

Philo and Origen on Moses as Prophet
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One day in the 240s, probably at an early-morning service, the presbyter Origen asked his Caesarean congregation to join him in seeking a spiritual interpretation of the Hebrew midwives who disobey Pharaoh’s command to kill the Israelites’ male infants (Exod. 1:15–22). Scattered remarks in Origen’s homilies make it safe to assume that at least some of the audience will have received the invitation with some consternation.¹ But Origen forges ahead and, as he often does, proposes that their names might provide a clue—Sephora and Phoua, as the Septuagint has them. Origen takes a cue from Philo, whom he credits anonymously as one of “those before us” (*ante nos quidam*).² He adopts Philo’s etymologies for the names: “bird” and “ruddy,” respectively, and links them, roughly in line with Philo, to the intellect’s soaring through instruction and the blushing modesty of moral integrity that should accompany that soaring. But Origen does not stop here. He proceeds with an emphatic adversative, at least in Rufinus’s Latin translation of Origen’s lost original: *Mihi tamen...*

To me, however, since Scripture says of them, “Because they feared God, they did not do the command of the king of Egypt” [Exod. 1:17], these two midwives seem to preserve a figure of both Testaments. Sephora, which is translated “sparrow,” can be compared with the Law that “is spiritual” [cf. Rom. 7:14]. But Phua, who is red or modest, can indicate the Gospels, which are red with the blood of Christ and glow red with the blood of his passion through the whole world. Therefore, the souls born in the Church are cared for by them as if by midwives, for in them the whole pedagogical remedy [*cuncta...eruditionis medicina*] is gathered together from the reading of the scriptures.³

¹ See *Hom. Gen.* 13.3; *Hom. Ezek.* 6.8; *Hom. Lk.* 25.6; et al.

² *Hom. Ex.* 2.2 (GCS 29:156). The text from which Origen is borrowing is *Her.* 128. See Annewies van den Hoek, “Philo and Origen: A Descriptive Catalogue of Their Relationship,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 12 (2000), 56.

³ *Hom. Ex.* 2.2 (GCS 29:156–57; trans. R. Heine, FC 71:242, significantly altered).

Despite the “however” at the beginning of the quote, attentive reading makes clear that Origen is not simply replacing Philo’s exegesis, but extending it. When Origen introduces Philo’s interpretation, he refers to the midwives as “bearing the form of rational instruction [*eruditionis*].”⁴ Origen’s own view thus does not reject Philo’s but further interprets it, specifying the “instruction” in an explicitly Christian way. For present purposes, what interests me is not so much the content of this particular interpretation as the form of Origen’s interaction with Philo that it instantiates. Origen learns something from Philo, essentially retains it, but expands it and turns it to his own Christian use. In what follows I would like to propose that Origen follows a similar pattern with respect to Philo’s view of Moses as prophet: Origen receives certain of Philo’s insights, but rather than parroting them (or rejecting them), he integrates them into his own system of thought, necessarily modifying them in the process—from his Christian perspective, deepening and completing them.

With this suggestion, I realize I am horning in on an ongoing conversation among scholars far more seasoned than I in the study of Philo. Before pursuing the argument itself, I should therefore position myself within this conversation. While the bare fact that Origen studied and was to some degree influenced by Philo’s writings has always been recognized and needs no defense, the precise scope and shape of Philo’s influence is a different matter. The beginning of the current phase of the conversation seems datable to the chapter on Origen in David Runia’s 1993 *Philo in Early Christian Literature*.⁵ The chapter manages to be both measured and rich, yet Runia laments its limitations. It suffers, he says, from a “lack of a solid foundation for the study of Philo’s influence on Origen” that might be provided by a “list of *loci Philonici* in Origen such as could form the basis of a study comparable to that of Van den Hoek on

⁴ *rationabilis eruditionis formam tenere* (GCS 29:156; my trans.).

⁵ David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 157–83.

Clement.”⁶ It was of course Annewies van den Hoek herself who stepped into the breach with her 2000 article “Philo and Origen: A Descriptive Catalogue of Their Relationship.”⁷ Ilaria L. E. Ramelli goes further in a 2012 article in which she argues, not only that Origen found a kindred spirit in Philo from whose particular interpretations he could draw, such as those catalogued by van den Hoek, but that Philo was Origen’s “declared model” of allegorical exegesis of scripture.⁸ My own view comports very well with what Michael Cover calls an approach of “absorbing Philo,” one that accepts many of the insights of other approaches but seeks to avoid their excesses and pitfalls. By absorption, Cover “means that Philo is so fully taken in, appropriated, and improved (from Origen’s Christian perspective) that his influence is both everywhere and nowhere felt.”⁹ Absorption’s presence “everywhere and nowhere” makes it difficult to demonstrate. It must be approached obliquely, by indirect means. Cover himself traces patterns of secondary and tertiary biblical lemmas shared by Philo and Origen, which he sees as indicators of Origen’s absorption of Philo.

I will to attempt to illustrate absorption from another angle, one that may prove more suggestive than dispositive. I wish to show that it is plausible and perhaps likely that Philo influenced Origen’s understanding of prophecy, specifically as embodied by the prophet *par excellence*, Moses. This influence can be detected in at least three interconnected ways: (1) with respect to Moses’s rational agency; (2) in the significance of the prophet’s life; and (3) in

⁶ Runia, 159.

⁷ *Studia Philonica Annual* 12 (2000): 44–121. See also “Assessing Philo’s Influence in Christian Alexandria: The Case of Origen,” in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism*, ed. James L. Kugel, 223–39 (Boston: Brill, 2002).

⁸ “Philo as Origen’s Declared Model: Allegorical and Historical Exegesis of Scripture,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 7 (2012): 1–17. “Origen tends expressly to refer to Philo as a predecessor precisely in points that are crucial to his Scriptural allegorical method. This strongly suggests that Philo was his main inspirer for the very technique of philosophical allegoresis of Scripture, and that Origen both was well aware of this and acknowledged his debt” (6).

⁹ Michael Benjamin Cover, “The Road Less Travelled By: Mapping Philonic Influence in Origen’s Writings” (forthcoming), 10.

Moses's conscious participation in a divine pedagogy of accommodation. After making a case for Origen's dynamic reception of each of these aspects of Philo's teaching, I will take stock of the importance of this nexus of issues for Origen's theology.

For Philo, prophecy is the inspired utterance of "what cannot be comprehended by reason."¹⁰ That the content of prophecy outstrips human rational capacities implies what Philo openly asserts in some texts, that the prophet becomes a passive mouthpiece (ἐρμηνεύς) for the divine voice, "speaking nothing that is his own."¹¹ Thus, "the prophet, even when he seems to be speaking, really holds his peace."¹² Such texts have led many readers to conclude that Philo held a straightforwardly ecstatic view of the prophecy, according to which divine inspiration simply suspends the rational faculty. While this is partially true, it is not the whole story. Many of the details of Philo's view of prophetic inspiration, particularly in the three types of prophecy laid out in *Mos.* 2.187–91, remain controversial. Nonetheless, there appears to be broad agreement that Philo seeks to carve out space for Moses's reason to remain operative, even in the state of prophetic ecstasy.¹³ In my judgment, David Winston sounds the right notes when he recalls Philo's view of "the human mind [as] an inseparable fragment of the Divine Logos," so that Moses's prophecy finally amounts to "an intuitive grasp of the higher divine realities, the

¹⁰ *Mos.* 2.187 (LCL 289:540–1; trans. modified): διὰ δὲ τῆς προφητείας ὅσα μὴ λογισμῷ καταλαμβάνεται θεσπίζη.

¹¹ *Spec.* 1.65 (LCL 320:136; my trans.): λέγων μὲν οἰκεῖον οὐδέν. Cf. *Her.* 259 (LCL 261:416): προφήτης γὰρ ἴδιον μὲν οὐδὲν ἀποφθέγγεται, ἀλλότρια δὲ πάντα ὑπηχοῦντος ἑτέρου.

¹² *Her.* 266 (LCL 261:419).

¹³ See, e.g., Helmut Burkhardt, *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Giessen-Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1988); David Winston, "Two Types of Mosaic Prophecy According to Philo of Alexandria," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 4 (1989): 49–67; John R. Levison, "Two Types of Ecstatic Prophecy according to Philo," *Studia Philonica Annual* 6 (1994): 83–89; John R. Levison, "Inspiration and the Divine Spirit in the Writings of Philo Judaeus," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 26 (1995): 271–323; David Winston, "Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon on Creation, Revelation, and Providence: The High-Water Mark of Jewish Hellenistic Fusion," in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet*, 109–30; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "Mosè e Balaam, propheteia e mantiké. Modalità e segni della rivelazione nel *De vita Mosis*," in A.M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi, eds., *La rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: natura, legge, storia. Atti del VII Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di ricerca su Origene e la tradizione alessandrina* (Bologna 29-30 settembre 2003), 33–74 (Bologna: Pazzini, 2004).

fundamental principles of being and the natural laws which constitute its structure.”¹⁴ This, Winston contends, helps explain the “inherently bipolar perspective” of Philo’s mystical vision,

which consistently allows two alternative modes of describing human intellectual activity. From the divine perspective, the higher workings of the human mind, when it has assimilated itself to the Logos, may aptly be ascribed to the divine power which is their true source and it may be said that God is prompting them from within, though from the human perspective they may reasonably be assigned to the individual human mind that appears to be producing them. Philo’s loose terminological usage, and the rapidly shifting focus of his literary expression often result in a disconcerting disarray of seemingly contradictory statements and inconcinnities.¹⁵

Origen seems to have held a similar basic conception of prophecy’s essence. In a surviving fragment of his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Origen offers a definition of prophecy as that which “points out things unseen through speech.” Prophecy, it seems, communicates (“through speech”) what is known by *gnōsis*, which he defines immediately afterward as “the awareness of the ordering of the cosmos and of the operation of elements and times.”¹⁶ This ordering and operation express God’s saving providence, the goal of which is divinization through the conformity of the human soul to the Logos, returning it to its protological condition of loving contemplation of God, but with the eschatological security of having experienced of the love of God in the passion of Christ.¹⁷ Conscious awareness is thus central to the logic of salvific providence, so it is no surprise that Origen is well known for his disavowal of mantic prophecy, which he associates with demonic influence. This goes for all true prophets, not just Moses. In his early *On First Principles*, he asserts that “the prophets and apostles [...] attended upon the

¹⁴ Winston, “Two Types,” 56–57.

¹⁵ Winston, “Two Types,” 57–58.

¹⁶ Προφητεία ἐστὶν ἡ διὰ λόγου τῶν ἀφανῶν σημαντικὴ γνῶσις, ἢ εἰδήσις τῆς τοῦ κόσμου συστάσεως καὶ ἐνεργείας στοιχείων καὶ χρόνων. *Frag. 1 Cor.* 55, ad loc. 14:6, ed. Claude Jenkins, *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909), 36. My translation reflects the re-punctuation for which C. P. Bammel convincingly argues (“Origen’s Definition of Prophecy and Gnosis,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989): 489–93). For Origen’s close association of knowledge and prophecy see, e.g., *Comm. Jn.* 6.21–27. At *Comm. Ser. Mt.* 49, Origen equates prophecy with teaching: *docere autem est prophetare* (GCS 38:107).

¹⁷ See *Cels.* 8.75; *Prin.* 2.8.3; *CRom* 5.10.

divine oracles without any mental disturbance.”¹⁸ Furthermore, unlike the demonically inspired, the true prophet enjoys *augmented* freedom in the state of inspiration:

The person inspired by the divine spirit ought to have derived from it far more benefit than anyone who may be instructed by the oracles to do that which helps towards living a life which is moderate and according to nature, or towards that which is of advantage or which is expedient. And for that reason he ought to possess the clearest vision at the very time when the deity is in communion with him.¹⁹

Is Philo the source of Origen’s conviction about non-ecstatic prophetic inspiration? I would be hesitant to go so far. It is true that several of Origen’s Christian predecessors Athenagoras, Justin, and Clement of Alexandria either appear to endorse a more nearly passive role for the inspired prophet or remain ambiguous.²⁰ Still, Clement’s “gnostic” understanding of prophecy²¹ is similar to Philo’s and Origen’s. And Philo himself, as we have seen, is hardly crystal-clear about the rational status of the prophets, even if he leans toward making space for Moses’s reason to remain operative. Nonetheless, it seems possible that Origen will at least have found some encouragement in Philo—something he could take in, digest, and assimilate.

Naturally enough, Origen’s emphasis on the prophet’s mental self-possession leads him also to underscore the prophet’s moral freedom even while inspired. A fragment on 1 Corinthians reads, “Certainly the prophets did not go into ecstasy, for it was in their power to be silent and to restrain the spirit that was upon them.”²² Here Origen is affirming the possibility of one under inspiration *not* prophesying, in obedience to Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 14:30–31a, “If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you

¹⁸ *Prin.* 3.3.4 (trans. Butterworth, 227).

¹⁹ *Cels.* 7.3 (trans. Chadwick, 397). Cf. *Cels.* 7.4.

²⁰ See J. R. Baskin, “Origen on Balaam: The Dilemma of the Unworthy Prophet,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983), 24, with references; Robert J. Hauck, *The More Divine Proof: Prophecy and Inspiration in Celsus and Origen* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 57–58, 63–64.

²¹ See the end of *Strom.* 6.

²² Οὐκοῦν οὐκ ἐξίσταντο οἱ προφηῆται· ἐν αὐτοῖς γὰρ ἦν τὸ σιωπῆσαι καὶ ἐπισχεῖν τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς πνεῦμα. *Frag. 1 Cor.* 69 (Jenkins, 40).

can all prophesy one by one” (NRSV). Elsewhere, Origen evokes the same principle of prophetic freedom (and even cites the same verse, 1 Cor. 14:30) in order to marvel at the “steadfastness” (*constantiam*) of prophets who are given unwelcome messages to deliver.²³ Ezekiel, for instance, proclaims Jerusalem’s sins, heedless of the risk of retribution he incurred.²⁴

The emphasis Origen places on the moral freedom of the prophets helps explain his insistence on the prophets’ moral purity.²⁵ There needs to be congruence between the prophet’s life and the prophetic message. In the *Contra Celsum*, Origen writes, “Of the Jewish prophets some were wise before they received the gift of prophecy and divine inspiration, while others became wise after they had been illuminated in mind by the actual gift of prophecy itself. They were chosen by providence to be entrusted with the divine Spirit and with the utterances that He inspired on account of the quality of their lives, which was of unexampled courage and freedom; for in the face of death they were entirely without terror.”²⁶ The moral character of the prophets’ *bios*, then, is inseparable from their prophetic office. This is certainly the case for Moses. In the words of Henri de Lubac, Origen “is dazzled by the greatness of Moses.”²⁷ In the *Contra Celsum* he defends Moses against all comers: “in the pure and pious soul of Moses, who rose above all that is created, and united himself to the Creator of the universe, there dwelt a divine spirit which showed the truth about God far clearer than Plato and the wise men among the Greeks and barbarians.”²⁸ Later, in Book 4, Origen sets Moses apart even from other true prophets: “Only those who are truly wise and genuinely pious are nearer to communion with God. Such is the

²³ *Hom. Ezek.* 6.1 (GCS 33:377).

²⁴ *Hom. Ezek.* 6.1 (GCS 33:378): *non posuit ante oculos suos periculum, quod ex praedicatione erat secuturum.*

²⁵ *Prin.* 3.3.3; *Cels.* 3.3; 4.96; 7.7, 18.

²⁶ *Cels.* 7.7 (Chadwick, 400); cf. *Hom. Jer.* 15.1.

²⁷ *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 299.

²⁸ *Cels.* 1.19 (Chadwick, 20). Hauck suggests that this passage, which does not appear in van den Hoek’s catalogue, is reminiscent of Philo, *Somn.* 2.229; *Mos.* 1.27 (*More Divine Proof*, 130).

character of our prophets and of Moses, of whom the scripture testified on account of his great purity that ‘Moses alone shall draw near to God, while the others shall not draw near’ [Exod. 24:2].”²⁹ (Origen, however, is prepared to ascribe sin to Moses where Philo is not. For instance, he speculates in a homily that Moses was hesitant to accept God’s call at the burning bush because his conscience was troubled over the Egyptian he killed and possibly “certain other sins as well.”³⁰ Philo justifies the killing at *Mos.* 1.44, and allegorizes it in two other texts.³¹)

On the question of the significance of the character of Moses’s *bios*, Origen’s similarity to Philo is much sharper than on that of ecstatic vs. rational inspiration. Philo’s concern to show congruence between Moses’s *bios* and his *logos* is pervasive in *Mos.* Summing up the moral excellence of the young Moses, still living in Pharaoh’s court, Philo writes that “in his daily behavior he lived out the doctrines of philosophy, saying what he thought and acting in keeping with what he said, producing harmony between speech and life, so that close scrutiny would find them sounding together as if on a musical instrument.”³² Like Origen, Philo attributes God’s selection of Moses as ruler and king to “virtue, good character, and goodwill towards all.”³³ But Moses’s complete integrity from youth also licenses Philo’s speculation that Moses may have become “a living and rational law” (νόμος ἔμψυχός τε καὶ λογικὸς) even before the revelation at Sinai.³⁴ At the very least, Philo is certain that when Moses enters “into the darkness where God was, that is into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence of existing things,” the unity of his knowledge, speech, and deed prepare him to become “in himself and his life [ἐαυτὸν

²⁹ *Cels.* 4.96 (Chadwick, 260).

³⁰ *Hom. Isa.* 6.2 (trans. Scheck, ACW 68:910).

³¹ *Leg.* 3.38; *Fug.* 148.

³² *Mos.* 1.29 (LCL 289:291; my trans.): τὰ φιλοσοφίας δόγματα διὰ τῶν καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν ἔργων ἐπεδείκνυτο, λέγων μὲν οἷα ἐφρόνει, πράττων δὲ ἀκόλουθα τοῖς λεγομένοις εἰς ἀρμονίαν λόγου καὶ βίου, ἵν’ οἷος ὁ λόγος τοιοῦτος ὁ βίος καὶ οἷος ὁ βίος τοιοῦτος ὁ λόγος ἐξετάζωνται καθάπερ ἐν ὀργάνῳ μουσικῷ συνηχοῦντες.

³³ *Mos.* 1.148 (LCL 289:352; my trans.): ἀρετῆς ἕνεκα καὶ καλοκάγαθίας καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἅπαντας εὐνοίας.

³⁴ *Mos.* 1.162 (LCL 289:358; my trans.).

καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον]...a model [of what he saw] for those who are willing to copy it.”³⁵ Moses embodies the content of his prophecy. This explains why proper understanding of the Law requires, as Philo insinuates at the opening of *Mos.*, knowledge of “the man as he really was” (ὅστις ἦν ἐπ’ ἀληθείας).³⁶

The final piece of my argument concerns two specific moral qualities of the prophet that both Philo and Origen highlight, though with different accents. The first of these is accommodation. Philo believes the Mosaic scriptures to have been written in keeping with a two-step pedagogy. While proper theological discourse eschews the ascription of any anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language to God, the first step of this pedagogy speaks of God anthropomorphically. This is a measure of accommodation, telling “beneficial lies” (ψευδῆ, δι’ ὧν ὠφελήθησονται) for those who are slower on the uptake (νωθεστέρα...καὶ ἀμβλεία...τῆ φύσει).³⁷ Importantly, Philo grounds the existence of this pedagogy in God’s “perfect and universal goodness.”³⁸ Just as importantly, in keeping with the harmony between Moses’s character and his teaching, Philo speaks of the prophet as consciously involved in this work of accommodation, rooted in divine kindness. At *Deus* 52, it is not God but “the Lawgiver” who uses anthropopathism for the sake of the less intelligent.³⁹ A little later, Philo has Moses answer those who question such a technique: “The one who legislates best must be committed to one goal: to benefit all who encounter [his laws].”⁴⁰ The need for the prophetic lawgiver to

³⁵ *Mos.* 1.158 (LCL 289:358–59; trans. Colson). See David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 110–11.

³⁶ *Mos.* 1.1 (LCL 289:276–77; trans. Colson).

³⁷ *Deus* 63–64 (LCL 247:43; my trans.). Cf. *Somn.* 1.234–237; et al.

³⁸ *Deus* 73 (LCL 247:46–47; trans. Colson and Whitaker): τῆς περὶ πάντα τελείας ἀγαθότητος. Cf. Tzvi Novick, commenting on *Abr.* 119–132: “That God deigns to become manifest other than as he is, for the benefit of less minds [...], is understood by Philo as a distinctively divine kindness” (“Perspective, Paideia, and Accommodation in Philo,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 21 (2009), 59).

³⁹ *Deus* 52 (LCL 247:36–37).

⁴⁰ *Deus* 61 (LCL 247:40; my trans.): τῷ ἄριστα νομοθετήσοντι τέλος ἐν δεῖ προκεῖσθαι, πάντας ὠφελῆσαι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας.

accommodate his teaching to the weak would seem to explain why “love of humanity” (τὸ φιλόανθρωπον) rates as one of the four special virtues that Philo associates with Moses as legislator in *Mos.* 2.9. Indeed, *philanthrōpia* is there described as the virtue by which the lawgiver disposes his judgments in such a way as to serve the common good (κοινωφελείζ).⁴¹ Conscious participation in divine pedagogical accommodation is a feature of authentic prophetic activity that Origen emphasizes frequently.⁴² Even more explicitly than Philo, Origen regards this as an expression of *philanthrōpia*: “We say that it is the task of those who teach the true doctrines to help as many people as they can, and as far as it is in their power to win everyone over to the truth by their love to mankind [διὰ φιλανθρωπῖαν]—not only the intelligent, but also the stupid.”⁴³ This is obviously very similar to what we encounter in Philo’s *Deus*.

Origen further implies that the prophet’s conscious accommodation to the needs of the many is a form of humiliation or suffering. (No one knows better than academics that refraining from saying all one knows in order to seek others’ benefit over one’s own can be a severe form of asceticism.⁴⁴) The paradigm here for Origen is Jesus himself, the Word whose silence before his accusers is presented in the *Contra Celsum*’s Preface as a vivid icon of the self-emptying love of God. But Origen also suggests that Moses’s accommodation to the people of Israel as costly. In Book 1 of the *Contra Celsum*, Origen responds to Celsus’s ridicule of Moses, whom he portrays as opportunistic and upwardly mobile, someone who plagiarizes from “wise nations and distinguished men” in order to “acquire[] a name for divine power”⁴⁵ among dupes to whom

⁴¹ *Mos.* 2.9 (LCL 289:454).

⁴² E.g. *Cels.* 1.18; 4.71–72; 7.10; *Comm. Jn.* 13.319; 19.28.

⁴³ *Cels.* 6.1 (SC 147:178; trans. Chadwick, 316).

⁴⁴ See *Hom. Lev.* 6.3, where Origen interprets the two tunics prescribed in Lev. 8:7: “ne [tunic is] of the ministry of the flesh; another of spiritual understanding. He [the high priest] knew also that spiritual sacrifices ought to be offered to God, yet he was offering carnal sacrifices nonetheless. For he could not be high priest of those who were living at that time, unless he immolated offerings. Therefore, it is rightly said that this high priest was clothed with two tunics” (trans. Barkley, FC 83:122).

⁴⁵ *Cels.* 1.21 (Chadwick, 21).

Celsus refers disparagingly as “goatherds and shepherds.”⁴⁶ In contrast, Origen sees Moses’s self-emptying appeal to these “goatherds and shepherds” as manifesting the *philanthrōpia* of the Logos, which “conquer[s]” the world’s hostility.⁴⁷ Suffering—whether through the contempt of the elite who despise the prophets’ accommodation, or through rejection at the hands of the recipients of unpopular oracles (as in the case of Ezekiel and others)—seems to Origen intrinsic to the prophetic vocation: “the prophets, who received the divine Spirit because of their purity of life, ‘went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes of the earth’ [Heb. 11:37–38]. As the Psalmist says, ‘many are the afflictions of the righteous’ [Ps. 33:20].”⁴⁸

While Philo does not link accommodation and suffering as clearly as Origen does, it is interesting to observe his emphasis on Moses’s renunciation of his Egyptian status and its attendant benefits.⁴⁹ The same idea is expressed in a New Testament text that Origen will quote as paradigmatic on the very first page of *Prin*. To secure Moses’s authenticity as a prophet, Origen “count[s] it sufficient [...] to quote this one testimony of Paul, taken from the epistle which he writes to the Hebrews, where he speaks as follows: ‘By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of Egypt’ [Heb 11.24-26].”⁵⁰

Now we are in a position to comment on the significance for Origen’s thought of this possible Philonic influence. Earlier I said that the content of Origen’s Christianizing revision of

⁴⁶ *Cels.* 1.23 (Chadwick, 22).

⁴⁷ *Cels.* 1.27 (Chadwick, 27). Importantly, it is right after this paragraph that Origen stops writing to go back and compose the Preface with its depiction of Christ the silent Word.

⁴⁸ *Cels.* 7.18 (Chadwick, 409). Cf. *Hom. Jer.* 20.5.

⁴⁹ *Mos.* 1.149 (LCL 289:149). See Louis H. Feldman, *Philo’s Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 290.

⁵⁰ *Prin* 1.praef.1 (Butterworth, 1).

Philo on the Hebrew midwives was not of interest. But it is time for a revision of my own.

Origen is famous for his desire to be *ecclesiasticus*, a man of the Church. Less often noticed is what he identifies as the decisive criterion for being *ecclesiasticus*. According to *Homily 16 on Luke*, it is the quest for “an equal accounting for both the Old Law and the New.”⁵¹ Or again, in the ninth homily on Joshua, Origen says that “we who are of the catholic Church do not reject the Law of Moses, but we accept it if Jesus reads it to us.”⁵² In other words, it is precisely commitment to the unity of the testaments that marks one out as *ecclesiasticus*. In this light, it is striking to note the context for Origen’s quotation of Heb. 11:24–26 concerning Moses in *Prin.* He adduces this text “to show from the divine scriptures how that Moses [and] the prophets were filled with the spirit of Christ in all their words and deeds.”⁵³ Moses’s willingness to suffer for God’s people is for Origen the telltale sign that he was “filled with the spirit of Christ.” This in turn is what guarantees that Moses’s words count as “the very words and teaching of Christ.”⁵⁴ In other words, Moses’s self-emptying service to Israel constitutes a major linchpin in Origen’s all-important case for the unity of the testaments. I do not claim to have proved that Philo is to thank for this. I do believe that I have shown that it is plausible and even likely that Origen absorbed Philo’s view of Moses as a conscious participant in God’s accommodating pedagogy for the sake of others, even at the cost of suffering, and that this absorption enriched his own account of a divine economy that culminated in the total self-gift of the incarnate Word.

Thank you.

⁵¹ *Hom. Lk.* 16.6 (trans. J. Lienhard, FC 94:68). *aequalem et in veteri et in nova lege quaero rationem* (SC 87:244).

⁵² *Hom. Jos.* 9.8 (trans. Bruce, FC 105:104). *Non enim nos, qui de ecclesia catholica sumus, spernimus legem Moysei, sed suscipiamus eam, sit amen >Iesus< eam nobis >legerit<* (GCS 30:353). Origen is interpreting Jos. 9:2e–f LXX: “And after these things Iesus thus read all the words of this law, the blessings and the curses, according to all things written in the law of Moyses. There was not a word of all that Moyses commanded Iesus that Iesus did not read in the ears of all the assembly [=church] of the sons of Israel” (NETS).

⁵³ *Prin.* 1.pref.1 (Butterworth, 1).

⁵⁴ *Prin.* 1.pref.1 (Butterworth, 1).