

## Research Article

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# The Pastoral Usefulness of Female Scriptural Speech in Origen of Alexandria

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2024-0026>

received September 06, 2024; accepted October 09, 2024

**Abstract:** In this article, I wish to build on the little work previously done on the theme of Origen and women by focusing on Origen's exegetical treatment of the speech uttered by a selection of female scriptural characters. I focus on their speech as a way of applying the observations made by Mark Randall James in his 2021 monograph, *Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation*, concerning one of Origen's primary exegetical goals, namely, to teach his pastoral-exegetical audience to become those who speak the words of scripture. I therefore focus on Origen's exegetical treatment of Mary and Elizabeth in his Homilies on Luke, the mother of the 7 martyrs in his Exhortation to Martyrdom, the Samaritan woman at the well in the Commentary on John, the Canaanite woman in the Commentary on Matthew, and finally the bride of the Song of Songs in the Commentary on the Song of Songs. I demonstrate that Origen's approach to this female scriptural speech was textured and complex. In some cases, Origen was not prepared to provide fitting contexts in which their words might be spoken by his audience, but in others, he could be found teaching his audience to use female characters' words as exemplary prayers, as words of encouragement in the face of a situation that may lead to martyrdom, as exemplary modes of proclaiming Christ, and even in difficult exegetical contexts. This focus on female utterances in the scriptural record allows us to see how thoroughly pastoral was Origen's exegesis, thus moving us beyond the idea that Origen used "the feminine" only for the sake of understanding complex theological and philosophical ideas.

**Keywords:** Origen of Alexandria, exegesis, biblical women

## 1 Introduction

Since the so-called linguistic turn in scholarship of Christian late antiquity,<sup>1</sup> and the attendant feminist turn in the same,<sup>2</sup> much attention has been devoted to both the historical lives of women and to their representation in early and late antique Christian writing.<sup>3</sup> Despite these important scholarly developments, the corpus of Origen has received relatively little analysis with respect to his treatment of "the feminine" as a general category, to biblical women, and to the lives of women in his day-to-day life. This is evidenced by the fact that the first thoroughgoing treatment of Origen on women was just published in 2024. Ilaria Ramelli provided the first such treatment of the subject in her "Constructions of Gender in Origen of Alexandria," a piece in which she gathered together the Alexandrian's various (and disparate) comments on both practical issues, such as the place of women in ecclesiastical ministry and in his school, and theoretical issues, as she also describes the

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough treatment of this phenomenon, refer to the Editor's introduction to this special issue by Lavinia Cerioni.

<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, debatable whether we can speak of just one such feminist turn in this field of study.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Burrus, "The Heretical Woman as Symbol," 229–48; Clark, *Women in the Early Church*; Clark, "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman,'" 155–84; Matthews, "Thinking of Thecla," 39–55; Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessing*.

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philosophical frame of Origen's protological and eschatological anthropology.<sup>4</sup> In Ramelli's presentation, Origen had a relatively positive take on the place of women in ministry, in part due to his careful reading of Paul and to the probable place of women in the diaconate and presbyterate in his own day.<sup>5</sup> However, Ramelli also demonstrates that for Origen, the distinction between male and female was in the end irrelevant in light of the eschatological, angelic (read, non-gendered) bodies all will have at the end of the age.<sup>6</sup>

Otherwise, the little work that has been conducted on the topic of Origen and "the feminine" has been concerned to demonstrate that Origen tended to treat issues related to the roles of women primarily in exegetical contexts where he encountered a female biblical character.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, these scholars have helpfully shown that Origen often used "the feminine" as an intellectual category for theological and philosophical purposes. For example, Emanuela Prinzivalli compared "the feminine" in Origen and various "gnostic" traditions, particularly of the Valentinian variety, as she examined his treatment of the Samaritan woman and God's creation of humankind in the image of God, that is, male and female (Gen 1:27).<sup>8</sup> Prinzivalli demonstrated that Origen's non-literal approach to scripture allowed him to "soften the blow" so to speak of some scriptural texts that were unfavourable to women, and that Eve in Genesis provided him the occasion to articulate the eschatological reunification of all humanity. Maren Niehoff recently examined how Origen made exegetical and theological use of female characters of the Hebrew Bible (specifically, Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Aseneth, the midwives, and Judith), in his *Homilies on the Psalms*, arguing that these women tended to represent boundary markers between Christians and various "others," thus helping Origen to negotiate and construct a distinct Christian identity.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the work of Lavinia Cerioni should also be mentioned. Cerioni too recently examined Origen and the Valentinian Heracleon's treatments of the Samaritan woman, particularly her water jar, demonstrating that despite their similar exegetical approaches, the two exegetes assigned different theological meanings to the woman.<sup>10</sup> Whereas Heracleon's allegorical reading led him to claim that the woman's sexuality represented flawed human nature, for Origen, she symbolised the embodiment of his notion of the human soul's spiritual progress.<sup>11</sup>

In this article, I wish to build on this work by focusing on Origen's exegetical treatment of the speech uttered by a selection of female scriptural characters. My choice to focus on female speech in the biblical literature requires explanation. In a recent monograph, Mark Randall James convincingly demonstrated that one of Origen's primary exegetical goals was to teach his pastoral-exegetical audience how to become those who speak the words of scripture.<sup>12</sup> James puts it this way:

As an interpreter of Scripture, Origen is not only interested in texts and their multiple meanings. Rather, he approaches the texts of scripture as exemplifying a broader capacity for proper speech. The goal of interpretation is to acquire the capacity to speak according to the example of the scriptures, which I refer to as "learning the language of scripture."<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Origen did not, James argues, assign arbitrary allegorical meanings to texts based on his "neo-Platonic" commitments as some would have it.<sup>14</sup> Rather, his approach to the text at both the literal and the non-

<sup>4</sup> Ramelli, "Constructions of Gender in Origen of Alexandria," 115–59.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 124–30. For a less positive take on Origen's on gender, refer to Niehoff's, "Biblical Women in Origen's Newly Discovered Homilies on the Psalms," 485–507.

<sup>6</sup> She also notes that Origen follows Bardaisan and Clement of Alexandria within the Platonic-Philonic inheritance.

<sup>7</sup> Given the nature of his corpus, the bulk of which is exegetical, and the fact that he devoted his life to the exegesis of scripture, this is only natural.

<sup>8</sup> Prinzivalli, "La donna, il femminile e la Scrittura nella tradizione origeniana," 77–96.

<sup>9</sup> Niehoff, "Biblical Women in Origen's Newly Discovered Homilies on the Psalms," 485–507.

<sup>10</sup> Cerioni, "Origen, Valentinianism and Women's Roles," 79–95. See also her previous work on "the feminine" in Gnostic circles in *Revealing Women*.

<sup>11</sup> For another recent treatment of Origen on the Samaritan Woman that is not interested in Origen on women or the feminine perse, refer to Klöckener's "The Samaritan Woman in Origen's Commentary on John," 67–80.

<sup>12</sup> James, *Learning the Language of Scripture*.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>14</sup> James' helpful introductory discussion of the history of scholarship on Origen and the tendency of scholars to deem his exegesis arbitrary, pages 1–12.

literal levels was extremely pragmatic and focused on teaching his audience how to discern the logic<sup>15</sup> and underlying wisdom of scripture's words so as to be able to speak them in the appropriate context.<sup>16</sup> This James aptly labels "the deification of discourse."<sup>17</sup> James focused primarily on Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms*, and thus on Origen's own focus on his audience's internalisation and utterance of the Psalmist's words, but he drew as well on examples from Origen's exegesis of other parts of the canon, such as the letters of Paul and the Gospels' quotations of Jesus.

In what follows, I will begin with a brief examination of a couple of examples in which Origen can be seen seeking to "deify" the speech of his audience. From there we will move to discuss his exegetical treatment of female scriptural characters' speech, beginning with a discussion of Mary, the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, followed by the mother of the seven martyrs, the Samaritan woman at the well, the Canaanite woman, and finally, the bride of the Song of Songs.

## 2 The "Deification of Discourse" in the Exegesis of Origen

Before turning to examine Origen's treatment of select examples of female speech, it will be helpful to look briefly at some representative examples to get a sense of what Origen was doing exegetically as he sought to attain "the deification of discourse" together with his audience.<sup>18</sup> In the first example, from *HomPs* 76.2.4, as he commented on Ps 76:13, "I will be concerned with all the works of God," Origen found an occasion to provide a kind of reflective statement on the theological principle that the words of God in scripture are to be preferred over one's own words.<sup>19</sup> He says:

Insofar as things turn out well, they are from God, just as good words are from God, for one is not speaking these things well on his own, but he speaks them from God. But just as, when the words proceed from my mouth, those that are unassailable and divine are not mine but God's, so that I say confidently, "or do you seek proof of Christ who speaks in me?" To the extent that I act well, so as to choose all the works of God's logos, ones that are to be completed according to God's commandment, it is God's doing.<sup>20</sup>

In his analogy between our works and our words, Origen claimed directly that one should aim to speak the words of God in scripture rather than one's own. This comment was followed by a quotation of one of his most used scriptural verses, in which Paul asked rhetorically "or do you seek proof that Christ speaks in me?" (2 Cor 13:3). Origen of course assumed that Christ was speaking in Paul, the author of a significant portion of the then still forming New Testament canon, and in the one who could join Paul in speaking his (inspired, scriptural) words.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> James demonstrates how thoroughly Stoic is Origen's approach to scripture's logic. James, *Learning the Language of Scripture*, 27–72.

<sup>16</sup> James goes further than this, however, as he demonstrates that the one who has internalised the scriptures can also, according to Origen, be so daring as to improvise speech based on the example as scripture, which one can do after having mastered the habits and customs of scripture itself. James, *Learning the Language of Scripture*, 211–43.

<sup>17</sup> James, *Learning the Language of Scripture*, 210.

<sup>18</sup> These examples are also treated by James in his monograph, and I remain indebted to him for highlighting this systematic aspect of Origen's exegesis.

<sup>19</sup> For James' treatment of this passage, *Learning the Language of Scripture*, 220–1.

<sup>20</sup> *HomPs* 76 2.4. (GCS 19:318; Trigg, 257). οἷον οἱ λόγοι καλοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν. οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἰδιά τις λέγει καλῶς, ἀλλὰ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ λέγει. ὥσπερ δὲ οἱ λόγοι κἀν ἐξίωσιν ἐκ στόματός μου, ὥσι δὲ ἀνεπίληπτοι καὶ θεῖοι, οὐκ εἰσιν ἐμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὥστε θαρροῦντά με λέγειν· ἢ δοκιμὴν ζητεῖτε τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ, οὕτως κἀν πράττω καλῶς ὥστε τὰ ἔργα πάντα ἐλῆσθαι τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ αἰεὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι ἐπιτελούμενα, τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν. Note that I translated λόγοι as "words," rather than leaving it untranslated as Trigg has done.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of Origen's self-understanding as an inspired scriptural exegete, my "Origen's Sources of Exegetical Authority: The Construction of an Inspired Exegete in the Pauline Lineage," 149–59. Cf. De Cock, "Origen's Mediation of the Logos in his Exegesis of the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets," 101–9.

It is also important to note here that for Origen, the Logos, that is Christ, spoke in all of scripture, and it was therefore the duty of the astute exegete to determine how this was so.<sup>22</sup> This can be seen clearly in another brief example, which also demonstrates how Origen could then teach his audience to emulate Christ's words, which he speaks through the Psalmist. He said the following in his second homily on Ps 15: "For that is why [Christ] says this, so that we may have some pattern. And we shall imitate [him], and let us say, 'I will bless the Lord who causes me to apprehend,' so that we may also say, 'my kidneys have disciplined me'<sup>23</sup> until midnight."<sup>24</sup>

In other instances, the words of the scriptural author himself, speaking in his own voice, and not in the persona of Christ, could be instructive for the reader or hearer who sought to emulate scriptural speech.<sup>25</sup> For example, in his sixth homily on Ps 77, he said:

I just said that I was in doubt [about the soul of the sinner changing from spirit to flesh]; that what I do not know is what to say about the spirit. The prophet taught me what I must say about the spirit: "He remembered that they are flesh [...]"<sup>26</sup>

In this admittedly brief set of examples, we have seen that Origen frequently taught his audience how to read scripture so as to be able to speak its words, particularly the words of Christ in the Gospels and elsewhere in the canon as the authors spoke in the persona of Christ. We have also seen that Origen taught his audience to emulate the speech of the scriptural authors themselves, trusted guides that they are.

In what follows, I will show that, on occasion, Origen also encouraged his audience to utter and emulate the speech of a handful of female biblical characters.<sup>27</sup> My focus on these instances not only provides us with several positive examples of Origen's treatment of "the feminine," but also with examples in which his exegesis of female scriptural characters was profoundly pastoral, thus moving us beyond the idea that Origen only used the feminine to make abstract theological-philosophical arguments.

We will see that he deemed each of the following female scriptural characters exemplary in her actions, and in some cases, in both her actions and her speech. We are of course most interested here in the latter. We will also see that Origen found pastoral benefit for his readers in the speech of these women on both the literal and the non-literal planes. In fact, if we put the speech of the women examined here on a spectrum from least to most pastorally useful, at least in the extant comments we have, we would see that as we move along the spectrum towards the most useful female speech, i.e., the speech he would explicitly have his audience imitate, we move closer and closer to the non-literal realm. In other words, it was once Origen had decided that the woman in question represented someone or something else that her words reached their full beneficial potential on the lips of his audience.

### 3 Mary and Elizabeth

We begin with Mary and Elizabeth, whose speech Origen decided not to examine in terms of its pastoral usefulness. Origen provided a literal reading of Luke 1, and he regarded both Mary and Elizabeth as exemplary, and this he claimed directly in his eighth homily on Luke:

<sup>22</sup> Torjesen demonstrated this well in her *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method of Origen's Exegesis*.

<sup>23</sup> Just what Origen made of these words has recently been treated at length by Alex Poulos in his contribution to the forthcoming volume, *Origen's Homilies on the Psalms*. Poulos, "Continuity and Development in Origen's Understanding of the Soul."

<sup>24</sup> *HomPs* 15 2.4. (GCS 19:100; Trigg, 65–6). Μιμηταὶ οὖν τοῦ Χριστοῦ γινόμενοι καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅσα λέγει τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοῦ Χριστοῦ φιλοτιμούμεθα εἰπεῖν. Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ταῦτα λέγει, ἵν' ἔχωμεν ὑπογραμμὸν τί μιμησόμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰπωμεν· εὐλογῆσω τὸν κύριον τὸν συνετίσαντά με, ἵνα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰπωμεν· ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἕως νυκτὸς ἐπαίδευσάν με οἰνεφοροὶ μου. Of course, Jesus' own words in the Gospels are also to be internalised and emulated by the interpreter and his audience. For example, *HomPs* 67 1.1, 2; *On Prayer* 16ff where he examines the Lord's prayer.

<sup>25</sup> The classic treatment of Origen's discernment of the person speaking in the psalms and other biblical texts is that of Rondeau, *Exégèse prosopologique et théologie*.

<sup>26</sup> *HomPs* 77 6.2. (GCS 19:429; Trigg, 359). Ἐλεγον τότε διστάζων, ὅτι τί εἶπω περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος οὐκ οἶδα. Ἐδίδαξέν με ὁ προφήτης τί δεῖ λέγειν περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος· ἐμνήσθη γάρ, φησίν, ὁ θεὸς ὅτι σὰρξ εἰσιν.

<sup>27</sup> Of course, he would also have his audience emulate the speech of the male characters of the scriptural narrative, and as one might well imagine, this he does all the more than the speech of the female characters.

Elizabeth prophesies before John; before the birth of the Lord and Savior, Mary prophesies.<sup>28</sup> Sin began from the woman and then spread to the man. In the same way, salvation had its beginnings from women. Thus the rest of women can also lay aside the weakness of their sex and imitate as closely as possible the lives and conduct of these holy women the Gospel now describes.<sup>29</sup>

Leaving aside Origen's interpretation of the fall and his traditionally low estimation of female ontology, we should note that his words here represent an early example of the later commonplace theological notion that Mary is the new Eve. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that for Origen, these two women were inspired prophets.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere in these homilies, he claimed that Mary was exemplary in her holiness and knowledge of the Law and the Prophets,<sup>31</sup> and because of her gentleness and humble submission.<sup>32</sup>

The speech of these prophetic, exemplary women, however, he did not encourage his audience to emulate.<sup>33</sup> He quoted Elizabeth at several points<sup>34</sup> and even paraphrased her speech,<sup>35</sup> but he was not, in these homilies, interested in teaching his audience how they might speak like her. It is even more striking in the case of Mary, for although he dedicated all of his eighth homily to working line by line through her song (the Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55), he did not make any gesture towards suggesting these words might be used by his audience themselves. Origen's focus in these homilies was decidedly (and we might add, understandably) on those men to whom their prophetic mothers pointed, namely, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth.

## 4 The Mother of the Seven Martyrs

Next, we turn to examine Origen's (literal) treatment of the mother of the seven martyrs in 2 Maccabees in his treatise *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Origen quoted the mother only in her joint speech with her sons. After recounting the scene of 2 Macc 7, Origen told his readers: "And it would be appropriate for us, as well, in such circumstances to use their words to those behaving this way and to say, 'The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us' (2 Macc 7:6)."<sup>36</sup> In this passage, Origen was keen to provide his audience with the context in which such scriptural speech could to be used, or put another way, he sought to provide his readership, who themselves might have found themselves in the dire circumstances that might well lead them to martyrdom, with the appropriate words to say to those who threatened them.

Beyond this usage of her (joint) speech, however, Origen did not quote the mother,<sup>37</sup> whom the author of 2 Maccabees himself lauded as "Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance" (2 Macc 7:20). In fact, her extended speech in 2 Macc 7:22–29 was left entirely unused and uncommented upon, and instead Origen provided an epitome of the event, merely summarising her words, saying "she mocked the tyrant and moved

<sup>28</sup> *HomGen* 10 where Rebecca is also regarded as prophetic in her speech, and she is exemplary like the Samaritan woman in that she comes daily to the well (of the scriptures, if we follow Origen's non-literal reading of wells). Cf. *HomGen* 5 on the action of Lot's daughters, if read on the allegorical plane; in *HomLuc* 17.6 Anna is considered prophetic, as is Deborah in *HomJud.* 5.2.

<sup>29</sup> Origen, *HomLuc* 8.1 (SC 87:164; Lienhard, 33). *Ante Ioannem prophetat Elisabeth, ante ortum Domini Salvatoris prophetat Maria. Et quomodo peccatum coepit a muliere et deinceps ad virum usque pervenit, sic et principium salutis a mulieribus habuit exordium, ut ceterae quoque mulieres, sexus fragilitate deposita, imitarentur vitam conversationem sanctarum earumque vel maxime, quae nunc in evangelio describuntur.*

<sup>30</sup> This he reiterates throughout these homilies. See also *HomLuc* 6.2; 7.2–5. On Elizabeth and Mary as prophets, refer to Hermanin's article, "The Doctrine of Memory in Origen of Alexandria," in this issue.

<sup>31</sup> Origen, *HomLuc* 6.7 (SC 87:148 Lienhard, 26).

<sup>32</sup> Origen, *HomLuc* 8.5 (SC 87:170; Lienhard, 35–6).

<sup>33</sup> At least, in the Latin translation of these homilies that we now have, he seems not to have been interested in rendering their speech useful for the various contexts of his audience.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Origen, *HomLuc* 6.2; 7.4, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Origen, *HomLuc* 7.5.

<sup>36</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 23 (GCS 2:21; Greer, 57). καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐν τοιούτοις γενομένους εἰπεῖν τοὺς ἐκείνων λόγους πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς τοῦτον ἔχοντας τὸν τρόπον οὕτως "κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐφορᾷ καὶ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ἐφ' ἡμῖν παρακαλεῖται."

<sup>37</sup> *HomEx* 6 where Miriam's contribution to the song is not mentioned.

her son with many words about endurance.”<sup>38</sup> By contrast, her sons were duly quoted, and it is difficult not to interpret the effect of his emphasis on the sons’ speech over that of their mother as a kind of literary silencing.<sup>39</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Origen did not consider the mother to be exemplary in her piety, hope, and endurance in the face of persecution. Like Elizabeth and Mary, this mother too was an example to be heeded. Of this mother, he said, “For the dews of true religion and the wind of holiness did not permit that fire of a mother’s love which flames up in most women under such heavy evils to be kindled in her bowels.”<sup>40</sup> She was thus clearly exemplary for Origen, and from her conduct, Origen can bring to his readers the story’s benefit. But again, instead of quoting her own words in the face of persecution, he ended his treatment of the woman and her sons in this way:

Human weakness does not live in the same city with this spell of love for God, since it is driven abroad from the soul and has no power to act when a person can say, “The Lord is my strength and my song” (Ps 118:14) and “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me, Christ Jesus our Lord” (Phil 4:13).<sup>41</sup>

He drew upon the words of two (male) scriptural authors instead. It seems that Origen, for whatever reason, would rather have had the person who found themselves in the context of possible martyrdom use the words of the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul, but not of the martyred woman whose very story he had just summarised. In this case, it was not even the words of the male characters of the narrative that he highlighted over those of the mother, but those of two male voices from unrelated contexts.<sup>42</sup>

## 5 The Samaritan Woman

With the Samaritan woman of John 4, we move closer to a true example of Origen’s pastoral usage of female scriptural characters’ speech. Again, the Samaritan woman was primarily exemplary for Origen in her actions and virtuous character, and she too had a prophetic voice. In this case, however, he also praised aspects of her speech. Whereas we might have expected him to teach his audience how to say the Samaritan woman’s words, “Lord, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come here to draw” (Jn 4:15), Origen did not take his reading in this direction. Instead, he developed his allegorical treatment of Jacob’s well versus the water of Jesus, which stood respectively for the scriptures versus the teachings of Jesus.<sup>43</sup> This Samaritan woman was for Origen an apostle to those in her Samaritan village,<sup>44</sup> who, “at the literal level” (κατὰ τὴν λέξιν), exhibited such eagerness to leave her water jar for the sake of the benefit of the many,<sup>45</sup> that she must be emulated by his audience. He commented thus:

<sup>38</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 26 (GCS 2:23; Greer, 59). ἡ δε ἐπιδειξαμένη πείσειν περὶ ὧν ἠθέλε τὸν υἱὸν καὶ χλευάσα τὸν τύραννον πολλοὺς τῷ υἱῷ ἐκίνει λόγους περὶ ὑπομονῆς.

<sup>39</sup> For a wider contextual view of the mother compared with Eleazar in the previous chapter of this text, see Rafael, “Origen and the Story of the Mother and Her Seven Sons,” 555–73.

<sup>40</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 27 (GCS 2:23; Greer, 59). δρόσοι γὰρ εὐσεβείας καὶ πνεῦμα ὁσιότητος οὐκ εἴων ἀνάπτεισθαι ἐν τοῖς σπλάγχνοις αὐτῆς τὸ μητρικὸν καὶ ἐν πολλαῖς ἀναφλεγόμενον ὡς ἐπὶ βαρυτάτοις κακοῖς πῦρ.

<sup>41</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 27 (GCS 2:24; Greer, 59). τοῦτω δὲ τῷ πρὸς θεὸν φίλτρον ἀνθρωπίνῃ ἀσθένεια οὐ συμπολιτεύεται ὑπερόριος ἀφ’ ὁλῆς τῆς ψυχῆς ἐλαυνομένη καὶ οὐδὲ κατὰ ποσὸν ἐνεργεῖν δυναμένη, ὅπου ἐστὶν ὁ οἶός τε εἰπεῖν· ἰσχύς μου καὶ ὑμνήσις μου ὁ κύριος καὶ πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

<sup>42</sup> Of course, that is unfair to Origen, who, like all ancient exegetes, worked with the principle that scripture interprets scripture and thus one should draw on passages from elsewhere that deal with a similar theme. In this case, the theme of hope in the Lord in the face of difficulty leads him to draw on these other passages.

<sup>43</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 13.40–42. For my extended treatment of this passage, see chapter three of my book *Interpreting the Gospel of John in Antioch and Alexandria*, 97–113.

<sup>44</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 13.169.

<sup>45</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 13.173 (SC 222:128; Heine, 105).



So must we too therefore, forgetting things that are more material in nature and leaving them behind, be eager to impart to others that benefit of which we have been partakers. For, by recording the woman's commendation for those capable of reading with understanding, the Evangelist challenges us to this goal.<sup>46</sup>

In this passage, it is, however indirectly, the woman's actions *and* her speech that were to be a model for his readers, for it was not only her eagerness to heed the spiritual needs of her countrymen, but also the message she brought them concerning Christ, that was exemplary. Origen made this point explicit as he drew his treatment of the woman to a close, saying, "Here, then, a woman proclaims Christ to the Samaritans, and at the end of the Gospels also the woman who saw him before all the others tells the apostles of the Resurrection of the Savior."<sup>47</sup> The proclamation of Christ was almost certainly the kind of speech he would have had his readers emulate, and while he did not seek to teach them to say her exact words, choosing instead to characterise its content, her proclamation of Christ placed her, in his estimation, in the same laudatory category as the women who proclaimed Christ's resurrection to the apostles.

## 6 The Canaanite Woman

With the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15, we shift now towards an example in which Origen treats female speech on the non-literal plane, and its pastoral usefulness is made much more explicit. We will first deal with his overarching interpretation of the woman. Origen dealt particularly with her words, "Have mercy on me, Lord Son of David" (Matt 15:22), which she herself was able to say because she had "come out from those regions" (of Tyre and Sidon, which were full of Gentile sinners).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, her very designation, the Canaanite woman, Origen claimed, means "humiliation," and accordingly it indicates that like all sinners, she was prepared for humiliation due to her wickedness, unlike the righteous who are prepared for the kingdom of God.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it was her speech and her movement out of the regions of sinful Gentiles that rendered her emblematic of all Gentiles who turn to Christ in faith.

Origen's next move was to "bring together from the Gospels" all the passages where people cry out to Jesus, calling him "Son of David" as she did.<sup>50</sup> He then went about listing them all for his readers, noting their similarities and differences, and indeed completing the "useful" exercise he set out for them himself, bringing together such figures as the blind men in Jericho and the demoniac.<sup>51</sup> Following his brief comparison of these figures, Origen argued that they represent "different kinds of souls that Jesus heals and makes alive," and that the healings recorded in the Gospels not only brought people at that time to faith, but they are also symbolic of how Jesus is active even now.<sup>52</sup> This Canaanite woman in particular displayed such exemplary persistence, worship of Jesus, and great faith as she made her plea for the cleansing of her demon-possessed daughter that she received what she wanted from Jesus. Of her Origen said,

[...] we will have to think of the Canaanite woman who is mother of the terribly demon-possessed girl to be a symbol of such a soul....And it is likely that this mother, of whom the Canaanite woman who had come out from the regions of Tyre and Sidon is

<sup>46</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 13.174 (SC 222:128, 130; Heine, 105). Χρή οὖν καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐπιλανθανομένους τῶν σωματικωτέρων καὶ ἀφιέντας αὐτὰ σπεύδειν ἐπὶ τὸ μεταδιδοῖναι ἢς μετελήφαμεν ὠφελείας ἑτέροις· ἐπὶ τοῦτο γὰρ προκαλεῖται ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς ἔπαινον τοῖς εἰδόσιν ἀναγινώσκειν ἀναγράφων τῆς γυναικός.

<sup>47</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 13.179 (SC 222:132; Heine, 106). Ἐνθάδε μὲν δὴ τοῖς Σαμαρείταις γυνὴ εὐαγγελίζεται τὸν Χριστόν, ἐπὶ τέλει δὲ τῶν εὐαγγελίων καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ σωτῆρος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἢ πρὸ πάντων αὐτὸν θεασαμένη γυνὴ διηγείται.

<sup>48</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.16 (GCS 40:60; Heine, 81–2).

<sup>49</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.16 (GCS 40:61; Heine, 82).

<sup>50</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.17 (GCS 40:61. Heine, 82).

<sup>51</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.17 (GCS 40:61–2; Heine, 82). This is not an exhaustive list. He includes several others before reflecting on what the list means.

<sup>52</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.17 (GCS 40:62; Heine, 82).

a symbol, of which the places on earth were types, has approached the Saviour and asked him, and continues to ask even now, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord Son of David; my daughter is terribly demon-possessed.”<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the Canaanite woman represented those mothers who, even now, petition Jesus on behalf of their children’s demon-possessed souls in the same manner using her very words.

The Canaanite woman’s words in 15:27, “Yes, Lord, for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs of what falls from the table of their masters,” were also pastorally useful. In the Matthean text, the woman says these words as she responds to Jesus, who tells her that “it is not possible to take the loaf of the children and throw it to the pups” upon her request for help (15:25–26). In this passage, Origen continued to be preoccupied with salvation history, which with respect to these verses meant explicating the loaves (intended for the children of Israel) and the dogs (those of Gentile origins). His final comments in this section of the commentary are of particular relevance to our topic. As he discussed the possibility of a dog becoming a child, the woman’s words provided pastorally useful language for the Gentile who turns to God via the Word:

But one who has been reproached as being a dog and is not annoyed at being said to be unworthy of the loaf of the children, and with great forbearance says what the Canaanite woman said, “Yes, Lord, for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs of what falls from the table of their masters,” will obtain the kind reply of Jesus who says to him, “Great is your faith,” when he takes up such great faith, and adds, “Let it be to you as you wish,” so that he himself may be healed and, if he has borne any fruit in need of healing, this one too may be healed.<sup>54</sup>

Any Gentile person who finds themselves at a similar point in their journey towards Christ can use her words, and such a one can accordingly expect to hear the same kind of response from Jesus as she did in return.

## 7 The Bride in the Song of Songs

With the Song of Song’s Bride, we are in full-blown allegorical mode, and the pastoral usefulness of her speech is clear, as the entire book consists of a dialogue between the bridegroom and the bride and her attendants, and thus the speech of the bride in the Song of Songs provides myriad examples of the phenomenon of our focus.<sup>55</sup> As is well known, Origen treated the entire work as a two-pronged allegory of the Christian soul’s relationship to Christ the Word, on the one hand, and of Christ and the church on the other. Origen began the preface to the work thus:

It seems to me that this little book is an epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the Bride, about to wed and burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God. And deeply indeed did she love Him, whether we take her as soul made in His image, or as the Church.<sup>56</sup>

It is the former metaphor that is particularly relevant for our purposes, for it is in that context that the bride’s speech can be spoken by the mature, devoted individual. We will look at several representative examples in what follows.

<sup>53</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.17 (GCS 40:62–3; Heine, 83). δεήσει νοῆσαι τὴν Χαναναίαν, μητέρα τῆς δεινῶς δαιμονιζομένης, σύμβολον τυγχάνουσιν μητρὸς τοιαύτης ψυχῆς... εἰκὸς δὲ ἐξηλθῆναι ταύτην. ἢ σύμβολον ἢ Χαναναία. ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος. ὧν τύποι ἦσαν οἱ ἐπὶ γῆς τόποι. Προσεληλυθυῖαν τῷ σωτῆρι ἡξιώκεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἔτι νῦν ἀξιοῦν λέγουσαν· ἐλέησόν με. Κύριε υἱὲ Δαυὶδ· ἡ θυγάτηρ μου δεινῶς δαιμονίζεται.

<sup>54</sup> Origen, *CommMatt* 11.17 (GCS 40:64–5; Heine, 84–5). ὁ ἐλεγχθεὶς ὡς κύων καὶ μὴ ἀγανακτήσας ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνάξιος εἶναι λέγεσθαι ἄρτου τέκνων καὶ μετὰ πάσης ἀνεξικακίας εἰπὼν τὸν τῆς Χαναναίας ἐκείνης λόγον τὸν φήσαντα· ναί, κύριε καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν φθίνων τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν τεύξεταί τῆς προσηνεστάτης ἀποκρίσεως Ἰησοῦ λέγοντος αὐτῷ· μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις, ἐπὶ τὴν τηλικαύτην ἀναλάβη πίστιν, καὶ λέγοντος· γένεσθω σοι ὡς θέλεις, ἵνα καὶ αὐτὸς ἰαθῇ καὶ, εἰ τινα καρπὸν ἐγέννησε δεόμενον ἰάσεως, καὶ οὗτος θεραπευθῇ.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *On Prayer* 13.2 where Origen mentions the prayer of Hannah as the first in the list of biblical characters who prayed as they ought. He includes Esther and Judith as well, though he does not quote their prayers, but they are in any case applauded as exemplary in their prayerful words, intentions, and posture.

<sup>56</sup> Origen, *CommCant* Preface 1.1. (SC 375:81; Lawson, 21). *Epithalamium libellus hic, id est nuptial carmen, dramatis in modum mihi videtur a Solomone conscriptus, quem cecinit instar nubentis sponsae et erga sponsum suum, qui est Sermo Dei, caelesti amore flagrantis. Adamavit enim eum sive anima quae ad imaginem eius facta est, sive ecclesia.*



The very first verse treated by Origen provides a good example. As he dealt with Song of Songs 1:2a, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” he provided three layers of interpretation in keeping with the overall interpretation he promised his reader in the preface. After explaining the context of “the content of the actual story,” namely, a bride who has received a dowry from her bridegroom of the most fitting gifts, but who must now wait patiently to see him, she turns to prayer saying the words of the verse, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”<sup>57</sup> Having presented the content of the drama, Origen turned to the second layer, that of the church longing for union with Christ, and from there to the third layer. He said:

[...] let us bring in the soul whose only desire is to be united to the Word of God and to be in fellowship with Him, and to enter into the mysteries of His wisdom and knowledge as into the chambers of her heavenly bridegroom; which soul has already received his gifts...let us regard natural law and reason and free will as the soul's betrothal gifts.<sup>58</sup>

This soul receives further instruction to build on her natural gifts, but in order to satisfy her desire and love perfectly – in keeping with the context set up by that which Origen provided in the first layer – the individual must pray “that her pure and virginal mind may be enlightened by the illumination and the visitation,” i.e., the kisses, of the Word of God himself. It is in such a context then and for the sake of such kisses, Origen said, “let the soul say in her prayer to God: ‘Let Him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.’”<sup>59</sup>

Origen ended his treatment of this verse by providing another context in which it would be appropriate for his readers to speak the bride's words, namely in a difficult exegetical context. He said the following:

As often, therefore, as we find some problem pertaining to the divine teachings and meanings revealed in our heart without instructors' help, so often may we believe that kisses have been given to us by the Bridegroom-Word of God. But, when we seek the meaning of something of this sort and cannot find it, then let us make this prayer our own and beg from God the visitation of His Word, saying: “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.” For the Father knows each single soul's capacity and understands the right time for a soul to receive the kisses of the Word in lights and insights of this sort.<sup>60</sup>

When the meaning of a given passage or divine doctrine is obscured, the bride's petitions for kisses should be spoken in the hopes that the Word would visit the soul in the form of insights pertaining to the puzzling divine teachings.

A second example comes from the next section of the commentary and deals with the next verse of the Song, the bride's words, “for thy breasts are better than wine” (Song of Songs 1.2b). In the literal drama, the bride speaks the words as she realises that the Bridegroom, whom she has just been praying would come, was already present with her and has revealed his breasts to her.<sup>61</sup> Having explained the literal meaning of the play, Origen moved on saying, “now let us enquire what the inner meaning holds,” and this involved an extended investigation of the meaning of the bridegroom's breasts.<sup>62</sup> He concluded, based on his consultation of an array of other scriptural passages, that it refers to “the ground of the heart” (*principale cordis*)<sup>63</sup> and that the bridegroom's heart/breasts are good because in them are stored “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”

<sup>57</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.1.4. (SC 375:178; Lawson, 59).

<sup>58</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.1.9. (SC 375:182; Lawson, 60–1). *Terti overo expositionis loco introducamus animam, cuius omne studium sit coniungi et consociari Verbo Dei et intra mysteria sapientiae eius ac scientiae veluti sponsi caelestis thalamus intrare; cuique animae praesentia etiam ipsius munera data sint, dotis scilicet nomine...ita huic lex naturae et rationalibus sensus ac libertas arbitrii dotalia munera deputentur.*

<sup>59</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.1.10. (SC 375:182; Lawson, 61). *Propter haec ergo et huiusmodi oscula dicat anima orans ad Deum: Osculetur me ab osculis oris sui.* Origen went on to discuss further the difference between the kisses given by the Word versus those given by the mouths of teachers.

<sup>60</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.1.14. (SC 375:184, 186; Lawson, 62). *Quotiens ergo in corde nostro aliquid quod de divinis dogmatibus et sensibus quaeritur, absque monitoribus invenimus, totiens oscula nobis data esse ab sponso Dei Verbo credamus. Ubi vero quaerentes aliquid de divinis sensibus invenire non possumus, tunc affect orationis huius assumpto petamus a Deo visitationem Verbi eius, et dicamus: Osculetur me ab osculis oris sui.*

<sup>61</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.1-2. (SC 375:190, 192; Lawson, 63).

<sup>62</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.2. (SC 375:192; Lawson, 63).

<sup>63</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.3. (SC 375:192; Lawson, 63).

(*sapientiae et scientiae reconditi*).<sup>64</sup> As for the wine to which the bride compares the breasts, it represents the teachings of the Law and the Prophets prior to the bridegroom's coming.<sup>65</sup> She realises upon seeing him now that his teachings are more perfect than that which she had previously received and says, "Thy breasts are better than wine." Origen then developed this argument with reference to several passages from the Gospels in which Jesus interpreted the Law and the Prophets, the good wine as it were, and by discussing bad, poisonous wines. Having established all this, Origen finally turned to his "third interpretation with reference to the perfect soul and the Word of God" and said the following:

[...] as long as a person is a child and has not yet offered himself wholly to God, he drinks the wine which that field produces, which holds within itself the hidden treasure too; and he is gladdened by the wine he drinks. But, when he has offered and vowed himself to God and has been made a Nazirite, and has found the hidden treasure and come to the very breasts and fountains of the Word of God, then he will no longer drink wine or spirit, but with reference to these treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in the Word of God, he will say to him: "Thy breasts are better than wine."<sup>66</sup>

Thus, upon encountering the Logos/Bridegroom, the mature, perfected soul, who has been prepared by the law and the prophets and by having offered himself completely to God, becomes aware of the superiority of Christ's teachings and can say like the bride, "Thy breasts are better than wine." The context in which the perfected soul can say these words is again one that assumes an encounter with Christ in the reading of scripture.

A third example develops this further. In Book 3 of the commentary, where Origen dealt with the bride's words of Song of Songs 2:8, "The voice of my nephew<sup>67</sup>! Behold here He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills." In the dramatic context of the play, Origen told us that the bride had been addressing the maidens, when she suddenly heard the bridegroom's voice, and therefore spoke the words of Song of Songs 2:8. In the second layer of interpretation, that of the Church and Christ, the Church also heard (without sight) the voice of Christ the bridegroom through the voices of prophets and apostles. In the third layer of his interpretation, that of the Christian soul and Christ the Word, Origen again provided a fitting context in which the soul could speak the words of the bride. Again, the context was exegetical. He said,

Now every soul—if such there is who is constrained by love for the Word of God—if at any time it is in the thick of an argument about some passage—and everyone knows from his own experience how when one gets into a tight corner like this, one gets shut up in the straits of propositions and enquiries—if at any time some riddles or obscure sayings of the Law or the Prophets hem in the soul, if then she should chance to perceive Him to be present, and from afar should catch the sound of His voice, forthwith she is uplifted. And, when He has begun more and more to draw near to her senses and to illuminate the things that are obscure, then she sees Him "leaping upon the mountains and the hills"; that is to say, He then suggests to her interpretations of a high and lofty sort, so that this soul can rightly say: "Behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills."<sup>68</sup>

Like the bride of the drama, who was engaged in discourse concerning the bridegroom with her attendants as she waited for him when she heard his voice, the Christian soul is uplifted when she hears the voice of the

<sup>64</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.8. (SC 375:196; Lawson, 65).

<sup>65</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.8. (SC 375:196; Lawson, 65).

<sup>66</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 1.2.23-24. (SC 375:204; Lawson, 69–70). *Sed et si tertia exposition de anima haec perfecta et Verbo Dei sentire debeamus, possumus dicere in his quia donec quis parvulus est et nondum semet ipsum ex integro obtulit Deo, bibit vinum quod offert ager ille qui habet intra se etiam thesaurum absconditum, et bibens laetificatur ex vino. Cum autem obtulerit et devoverit semet ipsum Deo ac Nazaraeus fuerit effectus, atque invenerit thesaurum absconditum et ad ipsa ubera fontesque pervenerit Verbi Dei, vinum et siceram iam non bibet dicens ad ipsum Dei Verbum de his thesauris qui in ipso sapientiae et scientiae reconditi sunt: Quia bona sunt uber atque super vinum. Cf. CommJn 13.15-39.*

<sup>67</sup> Origen explained how the nephew is the bridegroom in 1.2.5.

<sup>68</sup> Origen, *CommCant* 3.11.13-14. (SC 376:604; Lawson, 209–10). *Sed et unaquaeque anima – si qua tamen nest quae Verbi Dei amore constringitur – ,si quando in disputatione sermonis est posita – ut novit omnis qui expertus est quomodo cum in arctum venit et angustiis propositionum quaestionumque concluditur – ,si quando eam legis aut prophetarum vel aenigmata vel obscura quaeque dicta concludunt, si forte adesse eum sentiat anima et minus sonitum vocis eius accipiat, sublevatur statim. Et ubi magis ac magis propiari sensibus eius coeperit et illuminare quae obscura sunt, tunc eum videt salientem supra montes et colles, altae scilicet et excelsae sensus sibi intelligentiae suggerentem, ita ut merito dicat haec anima: Ecce hic venit saliens super montes, transiliens super colles.*

Word in the biblical text (or perhaps in the midst of discussion about a given passage). This Origen presented as a likely and indeed routine context that the Christian should place herself in to hear his voice, and gradually see him “leaping upon the mountains and the hills,” i.e., the prophetic and apostolic writings. When the Word suggests lofty interpretations of the text, the soul of the Christian can speak the bride’s words of recognition of her bridegroom.

In this section, then, we saw how profoundly text-focused were the contexts provided by Origen for the speaking of the bride’s words, which were useful for the perfected soul who was prepared for an encounter with the Logos by reading the Old Testament and by devoting herself wholly to God.

## 8 Conclusion

This brief examination of Origen’s exegetical treatment of the speech of scriptural women demonstrates how textured and complex was the exegete’s approach to the women he encountered in the text. We saw that in some cases, such as that of Mary and Elizabeth, and to an extent, the mother of the seven martyrs, Origen was not prepared to provide fitting contexts in which their words might be spoken by his audience, and in fact, he gave preference to the speech and actions of the male characters over these women. We might therefore say that like many of his contemporaries, Origen’s understanding of women and the feminine conformed to the patriarchal expectations of his time. We also saw, however, that Origen could on some occasions be found teaching his audience to use female characters’ words as exemplary prayers, as exemplary modes of proclaiming Christ, and even in difficult exegetical contexts.

Thus, analysis of his exegesis of female utterances in the inspired scriptural record provided the opportunity to witness a slightly different dynamic at play where the principle of the words’ pastoral usefulness bracketed the traditional binary understandings of the categories of male and female, all for the sake of “deifying” the speech of his audience.<sup>69</sup> That is, rather than simply using the female biblical characters as figures to think with about philosophical and doctrinal teachings, he exhorts his audience to use their words for the sake of their spiritual development. It was, nevertheless, at the non-literal level in particular that Origen found it pastorally beneficial to teach his audience how to speak the words of these female scriptural characters, probably because at this level, which inevitably concerned the individual Christian soul or the members of the church, female speech could be generalised and thus made fit for universal Christian usage. On the other side of the spectrum, it was perhaps the particularity of the words of Mary and Elizabeth that disinclined him from using them to make general claims about how his audience could best use them.

We must ask, however, how positive this phenomenon really was. That is, did the words spoken by the female characters of the biblical narrative register for Origen as feminine speech as such? Given that he believed that the personal, teaching Logos (Christ) was present in all of scripture,<sup>70</sup> and that all of scripture’s disparate parts, in the end, had the same (multifaceted) message concerning “the drama of salvation,”<sup>71</sup> was the characters’ historical femininity of any interpretive or theological consequence for him? Again, we must say that the answer to this question is complex. While it might be fair to say that Origen never considered the bride of the Song to be feminine as such given that he could be said to have begun with his two-pronged allegorical reading from the outset. Nevertheless, Origen gave credit where credit was due. That is, the fact of the Samaritan woman’s proclamation of Christ as a kind of female apostle to the Samaritans was not lost on

<sup>69</sup> Cerioni’s treatment of Origen’s inheritance of the Platonic understandings of the categories, male and female, in this special issue. Cerioni, “Feminine Metaphorical Language: Platonic Resonances in Origen of Alexandria.” She argues that, like those of Plato, Origen’s works displayed the mainstream binary distinction between genders whilst simultaneously adopting “a fluid and multifaceted feminine continuum that transcends simplistic dialectic oppositions between defective/inferior femininity and perfect/superior masculinity.” I understand Origen’s use of female speech in a similar way. Gilhuly, *The Feminine Matrix*, 58–97.

<sup>70</sup> Origen, *CommJn* 1.15 (SC 120:62; Heine, 35).

<sup>71</sup> Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 221. See Martens’ entire chapter on Origen’s ‘doctrine of Scripture’ as he calls it. He provides his own thorough account of the topic as well as the extensive literature on it. Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 193–226.

him, nor was the phenomenon of the prophesying women of scripture, a near trope in his corpus. Similarly, in his treatment of the Canaanite woman, in the first instance, it was mothers in a similar situation to that of the Canaanite woman who could use her words.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, I suggest that the femaleness of these scriptural figures' speech did register for the Alexandrian. However, as we saw throughout this article, his overarching treatment of the female figures' speech was to teach his mixed audience how to use their words and in which contexts.

**Funding information:** The publishing costs were covered from the project OriGen, managed by Dr. Lavinia Cerioni, funded from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement 894506.

**Author contribution:** The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

**Conflict of interest:** Author states no conflict of interest.

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<sup>72</sup> To the contrary, in the context of Origen's discussion of the speech of the mother of the seven martyrs, mothers are not explicitly encouraged to use her words. This is probably due to the fact that the mother's joint speech with her sons is more focused on the male sons anyway. We would not expect him to single mothers out.

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