

Research Article

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Conflict and Authority: William of Saint-Thierry and Peter Abelard as Readers of Origen

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Abstract: This study compares how two prominent twelfth-century Latin authors and theological opponents, namely the monastic author William of Saint-Thierry (c. 1080–1148) and the school master Peter Abelard (1079–1142), variously understood the authority of the controversial yet influential Greek author Origen (c. 184–253) in their works. Modern scholars who study the reception of Origen in the twelfth-century Latin West have, to this point, spoken of an Origenian revival in this period, concluding that Origen was especially popular in the cloister, among Cistercian monks, such as Bernard of Clairvaux and his followers, like William of Saint-Thierry, based on the assumption that as monks they found his writings more relevant. This study seeks to challenge this scholarly narrative by focusing on two authors who are perceived as typifying two different strands of theology, one of a contemplative character developed in the cloister (William) and one making use of dialectics and developed in the emerging schools (Abelard). By demonstrating that the schoolmaster Abelard drew on Origen to a greater degree and in a more transparent manner than his monastic opponent, this study will show that Origen's popularity in the cloisters was not, as such, a clear point of distinction between them and schools in the way that has usually been claimed by modern scholarship.

Keywords: *auctoritates*, medieval reception, monastic theology, early Cistercians, medieval schools, twelfth-century Latin West

1 Introduction

An essential feature of Latin medieval theology is its intense preoccupation with the notion of *auctoritas*.¹ The term, *auctoritates*, designated both people of authority and texts or extracts from texts that conferred authority.² Manifesting a deep concern for not transgressing the boundaries set by their Christian predecessors (Prov. 22:28) and for not introducing novelties in their teaching (1 Tim 6:20), Latin medieval writers were careful to show that their views, far from being their own, were firmly grounded in the established authorities of the past.³ Their main authority was undoubtedly the Bible, the most studied book in the Middle Ages. However, given its numerous difficulties, medieval authors considered that the Bible could not be properly read and understood without recourse to patristic authorities, the so-called *patres* and *doctores*

1 Otten, "Authority and Identity," 349.

2 Ziolkowski, "Cultures of Authority," 427.

3 Peters, "Transgressing the Limits," 338–63.

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of the church, i.e., both western and eastern Christian authors of earlier generations whose legacy included also a wealth of reflections on and interpretations of the biblical text.

Among the previous Christian authors who served as a guide to unravelling scriptural puzzles, the controversial early Greek author Origen occupied a special place. Condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council,⁴ his works were primarily preserved in late antique Latin translations made by Rufinus, Jerome, and Hilary. Although the Latins were aware of a number of controversial doctrines attributed to him, the massive edifice of commentary on scripture that Origen had bequeathed to posterity ensured that in the West he was read and drawn upon intermittently throughout the Middle Ages.⁵ Even a fierce critic of his thought, like Jerome, was not willing to deny Origen's remarkable contribution as a biblical scholar, famously declaring that in Origen he "praised the commentator not the dogmatist" *laudavi interpretem, non dogmatisten*.⁶ Jerome's formulation influenced a great deal the way in which Origen's works were read in the medieval west for centuries to come.

In spite of the fact that the Latins adopted a more positive attitude toward Origen's reputation than their eastern counterparts, interest in Origen's works was not steady, but varied from century to century. After his rediscovery in the ninth century by Carolingian scholars, it was especially the twelfth century that witnessed such a vivid interest in his work, that modern scholars came to speak of an "Origenian renaissance," or an "Origenian revival," describing this century as an *aetas Origeneana*.⁷ This conclusion has rested on the marked increase in the number of Origen's manuscripts available in this period in medieval libraries, which led to the assumption that he enjoyed a growing popularity among medieval readers.⁸ Beyond this, the modern scholarly narrative has gone on to establish a direct connection between the Origenian renaissance and the monastic renewal taking place at this time.⁹ It has associated the considerable interest in Origen's works with the early Cistercians and, in particular, with the influential Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, whose masterpiece commentary on the Song of Songs is commonly considered to be more indebted to Origen than to any other single patristic authority.¹⁰ However, this long-ingrained scholarly view is in need of reassessment, for it has been pointed out on several occasions that Bernard does not follow the Greek

4 Origen's condemnation is not a straightforward matter and despite much scholarly scrutiny remains largely unclear. The acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council preserved only in Latin do not contain any of the anti-Origenist anathemas that came to be associated with the council. Although canon 11 mentions Origen's condemnation as part of a list of heretics, some scholars argue that this has been added after the fact, see Crouzel, "Les Condamnations subies par Origène;" and Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apocatastasis*. In contradistinction, Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople*, argues that Origen's inclusion in canon 11 is original. Reports concerning the condemnation of Origen (together with Didymus and Evagrius Ponticus) in 553 have been written by writers contemporary to the council, such as the church historian Evagrius and Cyril of Scythopolis. It remains however difficult to estimate how well were the Latins informed about Origen's condemnation, see Louth, "The Reception of Origen," 616.

5 For a survey of Origen's spread in the Latin medieval West, see De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, chapter *Origenes latinus*.

6 Jerome, *Ep.* 84.2. Jerome was not always a critic of Origen's thought. At the early stages of his career he admired and studied assiduously the writings of the Greek author. Apart from offering translations of a number of Origen's works, he also relied partly on Origen's ideas in some of his works, such as his *Commentary on Ephesians*. He began to distance himself from Origen beginning with 396 when, caught up in the heat of the first Origenist controversy, he was forced to defend himself against charges of Origenism. The phrase quoted above derives from a letter dated to around 400, in which Jerome forcefully refutes the charges of Origenism brought up against him, yet still maintains that Origen's scriptural writings are worth reading. For a detailed account of the first controversy surrounding Origen's legacy and for Jerome's involvement in it, see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*.

7 McGinn, "The Spiritual Heritage of Origen in the West," 273.

8 Delmule, "Présence des Pères Grecs," 305–35 shows that Origen was present with at least one manuscript in almost forty of the seventy-one extant library inventories originating from Northern France in the period between the ninth and the twelfth century. This number is not representative because it is based only on evidence from the surviving inventories. For example, the existence of Origen's works in six volumes at the Cistercian monastery of Signy in the twelfth century is well attested, but this evidence has not been included in Dellmule's study because the inventory did not survive. This study shows nevertheless that Origen was, with 120 manuscripts of his works identified, the most popular Greek author in the libraries of Northern France and that the number of his manuscripts increased considerably in the second half of the eleventh and in the twelfth century.

9 Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 94–6.

10 Evans, "Origen in the Twelfth Century," 280–1.

author to the extent it has been assumed so far, and moreover, that his rare mentions of Origen take place mainly in a negative context.¹¹ Therefore, in light of this evidence, which suggests that Bernard was quite critical of Origen's legacy, and that he used him only sparingly, the question arises as to whether it is still justified to consider Bernard as the main promoter of Origen's thought in the twelfth century.

In the attempt to reevaluate the existing scholarly narrative, this article will not deal with Bernard's reception of Origen, as might perhaps be expected, but it will investigate instead how two of Bernard's contemporaries, namely his friend and monastic author, William of Saint-Thierry (c. 1075–1148) and his reputed adversary, the schoolmaster Peter Abelard (c. 1079–1142), made use of Origen in their works. There are several reasons for deciding to look at these two authors' readings of Origen comparatively. First, both William and Abelard use Origen more extensively and in a more transparent manner in their works than Bernard does. In fact, among the early Cistercians, William is likely the one who draws most on the writings of the Greek author.¹² Abelard in turn, in addition to quoting Origen explicitly throughout his works, went so far as to identify himself on occasion with the ancient author, not only on the grounds of their emasculation, but most importantly because, like Origen, whom he considered "the greatest Christian philosopher," Abelard also thought of himself as a Christian philosopher.¹³ Second, William and Abelard are usually perceived as typifying two different strands of theology: one centered on the contemplation of God, which developed in the cloister, and another based on logic and dialectics, which developed in the emerging schools.¹⁴ As Abelard is associated with the schools, his reading of Origen will help me draw attention to the fact that, in the twelfth century, Origen's relevance clearly extended beyond the walls of the monastery. Of course, Abelard is not an isolated example for the use of Origen outside the cloister. The various versions of the glossed Bible produced in the early twelfth century in the cathedral schools also attest to a growing interest in the works of the Greek author, as they provide frequent citations of Origen for glosses to the books of the Old and New Testament.¹⁵ Thirdly, William and Abelard were embroiled in a vigorous theological conflict that ended with the latter's condemnation at Sens in 1141. Among the various doctrinal and methodological accusations adduced against Abelard by Bernard of Clairvaux, on the basis of a list of charges initially assembled by William, was the imputation that Abelard embraced and disseminated "Origen's blasphemies" because he, like Origen, denied the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Thus, the specter of Origen appears at the very heart of the conflict that opposed these formidable personalities, making us wonder if Abelard's reading of Origen played any kind of role in the condemnation of his theology.

So far there is no study that looks comparatively at the way in which William and Abelard made use of Origen in their works. However, the two medieval authors have been under intense scholarly scrutiny in the context of the above-mentioned theological controversy.¹⁷ More recently there have been some attempts to look at their rivalry through the prism of William's and Abelard's homonymous commentaries on Paul's

¹¹ Jean Leclercq was the first to observe that Bernard's references to Origen's writings in his sermons on the Song of Songs were disappointingly meagre, see Leclercq, *Récueil*, 279. Louth, "The Reception of Origen," 626 observes that Bernard turns his interpretation of the Song of Songs into something completely different from what we can find in Origen. More recently, I have questioned the view that Bernard was a follower of Origen especially in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, showing that older scholarship based its main claims regarding Bernard's reception of Origen on tenuous evidence and by erroneously indicating Origen as a source in passages where Bernard, in fact, clearly followed Augustine, see Cvetković, "Contested Authority," 469–84.

¹² Louth, "The Reception of Origen," 625.

¹³ See the discussion below, p. 14.

¹⁴ Leclercq was the first to launch the idea of two different types of theologies developing in the twelfth century, see Leclercq, "Saint Bernard et la Théologie Monastique," 7–23.

¹⁵ Matter, "The *Glossa Ordinaria*," 87–8, 97–8, 105–7, and 109, shows that there are frequent citations of Origen for glosses to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, and Ezekiel. The gloss on the Song of Songs includes over twenty citations deriving all from Origen's homilies on this biblical book without acknowledging their author. Material from Origen's works was also included in the glosses to the Gospels and Acts. The main redactors of the various versions of *Glossa ordinaria* in the early twelfth century have been thought to be the schoolmasters Anselm and Ralph of Laon, Gilbert of Auxerre and Gilbert of Poitiers.

¹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.* 190.1.3.

¹⁷ The literature on the conflict that opposed Bernard and William to Abelard is vast. For a survey of the most important studies, see Mews, "The Council of Sens (1141)," 343, note 2.

Epistle to the Romans, both of which were written in the 1130s.¹⁸ Since in these commentaries, William and Abelard both draw extensively on Origen's own commentary on Romans, a handful of recent studies have also investigated their individual treatment of the Greek author.¹⁹ However, their commentaries on Romans are not the only works where William and Abelard manifest their knowledge of Origen. The former also relied on Origen in his exposition on the Song of Songs, whereas Abelard refers to Origen repeatedly throughout his works and quotes from a number of the latter's writings. Without claiming to be exhaustive, as the space in this article is limited, we will extend our investigation beyond William's and Abelard's readings of Origen's commentary on the Romans.

By comparing the way in which William and Abelard read Origen, this article seeks to produce a more nuanced picture of how such a controversial authority was handled in two different settings, the cloister and the school (at least in the case of these two authors), to inquire whether there are differences in usage stemming from incompatible approaches to reading authorities and to investigate the role played by Origen in the conflict that led to Abelard's condemnation. In dealing with these questions, we need to delve first into a discussion of their attitude toward patristic authorities. This will enable us to better grasp both their approaches to Origen and, at the same time, to shed more light on their conflict. For our purposes here, it will be significant that William's articulation of his own views regarding the appropriate way to interpret patristic texts is often intertwined with both overt and oblique criticisms of Abelard's own interpretive method. The second part of the article will be devoted to their respective readings of Origen.

2 Reading patristic authorities according to William and Abelard

William and Abelard were involved in the famous theological controversy of 1140/1141, when William, a simple Cistercian monk at the remote monastery of Signy, wrote a letter to Bernard, the powerful abbot of Clairvaux and to Geoffrey, the bishop of Chartres.²⁰ The letter alerted them to a number of doctrinal errors he encountered while perusing a couple of works written by Abelard and urged them to swiftly intervene and condemn his erroneous teachings.²¹ William's accusations convinced a reluctant Bernard to join the dispute and thus greatly influenced the abbot's own attack against the schoolmaster, which led to Abelard's condemnation at Sens in 1141.

William's letter focused on thirteen doctrinal errors collected from Abelard's works concerning "no minor things, but the faith of the Holy Trinity, the person of the Mediator, the Holy Spirit, the grace of God and the sacrament of our universal redemption."²² It also objected to Abelard's propensity for "unusual novelties of the words about faith and new inventions of unheard-of meanings."²³ These accusations were repeated and closely scrutinized in the work *Disputatio adversum Abaelardum*, which also voiced William's concerns regarding Abelard's approach to reading patristic authorities. So far as the latter is concerned, he presented the main tenets of his method of dealing with patristic textual authorities quite systematically in the prologue to his work *Sic et Non*, which William mentioned in his letter to Bernard and Geoffrey, but which he confessed he had not read.²⁴ Abelard's work addressed a topic of high importance for learned medieval

¹⁸ Cartwright, *The Romans Commentaries*; Cartwright, "Twelfth-century Pauline Exegesis," 205–35.

¹⁹ On William's use of Origen in his commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans, see Cartwright, "William of St Thierry's Use of Patristic Sources," 27–53; Scheck, "William's Reception of Origen," 236–56. On Abelard's use of Origen in his homonymous commentary, see Elliott, "Tracing the Romans Commentary of Origen in Abelard's," 415–29; Georges, "*Summus Christianorum philosophorum*," 431–40.

²⁰ William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326.

²¹ Scholars agree that the controversial works of Abelard, which William read, were the *Theologia scholarium* and a collection of sentences that seems to have been put together by Abelard's students rather than himself.

²² William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326.1: *Nec de minimis agitur, sed de fide Sanctae Trinitatis, de persona Mediatoris, de Spiritu Sancto, de gratia Dei, de sacramento communis redemptionis.*

²³ William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326.2: [...] *insolitas in fide vocum novitates et novas inauditorum sensuum adinventiones* [...].

²⁴ William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326.4.

men, namely that of apparent contradictions among patristic authorities, and suggested several solutions for resolving textual inconsistencies. William himself was preoccupied with this topic long before his attack against Abelard, when in his work *De Sacramento altaris* (most likely written prior to 1128) he proposed a way of treating opposing patristic statements that went along similar lines to what Abelard suggested.²⁵

Abelard's guidelines for reconciling contradicting textual authorities, provided in the prologue of the *Sic et Non*, began with the uncontroversial and traditional view that when encountering apparent errors or obscure passages, the readers should rather blame their own feebleness and lack of understanding than suspect the ancient authors of failure in writing.²⁶ Abelard went on to observe that contradictions could be solved by scrutinizing whether words were used with different meanings, whether a text had been corrupted by scribes during the copying process, or whether a text was misattributed or forged. Contrasting passages could also be clarified by investigating the authorial intention and the context of various sayings of the *patres*. Sometimes contradictions occurred because patristic authors quoted or used texts pertaining to heretical authors without clearly indicating their source. Drawing heavily on numerous passages from Augustine and Jerome, Abelard also made an important distinction between the authority of the Bible and that of the patristic texts, arguing that the authority of the Bible itself was superior to the authority of the texts produced by subsequent ecclesiastical authors. This meant that the medieval readers could treat them differently, and when confronted with unsolvable contradictions through the means presented above, they had the possibility to judge between them and opt for the view expressed by the older or greater authority. Abelard was not breaking new territory here, and he was careful to mention that, before him, Isidore and Jerome had suggested this solution. However, by considering contrasting authorities, Abelard saw an opportunity both for his students and for himself to ask questions and thus develop independent reasoning. Following Aristotle, but also the evangelical dictum "Seek and you will find" (Mt. 7.7), Abelard insisted that "only by doubting does one come to inquiry and by inquiry does one perceive the truth."²⁷ This principle lies at the very heart of Abelard's theology. The importance of doubting and questioning for theological reflection is well illustrated by the remainder of the *Sic et Non*, which gathers "pro" and "con" answers mainly from patristic authorities on 158 questions, and orders them in a such a way that the "yes" passages come first, followed by the "no" passages, without attempting to offer a solution to the identified problems.²⁸ Such an approach called into question an unreflective recourse to authorities as the chief method for discovering the truth. Long before Alain of Lille famously remarked that authority is like a wax nose that one can bend any way one likes,²⁹ simply by showing that, on the face of things, church authority speaks with a divided voice, Abelard hinted similarly that if one's interpretation of it is not properly subject to the limitations imposed by the rational disciplines of philosophy, one can prove almost anything from it. Nevertheless, while Abelard was reluctant about relying on authority alone in the search for truth, he did not dismiss it altogether; his point was that authority ought not to be followed blindly, but that one had to rely on reason when using and interpreting it. Conversely, he complained about shallow dialecticians who were disdainful of authority and who professed to discuss everything with their "little reasons."³⁰

²⁵ For the dating of William's work, see McGuire, "A Chronology and Biography of William of St Thierry," 20. Given the similarities of their approaches and the fact that in his *Ep.* 326.4 William confessed about Abelard *Dilexi et ego eum*, scholars have posited that William and Abelard knew each other, perhaps from their school days at Laon, where they could have been introduced to similar methods of reading the patristic authorities, see Zerbi, "Guillaume de Saint Thierry," 398.

²⁶ Peter Abelard, *SN*, Prol.

²⁷ Peter Abelard, *SN*, Prol.: *dubitando enim ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo veritatem percipimus*.

²⁸ Abelard was not the first to introduce this format. This listing of contradictory statements from church authorities for the sake of their future reconciliation is to be encountered before him in Yves of Chartres and much earlier in *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. On the former, see De Ghellink, *Le Mouvement*, 277ff, on the latter, see Charles-Edwards, "The Construction of the Hibernensis," 209–37; and Flechner "The Problem of Originality in Early Medieval Canon Law," 29–47. Even William adopted this format on a much smaller scale in his *De sacramento altaris* written at roughly the same time as Abelard's *Sic et Non*, see above p. 5, note 25.

²⁹ Alan of Lille, *Contra haereticos*, 1.30. PL 210, 333A.

³⁰ Peter Abelard, *TChr.* 3.135.

Thus, Abelard's position concerning the use of authorities lies midway between the so-called "authoritarians," who relied exclusively on authorities and refused to discuss anything, and dialecticians, who rejected authorities, preferring to discuss everything.³¹ However, because of his intermediate position, Abelard exposed himself to attacks from both sides.

In comparison to Abelard, William did not leave us any systematic account of his approach to patristic authorities. Some of his views, expressed in one of his early works, *De Sacramento altaris*, reflect William's training in the schools before he became a monk, and therefore bear similarities with Abelard's method of dealing with conflicting authorities, as he discussed it in the *Sic et Non*. William's work also proposed a way to deal with the contrasting statements of ecclesiastical doctors, which focused only on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in line to the topic of his treatise.³² William observed that some of the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the writings of the patristic authors arose from the fact that they were written circumstantially, in order to refute heretical issues without going into explanations beyond what was absolutely necessary. As a result, some of their accounts remained incomplete and were highly circumstantial, so it comes as no surprise that they occasionally express conflicting views. Therefore, like Abelard, William suggested that such passages ought to be read contextually. If a contextual reading does not clarify the difficulties, the reader should blame his own limitations rather than suspect the doctors of the church of propagating errors, an interpretive principle adhered to by Abelard as well. Also similar to Abelard, William did not equate the text of the Bible with that of the ecclesiastical doctors, considering the authority of the Scripture as superior to that of the patristic authors. William's succinct discussion on how to deal with conflicting authorities in this early work was followed by a series of sentences that illustrated the discordant viewpoints of ecclesiastical authors, in a similar manner to Abelard's *Sic et Non*.

In his subsequent works, and in contrast to Abelard, William manifested a deep concern for not introducing any novelties to the doctrine handed down by the *patres* and doctors of the church. He criticized Abelard for the new terms he employed, for the new meanings he attached to terms long in use, and for applying novel dialectical methods to the study of the Bible.³³ William repeatedly stressed that he himself said nothing new, but that he was completely indebted to the authority of his predecessors, especially in his compilatory works. He famously compared his work, which allegedly did nothing else than to gather diverse patristic sayings, with a small bird dressed in numerous bright feathers: if the feathers were to be removed, the small bird would be naked.³⁴ Moreover, in drawing on a multitude of ecclesiastical authors, he sought to present them as speaking with a unified voice. In his efforts to weave a commentary that presented a patristic consensus, he expressly admitted that he abstained from addressing "troublesome questions" (*quaestionum molestiis*).³⁵ This has been interpreted as a covert criticism of Abelard's method.³⁶ While the habit of not indicating one's sources was widespread amongst medieval authors, in William's case, his silence about the sources used might also be due to the fact that he was not interested in following the doctrine of any particular patristic author, but in unravelling the concordance of different patristic voices. As in his compilatory works, William also spoke in his own voice, he made sure that what he had to say blended in harmoniously with the views of his predecessors, so that the end result was a unitary work expressing one voice.

Although William recognized the diversity of patristic views and even their ostensible contradiction, he condemned Abelard's habit of setting authorities against each other in order to work out a scholastic solution. He criticized Abelard for all too easily discarding the traditional doctrinal views developed over centuries in favor of his own opinions, introduced with the words *ut nobis videtur*, that set him clearly apart

³¹ Murray, *Abelard and St Bernard*, in particular the chapter "Abelard's Method."

³² William's method is presented in *Sacr.* 11–2.

³³ William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326.1: *Petrus enim Abaelardus iterum nova docet, nova scribit [...]; Ep.* 326.2: [...] *agens in Scriptura divina quod agere solebat in dialectica, proprias adinventiones, annuas novitates.*

³⁴ William of St Thierry, *ExpRom*, Praefatio: *Secundum poeticam fabulam, aviculam nostram diversarum plumis avium, et coloribus sollemniter vestivimus; quae si venerint, et abstulerint singulae, quae recognoverint sua, nuda vel nulla remanebit nostra cornicula.*

³⁵ William of St Thierry, *ExpRom*, Praefatio.

³⁶ Scheck, *Origen*, 107.

from the company of the ecclesiastical authors.³⁷ William thought that Abelard's attitude was arrogant, and he could not cease to wonder at the latter's audacity to presume that he was better equipped than the Apostles and their successors to answer questions about the mysteries of faith.³⁸ According to William, by seeking to scrutinize almost everything by means of reason, Abelard not only proved himself to be a conceited innovator, but also fell into the same old traps that numerous heretics had fallen into before him.³⁹ Time and again, in writings that are most likely directed against Abelard, William insisted that the Christian predecessors needed to be read *pie et humiliter*.⁴⁰ For William, the person who embodied the correct attitude to patristic authorities was Bernard of Clairvaux, whom he depicted in his account of the abbot's life as reading his predecessors works in a humble manner, following their judgment in matters of faith and with no intention of considering himself to be their equal.⁴¹

Enough has been said to understand where William and Abelard's attitude to patristic authorities overlapped and where it differed, so with these considerations in mind let us turn to William's and Abelard's readings of Origen.

3 William as a reader of Origen

Before embarking on a monastic career as the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Thierry (1121–1135) and later as a Cistercian monk at Signy (1135–1148), William was trained in the schools,⁴² where he acquired both a vast knowledge of the writings of patristic authors and the techniques necessary to excerpt and use their works.⁴³ As modern scholars rediscovered his significant contribution to the development of twelfth-century theology, they also remarked on his fondness for the use of Greek sources (in Latin translation), something which is unusual among the medieval learned men of the period. In particular, Jean-Marie Déchanet was among the first to notice William's knowledge of Origen.⁴⁴ Although a more recent generation of scholars has since successfully contested the claims of Déchanet and his followers about the presence of Greek sources in William's thought,⁴⁵ they must nevertheless acknowledge that William relied on Origen in at least two of his exegetical works, namely the *Expositio super Epistolam ad Romanos* and his *Expositio super Cantica Cantorum*, both composed in the 1130s.

³⁷ William of St Thierry, *Disp.* 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Also the recommendation to read *pie et humiliter* occurs in works William most likely directed against Abelard although he did not name him explicitly, such as the *Speculum fidei* 35 and *Aenigma fidei* 45: *Pie ergo et humiliter in via hac qua ambulamus, praecedentium Patrum vestigia venerantes procedamus.*

⁴¹ William of St Thierry, *Vita prima*, 1.24.

⁴² Given the lacunar testimony about William's early life, there is no scholarly agreement regarding William's training in the schools. Some scholars claim that he studied at Reims, based on a line in William's *vita*, the *Vita antiqua*, which says that William attended the school at Reims, whereas other scholars, based on the features of his works and on William's own sparing remarks, conjectured that he might have studied at Laon, like Abelard. On William's education see McGuire, "Chronology and Biography," 14–6.

⁴³ Déchanet observed that William was fond of two excerpting techniques, which he referred to as *florilegium*, which entails express quotation, and *recapitulatio*, which is a skillful arrangement and fusion of texts from different writers. The first technique is to be found in *De Sacramento altaris*, *Epistola ad Rupertum*, *Disputatio adversum Abaelardum*, *De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis* and the two *florilegia* of sentences about the Song of Songs collected from the works of Ambrose of Milan and William of St Thierry. The second technique is encountered in William's partial compilations, such as *Expositio super Epistolam ad Romanos*, *Aenigma fidei* and *De natura corporis et animae*. For a discussion of William's methods of work, see Déchanet, *Guillaume de Saint-Thierry*, 124–35.

⁴⁴ Déchanet, *Aux Sources*, 45–7.

⁴⁵ Scholars such as John Anderson and David N. Bell were among the first to contest William's interest in Greek sources as claimed by Déchanet, see Bell, "The Alleged Greek Sources of William of St Thierry," 109–22.

3.1 *Expositio super Epistolam ad Romanos*

The primary difficulty faced in giving an account of William's dependence on Origen is that he did not, as a general rule, explicitly name his sources, mentioning Origen by name only once in his entire corpus. This instance is found in the preface of his exposition, where William indicated that Origen was one of the major sources for his commentary and that he considered him a doctor of the church on a par with Augustine and Ambrose:

The resulting commentary should be much more acceptable to the readers since it is not founded on novelty or vain presumption but is recommended by the profound authority of outstanding teachers such as blessed Augustine, as I have said, and also Ambrose, Origen and some other learned men, whom we are certain, have not in any way transgressed the limits set by our Fathers.⁴⁶

Due to the importance of compilation to the overall character of this biblical commentary, scholars were able to find solid traces of Origen's reception. Steven Cartwright, who investigated the commentary in detail, emphasized William's originality, estimating that approximately a quarter of the material in this work derives from patristic sources, whereas the rest is William's own contribution.⁴⁷ He identified Augustine as the primary source of William's commentary, followed by Origen with no less than 68 quotations amounting however to only a half of the material drawn from Augustine. Whereas William drew on a variety of Augustine's works, for the most part, by using the compilations of Florus and Rabanus, all of his quotations of Origen stemmed from one single work: the *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, translated into Latin by Rufinus, who condensed the material of the 15 books of the original version reducing it to 10 books in Latin translation. In his critical edition of William's exposition, Paul Verdeyen claimed that William also quoted Origen's *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*. However upon checking the quotation indicated by Verdeyen, I have found its source in Augustine's *Contra Faustus*.⁴⁸

When looking for the source of William's quotations of Origen, it has been observed that some coincide with those contained in the compilation of Rabanus,⁴⁹ but this source cannot account for all of William's quotations of Origen. As William drew on each of the ten books of Rufinus' translation, it is likely that he had Origen's entire commentary in front of him. Furthermore, we know that, at the end of the twelfth century, numerous writings of Origen were present at Signy in a six-volume collection preserved today as manuscript 207 at the Library of Charleville, containing the following: vol. 1, the *Homelies on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticum*; vol. 2, the *Homelies on Numbers*; vol. 3, the *Homilies on Joshua, Judges, Kings, the Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezechiel*; vol. 4, the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and the *De principiis*; vol. 5, the second part of the *Commentary on Matthew*; and vol. 6, the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.⁵⁰ It is not clear what exactly was available to William;⁵¹ however, Origen's works were present in libraries across Northern France in the first half of the twelfth century, the most remarkable example being the library of Clairvaux, which boasted a large collection of Origen's works, in eight volumes, that was available during Bernard's abbacy.⁵²

Some scholars have argued that William's exposition may be aptly described as "a blending and synthesis of Augustine and Origen."⁵³ However, this view has not been accepted unanimously. John Anderson regards the commentary as thoroughly Augustinian despite William's use of Origen, while more recently, Cartwright has emphasized the originality of this partial compilatory work, based on the

⁴⁶ *ExpRom*, Praefatio: *Quae tanto debebit gratior esse lectoribus, quanto eam non novitas vel vanitatis praesumptio adinvenit, sed magnorum doctorum magna commendat auctoritas, praecipue, sicut dictum est, beati Augustini, deinde vero Ambrosii, Origenis et nonnullorum aliorum doctorum; aliquorum etiam magistrorum nostri temporis, de quibus certum habemus non praeteriisse eos in aliquot terminis quos posuerunt Patres nostri.*

⁴⁷ Cartwright, "William of St. Thierry's Use of Patristic Sources," 32–3.

⁴⁸ See CCCM 86, *Index Scriptorum*, 207.

⁴⁹ Cartwright, "William of St Thierry Use of Patristic Sources," 43.

⁵⁰ See Déchanet, "Introduction," 32.

⁵¹ Bondéelle-Souchier, *Bibliothèques Cisterciennes*, 291 mentions the presence of Origen's commentary on the Romans at Signy, but she dates it to the second half of the twelfth century.

⁵² Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 94.

⁵³ Sheck, *Origen*, 107.

fact that, for a large part of his exposition on Romans, William did not rely on citations from patristic authorities, but spoke in his own voice. In terms of content, William used Origen's commentary as a convenient source for clear distinctions and useful definitions of key terms found in Paul's epistle on the Romans, following Origen in his explanations of grace and apostleship,⁵⁴ Jew and Greek,⁵⁵ anger,⁵⁶ faith and works,⁵⁷ keeping the law and perfecting the law,⁵⁸ stages of conversion,⁵⁹ and so forth. William also followed Origen when speaking of justification, the new life of dying to sin, and conformity to Christ. However, he makes no use of Origen in his treatment of the Trinity, the sacraments or predestination. Significantly, a text where Origen spoke of the presence of all humanity in Adam was changed in such a way so as to convey Augustine's notion of inherited guilt as a result of Adam's sin:⁶⁰

Origen, *CRm* 5.1.

*Si ergo Levi, qui generatione quarta post Abraham nascitur, in lumbis Abrahae fuisse perhibetur, multo magis omnes homines qui in hoc mundo nascuntur, et nati sunt, in lumbis erant Adae, cum adhuc esset in paradiso: et omnes homines cum ipso vel in ipso expulsi sunt de paradiso, cum ipse inde depulsus est; et per ipsum mors, quae ei ex praevaricatione venerat, consequenter et in eos pertransiit qui in lumbis eius habebantur [...].*⁶¹

William, *ExpRom* 3.5.12.

*Si ergo Levi, qui generatione quarta post Abraham nascitur, in lumbis Abrahae fuisse perhibetur, multo magis omnes eran in lumbis Adae, cum peccaret; et in ipso peccaverunt, et cum ipso a paradiso expulsi sunt, et per ipsum mors in omnes pertransiit, qui in lumbis eius habebantur.*⁶²

⁵⁴ cf. *ExpRom* 1.1.5: [...] *gratiam ad laborum patientiam, apostolatum ad praedicationis auctoritatem*, and *CRm* 1.7: *Gratia ad laborum patientiam referenda est, apostolatus ad praedicationis auctoritatem*.

⁵⁵ cf. *ExpRom* 1.1.16: *Graeci etiam primum omne hominum genus duabus appellationibus censuerunt, omnem hominem dicentes esse Graecum vel Barbarum; ut Barbarus esset, quicumque Graecus non esset. Sed multo veriore distinctione utitur Paulus. Iudaeos primum ponens, deinde Graecos, et postmodum Barbaros. Cum enim Graeci ideo se caeteris, quia legibus utebantur, merito ab apostolo ipsis etiam Graecis Iudaei praelati sunt, quia ante omnes leges a Deo perceperunt* and *CRm* 1.14: *Graeci primum duabus appellationibus omne hominum censuerant genus, id est vel Graecum dicentes esse unumquemque vel barbarum; et distinctio eorum talis fuerat ut omnis qui Graecus non esset barbarus haberetur. Sed multo veriore distinctione utitur Paulus Iudaeos primo dicens et postmodum Graecos postremo barbaros. Cum enim Graeci quia ipsi legibus utebantur omnes reliquos tamquam sine legibus viventes barbaros appelaverint, merito Iudaei etiam ipsis Graecis ab apostolo praeferuntur, quia et ante ipsos legibus vivere coeperunt et leges eorum a Deo et non ab hominibus promulgatae sunt*.

⁵⁶ cf. *ExpRom* 1.2.8–9: *His ergo ira et indignatio, angustia et tribulatio. Ira est ex peccati conscientia incussus animae cruciatus. Indignatio vero ipsius irae, et quasi vulneris tumor quidam intelligitur, et per singular quaeque commotio, ut si verbi ghratia vulnus aliquod pessimum iram ponamus, cuius tumor et distentio idignatio vulneris appelletur* and *CRm* 2.5: *Et his sunt quos sine dubio consequuntur illa quae scripta sunt ira et indignatio tribulatio et angustia. De ira saepe iam diximus quod interdum ipse qui ex peccati conscientia animae incutitur cruciatus ira appellitur; indignatio autem ipsius irae tumor quidam significatur et per singula quaeque commotio; ut si verbi gratia vulnus aliquod pessimum iram ponamus; huius autem tumor et distentio indignatio vulneris appelletur*.

⁵⁷ *ExpRom* 2.4.8: *Videtur enim ostendere, quasi in fide quidem gratia sit iustificantis; in opere vero sonare videtur iustitia retribuientis* and *CRm* 4.1: *videtur ostendere quasi in fide quidem gratia sit iustificantis, in opere vero iustitia retribuientis*.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ExpRom* 2.2.26 and *CRm* 2.9. I owe this parallel to Scheck, *Origen*, 110. It is not mentioned in the critical apparatus of the critical edition of William's exposition.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ExpRom* 2.4.6–7 and *CRm* 4.1. 234–44. This passage is too large to be reproduced here. For a discussion of all these distinctions see, Scheck, *Origen*, 109–15.

⁶⁰ On this text see also Cartwright, "William of St Thierry's Patristic Sources," 46–7; and Anderson, "Romans," 144–5, who commenting on this text argues that it offers an eloquent example that William's theology is thoroughly Augustinian.

⁶¹ "If then Levi, who was born in the fourth generation after Abraham, is said to have been in the loins of Abraham, all the more were all human beings, those who were and have been born in this world, in Adam's loins when he was still in paradise. And all human beings who were with him or rather in him, were expelled from paradise when he himself was driven out from there; and through him the death which had come to him from the transgression consequently passed into them as well, who were in his loins [...]" Translation by Scheck, *Commentary*, 310–1 with my own minor alterations.

⁶² "If then Levi, who was born in the fourth generation after Abraham, is said to have been in the loins of Abraham, all the more were all human beings, who were in Adam's loins when he had sinned; and they sinned in him and were expelled with him from paradise, and through him the death passed into them as well, who were in his loins."

In fact, this is how William makes use of Origen most of the time. That is, he edits his texts heavily, removing words or sentences, condenses Origen's ideas, and makes additions that bring about new emphases, which were absent from the original text. As Cartwright observed, "he quotes from Augustine, but paraphrases Origen."⁶³ Although it is clear that William read Origen's entire commentary, and that he used it throughout his own exposition, the question arises as to why he read Origen so differently from how he read Augustine. This tweaking of Origen's text must have much to do with William's concern for expressing the concordance of patristic voices rather than their conflicting views. Origen and Augustine developed different understandings of grace and human freedom, but through his intervention in Origen's text, William smoothed out their differences, presenting them as though they were in agreement. He was most likely aware of the controversial teachings attributed to Origen, and he used Augustine as the standard measure for reading the former's texts, thus ensuring that he was putting forward an orthodox view.

3.2 *Expositio super Cantica canticorum*

The twelfth-century authors, in particular the early Cistercians, had a consuming interest in another biblical book, namely, the Song of Songs. While Bernard's *Sermones super Canticum Canticorum* is considered the most famous medieval commentary on this biblical book, William also manifested a passionate interest in this text, which was viewed by monks as referring to the contemplative experience of God. In the *Vita prima*, his hagiography of Bernard, William famously recalled how during one of his visits at Clairvaux, when both he and Bernard were ill, they spent their entire time reading and discussing the Song of Songs.⁶⁴ It is thought that William's *Brevis commentatio* on the Song of Songs is a reworked version of notes he had taken on the conversations they had enjoyed while convalescing in the infirmary at Clairvaux sometime during Lent of 1128.⁶⁵ William's interest in this text is evidenced also by two *florilegia* he excerpted from the works of Ambrose of Milan and Gregory the Great on this biblical text and by his own meditation on the Song of Songs in the *Expositio super Canticum Canticorum*. This was written later in life, between 1136 and 1139,⁶⁶ when he was at Signy and which he interrupted in order to address Peter Abelard's problematic theology.

Although William did not mention Origen at all in his account of his convalescence at Clairvaux, in his interpretation of this episode, Paul Verdeyen assumes that Bernard and William could not have been satisfied with reading merely the biblical text, but that they must also have read Origen's commentary and homilies on the Song of Songs.⁶⁷ However, when searching for traces of Origen's influence in both Bernard's sermons and in William's texts, one becomes rather disappointed. For example, in his critical edition of William's *Expositio super Cantica Canticorum*, Paul Verdeyen lists more than twenty references to Origen's commentary and a dozen references to his homilies. Although their number is not negligible, these references are in general very short and general. For example, like Bernard did on occasion, William interpreted the main protagonists of the Song, the Bridegroom and the Bride, as representative of Christ and the human soul, thus following Origen's own interpretation. William followed Origen when describing the Song as having been written *in modum dramatis*⁶⁸ and when identifying four types of characters featuring in the text: the Bridegroom and his companions together with the Bride and her bridesmaids. Like Origen, he considered the Bridegroom's companion to be angels, whereas the bridesmaids represented

⁶³ Cartwright, "William of St Thierry's Patristic Sources," 49.

⁶⁴ William of St Thierry, *Vita prima*, 1.59.

⁶⁵ Ceglar, "The Date of William's Convalescence," 30–1.

⁶⁶ Verdeyen, "Introduction," xi–xiv.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Cant.* 7 and *Comm. Cant.* Prol. 6–7.

the young souls at the beginning of their spiritual journey toward Christ.⁶⁹ Beyond this, short expressions that are identical (or nearly identical) to Origen further demonstrate William's dependence on him. A notable example is his statement that the twofold love at the heart of the Song – which is both God and the love whose object is God – is called *utrum amor dicatur, an caritas, an dilectio*.⁷⁰ Another, is his interpretation of the biblical verse *Hiems transit, imber abiit et recessit*, where he speaks similarly to Origen of God who dissipates the winter of troubles and the storms of vices *hiemem perturbationem et vitiorum dissipat procellas*.⁷¹ Also reminiscent of Origen is the way in which he describes the ascent of the soul toward Christ as taking place *extra domum, extra civitatem* and beyond the human condition.⁷² He borrows from Origen the interpretation of a number of biblical verses, such as when he considers that the treasures of the bride's breasts are wisdom (*sapientia*) and knowledge (*scientia*).⁷³ Further, William, following Origen, interpreted the verse *Nardus mea dedit odorem eius* by referring to the biblical episode of Mary's anointment of Jesus's feet.⁷⁴

The examples of literary dependence continue in a similar vein, and although they supply clear evidence of William's knowledge of Origen's exegesis of the Song of Songs, one cannot help but wonder why he used Origen in such a limited way. If Origen played as important a role as Verdeyen claimed for both William and Bernard, why did they draw so selectively and sparingly on his commentary and homilies on the Song of Songs? Moreover, why are references to Origen almost absent from the *Brevis commentatio*, which, as has already been mentioned, allegedly contains the conversations of the two friends on the Song of Songs? As far as William is concerned, given that his exposition on the Song of Songs is neither a compilatory work nor a *florilegium*, his primary intention seemed to have been to present his own theology of the soul's contemplation of God as it had developed throughout the years, especially under Augustine's influence, keeping references to patristic sources to a minimum. Given their brevity, the instances presented above, where William's own interpretation of the Song of Songs is textually dependent on Origen's, seem to be quotations from memory rather than a result of close reading.

My impression is that in reading Origen, William did not pursue a special interest in the author himself or in Origen's thought as such. In such a case, one would have expected him to seek out more of what the Greek author wrote, and with Origen's manuscripts becoming available all-over Northern France, he would have had ample opportunity to pursue such an interest, had he wished it. Instead, William tended not to be interested in the thought of commentators like Origen for their own sake, but insofar as he found them illuminating for the topic at hand: as he approached Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he focused on the relationship between freedom and grace, and with respect to the Song of Songs, on the allegorical presentation of the soul's contemplation of the divine. As pervasive as Augustine's interest in Paul's Epistle to the Romans is throughout his corpus, he never wrote a commentary on this text. In addition, he seemed to have been reluctant to interpret the Song of Songs. Since Origen had interpreted these biblical books in

⁶⁹ Cf. *Cant.* 7 and *Hom. Cant.* 1.4–8.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Cant.* 5 and *Comm. Cant.* Prol, 12–3: *Nihil ergo interest in scripturis divinis utrum amor dicatur an caritas, an dilectio, nisi quod in tantum nomen caritatis extollitur, ut etiam Deus ipse caritatis appelletur, sicut Johannes dicit.* “It makes no difference, then, in the divine Scriptures, whether it is called love, or charity or deep affection, except that the name of charity is exalted to such a degree that even God himself is called “charity,” as John says.”

⁷¹ Cf. *Cant.* 158 and *Comm. Cant.* 3.9–10: *Quia ecce inquit hiems “transiit, pluvia abiit.” Non enim ante anima Verbo Dei iungitur et sociatur, nisi omni ex ea “hiems” perturbationum vitiorum que procella discesserit [...]* “For ‘behold,’ he says, ‘the winter is past, the rain is gone.’” “The soul is not joined and united to the Word of God, except when the winter of all disturbances of vices and the storm departed from it (i.e. the soul).”

⁷² Cf. *Cant.* 160 and *Comm. Cant.* 3.2–4: *Tunc ad eam venit Verbum Dei, tunc eam vocat ad se et hortatur, ut ‘exeat’ non solum extra domum, sed extra civitatem, id est, non solum extra carnis vitia efficiatur, sed extra omne quicquid corporeum et visibile continetur in mundo.* “Then the Word of God came to her, then he calls her to him and urges her, to go not just outside the house, but also outside the city, that is not only out of the vices of the flesh, but out of everything that is corporeal and visible in the world.”

⁷³ Cf. *Cant.* 79 and *Comm. Cant.* 1.2.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Cant.* 73 and *Hom. Cant.* 2.2.

their entirety, William naturally turned to his works, drawing on them in such a way that the material selected did not collide with that which he derived from other patristic sources.

4 Peter Abelard as a reader of Origen

In comparison with William, who named Origen only once and made demonstrable use of his thought in no more than two of his works, Peter Abelard referred to the Greek author by name more than ninety times and depended on material drawn from Origen in seven of his works.⁷⁵ Most occurrences take place in Abelard's commentary on Romans (40) and in his *Sic et Non* (31). In addition, Origen is mentioned or quoted in the *Theologia Christiana* and *Theologia scholarium* almost a dozen times, several times in his letter collection, and at least once in *Scito te ipsum* and *Expositio in Hexamaeron*. Frequently, he praised Origen, referring to him as “the greatest Christian philosopher,”⁷⁶ “a doctor of the church,”⁷⁷ and “a well-read man.”⁷⁸ At the same time, however, Abelard also criticized Origen. He followed Jerome in considering Origen a “heretic” and demonstrated that he was well-informed about the problematic teachings attributed to Origen concerning the resurrection of the body, the condition of the souls, the salvation of demons and some trinitarian issues involving the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Abelard derived from Jerome also his knowledge about Origen's *De principiis*, as a dubious work that contains most of these erroneous teachings.⁸⁰

These examples show that Abelard was not only interested in reading Origen, but also in reading *about* Origen. He often referred to his sources of information regarding Origen, perhaps from a concern to stress the normativity of his views on such a controversial ecclesiastical authority. In addition to using the unimpeachably orthodox Jerome as a guide to the safe reading of such a contested author, Abelard relies also on Eusebius' account of Origen from the *Ecclesiastical History*, book VI,⁸¹ and on the textual authority of the *Decretum Gelasianum*. Placed immediately after his *Prologue* to the *Sic et Non*, this document that Abelard wrongly attributed to Pope Gelasius, announced that: “We accept some works of Origen, which the very blessed Jerome did not reject. The rest of his works, along with his author, we say should be rejected.”⁸² But Abelard did not simply report the opinions of his authorities regarding Origen; he also wrote *about* Origen, especially in his correspondence with Heloise. It is to the investigation of Origen in this epistolary corpus that this article turns next.

4.1 Origen in Abelard's Letters

Abelard's letter collection consists of eight letters, beginning with the *Historia calamitatum*, the famous story of Abelard's misfortunes, and ending with a rule devoted to religious women.⁸³ Although the letters

⁷⁵ The *Library of Latin Texts* databank lists 89 occurrences of Origen's name in the Abelardian corpus. However, this number is approximate as it does not include Abelard's epistles, except for *Historia calamitatum*, where two mentions of Origen occur.

⁷⁶ Ep. 1.34: [...] *summum Christianorum philosophorum Origenem*; Ep. 1.65: *maximum illum Christianorum philosophum Origenem*. Ep. 5.22: [...] *magnus ille Christianorum philosophus Origenes*; Ep. 7.47: [...] *maximus Christianorum philosophus*.

⁷⁷ TChr. 2.127. Ep. 7.47.

⁷⁸ Rom. 2.4.11: [...] *tam litteratum virum*.

⁷⁹ TSch. 2.4, where Abelard cites a long passage from Jerome's letter to Vigilantius, Ep. 61.1–2. See also TChr. V.25: [...] *iuxta illum detestabilem Origenis errorem qui usque etiam ad daemones salvationem extenderit*. “[...] according to him the detestable error of Origen, who extends the salvation even to demons.”

⁸⁰ TSch. 2.11, where Abelard indicates Jerome's letter to Avitus as his source concerning Origen's *De principiis*. Also SN. Prol. indicates the same letter to Avitus.

⁸¹ Ep. 1.34 and 65; Ep. 7.47.

⁸² *Decretum Gelasianum: Item Origenis nonnulla opuscula, quae vir beatissimus Hiernoymus non repudiat, legenda suscipimus. Reliqua autem omnia cum auctore suo dicimus renuenda*.

⁸³ On how this letter collection, which includes also letters by Heloise, took shape, on its authorship and authenticity, see Luscombe, *The Letter Collection*, xxviii–xxx.

contain some of Abelard's most flattering remarks about Origen, whom he repeatedly called "the greatest Christian philosopher," and "doctor of the church," praise and blame occur occasionally on the same page. This suggests that Abelard was keen to demonstrate that his view of Origen aligned with the ambivalent view of him which predominated in Latin Christianity.⁸⁴ It is, however, striking that despite his awareness of Origen's controversial status, Abelard did not hesitate to compare himself repeatedly with the Greek author. He did so especially when he recalled the episode of his bodily mutilation as a punishment for his affair with Heloise.⁸⁵ In comparison to Origen, who was thought to have castrated himself for chastity's sake, Abelard believed that God was kinder toward him, for his own mutilation was carried out by others. Whereas Origen was to be blamed for having acted imprudently, Abelard considered that he himself could not be blamed for the mutilation that others inflicted upon him. Abelard could not help observing that his predecessor had seriously erred by understanding literally the scriptural texts, which said that those who castrated themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake were truly blessed (Mt. 19:22), or that the Lord prefers eunuchs to the rest of the faithful (Is. 56.4–5).⁸⁶ The fact that Abelard criticizes the master of allegorical exegesis for having failed to interpret the biblical text appropriately is a good illustration of his attitude toward patristic authors, namely that even the most authoritative of them are not above mistakes, even in areas in which they are especially expert.

Having become a monk after his castration, Abelard sought to present this unfortunate event in his life in a positive light. Writing to Heloise, he gave thanks for his predicament that enabled him to live an exemplary ascetic life, as he was liberated from carnal desires. The impulse toward a physical consummation of erotic desire was one of the main obstacles faced by Christians in their quest for spiritual perfection and many sages wanted to eliminate it in order to live a pure life. Among the sages who yearned for complete chastity, Abelard singled out Origen, whose intense desire for purity recommended him as a perfect model for ascetic life, despite his aforementioned criticism of him.⁸⁷

On a different note, Abelard seized on this occasion to claim that through his castration, God sought to make him "ready and free for similar work."⁸⁸ As M. Clanchy observed, "the implication of 'similar' work is that Abelard is destined to become a prolific and inspired Christian writer like Origen."⁸⁹ And indeed, Abelard identified himself even more explicitly with Origen "the greatest of the Christian philosophers," when he described how during his withdrawal at the monastery of St Denis in the aftermath of his castration, he sought to draw his students to the study of true philosophy (*vera philosophia*) by using secular philosophy and profane arts as a hook, following the example set by Origen, according to Eusebius' account.⁹⁰

Another way in which Abelard sought to liken himself to Origen may be detected in his genuine interest for the teaching and pastoral care of devout women. Abelard interpreted Origen's act of self-harm not only as a result of his zeal for preserving perfect chastity, but also as a result of his eagerness to remove any suspicion regarding his behavior toward the women entrusted to his care for doctrinal instruction.⁹¹ Like Origen, due to his bodily mutilation, Abelard raised himself above suspicions in his relationships with women and, consequently, he was well-suited, for example, to act as a patron for Heloise and her nuns.

In sum, Abelard did not compare himself with Origen only because they shared the misfortune of having experienced castration. Given his longing for chastity, Origen served as a model for the ascetical life. Moreover, given his profound knowledge of secular philosophy, he offered Abelard an example of how

⁸⁴ Ep. 1.65–6; Ep. 5.22.

⁸⁵ Ep. 1.66; Ep. 5.21–2.

⁸⁶ Ep. 5.22.

⁸⁷ Ep. 5.22 and for Origen as a model for ascetic life, see also Georges, "Summus Christianorum Philosophorum," 435–6.

⁸⁸ Ep. 1.66.

⁸⁹ Clanchy, *Abelard*, 225.

⁹⁰ Ep. 1.34. Abelard refers to book 6 of Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica* on several occasions when discussing aspects of Origen's life. However, it is worth mentioning that he read it in Rufinus' translation. For one of the ways in which Rufinus' version is not a simple translation of the original Greek text is that it expands significantly on the Origenist apologetics of Eusebius.

⁹¹ Ep. 7.47 and 50.

to attract students to the study of the Bible by means of profane arts and also how to be a Christian philosopher himself. Furthermore, given his concern for the instruction of women, he provided a patristic paradigm for Abelard's role as a mentor and protector of the female monastic community headed by Heloise. In other words, by comparing himself with Origen, Abelard selected those aspects of his predecessor's life that enabled him to construct his own identity as an ascetic, teacher, Christian philosopher, and spiritual mentor for devout women.

Abelard's correspondence with Heloise contains another reference to Origen, when in *Ep.* 8, the rule for religious women, Abelard quoted several passages from Origen's *Homilies on Genesis* in Rufinus' Latin translation in order to explain how one ought to read biblical and other authoritative texts so that one profited from sacred learning. Although addressed to a monastic readership, this passage is also indicative of how Abelard himself approached textual authorities. Borrowing Origen's voice, who commented on Prov 5:15–16 “drink water from your own springs and your own wells,” Abelard encouraged his audience to show some understanding (*aliquem intellectum*) based on their own perception (*ex proprio sensu*) when reading the Holy Scriptures and thus, to drink from the spring of their own ability (*de fonte ingenii*). To this passage, where independent thinking is recommended, Abelard adds other quotations from Origen which argue for discussing new things (*nova*) as well as old (*vetera*). In addition, Abelard used Origen's interpretation of Gen. 26.12–33 – about the Philistines who persecuted Isaac when he was digging wells, filling them in with heaps of earth in an attempt to deprive them of water – in order to criticize those who kept monks and nuns away from the reading and understanding of the sacred text.⁹² Some of the terms featured in these passages, such as *ingenium*, *intellectum*, *rationabilis sensus*, or *nova*, are also crucial for describing Abelard's method of approaching textual authorities, an approach which modern scholars have defined as “scholastic.” It is Abelard's recommendation to rely on one's own ability (*ingenium*) and reason (*rationabilis sensus*) when reading authorities in order to reach understanding (*intellectum*) and to discuss both old and new things that he was strongly criticized by his monastic adversaries.⁹³ On the basis of such terminology, he was accused of introducing novelties to the doctrine of the church, whereas it appears that Abelard was not breaking such new ground after all, since he was merely repeating and putting into practice what Origen had already recommended.

4.2 Origen in the *Sic et Non*

Abelard's interest in Origen may actually be detected before his correspondence with Heloise in the 1130s. It is possible that he discovered Origen already in 1113 when he went to Laon to study biblical exegesis with the famous master, Anselm, who was known for his extreme fidelity to patristic teaching. Origen's works were present in the library of the cathedral school of Laon already in the ninth century when three manuscripts were attested, containing Origen's homilies on the Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Leviticus, Jeremiah, Numbers, and Kings.⁹⁴ Although it is difficult to believe that these works were available for perusal by students, they nevertheless bear the marks of having been used by the masters who taught in the school there.⁹⁵ In *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard narrated an anecdote about his time at Laon when he was provoked by Anselm's students to comment on the obscure book of Ezekiel.⁹⁶ In doing so, he chose an expositor as a guide to his reading without mentioning his name. This episode might have occasioned a first encounter with Origen, although this encounter would most likely not have been direct, but through an

⁹² See Georges, “*Summus Christianorum Philosophorum*,” 436.

⁹³ Against Abelard's novelties, see William of St Thierry *Ep.* 326.1–2 and the discussion above in this article, pp. 6–7. For a scathing critique of Abelard's reliance on *ingenium* and *ratio*, see Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.* 190, *passim*.

⁹⁴ Evans, “Origen in the Twelfth Century,” 279.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ep.* 1.11.

intermediary, such as Rabanus Maurus, for instance, a favorite expositor for study in the schools. He included material from Origen in his own commentary on Ezekiel.⁹⁷

However, leaving aside conjecture, it is obvious that Abelard made use of Origen in a text composed after the condemnation of his first doctrinal work, *Theologia summi boni*, at the council of Soissons in 1121.⁹⁸ This work is the *Sic et Non*, a collection of almost 2,000 sentences coming largely from the writings of patristic authors assembled around 158 *quaestiones* answered both affirmatively and negatively. Origen was given largely as a negative example in the *Prologue*, where Abelard quoted Jerome at length on the need to distinguish Origen's erroneous teachings from those of orthodox authors such as Hilary of Poitiers or Jerome himself, both of whom happened to translate or quote them in their own works, although they did not agree with them.⁹⁹

Though Origen is not a major presence in the *Sic et Non*, Abelard quotes excerpts from him in connection with sixteen questions which discuss eternal plurality in the Trinity (qu. 8), the birth of the Son (qu. 18), divine foreknowledge (qu. 27), the depiction of God by physical images (qu. 45), the descent of Christ from the tribe of Judah (qu. 63), and so on. Each time he quotes Origen, Abelard carefully indicates the name of the author and the title of the work from which the passage originated, although sometimes the information he provides is not correct. Most of the excerpts, nine more precisely (qu. 8, 18, 27, 63, 69, 133, 137, and 144), derive from Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. It has been observed that none of these excerpts correspond to those used by Abelard when writing his own commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans in the 1130s,¹⁰⁰ which suggests that Abelard did not use this anthology of sentences as a repository of patristic thought destined for use in his other works. In addition, the *Sic et Non* contains quotes from Origen's homilies on Genesis (qu. 84), Exodus (qu. 45, qu. 116), Leviticus (qu. 146), and on the vigil of the Lord's birth (qu. 61). Abelard also quoted two passages from Origen's commentary on Matthew (qu. 95 and qu. 117), which has been translated by the author of the *Opus imperfectum* in Italy or Illyria, likely in the middle of the sixth century.¹⁰¹ Aside from self-conscious uses of Origen, Abelard also misattributed one fragment from Origen's homily on Jeremiah to Jerome and four fragments from the *De principiis* to an alleged work of Augustine, *De incarnata deitate ad Ianuarium*, which is in fact pseudo-Augustinian.¹⁰²

It is known that Abelard envisaged the *Sic et non* as a textbook for use in the classroom.¹⁰³ The contradictory patristic statements were intended to provoke the students (or "tender readers," as Abelard called them) to discuss and sort out theological problems by relying on their own ability (*ingenium*), with the aim of sharpening their reasoning. As Origen was present in this collection right from the *Prologue*, we can safely assume that his texts were also part of the conversation taking place in the classroom between the students and their master. Admittedly, anthologies, such as *Sic et Non*, introduced students to only a limited and fragmentary knowledge of Origen, as it would have been difficult for them to have access to the complete books of the Greek author. Origen's entire manuscripts were present mainly in the libraries of prominent monasteries, where the monks had the opportunity to assist to readings from his works during meals, or at the chapter, as one sermon of Bernard of Clairvaux testifies.¹⁰⁴ Bernard's sermon also seems to indicate that exposure to Origen's works in the medieval monasteries was principally the result of shared reading rather than individual study of the text. Based on this isolated piece of

⁹⁷ Luscombe, *The Letter Collection*, 19, n. 44. Luscombe also mentions the *Gloss* on the book of Ezekiel as including excerpts from Origen largely through Rabanus' commentary, but this was not yet available when Abelard was at Laon. Other potential expositors might have been Jerome or Gregory the Great, who may have also facilitated some indirect access to Origen given their dependence on the Greek author.

⁹⁸ A first version of this work might have been in place already in 1122, but the work has passed through various stages of composition, see Buytaert, "Greek Fathers in *Sic et Non*," 414–27.

⁹⁹ *SN*. Prol.

¹⁰⁰ Buytaert, "Greek Fathers in the *Sic et Non*," 446.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 445.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 447.

¹⁰³ Clanchy, *Abelard*, 88.

¹⁰⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones de Diversis* 34, 10.8–9.

evidence, scholars have gone on to conclude that monasteries were the preferred setting for Origen's reception.¹⁰⁵ However, the fact that Abelard endeavored to introduce material from a range of Origen's works in his *Sic et Non*, a textbook destined for *disputatio* in the classroom among students, calls this scholarly view into question. It is clear that, in the early twelfth century, Origen entered also the world of the medieval schools, albeit in a fragmentary manner. As far as Abelard is concerned, this fact is proven not only by the *Sic et Non*, but also by another work, namely his popular commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.

4.3 Origen in Abelard's *Expositio in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*

Abelard's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, most likely composed between 1134 and 1138, when he returned to Paris at the school of Ste-Geneviève, represents the lectures on the Bible that he gave to students who intended to pursue clerical careers and needed biblical, doctrinal, and ethical instruction.¹⁰⁶ This commentary was written almost at the same time as that of William of St Thierry, but differed from it, especially in Abelard's preference for the use of dialectics when expounding on the biblical text. The style of the commentary reflects Abelard's didactic method in the classroom, where he often raised a question that had to be debated and then answered. While Abelard excelled at raising disconcerting questions, he was not always interested in providing an adequate answer, because he wanted to encourage his students to sharpen their logical thinking. It was especially this aspect of Abelard's works that attracted William's criticism, rather than Abelard's use of dialectics as such, for it not only allowed, but forced, students to draw their own conclusions, and thus, to enter uncharted territory.

In addition to his heavy use of dialectics, Abelard relied also on traditional exegetical methods, and, like William, he drew considerably on the authority of his predecessors in his interpretation of the biblical text.¹⁰⁷ Origen has been identified as the major patristic source for Abelard's commentary, for while all his quotations of Origen derive from the same work, they nevertheless surpass all of his quotations from Augustine in terms of amount of text quoted.¹⁰⁸ Abelard knew that Origen's work was available in Rufinus' Latin translation, which he indicates explicitly in the preface of his commentary.¹⁰⁹ Given the large amount of material quoted from Origen, it is quite likely that Abelard was working with a manuscript of Origen's commentary and that he was not drawing on intermediaries when inserting excerpts in his own exposition.¹¹⁰ Like the other patristic authors quoted in Abelard's commentary, Origen is mentioned by name each time Abelard depended on his interpretation, and is introduced in various ways: *sicut Origenes* [...] *meminit, ut ait Origenes, inquit Origenes, secundum Origenis verba, ut secundum Origenem* or simply *Origenes*. While Abelard's intention in routinely identifying his sources might have been to defend the normativity of his views and thus avoid criticism, his method also had the effect of revealing the diversity of patristic voices, though not for diversity's sake, but because he took the real unity of church tradition to be achievable through a full recognition of this diversity. Abelard had no qualms about highlighting the differences between patristic authors. When discussing, for example, the source of a biblical *exemplum*, he observed that Origen believed it derived from Isaiah, whereas Ambrose attributed it to the prophet

¹⁰⁵ Evans, "Origen in the Twelfth Century," 281–2.

¹⁰⁶ For the dating of this text, see Cartwright, "Introduction," 6–7.

¹⁰⁷ Cartwright, "Introduction," 24, n. 78 has calculated that approximately 15% of the commentary is based on patristic sources. Excepting Origen, the most quoted authorities are the Latin authors Augustine, Ambrosiaster, Haymo of Auxerre, and Jerome, whereas Eusebius of Caesarea is the most quoted Greek author.

¹⁰⁸ Cartwright, "Introduction," 25.

¹⁰⁹ *Rom* 1.1.

¹¹⁰ Buytaert, "Greek Fathers in Abelard's Theologies," 429 argues also that Abelard was quite likely in possession of the translation of Rufinus, not in an excerpted form, since he consulted the Latin commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans written between 800 and the days of Abelard and he concluded that none of them could be the immediate source for Abelard's quotations.

Nahum.¹¹¹ Moreover, despite acknowledging his erudition, Abelard disagreed overtly with Origen and even claimed that his predecessor was mistaken to interpret the second circumcision of Joshua figuratively. Relying on Augustine, Abelard claimed that the biblical passage about Joshua's circumcision should be interpreted literally, not as a second circumcision to the same individual persons, but to the same people.¹¹² It is interesting that here, like in the *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard disapproves, not of Origen's erroneous theology, as perhaps we might expect given the latter's condemnation, but of his biblical exegesis, for which it is claimed that medieval authors held him in high esteem.

Notwithstanding this isolated illustration of overt criticism, Origen is used as a trustworthy authority throughout Abelard's commentary. The size of Abelard's excerpts from Origen varies from less than one line to large blocks of text, such as the passages from book 1 and book 2, where Origen is quoted at length on the topic of circumcision. In arguing, like Origen, that circumcision was a commandment restricted to the people of Israel, Abelard quoted almost verbatim from book 2 of Origen's commentary.¹¹³ Abelard's method of excerpting resembles that of taking notes while reading. In other words, he reduces Origen's text considerably by eliminating words and often whole sentences or paragraphs in order to avoid repetitions and verbosity while retrieving almost word-for-word sentences and passages that he considered essential for his argument. Although Origen's text was significantly compressed in these passages, the ensuing changes did not result in a significant alteration of the meaning of the source text. Abelard offered to his students a rather accurate summary of what Origen had to say on this topic while borrowing the words of the author himself. The following brief example, where Abelard quoted Origen on newness of life, is a good illustration of his method of working with his main patristic source:

Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 5.8

Novitas autem vitae est ubi veterem hominem cum actibus suis deposuimus et induimus novum qui secundum Deum creatum est et qui renovatur in agnitione Dei secundum imaginem eius qui creavit eum. Neque enim putes innovatio vitae quae dicitur semel facta sufficiat; sed semper et cotidie si dici potest ipsa novitas innovanda est. Sic enim dicit apostolus: “nam etsi is qui foris est homo noster corrumpitur sed qui intus est renovator de die in diem.” Sicut enim vetus semper veterescit et de die in diem vetustior efficitur, ita et novus hic semper innovatur et numquam est quando non innovatio eius augeat. Intuere denique eos qui in fide proficiunt et cotidie in virtutibus enitescunt quomodo semper bonis operibus adiciunt meliora [...]¹¹⁴

Peter Abelard, *Rom.* 2.6.5

*“Novitas vitae est,” ut ait Origenes, “ubi veterem hominem cum actibus suis deponimus et induimus novum, qui renovatur in agnitione Dei. Quotidie, si dici potest, ipsa novitas innovanda est. Sic enim dicit: ‘Nam etsi is, qui foris est, homo noster corrumpitur sed qui intus renovator de die in diem.’ Qui in fide proficiunt, semper bonis operibus adiciunt meliora.”*¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Rom.* 4.1.15.

¹¹² *Rom.* 2.4.11.

¹¹³ Cf. *Rom.* 1.2.16, *Rom.* 2.4.11 and *CRm.* 2.13.

¹¹⁴ “Now the newness of life is where we put aside ‘the old man with his acts’ and put on ‘the new man, who has been created according to God’ and ‘who is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him.’ For you must not imagine that the renewing of the life which is said to have been done once, suffices. On the contrary at all times that newness should be renewed daily, if it can be said. For this is what the Apostle says ‘for although our outer man is wasting, our inner man is renewed from day to day.’ For just as the old is constantly aging and from day to day becoming older, so also this new one is constantly being renewed and there is never a time when his renewing is not increasing. Just consider those who make progress in faith and who daily shine forth in virtues, how they are always add better things to their good works.” Translation by Scheck, *Commentary*, 359–60 with my own alterations.

¹¹⁵ “As Origen says, “Newness of life is where we put aside the old man with his acts and put on ‘the new man who is renewed in the knowledge of God. That newness should be renewed daily, if it can be said. For thus he says, ‘For although our outer man

The same method of excerpting is to be encountered in other passages where, Abelard, following Origen, speaks of Christ as a sacrifice for sin¹¹⁶ and of Christ as one's neighbor.¹¹⁷ In my view this way of working with the text suggests that Abelard most likely had a larger text in front of him from which he took notes while reading. Moreover, the fact that the excerpted passages derive from seven out of the ten books of Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's commentary only further strengthens the impression that Abelard had access to a whole manuscript.

The remaining passages borrowed from Origen's commentary show that Abelard did not follow Origen in matters of doctrine. He drew on Origen when distinguishing between "signs" *signa* and "wonders" *prodigia*,¹¹⁸ when mentioning the role of women as ministers in the early church,¹¹⁹ when referring to women working for the church¹²⁰ and when he needed information about places and people mentioned in Paul's epistle.¹²¹ He also relies on Origen, quoting him directly, for his identification of Hermas as the author of *The Shepherd*.¹²²

A close look at the passages quoted by Abelard shows that, while he was perhaps aware of Jerome's view of the Greek author, he did not regard Origen as an authority for theological matters, but rather as an authority in biblical exegesis and as a repository of scholarly knowledge, which was useful for understanding the larger setting of Paul's epistle. There is nothing in Abelard's reading of Origen that could have exposed his students to controversial teachings. Moreover, despite the quantity of material quoted, Abelard did not rely on Origen for buttressing arguments on major issues, but rather on some secondary or marginal topics. While far from offering the medieval students or readers particularly deep insights into Origen's thought, Abelard's use of Origen's commentary in a text addressed to his students bears witness nevertheless to the Greek author's presence in the classroom. This evidence corroborated, for instance, with the fact that other schoolmasters at slightly the same time were drawing on Origen's works when glossing the Bible,¹²³ problematizes the view that Origen was primarily a monastic matter.

4.4 Origen in Abelard's *Theologies* and other works

A handful of references to Origen are to be found also in the two later and extended versions of Abelard's main theological *opus* on the Divine Trinity, namely the *Theologia Christiana* and *Theologia scholarium*, which William found problematic, and which the Council of Sens condemned in 1141. The earlier version of this treatise, the *Theologia summi boni*, also condemned at the Council of Soissons in 1121, made no mention of Origen, showing that Abelard most likely developed his interest in the Greek author after this date, beginning with the collection of sentences, *Sic et Non*.

In the *Theologia Christiana*, Abelard gives Origen, together with Cyprian and Augustine, as examples of doctors of the church, who were famous for their erudition and training in the liberal arts, in support of his argument that Christians should not neglect the study of secular arts, such as grammar, rhetoric, or philosophy.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, in the same work, Abelard also makes a negative remark about the "abhorrent error of Origen who

is wasting, our inner man is renewed from day to day.' They who make progress in faith always add better things to their good works." Translation by Cartwright, *Commentary*, 230.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Rom.* 3.8.3–4 and *CRm.* 6.12.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Rom.* 3.7.6 and *CRm.* 9.31.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Rom.* 4.15.19 and *CRm.* 10.11.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Rom.* 4.16.2 and *CRm.* 10.17.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Rom.* 4.16.14 and *CRm.* 10.20.

¹²¹ For example, cf. *Rom.* 4.16.10 and *CRm.* 10.23 and *CRm.* 10.25.

¹²² Cf. *Rom.* 4.16.14 and *CRm.* 10.31.

¹²³ See above note 15.

¹²⁴ *TChr.* 2.127: *Quid de eloquentia Cypriani sive Origenis et aliorum innumerabilium ecclesiasticorum doctorum [...] in omnibus liberalium artium studiis eruditissimorum?* What about the eloquence of Cyprian or Origen and that of other numerous ecclesiastical doctors [...] most educated in the studies of all liberal arts?"

extended the salvation even to demons.”¹²⁵ However, not all of Abelard’s quotations in this work are made in the knowledge they belong to Origen. Thus, Abelard quotes a passage from Origen’s Homily 5 on Jeremiah, which describes the divine persons in the Trinity as three spirits twice, each time misattributing it to Jerome.¹²⁶

Two references to Origen occur in book 2 of *Theologia scholarium* and are directed against those who denied that faith can be encountered in the testimony of unbelievers. By quoting from Jerome’s letter to the presbyter Vigilantius and mentioning also Jerome’s letter to Avitus, Abelard demonstrated that he was well acquainted with the traditional view concerning the acceptable way in which the controversial Origen was to be read. The passages quoted from the letter to Vigilantius, in which Jerome defended himself from accusations of Origenism, were used to argue that one could read and profit from what was good in Origen without accepting his many doctrinal errors. C. J. Mews has observed that Jerome’s position toward Origen was, in Abelard’s view, the position that Christians ought to have *vis-à-vis* all patristic authorities.¹²⁷ Abelard also adopted from Jerome a list of Origen’s errors that had to be rejected. Abelard’s reference to Jerome’s letter to Avitus occurs in a more negative context, where Abelard accused heretics of being worse than pagan philosophers and singled out Origen as one of the heretics worthy of condemnation. He pointed to Jerome, who wrote a letter to Avitus to warn him that most of Origen’s unacceptable teachings were to be found in the *De Principiis*, which Abelard preferred to name in Greek as *libri Periarthes* or as *Peri Archon*.¹²⁸ A large quotation from Origen’s commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans on whether the prophets of the Old Testament understood their own prophecies completes the list of references to the Greek author in Abelard’s doctrinal work.

Two more works of Abelard recorded solitary references to Origen. In the *Scito te ipsum*, Abelard recalled Origen’s view on bishops from the latter’s *Commentarius in Matthaëum*. According to Origen, not all bishops were granted the powers bestowed on Peter, but only those who imitated him in the dignity of merits.¹²⁹ Finally, in his *Expositio in Hexamaeron* Abelard quoted a passage from Origen’s *Homilia 1 in Canticum Canticorum*, where the Greek author mentioned the Hebrew practice of reserving Genesis, the book of Ezekiel, and the Song of Songs for those most advanced in the study of the sacred text.¹³⁰

These are only isolated references to Origen, yet they convey well Abelard’s ambivalent view of Origen. On the one hand, a predominantly negative image of Origen emerges from his *Theologies*, where Abelard was careful to rely repeatedly on Jerome’s authority, one of Origen’s fiercest critics, in his evaluation of the Greek author’s legacy. As these writings came under the intense scrutiny of his theological adversaries, it is understandable that Abelard was keen to show that his view of Origen was grounded in respected ecclesiastical authorities and was hence beyond suspicion. On the other hand, he did not hide his admiration for Origen’s erudition and continued to quote and refer to him as an authority, especially in the area of biblical exegesis.

It is thus possible to say that, despite its contradictory elements, Abelard’s view of Origen, based primarily on the authority of Jerome, epitomizes the position of western Christian tradition toward the Greek author, which was one of both fascination and rejection.¹³¹ The most favorable image of Origen emerges from Abelard’s letter collection, where he was repeatedly designated “the greatest Christian philosopher,” and,

¹²⁵ TChr. 5.25: [...] *detestabilem Origenis errorem qui usque etiam ad daemones salvationem extenderit* [...] “[...] the detestable error of Origen, who extended salvation even to demons.”

¹²⁶ TChr. 1.67 and TChr. 4. 8: Hieronymus [...] *ait sic: David in psalmo tres spiritus postulat dicens: Spiritu principali confirma me, Spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis, Spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me. Qui sunt isti tres spiritus? Principalis spiritus Pater est, rectus spiritus Christus est, spiritus sanctus Spiritus Sanctus est.* “Jerome [...] says so: David demands in the Psalm three spirits saying: Strengthen me with a perfect spirit, renew a right spirit within me, do not cast your Holy Spirit away from me. Who are these three spirits? The perfect spirit is the Father, the right spirit is Christ, the holy spirit is the Holy Spirit.”

¹²⁷ Mews, “Un Lecteur de Jerome,” 234.

¹²⁸ TSch. 2.11 speaks of *libri Periarthes* whereas the SN. Prol. mentions the *Peri Arcon*.

¹²⁹ *Scito te ipsum* 1.77: *Patenter itaque Origenes ostendit [...] quod in his quae diximus Petro concessa esse nequaquam omnibus episcopis a Domino collate sunt, sed his solis qui Petrum non ex sublimitate cathedrae sed meritorum imitantur dignitate.* “Origen, therefore, shows clearly [...] that, in those things we said about Peter, the concessions made by the Lord are in no way conferred on all bishops, but only on those who imitate Peter not through the excellence of the see, but through the dignity of merits.”

¹³⁰ *Expositio in Hexamaeron*, Praefatio, 2. Cf. *Hom. Cant.* 1.1.

¹³¹ Louth, “The Reception of Origen,” 615.

as such, served as a role model for Abelard himself in matters of ascesis, teaching, sacred and secular philosophy, and the mentorship of religious women. Abelard's doctrinal works, in particular the *Theologia scholarium*, present his least flattering view of the Greek author, that of a heretic worthy of condemnation. Between these extremes, works like *Sic et Non* and the commentary on Paul's epistle testify not only to Abelard's readiness to draw directly or indirectly on a range of Origen's writings available in Latin translation, but also to Abelard's role in introducing Origen to the world of the medieval schools.

5 Conclusion

By comparing the two readers of Origen, the monastic author, William of St Thierry, with his theological adversary, the schoolmaster, Peter Abelard, it is possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. From a quantitative point of view, the schoolmaster, Peter Abelard, surpasses his monastic opponent both in the number of times that he makes reference to Origen, and quotes from his works, and also in the range of Origen's works that these references and quotations come from. William, who appears to have used Origen more than any other twelfth-century Cistercian author, mentioned Origen explicitly only once in the whole of his corpus. While William ranks Origen among the doctors of the church in this one instance, it remains that the extant evidence does not indicate that his knowledge of Origen extended beyond three works, namely his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. His reading of Origen is also evident in two of his mature writings, written in the 1130s, although William kept silent about his source, when quoting or alluding to the Greek author. In his exposition on Paul's epistle to the Romans, it is clear that he drew directly and extensively – on occasion even verbatim – on Origen's homonymous commentary, making use of the excerpting techniques he acquired during his training in the schools. Based on the quotations provided by Verdeyen's critical edition, William, in his interpretation of the Song of Songs, seems to have relied on reminiscences of his reading of Origen's commentary and homilies on this biblical book, as the passages indicating literary dependence are extremely brief, amounting to no more than some identical short expressions or similar interpretations of the same biblical verses. It is therefore difficult to say if these reminiscences were the result of independent study of the text or participation in shared reading during communal activities in the monastery. A more definitive conclusion may be reached only after a more in-depth study of William's and Origen's homonymous works.

In contrast to William, Abelard often mentioned Origen by name in his literary and theological works which date after the council of Soissons in 1121. He referred to Origen by name more than ninety times and quoted from a range of his works. With scholarly rigor, and perhaps for the sake of deflecting criticism, Abelard indicated his indebtedness to Origen explicitly, even mentioning the title of the work on which he was drawing. Like William, most of his quotations derive from Origen's *Commentary to the Romans*, which he likely consulted directly from a complete manuscript copy. In addition, he quoted from Origen's homilies on Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus, commentary on Matthew, and the homily 1 on the Song of Songs. Abelard even quoted some material from the controversial *De principiis*, though without awareness of its real provenance, as he misattributed it to Augustine. The material from the *De principiis* most likely derived from anthologies of sentences and thus does not indicate that Abelard had read some version of this work directly or as a whole.

2. Also in contrast to William's view of Origen, which, despite being laconic was entirely positive, Abelard's view, based on respected patristic authorities such as Jerome and Eusebius of Caesarea, was more nuanced and ambivalent, oscillating between praise and blame, though it was in line with the way in which Origen was traditionally regarded in the Western Christendom. Abelard differed greatly from William in the way in which he compared himself with Origen in his role as an ascetic, teacher, Christian philosopher, and protector of women. Although Abelard emphasized the positive aspects he shared with Origen, his self-identification with such a controversial author, who had been attributed an

- array of problematic doctrines, might well have exposed him to the attacks of his theological adversaries and to direct charges of Origenism, which his simple use of Origen would never have provoked.
3. When drawing on Origen, both William and Abelard seem to have avoided quoting him on major aspects of Christian theology, such as the Trinity, Christology, and the sacraments, using him rather for providing useful definitions, distinctions, interpretations of various biblical verses, as well as scholarly information about biblical persons or places. Between the two medieval authors, William is the one who delves more into Origen's theology, quoting him on the notions of grace, faith, justification, or original sin. However, apart from drawing on material that was beyond suspicion, William also intervened occasionally in the text, changing it in such a way as to correspond to the Augustinian character of western theology at that time. Given his interest in conveying the unified voice of tradition on a certain topic, William adroitly stretched Origen's authority in order to achieve this goal. Abelard presented Origen's texts more accurately. It remains that he also edited them heavily, but for the sake of conciseness, not in an attempt to interfere with their meaning. Since he was not bothered by the diversity of patristic views, he occasionally pointed out discrepancies of interpretation between Origen and other doctors of the church. Relying on reason, he sometimes favored Origen's interpretation and sometimes that of another patristic author. He also disagreed overtly with Origen's position on occasion, criticizing him for inadequate biblical exegesis. This way of reading Origen (and other patristic authors)¹³² inevitably resulted in accusations that it weakened the belief in the certitude of Christian tradition, through undermining patristic authority.¹³³ Although, in terms of content, the material Abelard drew from Origen is rather inoffensive and does not support the charges of Origenism laid against him, using his approach to Origen as a model for reading all patristic authors irritated traditionalist theologians such as William and Bernard.
 4. Finally, this comparative study of Origen's reception shows that in the early twelfth century Origen's works were not read only in the cloister. Two of Abelard's works in which he drew most extensively on Origen, namely, the *Sic et Non*, a textbook of patristic sentences, and his *Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, addressed to his Parisian students, and in which Origen is the main patristic source, suggest that Origen's works, at least in a fragmentary form, were part of the discussion in the classroom. Moreover, Abelard's interest in Origen seems not to be unique among twelfth-century schoolmasters, but to reflect a broader tendency in the schools, illustrated by, among other things, the significant use of Origen in the glosses to the Bible, redacted by twelfth-century schoolmasters, such as Anselm and Ralph of Laon, Gilbert of Auxerre, and Gilbert of Poitiers. Beyond this, Abelard's works were extremely valuable to twelfth-century readers, who did not have easy access to entire manuscripts, and they were raided for teaching materials by later schoolmasters, such as Peter Lombard.¹³⁴ Peter Lombard is especially significant in this respect, as he himself quoted Origen on a number of issues in his famous *Libri Sententiarum*. Thus, it is clear that the interest of schoolmasters in Origen's writings continues beyond Abelard, pointing to a much more widespread tendency in the schools that will reward further consideration.

Abbreviations

CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
GCS	<i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
William of Saint-Thierry	

¹³² See above n. 116.

¹³³ See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.* 190 and William of St Thierry, *Ep.* 326 and *Disp.*

¹³⁴ Clanchy, *Abelard*, 88.

<i>Cant.</i>	<i>Expositio super Cantica Canticorum</i>
<i>Disp.</i>	<i>Disputatio adversus Abaelardum</i>
<i>ExpRom</i>	<i>Expositio super epistulam ad Romanos</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacramento Altaris</i>
Peter Abelard	
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>Expositio in epistulam ad Romanos</i>
<i>Sic et Non</i>	<i>SN</i>
<i>TChr</i>	<i>Theologia Christiana</i>
<i>TSch</i>	<i>Theologia Scholarium</i>
Origen	
<i>CRm</i>	<i>Commentarius in epistulam Pauli ad Romanos</i>
<i>Comm. Cant</i>	<i>Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum</i>
<i>Hom. Cant.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum</i>

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