinguished, and hoary pre-eminently in mind. But, nevertheless, this man being such, is perfectly persuaded that nothing is wanting to him as far as respects righteousness, but that he is entirely destitute of life. Wherefore he asks it from Him who alone is able to give it. And with reference to the law, he carries confidence; but the Son of God he addresses in supplication. He is transferred from faith to faith. As perilously tossing and occupying a dangerous anchorage in the law, he makes for the Saviour to find a haven.

IX. Jesus, accordingly, does not charge him with not having fulfilled all things out of the law, but loves him, and fondly welcomes his obedience in what he had learned; but says that he is not perfect as respects eternal life, inasmuch as he had not fulfilled what is perfect, and that he is a doer indeed of the law, but idle at the true life. Those things, indeed, are good. Who denies it? For the commandment is holy, **Romans 7:12** as far as a sort of training with fear and preparatory discipline goes, leading as it did to the culmination of legislation and to grace. **Galatians 3:24** But Christ is the fulfilment of the law for righteousness to every one that believes; and not as a slave making slaves, but sons, and brethren, and fellow-heirs, who perform the Father's will.

X. If you will be perfect. **Matthew 19:21** Consequently he was not yet perfect. For nothing is more perfect than what is perfect. And divinely the expression if you will showed the self-determination of the soul holding converse with Him. For choice depended on the man as being free; but the gift on God as the Lord. And He gives to those who are willing and are exceedingly earnest, and ask, that so their salvation may become their own. For God compels not (for compulsion is repugnant to God), but supplies to those who seek, and bestows on those who ask, and opens to those who knock. If you will, then, if you really will, and art not deceiving yourself, acquire what you lack. One thing is lacking you — the one thing which abides, the good, that which is now above the law, which the law gives not, which the law contains not, which is the prerogative of those who live. He forsooth who had fulfilled all the demands of the law from his youth, and had gloried in what was magnificent, was not able to complete the whole with this one thing which was specially required by the Saviour, so as to receive the eternal life which he desired. But he departed displeased, vexed at the commandment of the life, on account of which he supplicated. For he did not truly wish life, as he averred, but aimed at the mere reputation of the good choice. And he was capable of busying himself about many things; but the one thing, the work of life, he was powerless, and disinclined, and unable to accomplish. Such also was what the Lord said to Martha, who was occupied with many things, and distracted and troubled with serving; while she blamed her sister, because, leaving serving, she set herself at His feet, devoting her time to learning: You are troubled about many things, but Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken

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away from her. **Luke 10:41-42** So also He bade him leave his busy life, and cleave to One and adhere to the grace of Him who offered everlasting life.

XI. What then was it which persuaded him to flight, and made him depart from the Master, from the entreaty, the hope, the life, previously pursued with ardour? — Sell your possessions. And what is this? He does not, as some conceive off-hand, bid him throw away the substance he possessed, and abandon his property; but bids him banish from his soul his notions about wealth, his excitement and morbid feeling about it, the anxieties, which are the thorns of existence, which choke the seed of life. For it is no great thing or desirable to be destitute of wealth, if without a special object — not except on account of life. For thus those who have nothing at all, but are destitute, and beggars for their daily bread, the poor dispersed on the streets, who know not God and God's righteousness, simply on account of their extreme want and destitution of subsistence, and lack even of the smallest things, were most blessed and most dear to God, and sole possessors of everlasting life.

Nor was the renunciation of wealth and the bestowment of it on the poor or needy a new thing; for many did so before the Saviour's advent, — some because of the leisure (thereby obtained) for learning, and on account of a dead wisdom; and others for empty fame and vainglory, as the Anaxagorases, the Democriti, and the Crateses.

XII. Why then command as new, as divine, as alone life-giving, what did not save those of former days? And what peculiar thing is it that the new creature the Son of God intimates and teaches? It is not the outward act which others have done, but something else indicated by it, greater, more godlike, more perfect, the stripping off of the passions from the soul itself and from the disposition, and the cutting up by the roots and casting out of what is alien to the mind. For this is the lesson peculiar to the believer, and the instruction worthy of the Saviour. For those who formerly despised external things relinquished and squandered their property, but the passions of the soul, I believe, they intensified. For they indulged in arrogance, pretension, and vainglory, and in contempt of the rest of mankind, as if they had done something superhuman. How then would the Saviour have enjoined on those destined to live for ever what was injurious and hurtful with reference to the life which He promised? For although such is the case, one, after ridding himself of the burden of wealth, may none the less have still the lust and desire for money innate and living; and may have abandoned the use of it, but being at once destitute of and desiring what he spent, may doubly grieve both on account of the absence of attendance, and the presence of regret. For it is impossible and inconceivable that those in want of the necessities of life should not be harassed in mind, and hindered from better things in the endeavour to provide them somehow, and from some source.

XIII. And how much more beneficial the opposite case, for a man, through possessing a competency, both not himself to be in straits about money, and also to give assistance to those to whom it is requisite so to do! For if no one had anything, what room would be left among men for giving? And how can this dogma fail to be found plainly opposed to and conflicting with many other excellent teachings of the Lord? Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when you fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations. **Luke 16:9** Acquire treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, nor thieves break through. **Matthew 6:19** How could one give food to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and shelter the houseless, for not doing which He threatens with fire and the outer darkness, if each man first divested himself of all these things? Nay, He bids Zaccheus and Matthew, the rich tax-gathers, entertain Him hospitably. And He does not bid them part with their property, but,

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applying the just and removing the unjust judgment, He subjoins, Today salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. He so praises the use of property as to enjoin, along with this addition, the giving a share of it, to give drink to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, to take the houseless in, and clothe the naked. But if it is not possible to supply those needs without substance, and He bids people abandon their substance, what else would the Lord be doing than exhorting to give and not to give the same things, to feed and not to feed, to take in and to shut out, to share and not to share? Which were the most irrational of all things.

XIV. Riches, then, which benefit also our neighbours, are not to be thrown away. For they are possessions, inasmuch as they are possessed, and goods, inasmuch as they are useful and provided by God for the use of men; and they lie to our hand, and are put under our power, as material and instruments which are for good use to those who know the instrument. If you use it skilfully, it is skilful; if you are deficient in skill, it is affected by your want of skill, being itself destitute of blame. Such an instrument is wealth. Are you able to make a right use of it? It is subservient to righteousness. Does one make a wrong use of it? It is, on the other hand, a minister of wrong. For its nature is to be subservient, not to rule. That then which of itself has neither good nor evil, being blameless, ought not to be blamed; but that which has the power of using it well and ill, by reason of its possessing voluntary choice. And this is the mind and judgment of man, which has freedom in itself and self-determination in the treatment of what is assigned to it. So let no man destroy wealth, rather than the passions of the soul, which are incompatible with the better use of wealth. So that, becoming virtuous and good, he may be able to make a good use of these riches. The renunciation, then, and selling of all possessions, is to be understood as spoken of the passions of the soul.

XV. I would then say this. Since some things are within and some without the soul, and if the soul make a good use of them, they also are reputed good, but if a bad, bad — whether does He who commands us to alienate our possessions repudiate those things, after the removal of which the passions still remain, or those rather, on the removal of which wealth even becomes beneficial? If therefore he who casts away worldly wealth can still be rich in the passions, even though the material [for their gratification] is absent — for the disposition produces its own effects, and strangles the reason, and presses it down and inflames it with its inbred lusts — it is then of no advantage to him to be poor in purse while he is rich in passions. For it is not what ought to be cast away that he has cast away, but what is indifferent; and he has deprived himself of what is serviceable, but set on fire the innate fuel of evil through want of the external means [of gratification]. We must therefore renounce those possessions that are injurious, not those that are capable of being serviceable, if one knows the right use of them. And what is managed with wisdom, and sobriety, and piety, is profitable; and what is hurtful must be cast away. But things external hurt not. So then the Lord introduces the use of external things, bidding us put away not the means of subsistence, but what uses them badly. And these are the infirmities and passions of the soul.

XVI. The presence of wealth in these is deadly to all, the loss of it salutary. Of which, making the soul pure — that is, poor and bare — we must hear the Saviour speaking thus, Come, follow Me. For to the pure in heart He now becomes the way. But into the impure soul the grace of God finds no entrance. And that (soul) is unclean which is rich in lusts, and is in the throes of many worldly affections. For he who holds possessions, and gold, and silver, and houses, as the gifts of God; and ministers from them to the God who gives them for the salvation of men; and knows that he possesses them more for the sake of the brethren than his own; and is superior to the possession of them, not the slave of the things he possesses; and does not carry them about in his soul, nor bind

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and circumscribe his life within them, but is ever labouring at some good and divine work, even should he be necessarily some time or other deprived of them, is able with cheerful mind to bear their removal equally with their abundance. This is he who is blessed by the Lord, and called poor in spirit, a meet heir of the kingdom of heaven, not one who could not live rich.

XVII. But he who carries his riches in his soul, and instead of God's Spirit bears in his heart gold or land, and is always acquiring possessions without end, and is perpetually on the outlook for more, bending downwards and fettered in the toils of the world, being earth and destined to depart to earth — whence can he be able to desire and to mind the kingdom of heaven — a man who carries not a heart, but land or metal, who must perforce be found in the midst of the objects he has chosen? For where the mind of man is, there is also his treasure. The Lord acknowledges a twofold treasure — the good: For the good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good; and the evil: for the evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth evil: for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **Matthew 12:34-35** As then treasure is not one with Him, as also it is with us, that which gives the unexpected great gain in the finding, but also a second, which is profitless and undesirable, an evil acquisition, hurtful; so also there is a richness in good things, and a richness in bad things, since we know that riches and treasure are not by nature separated from each other. And the one sort of riches is to be possessed and acquired, and the other not to be possessed, but to be cast away.

In the same way spiritual poverty is blessed. Wherefore also Matthew added, Blessed are the poor. **Matthew 5:3** How? In spirit. And again, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God. **Matthew 5:6** Wherefore wretched are the contrary kind of poor, who have no part in God, and still less in human property, and have not tasted of the righteousness of God.

XVIII. So that (the expression) rich men that shall with difficulty enter into the kingdom, is to be apprehended in a scholarly way, not awkwardly, or rustically, or carnally. For if the expression is used thus, salvation does not depend on external things, whether they be many or few, small or great, or illustrious or obscure, or esteemed or disesteemed; but on the virtue of the soul, on faith, and hope, and love, and brotherliness, and knowledge, and meekness, and humility, and truth, the reward of which is salvation. For it is not on account of comeliness of body that any one shall live, or, on the other hand, perish. But he who uses the body given to him chastely and according to God, shall live; and he that destroys the temple of God shall be destroyed. An ugly man can be profligate, and a good-looking man temperate. Neither strength and great size of body makes alive, nor does any of the members destroy. But the soul which uses them provides the cause for each. Bear then, it is said, when struck on the face; **Matthew 5:39** which a man strong and in good health can obey. And again, a man who is feeble may transgress from refractoriness of temper. So also a poor and destitute man may be found intoxicated with lusts; and a man rich in worldly goods temperate, poor in indulgences, trustworthy, intelligent, pure, chastened. If then it is the soul which, first and especially, is that which is to live, and if virtue springing up around it saves, and vice kills; then it is clearly manifest that by being poor in those things, by riches of which one destroys it, it is saved, and by being rich in those things, riches of which ruin it, it is killed. And let us no longer seek the cause of the issue elsewhere than in the state and disposition of the soul in respect of obedience to God and purity, and in respect of transgression of the commandments and accumulation of wickedness.

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XXX. He then is first who loves Christ; and second, he who loves and cares for those who have believed on Him. For whatever is done to a disciple, the Lord accepts as done to Himself, and

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reckons the whole as His. Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and you gave Me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink: and I was a stranger, and you took Me in: I was naked and you clothed Me: I was sick, and you visited Me: I was in prison, and you came to Me. Then shall the righteous answer, saying, Lord, when saw we You hungry, and fed You? Or thirsty, and gave You drink? And when saw we You a stranger, and took You in? Or naked, and clothed You? Or when saw we You sick, and visited You? Or in prison, and came to You? And the King answering, shall say to them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me. Again, on the opposite side, to those who have not performed these things, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have not done it unto one of the least of these, you have not done it to Me. And in another place, He that receives you; receives Me; and he that receives not you, rejects Me. **Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16**

XXXI. Such He names children, and sons, and little children, and friends, and little ones here, in reference to their future greatness above. Despise not, He says, one of these little ones; for their angels always behold the face of My Father in heaven. **Matthew 18:10** And in another place, Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom of heaven. **Luke 12:32** Similarly also He says that the least in the kingdom of heaven that is His own disciple is greater than John, the greatest among those born of women. **Matthew 11:11** And again, He that receives a righteous man or a prophet in the name of a righteous man or a prophet, shall receive their reward; and he that gives to a disciple in the name of a disciple a cup of cold water to drink, shall not lose his reward. **Matthew 10:41** Wherefore this is the only reward that is not lost. And again, Make to you friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations; **Luke 16:9** showing that by nature all property which a man possesses in his own power is not his own. And from this unrighteousness it is permitted to work a righteous and saving thing, to refresh some one of those who have an everlasting habitation with the Father. See then, first, that He has not commanded you to be solicited or to wait to be importuned, but yourself to seek those who are to be benefited and are worthy disciples of the Saviour. Excellent, accordingly, also is the apostle's saying, For the Lord loves a cheerful giver; **2 Corinthians 9:7** who delights in giving, and spares not, sowing so that he may also thus reap, without murmuring, and disputing, and regret, and communicating, which is pure beneficence. But better than this is the saying spoken by the Lord in another place, Give to every one that asks you. **Luke 6:30** For truly such is God's delight in giving. And this saying is above all divinity, — not to wait to be asked, but to inquire oneself who deserves to receive kindness.

XXXII. Then to appoint such a reward for liberality, — an everlasting habitation! O excellent trading! O divine merchandise! One purchases immortality for money; and, by giving the perishing things of the world, receives in exchange for these an eternal mansion in the heavens! Sail to this mart, if you are wise, O rich man! If need be, sail round the whole world. Spare not perils and toils, that you may purchase here the heavenly kingdom. Why do transparent stones and emeralds delight you so much, and a house that is fuel for fire, or a plaything of time, or the sport of the earthquake, or an occasion for a tyrant's outrage? Aspire to dwell in the heavens, and to reign with God. This kingdom a man imitating God will give you. By receiving a little here, there through all ages He will make you a dweller with Him. Ask that you may receive; haste; strive; fear lest He disgrace you. For He is not commanded to receive, but you to give. The Lord did not say, Give, or bring, or do good, or help, but make a friend. But a friend proves himself such not by one gift, but by long intimacy. For it is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day, but he that endures to the end shall be saved. **Matthew 10:22**

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XXXIII. How then does man give these things? For I will give not only to friends, but to the friends of friends. And who is it that is the friend of God? Do not you judge who is worthy or who is unworthy. For it is possible you may be mistaken in your opinion. As in the uncertainty of ignorance it is better to do good to the undeserving for the sake of the deserving, than by guarding against those that are less good to fail to meet in with the good. For though sparing, and aiming at testing, who will receive meritoriously or not, it is possible for you to neglect some that are loved by God; the penalty for which is the punishment of eternal fire. But by offering to all in turn that need, you must of necessity by all means find some one of those who have power with God to save. Judge not, then, that you be not judged. With what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you again; **Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37-38** good measure, pressed and shaken, and running over, shall be given to you. Open your compassion to all who are enrolled the disciples of God; not looking contemptuously to personal appearance, nor carelessly disposed to any period of life. Nor if one appears penniless, or ragged, or ugly, or feeble, do you fret in soul at this and turn away. This form is cast around us from without, the occasion of our entrance into this world, that we may be able to enter into this common school. But within dwells the hidden Father, and His Son, who died for us and rose with us.

XXXIV. This visible appearance cheats death and the devil; for the wealth within, the beauty, is unseen by them. And they rave about the carcass, which they despise as weak, being blind to the wealth within; knowing not what a treasure in an earthen vessel **2 Corinthians 4:7** we bear, protected as it is by the power of God the Father, and the blood of God the Son, and the dew of the Holy Spirit. But be not deceived, you who has tasted of the truth, and been reckoned worthy of the great redemption. But contrary to what is the case with the rest of men, collect for yourself an unarmed, an unwarlike, a bloodless, a passionless, a stainless host, pious old men, orphans dear to God, widows armed with meekness, men, adorned with love. Obtain with your money such guards, for body and for soul, for whose sake a sinking ship is made buoyant, when steered by the prayers of the saints alone; and disease at its height is subdued, put to flight by the laying on of hands; and the attack of robbers is disarmed, spoiled by pious prayers; and the might of demons is crushed, put to shame in its operations by strenuous commands.

XXXVI. All the faithful, then, are good and godlike, and worthy of the name by which they are encircled as with a diadem. There are, besides, some, the elect of the elect, and so much more or less distinguished by drawing themselves, like ships to the strand, out of the surge of the world and bringing themselves to safety; not wishing to seem holy, and ashamed if one call them so; hiding in the depth of their mind the ineffable mysteries, and disdaining to let their nobleness be seen in the world; whom the Word calls the light of the world, and the salt of the earth. **Matthew 5:13-14** This is the seed, the image and likeness of God, and His true son and heir, sent here as it were on a sojourn, by the high administration and suitable arrangement of the Father, by whom the visible and invisible things of the world were created; some for their service, some for their discipline, some for their instruction; and all things are held together so long as the seed remains here; and when it is gathered, these things shall be very quickly dissolved.

XXXVII. For what further need has God of the mysteries of love? And then you shall look into the bosom of the Father, whom God the only-begotten Son alone has declared. And God Himself is love; and out of love to us became feminine. In His ineffable essence He is Father; in His compassion to us He became Mother. The Father by loving became feminine: and the great proof of this is He whom He begot of Himself; and the fruit brought forth by love is love. For this also He came down. For this He clothed Himself with man. For this He voluntarily subjected Himself to the experiences of men, that by bringing Himself to the measure of our weakness whom He loved, He

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might correspondingly bring us to the measure of His own strength. And about to be offered up and giving Himself a ransom, He left for us a new Covenant-testament: My love I give unto you. And what and how great is it? For each of us He gave His life — the equivalent for all. This He demands from us in return for one another. And if we owe our lives to the brethren, and have made such a mutual compact with the Saviour, why should we any more hoard and shut up worldly goods, which are beggarly, foreign to us and transitory? Shall we shut up from each other what after a little shall be the property of the fire? Divinely and weightily John says, He that loves not his brother is a murderer, **1 John 3:14-15** the seed of Cain, a nursling of the devil. He has not God's compassion. He has no hope of better things. He is sterile; he is barren; he is not a branch of the ever-living supercelestial vine. He is cut off; he waits the perpetual fire.

XXXIX. If one should escape the superfluity of riches, and the difficulty they interpose in the way of life, and be able to enjoy the eternal good things; but should happen, either from ignorance or involuntary circumstances, after the seal and redemption, to fall into sins or transgressions so as to be quite carried away; such a man is entirely rejected by God. For to every one who has turned to God in truth, and with his whole heart, the doors are open, and the thrice-glad Father receives His truly repentant son. And true repentance is to be no longer bound in the same sins for which He denounced death against Himself, but to eradicate them completely from the soul. For on their extirpation God takes up His abode again in you. For it is said there is great and exceeding joy and festival in the heavens with the Father and the angels when one sinner turns and repents. **Luke 15:10** Wherefore also He cries, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. **Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13** I desire not the death, but the repentance of the sinner. **Ezekiel 18:23** Though your sins be as scarlet wool, I will make them white as snow; though they be blacker than darkness, I will wash and make them like white wool. **Isaiah 1:18** For it is in the power of God alone to grant the forgiveness of sins, and not to impute transgressions; since also the Lord commands us each day to forgive the repenting brethren. **Matthew 6:14** And if we, being evil, know to give good gifts, **Luke 11:13** much more is it the nature of the Father of mercies, the good Father of all consolation, much pitying, very merciful, to be long-suffering, to wait for those who have turned. And to turn is really to cease from our sins, and to look no longer behind.

XL. Forgiveness of past sins, then, God gives; but of future, each one gives to himself. And this is to repent, to condemn the past deeds, and beg oblivion of them from the Father, who only of all is able to undo what is done, by mercy proceeding from Him, and to blot out former sins by the dew of the Spirit. For by the state in which I find you will I judge, also, is what in each case the end of all cries aloud. So that even in the case of one who has done the greatest good deeds in his life, but at the end has run headlong into wickedness, all his former pains are profitless to him, since at the catastrophe of the drama he has given up his part; while it is possible for the man who formerly led a bad and dissolute life, on afterwards repenting, to overcome in the time after repentance the evil conduct of a long time. But it needs great carefulness, just as bodies that have suffered by protracted disease need regimen and special attention. Thief, do you wish to get forgiveness? steal no more. Adulterer, burn no more. Fornicator, live for the future chastely. You who has robbed, give back, and give back more than you took. False witness, practice truth. Perjurer, swear no more, and extirpate the rest of the passions, wrath, lust, grief, fear; that you may be found at the end to have previously in this world been reconciled to the adversary. It is then probably impossible all at once to eradicate inbred passions; but by God's power and human intercession, and the help of brethren, and sincere repentance, and constant care, they are corrected.

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Apologists: Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria & Origen of Alexandria

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0207.htm>

Translated by William Wilson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

Introductory notes excerpted from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04045a.htm>

Origen of Alexandria (AD 184-253) On Prayer

Origen was, according to Eusebius, “not quite seventeen” when Septimius Severus’ persecution of the Christians began “in the tenth year of [his] reign,” (*Ecclesiastical History*; tr. Williamson, p. 179) which gives the approximate date of Origen’s birth as 185/6 C.E. He died around the reign of Gallus, which places his death in 254/5 C.E. Origen lived during a turbulent period of the Roman Empire, when the barbarian invasions were sweeping across Europe, threatening the stability of the Roman Empire. His was also a time of periodic persecution against Christians, notably during the reigns of the Emperors Severus, Maximin, and Decius, so that Origen’s life began and ended with persecution.

His family was devoutly Christian, and likely highly educated; for his father, who died a martyr, made sure that Origen was schooled not only in biblical studies, but in Hellenistic education as well. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, tr. Williamson, p. 182) tells us that Origen was only seventeen when he took over as Headmaster (*didaskalos*) of the Christian Catechetical School at Alexandria. He became interested in Greek philosophy quite early in his life, studying for a while under Ammonius Saccas (the teacher of Plotinus) and amassing a large collection of philosophical texts. It is probably around this time that he began composing *On First Principles*. However, as he became ever more devoted to the Christian faith, he sold his library, abandoning, for a time, any contact with pagan Greek wisdom, though he would eventually return to secular studies (Greek philosophy), from which he derived no small measure of inspiration, as Porphyry (recorded in Eusebius) makes quite clear, as he continued with his ever more sophisticated elucidation of biblical texts.

Origen’s debt to Holy Scripture is obvious; he quotes the Bible at great length, often drawing together seemingly disparate passages to make a profound theological point. Yet his thought is all the while informed by his Greek philosophical education, specifically that of the Middle Platonic tradition, notably the works of the Jewish Platonist Philo of Alexandria and the Neopythagorean philosopher Numenius of Apamea (fl. 150-176 C.E.). Origen shares with Philo an insistence on the free will of the person, a freedom that is direct evidence of humanity’s likeness to God - for, like God’s Being, human existence is free from all necessity. From Numenius, Origen likely adopted the conception of a “second god” proceeding from a first, ineffable being called the One, “First God,” or Father. Numenius referred to this “second god” as Demiurge or craftsman, and taught that he created the cosmos by imitating the intellectual content of the “First God.” Origen applied this basic notion to his doctrine of Christ, whom he also called Demiurge (*Commentary on John* 1.22), and went on to describe Christ as a reflection of the Truth of the Father, stating that compared to human beings Christ is Truth, but compared to the Father He is falsehood (Jerome, *Epistle* 92, quoting Origen; see also *On First Principles* 1.2.6).

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Although it was written in the late first/early second century CE, *On Prayer* remains an influential text for believers on the practice, structure, and mindset of prayer....Origen writes that prayer is the way in which humans can know and have discourse with God. He notes the many ways prayer is depicted in the Bible, and then tackles the argument that prayer is superfluous. He describes the four purposes of prayer: requests, prayers (praise), intercessions, and thanksgivings. Origen also performs an exegesis of the Lord’s Prayer, and this in-depth look at each phrase of the prayer is a valuable resource for Christians old and new. Origen concludes with comments on the formalities

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of prayer, in which he describes the proper posture and state of mind for praying. *On Prayer* is helpful for those who wish to know how to approach prayer and notable for its expert discussion of the Lord's Prayer. Origen uses many Biblical references, particularly to prayerful characters, so the text presents a number of heralded role models for our communication with God.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Things in themselves so supremely great, so far above man, so utterly above our perishable nature, as to be impossible for the race of rational mortals to grasp, as the will of God became possible in the immeasurable abundance of the Divine grace which streams forth from God upon men, through Jesus Christ the minister of His unsurpassable grace toward us, and through the cooperant Spirit. Thus, though it is a standing impossibility for human nature to acquire Wisdom, by which all things have been established—for all things, according to David, God made in wisdom—from being impossible it becomes possible through our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

For what or who is man that he shall know the counsel of God, or who shall conceive what that Lord willeth? Since the thoughts of mortals are weakling and our purposes are prone to fail; for the body that is corruptible weighs down soul, and mind with its store of thought is burdened by its earthly tabernacle; and things on earth we forecast with difficulty, but things in heaven whoever yet traced out? Who would not say that it is impossible for man to trace out things in heaven? Yet this impossible thing, by the surpassing grace of God, becomes possible; for he who was caught up unto a third heaven traced out things in the three heavens through having heard unutterable utterances which it was not permitted for man to speak. Who can say that it is possible for the mind of the Lord to be known by man?

But this, too, God graciously gives through Christ who said to His disciples: "No longer do I call you servants, because the servant knows not what his lord's will is, but I have called you friends, because all the things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you; so that through Christ there is made known to them the will of one who, when He teaches them the will of the Lord, has no desire to be their lord any longer but instead becomes a friend to those whose lord he was before."

Moreover, as no one knows the things of man save the Spirit of man that is in him, so also no one knows the things of God save the Spirit of God. Now if no one knows the things of God save the Spirit of God, it is impossible that a man should know the things of God. But mark how this too becomes possible: but we, he says, have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is from God, that we may know the things graciously given to us by God, and these also we speak not in words taught of human wisdom but in those taught of the Spirit.

But I think, right pious and industrious Ambrosius, and right discreet and manful Tatiana, from whom I avow that womanly weakness has disappeared as truly as it had from Sarah of old, you are wondering to what purpose all this has been said in preface about things impossible for man becoming possible by the grace of God, when the subject prescribed for our discourse is Prayer. The fact is, I believe it to be itself one of those things which, judged by our weakness, are impossible, clearly to set forth with accuracy and reverence a complete account of prayer, and in particular of how prayer ought to be offered, what ought to be said to God in prayer, which

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seasons are more, which less, suitable for prayer . . . The very apostle who by reason of the abundance of the revelations is anxious that no one should account to him more than he sees or hears from him, confesses that he knows not how to pray as he ought, for what we ought to pray, he says, we know not how to as we ought. It is necessary not merely to pray but also to pray as we ought and to pray what we ought. For even though we are enabled to understand what we ought to pray, that is not adequate if we do not add to it the right manner also.

On the other hand what is the use of the right manner to us if we do not know to pray for what we ought? Of these two things the one, I mean the 'what we ought' of prayer, is the language of the prayer, while the 'as we ought' is the disposition of him who prays. Thus the former is illustrated by "Ask for the great things and the little shall be added unto you," and "Ask for the heavenly things and the earthly shall be added unto you," and "Pray for them that abuse you," and "Entreat therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send out workers unto his harvest," and "Pray that you enter not into temptation," and "Pray that your flight be not in winter or on a Sabbath," and "In praying babble not" and the like passages: the latter by "I desire therefore that men pray in every place lifting up holy hands without anger and questioning, and in like manner that women array themselves decently in simplicity, with modesty and discretion, not in or gold or pearls or costly raiments, but, as becomes women of pious profession, through good works. Instructive too, for prayer 'as we ought' is the passage: "If then you are offering your gift at the altar and there think you that your brother hath aught against you, leave there your gift before the altar, and go back—first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift;" for what greater gift can be sent up to God from a rational creature than fragrant words of prayer that is offered from a conscience devoid of taint from Sin?

Similarly instructive is "Deprive not one another, save by agreement for a season that you may give yourselves to prayer and may be together at another time again, in order that Satan may not have occasion to exalt over you by reason of your incontinence. For prayer 'as we ought' is restrained unless the marriage mysteries which claim our silence be consummated with more of solemnity and deliberation and less of passion, the 'agreement' referred to in the passage obliterating the discord of passion, and destroying incontinence, and preventing Satan's malicious exultation.

Yet again instructive for prayer 'as we ought' is the passage: "If you are standing at prayer, forgive aught that you have against any man;" and also the passage in Paul "Any man who prays or preaches with covered head dishonours his head, and any woman who prays or preaches with unveiled head dishonors her head" is descriptive of the right manner of prayer. Paul knows all these sayings, and could cite, with subtle statement in each case, manifold more from law and prophets and gospel fulfillment, but in the moderation, yes, and in the truthfulness of his nature, and because he sees how much, after all of them, is lacking to knowledge of the right way to pray what he ought, he says "but what we ought to pray we know not how to as we ought," and adds thereto the source from which a man's deficiency is made up if though ignorant he has rendered himself worthy to have the deficiency made up within him: "The Spirit himself more than intercedes with God in sighs unspeakable and He that searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because His intercession on behalf of saints is according to God."

Thus the Spirit who cries "Abba Father" in the hearts of the blessed, knowing with solicitude that their sighing in this tabernacle can but weigh down the already fallen or transgressors, "more than intercedes with God in sighs unspeakable," for the great love and sympathy He feels for men taking our sighs upon himself; and, by virtue of the wisdom that resides in Him, beholding our Soul

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humbled 'unto dust' and shut within the body 'of humiliation,' He employs no common sighs when He more than intercedes with God but unspeakable ones akin to the unutterable words which a man may not speak. Not content to intercede with God, this Spirit intensifies His intercession, "more than intercedes," for those who more than conquer, as I believe such as Paul was, who says "Nay in all these we more than conquer." He simply "intercedes," I think, not for those who more than conquer, nor again for those who are conquered, but for those who conquer. Akin to the saying "what we ought to pray we know not how to as we ought, but the Spirit more than intercedes with God in sighs unspeakable," is the passage "I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit; and I will sing with the understanding also."

For even our understanding is unable to pray unless the spirit leads it in prayer within hearing of it as it were, anymore than it can sing or hymn, with rhythmic cadence and in unison, with true measure and in harmony, the Father in Christ, unless the Spirit who searches all things even the depth of God first praise and hymn Him whose depth He has searched and, as He had the power, comprehended. I think it must have been the awakened consciousness of human weakness falling short of prayer in the right way, above all realized as he listened to great words of intimate knowledge falling from the Savior's lips in prayer to the Father, that moved one of the disciples of Jesus to say to the Lord when He ceased praying, "Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples." The whole train of language is as follows: "And it came to pass, as He was at prayer in a certain place, that one of His disciples said to Him when He ceased "Lord, teach us to pray even as John also taught his disciples." For is it conceivable that a man who had been brought up under instruction in the law and hearing of the words of the prophets and was no stranger to the synagogue had no knowledge whatsoever of prayer until he saw the Lord praying in a certain place? It is absurd to pretend that he was one who did pray after the Jewish practice but saw that he needed fuller knowledge as to the place in reference to prayer.

What was it, too, in reference to prayer that John used to teach the disciples who came to him for baptism from Jerusalem and all Judea and the country round about, but certain things of which, as one who was greater than a prophet, he had vision in reference to prayer, which I believe he would not deliver to all who were baptized but privately to those who were disciples with a view to baptism? Such are the prayers, which are really spiritual because the spirit was praying in the heart of the saints, recorded in scripture, and they are full of unutterably wonderful declarations. In the first book of Kings there is the prayer of Hannah, partially, because the whole of it was not committed to writing since she was 'speaking in her heart' when she persevered in prayer before the Lord; and in Psalms, the seventeenth psalm is entitled "A prayer of David," and the ninetieth "A prayer of Moses, man of God," and the hundred and second "A prayer of a poor man at a time he is weary and pours forth his supplication before the Lord."

These are prayers which, because truly prayers made and spoken with the spirit, are also full of the declarations of the wisdom of God, so that one may say of the truths they proclaim "Who is wise that he shall understand them? And understanding, then he shall fully know them." Since therefore it is so great an undertaking to write about prayer, in order to think and speak worthily of so great a subject, we need the special illumination of the Father, and the teaching of the first born Word himself, and the inward working of the Spirit, I pray as a man—for I by no means attribute to myself any capacity for prayer—that I may obtain the Spirit of prayer before I discourse upon it, and I entreat that a discourse full and spiritual may be granted to us and that the prayers recorded in the Gospels may be elucidated. So let us now begin our discourse on Prayer.

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CHAPTER XX FORMALITIES OF PRAYER: CONCLUSION

I think it not out of place to add, by way of completing my task in reference to prayer, a somewhat elementary discussion of such matters as the disposition and the posture that is right for one who prays, the place where one ought to pray, the direction towards which one ought except in any special circumstances to look, and the time suitable and marked out for prayer. The seat of disposition is to be found in the soul, that of the posture in the body.

Thus Paul, as we observed above, suggests the disposition in speaking of the duty of praying without anger and disputation and the posture in the words lifting up holy hands, which he seems to me to have taken from the Psalms where it stands thus—the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice; as to the place I desire therefore that men pray in every place, and as to the direction in the Wisdom of Solomon: that it might be known that it is right to go before the sun to give thanks to you and to intercede with you towards the dawn of light.

Accordingly it seems to me that one who is about to enter upon prayer ought first to have paused awhile and prepared himself to engage in prayer throughout more earnestly and intently, to have cast aside every distraction and confusion of thought, to have bethought him to the best of his ability of the greatness of Him whom he is approaching and of the impiety of approaching Him frivolously and carelessly and, as it were, in contempt, and to have put away everything alien. He ought thus to enter upon prayer with his soul, as it were, extended before his hands, and his mind intent on God before his eyes, and his intellect raised from earth and set toward the Lord of All before his body stands. Let him put away all resentment against any real or imagined injurer in proportion to his desire for God not to bear resentment against himself in turn for his injuries and sins against many of his neighbors or any wrong deeds whatsoever upon his conscience.

Of all the innumerable dispositions of the body that, accompanied by outstretching of the hands and upraising of the eyes, standing is preferred—inasmuch as one thereby wears in the body also the image of the devotional characteristics that become the soul. I say that these things ought to be observed by preference except in any special circumstances, for in special circumstances, by reason of some serious foot disease one may upon occasion quite properly pray sitting, or by reason of fevers or similar illnesses, lying, and indeed owing to circumstances, if, let us say, we are on a voyage or if our business does not permit us to retire to pay our debt of prayer, we may pray without any outward sign of doing so.

Moreover, one must know that kneeling is necessary when he is about to arraign his personal sins against God with supplication for their healing and forgiveness, because it is a symbol of submission and subjection. For Paul says; For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father from whom is all fatherhood named in heaven and on earth. It may be termed spiritual kneeling, because of the submission and self-humiliation of every being to God in the name of Jesus, that the apostle appears to indicate in the words: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. It should not be supposed that beings in heaven have bodies so fashioned as actually to possess knees, since their bodies have been described possibly as spherical in form by those who have discussed these matters more minutely. He who refuses to admit this will also, unless he outrages reason, admit the uses of each of the members in order that nothing fashioned for them by God may be in vain.

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Apologists: Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria & Origen of Alexandria

One falls into error on either hand, whether he shall assert that bodily members have been brought into being by God for them in vain and not for their proper work, or shall say that the internal organs, the intestine included, perform their proper uses even in heavenly beings. Exceedingly foolish will it be to think that it is only their surface, as with statues, that is human in form and nothing further underneath. This much discussion will suffice, then, of kneeling and of seeing that: in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. To the same effect, it is written by the prophet: To me every knee shall bow. In regard to place, it should be known that every place is rendered fit for prayer by one who prays rightly, for in every place sacrifice is offered to me . . . says the Lord, and I desire therefore that men pray in every place.

But to secure the performance of one's prayers in peace without distraction, the rule is for every man to make choice, if possible, of what I may term the most solemn spot in his house before he prays, considering in addition to his general examination of it, whether any violation of law or right has not been done in the place in which he is praying, so as to have made not only himself but also the place of his personal prayer of such a nature that the regard of God has fled from it. And in reference to this matter of place, lengthy consideration leads me to say what may seem to be harsh, but what, if one inquires into it carefully, may possibly not invite contempt, namely that it is a question whether it is reverent and pure to intercede with God in the place of that union which is not unlawful but is conceded by the Apostle's word by way of indulgence not injunction. For if it is not possible to give oneself to prayer as one ought without devoting oneself to it by agreement for a season, the matter of the place also may possibly deserve to be considered if possible.

Yet there is a certain helpful charm in a place of prayer being the spot in which believers meet together. Also it may well be that the assemblies of believers also are attended by angelic powers, by the powers of our Lord and Savior himself, and indeed by the spirits of saints, including those already fallen asleep, certainly of those still in life, though just how is not easy to say. In reference to angels we may reason thus: If an angel of the Lord shall encamp round about those that fear Him and shall deliver them, and if Jacob's words are true, not only of himself but to all who have devoted themselves to God, when we understand him to say the angel who delivers me from all evil . . . it is natural to infer that, when a number of men are genuinely met for Christ's glory, that angel of each man—who is round about each of those that fear—will encamp with the man with whose guardianship and stewardship he has been entrusted, so that when saints assemble together there is a twofold church, the one of men the other of angels. And although it is only the prayer of Tobit, and after him of Sarah who later became his daughter-in-law owing to her marriage to Tobias, that Raphael says he has offered up as a memorial, what happens when several are linked in one mind and conviction and are formed into one body in Christ? In reference to the presence of the power of the Lord with the church Paul says: you being gathered together with my spirit and with the power of the Lord Jesus, implying that the Lord Jesus' power is not only with the Ephesians but also with the Corinthians.

And if Paul, while still wearing the body, believed that he assisted in Corinth with his spirit, we need not abandon the belief that the blessed departed in spirit also, perhaps more than one who is in the body, make their way likewise into the churches. For that reason we ought not to despise prayer in churches, recognizing that it possesses a special virtue for him who genuinely joins in. And just as Jesus' power and the spirit of Paul and similar men, and the angels of the Lord who encamp round about each of the saints, are associated and join with those who genuinely

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assemble themselves together, so we may conjecture that if any man be unworthy of a holy angel and give himself up through sin and transgressions in contempt of God to a devil's angel, he will perhaps, in the event of those like him being few, not long escape that providence of those angels which oversee the church by the authority of the divine will and will bring the misdeeds of such persons to general knowledge; whereas if such persons become numerous and meet as mere human societies with business of the more material sort, they will not be overseen.

That is shown in Isaiah when the Lord says: neither if you shall come to appear before me; for I will turn away my eyes from you, and even if you multiply your supplication I will not pay attention. For in place of the already mentioned twofold company of saintly men and blessed angels there may, on the other hand, be a twofold association of impious men and evil angels. Of such a congregation it might be said alike by holy angels and by pious men: I sat not down with the council of vanity, and with transgressors I will not enter in; I hated the church of evildoers and with the impious I will not sit down.

I think that it was also for such a reason that the people in Jerusalem and the whole of Judea, having come to be in a state of great sinfulness, became subject to their enemies through the abandonment by God and the overshadowing angels and the saving work of saintly men—having become people who have abandoned the Law. For whole gatherings are at times thus abandoned to fall into temptation in order that even that which they seem to have may be taken away from them. Like the fig tree that was cursed and taken away from the roots because it had not given fruit to the hungry Jesus, they wither and lose any little amount they once had of lively power according to faith. So much for what seem to me to have been necessary observations in considering the place of prayer and in setting forth its special virtue in respect to place in the case of the meetings of saintly men who come together reverently in churches.

A few words may now be added in reference to the direction in which one ought to look in prayer. Of the four directions, the North, South, East, and West, who would not at once admit that the East clearly indicates the duty of praying with the face turned towards it with the symbolic suggestion that the soul is looking upon the dawn of the true light? Should anyone, however, prefer to direct his intercessions according to the aperture of the house, whichever way the doors of the house may face, saying that the sight of heaven appeals to one with a certain attraction greater than the view of the wall, and the eastward part of the house having no opening, we may say to him that since it is by human arrangement that houses are open in this or that direction but by nature that the East is preferred to all the other directions, the natural is to be set before the artificial.

Besides, on that view why should one who wished to pray when in the open country pray to the East in preference to the West? If, in the one case it is reasonable to prefer the East, why should the same not be done in every case? Enough on that subject. I have still to treat the topics of prayer, and therewith I purpose to bring this treatise to an end. Four topics which I have found scattered throughout the Scriptures appear to me to deserve mention, and according to these everyone should organize their prayer. The topics are as follows: In the beginning and opening of prayer, glory is to be ascribed according to one's ability to God, through Christ who is to be glorified with Him, and in the Holy Spirit who is to be proclaimed with Him.

Thereafter, one should put thanksgivings: common thanksgivings—into which he introduces benefits conferred upon men in general—and thanksgivings for things which he has personally received from God. After thanksgiving it appears to me that one ought to become a powerful accuser of one's own sins before God and ask first for healing with a view to being released from the habit

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which brings on sin, and secondly for forgiveness for past actions. After confession it appears to me that one ought to append as a fourth element the asking for the great and heavenly things, both personal and general, on behalf of one's nearest and dearest. And last of all, one should bring prayer to an end ascribing glory to God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As I already said, I have found these points scattered throughout the scriptures.

The element of glorious ascription occurs in these words in the one hundred and third psalm:—O Lord, my God, how exceedingly you are magnified. You have put on praise and majesty, who are He that wraps himself in light as in a mantel, who stretches out the heaven like a curtain, who roofs His upper chambers with waters, who makes clouds His chariot, who walks on wings of winds, who makes winds His angels and flaming fire His ministers, who lays the foundations of the earth for its safety—it shall not swerve for ever and ever; the deep is a mantle of His vestment; on the mountains shall waters stand; from your rebuke shall they flee; from the sound of your thunder shall they shrink in fear. Indeed most of the psalm contains ascription of glory to the Father.

But anyone may select numerous passages for himself and see how broadly the element of glorious ascription is scattered. Of thanksgiving, this may be set forth as an example. It is found in the second book of Kings, and is uttered by David, after promises made through Nathan to David, in astonishment at the bounties of God and in thanksgiving for them. It runs: Who am I, O Lord my Lord, and what is my house, that you have loved me to this extent? I am exceeding small in your sight, my Lord, and yet you have spoken on behalf of the house of your servant for a long time to come. Such is the way of man, O Lord my Lord, and what shall David go on to say more to you? Even now you know your servant, O Lord. For your servant have you wrought and according to your heart have you wrought all this greatness to make it known to your servant that he should magnify you, O Lord my Lord. Of confessions we have an example in: From all my transgressions deliver me. And elsewhere: My wounds have stunk and been corrupt because of my folly. I have been wretched and bowed down utterly; all the day have I gone with sullen face. Of petitions we have an example in the twenty-seventh psalm: Draw me not away with sinners, and destroy me not with workers of unrighteousness, and the like. And it is right as one began with ascription of glory, to bring one's prayers to an end in ascription of glory, singing and glorifying the Father of all through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit—to whom be glory unto eternity.

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http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/origen_on_prayer_02_text.htm (translated by William A. Curtis).

Introductory notes excerpted from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/origen-of-alexandria/> and <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/origen/prayer.html>