Lorenzo Perrone (Pisa)

"Ιχνος ἐνθουσιασμοῦ Origen, Plato and the inspired Scriptures"

Inspiration as a subjective criterion:
the evidence of the act of reading

No other text in Origen's quite considerable complex of writings displays a methodological awareness of the kind we meet in the fourth book of Peri archon (IV, 1-3)¹. It is indeed his discours de la méthode as a commentator of the Bible, though other important pronouncements on the same subject may be found throughout his work. Already in antiquity they had been collected in the anthology called the Philokalia, and there are some modern equivalents². The "Treatise on Biblical Hermeneutics", however, offers the best introduction to the way Origen treats the inspired Scriptures, first delivering an explanation of their divine character and then recommending the criteria for an interpretation of the Holy Scriptures to conform exactly to that character³. Partly because of its well-known hermeneutical schemes (first and foremost, the threefold sense of the Scriptures), this impressive presentation attracts the Alexandrian's readers, who normally do not perceive the tensions hidden within his discourse. In reality, despite the systematic effort he clearly deploys here, he does not wholly succeed in overcoming the problems raised by setting up certain polarities in his arguments. I will limit myself only to one aspect of them, concerning the first section of the Treatise (PArch IV, 1) devoted to establishing the inspired nature of the Christian Scriptures.

In this case the polarity is the result of the intersection of two different lines of reasoning. His main one relies on the link between prophecy and history, applying a traditional apologetic argument to the problem of inspiration. The coming of Jesus Christ and the spread of Christianity throughout the oikoumenē confirm the prophecies in the Scriptures, and for the same reason supply a proof of their divine character⁴. The emphasis is therefore on the apologetic, objective demonstration provided by the course of history and by its retroactive justification in the Old Testament, as well as in the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. On the other hand, Origen hints at a different approach to the claim that the Christian Scriptures are divinely inspired. He also argues for a subjective experience of the same thing, in that reading the "prophetic texts" with particular care and attention can lead readers to "experience" within themselves "the trace of the divine inspiration" (Ιχνος ἐνθουσιασμοῦ)⁵.

In Origen's formulation this subjective, personal criterion seems more a tentative suggestion than a well-rounded thesis, since he abandons it immediately after introducing it. The development of his reflection on inspiration reverts to the "objective" criterion provided by the relation between prophecy and history. We may then wonder what weight we should give to this point. Is Origen not wholly convinced by it, since his emphasis falls on Christ as the only key to our understanding the Scriptures? Do the prophecies

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Charles Hindley (University of Bologna) for the final revision of the English text.
² Regarding the problem of "method" in Origen, see my article: Metodo, in A. MONACI CASTAGNO (ed.), Origene. Dizionario: la cultura, il pensiero, le opere, Roma 2000, 276-281.
³ I quote Peri archon (= PArch) from the edition of P. KOETSCHAU (GCS 22, Leipzig 1913).
² With regard to the Philokalia, see especially the first p pzig 1913).
⁴ For a detailed analysis of the structure and themes of PArch IV, 1-3, see my contribution: L'argomentazione di Origene nel Trattato di ermetica biblica. Note di lettura su Περὶ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ IV 1-3, in "Studi Classici e Orientalì", 40 (1990) 161-203.
⁵ From its beginnings, apologetic discourse held up the success of Christianity among the Gentiles as major evidence of the divine origin of the new religion and its message. Origen himself will often point to it in Contra Celsum: see H. CHADWICK, The Evidence of Christianity in the Apologetic of Origen, in Studia Patristica, II, Berlin 1957, 331-339.
⁶ Cfr. PArch IV, 1, 6 (302.4-5).
of the Old Testament manifest their inspired character only through God's revelation in his Son and as a consequence of a preceding faith in Christ? Or is the relevance of the act of reading necessarily played down by the apologetic stance of the "Treatise", which obliges Origen to rest upon undisputed factors? We should probably look for an answer in this latter direction, though apologetic concerns may of themselves be ambivalent, inasmuch as they are directed not only against the pagans, but also against the Jews. According to Hermann Josef Vogt, it is precisely the polemic against the Jews which prevents Origen from whole-heartedly accepting the second criterion of inspiration. Nevertheless, the claims of a subjective verification of the inspired Scriptures "through the act of reading itself" (Εξ αυτοῦ τοῦ ἀναγινώσκειν) lead him to accept a point of view already expressed within the spiritual horizons of Hel lenism. Plato's view has a very important parallel in the ideas formulated by Plato in his dialogue Ion, and is probably not devoid of Aristotelian echoes. Both directions lead us, on the other hand, to discover one of the most characteristic aspects of Origen's conception of the Holy Scriptures.

Plato's paradigm for interpretation: the spiritual magnetism of inspiration

If we go back to Origen's formulations regarding the "trace of inspiration" in the Bible and the "experience" that spiritually alert readers are able to make of this, we can detect the influence of philosophical sources both in the language and in the ideas. The closest parallel is apparently to be found in Plato's Ion, where the philosopher elaborates an analogous paradigm for interpreting Homer's poetry. In the course of the dialogue Socrates leads the rhapsode Ion to recognize the true factors required for both the proper interpretation of Homer's verses and its empathetic reception on the part of the hearers. The main point is that the hermeneutic does not derive from the possession of a "technique" (τεχνη) or a "science" (ἐπίστημη), but from a "divine power" (θεῖα δύναμις). This is originally at work in the poet himself and then operates in his interpreter as well as in his hearers, thus creating a truly magnetic chain (an example chosen by Plato himself) of inspired dynamism as the indispensable premise for participating in the process. The poet, the interpreter and the hearer all enjoy, as a consequence, what should be called an "ecstatic" experience (which of course at first sight recalls what Origen terms ἀναγινώσκειν). It is precisely this ecstatic experience which leads the hearers and/or the readers to recognize that they have to do with not merely human work, but with something divinely inspired.

Plato's hermeneutical paradigm, on the one hand, reflects a common assumption of ancient hermeneutics, which is best summarised in the axiom simile a simili, according to which knowledge is possible only on the basis of a certain similarity between subject and object. A methodological conviction of this sort is generally shared unproblematically by both pagan and Christian authors. In other words, only a spiritual reader is able to grasp the deep meaning of the inspired Scriptures. On the other hand, Plato's perspective focuses on the transcendent nature of the inspired text more than on subjective perception or the personal prerequisites required for that, which is the case in Origen's treatise. Yet for both of them we have to do with a process that enables us to recognise that a specific text (Homer's poetry or...
the Bible) is not merely human. Origen expresses this result almost in the same words in the passage of the Treatise under discussion.

If Plato's model of inspired Scriptures has to be regarded as the nearest parallel to Origen's hermeneutical pattern in PArch IV, 1, 6, there may be another philosophical influence present. Scholars have pointed to a possible allusion to a lost writing of Aristotle, the Peri philosophias. In a fragment preserved by Synesius of Cyrene, we find a wording similar to some expressions of the Treatise. Synesius' autobiographical treatise Dion quotes Aristotle when comparing the author's way of life as a well-educated humanist, fond of the Greek paideia, to the conduct of the religious. The latter do not aim to attain an intellectual education, but are eager for an initiate's immediate experience of the divine. The key-word in the passage, taken over (probably not literally) from Aristotle's work, is παθεῖν, which of course may be echoed by Origen's formulations (παθω... Ἰχνος ἑνθουσιασμοῦ, κ.τ.λ. ὁνάν πάσχει...)15. A point common both to Plato and to Aristotle is the fact that this kind of experience occurs without the involvement of the mind. Also for Aristotle, then, we may speak here of an ecstatic condition.

It is not my intention to contend that Origen relies directly upon the two Greek philosophers for his idea of a subjective experience and personal recognition of the inspired nature of the Holy Scriptures (though in my opinion this seems to be quite certain, at least with Plato's Ion). I am concerned rather to see how such evident affinities with Plato and Aristotle function within Origen's writings and thought. If the experience of inspiration is understood as a kind of ecstatic participation by the reader, analogous to the experience originally made by the prophet or by the hagiographer of the Sacred Writings, we should try to clarify further the Alexandrian's view of ἑνθουσιασμὸς and his general attitude towards ἔκπτασις. Both subjects are of course important for Origen, especially concerning the distinctive nature of Jewish-Christian prophecy compared to pagan (as is the case in his dispute with Celsus). But they also impinge more generally upon the views he has of the relation between God and man, the realm of the divine, and human existence, with its final goal of spiritual perfection. We shall note Origen's significant efforts to distinguish the biblical view of inspiration and ecstasy from that of the pagan world.

To avoid an all-embracing exhaustive investigation, I shall approach: the experience of reading (or hearing) the Scriptures as a way to infer their divine character.

The effectiveness of the inspired Scriptures

The word itself occurs rather seldom in Origen's writings. There are only a few mentions of ἑνθουσιασμὸς and the related verb ἑνθουσιάω in the Commentary on John (= Com Joh.) and the Against Celsus (CC). Before we examine these passages, we should try to collect at least some of the evidence regarding the effects of the act of reading, a subject dealt with in many of his other works. As already stated, the προσοχή recommended by PArch IV, 1, 6 describes an attitude of spiritual alertness, which is often inculcated by Origen, also in association with its negative counterpart, προτεστεία, "hastiness"16. In CC 3, 20 this respectful attention on the part of the reader, when brought to Paul's letter, will

13 Compare PArch IV, 1, 6 (ὁ δὲ μετ᾿ ἐπιμέλειας καὶ προσοχῆς ἐντυπωσάτο τῶν προφητικῶν λόγων, παθῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἄναγκαιόν Ἰχνὸς ἑνθουσιασμοῦ, κ.τ.λ. ὁνάν πάσχει πειθοδημῆται οὕς ἀνθρώποις εἰσὶ συγγράμματα τῆς πνευματικοῦ Ημῶν εἰς θεοῦ λόγων) with Ion, 534 ε, quoted above (n. 11). A similar formulation appears also in PArch IV, 1, 2 (μεῖζον ἤ κατὰ ἄθρωμα τὸ πράγμα εἰσὶ λέγειν ὡς θατάξωμεν), in this case implying the recognition of the historical triumph of Christianity as divinely supported.

14 Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστιν οἷον ἑπατοσαία τῆς γνώσεως, ἢ διέξοδος ὑπὸ τὸ χρὴμα λεροῦ, οὐδὲ οἷον ἀλλὰ ἐν ἀλλῷ ἄλλῳ, ὡς μικρὸ μεῖζον εἰκάσω, καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ἥξει τοῖς τελευταίοις μοι προς τὸν θεῖον, ἀλλὰ πᾶσχει καὶ διατεθήκη, δηλονύτων γειμονεύουσα ἐπιτρέψεις καὶ ἡ ἐπιτρέπσῃς δὲ ἐλογος, εἰ δὲ μηδὲ λόγος αὕτη παρακεκάει (SYNESIS OF CYRENE, Dion 8 = fr. 15 ROSS; I quote from Opere di Sinesio di Cirene, a cura di A. GARZIYA, Torino 1989, 682-684).

15 The similarity was stressed by M. Harl, Philocalie, 65, since also Origen, in the Treatise and elsewhere is open to the idea of a πάθος τῆς ψυχῆς as an access to knowledge. On the other hand, PArch IV, 1, 7 introduces a notion of provision, which is contrary to Aristotle's doctrine: "Man könnte also gewissermaßen für die Verteidigung der vollen Inspiration den Kampf gegen Aristoteles und Gnostiker ausnutzen" (H.J. Vogt, Die Lehre des Origines von der Inspiration der Heiligen Schrift..., 102). Origen's readings of Aristotle are not comparable with his extensive knowledge of Plato. See G. DORIVAL, Philologia, in A. MONACI CASTAGNO (ed.), Origene. Dizionario..., 171-177, esp. p. 175; see also Id., L'apport d'Origène pour la connaissance de la philosophie grecque, in R.J. DAIL (ed.), Origennana Quinta, Leuven 1992, 189-216.

16 PArch IV, 3, 5 sums up in προσοχή the methodological indications of the second section of the Treatise for a correct interpretation of the Scriptures: διὸσπερ πολλὰ προσοχὴν συνεισάκτικον τῷ εὐαλωτὶ ἑντυπωσάστῃ ὡς θεοῦ γράμμα σος τῆς θείης βίβλος (p. 331.16-17). The positive content of προσοχή emerges in Phil. 1, 28 against its counterpart, the προτεστεία. M. Harl's commentary on this text eloquently describes the "ideal reader" in Origen's eyes: "il faut une âme 'purifiée,' consciente de la faiblesse humaine... et du caractère 'indicible' de la Sagesse de Dieu; une âme prête à 'chercher' en conformité avec... le Logos et la Sagesses de Dieu" (Philocalie, 204-205).
lead to recognition of the greatness of the man and his thoughts, unless he wishes to make himself ridiculuous for being unable to grasp it. The "careful" reader is the one who is able to reach beyond the "mean letter" (διδωτική λέξις) of the Sacred Text and discover its hidden treasures. A result of this kind, however, does not depend only on the spiritual disposition of the reader, but is granted by God in response to human effort.

The paradox betrayed by the contrast between the apparent simplicity of the letter and the deeper meaning behind it is solved by Origen thanks to the idea that there is a mighty power at work, which comes from God and thus transcends the categories and forms of human discourse. Faced with the pagan criticism of the Bible, instead of defending the literary or poetic character of at least some portions of the Bible (admitted even by Greek readers such as Pseudo-Longinus, if not by the neo-pythagorean philosopher Numenius, who otherwise was sensitive to the "barbarian philosophy" of the Jews), Origen lays claim to a spiritual effectiveness of another kind.

In a passage from the fourth Book of Comiloh, found in the Philokalia, Origen goes so far as to justify even the grammatical mistakes and the inelgance of style of the Scriptures, so that he may strengthen the view of a divine "dialectic" operating through them. His formulations essentially rest upon the Pauline statement of 1 Cor. 2.4, combining moreover this passage with 2 Cor. 4.19. While restating some of the ideas expressed in the contemporary "Treatise on biblical hermeneutics", Origen emphasises the fact that the Scriptures avoided the beauties of style. The success of Christianity did not depend on human eloquence and persuasiveness, but was brought forth through the power of the Spirit. On the other hand, such power penetrates every single word of the Scriptures, so that not even one letter is devoid of an "operating capacity" (ἐργατικόν), as he eloquently argues in a fragment from the XXXIXth Homily on Jeremiah, thus extending a characteristic of the prophetic word to the whole Bible.

Taking into account this constitutive efficacy of the divine Scriptures, also generally indicated by Origen with the word ὀφέλεια ("utility"), we can understand why he sees it at work even when we are not conscious of it. There is a revealing reflection on this point in the XXIXth Homily on Joshua, where Origen in a sense comes to a conclusion not too far from the "ecstatic" experience of the act of reading as laid down in Parch IV, 1.6. As with enchantments, endowed with a natural capacity to affect people, though they are unaware of it, so the Word of God, especially the pronunciation of the names of the Holy Scriptures, affects the souls of the believers. This effect is much more important than that of enchantments, since it is the result of the co-operation of the benign powers present within us and which respond to the action exerted on our soul by the Word of God. Even if the reader sometimes does not perceive the spiritual utility of the Scriptures, he should nevertheless believe that the evil powers are subject to their enchanting power like snakes that undergo enchantment. As stated by Origen himself,


19 CC 1, 2 exploits in a similar manner 1 Cor 2, 4 to support the idea of an ἀπόδειξεια of the Spirit, superior to Greek "dialectics".

20 Ίδος γὰρ εἰ κάλλος καὶ περιβολὴ φράσεως ὡς τὰ πάρ' Ἑλληνικη βαθμολογία εἶχεν ἡ γραφή, ὑπεύχετον ἄν τις ὧν ἡν ἐλεύθερη κεκρατικαί τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐμφανομένην ἀκολούθησεν καὶ τὸς φράσεως κάλλος ἐφυκαγγυρίκην τοῖς ἀκροβυθέσιν, καὶ ἡμίπλεκεν αὐτός προσελπηθείναι (Comiloh. IV = Phil. 4). In conformity with this the Commentary on Hoseas (= Phil. 8) recommends us not to correct what we take to be grammatical and syntactical mistakes in the Scriptures, since they too provide a key to its hidden meaning.

21 Καὶ οὐ θαυμαστῶν εἰ πᾶν τὸ ρήμα τὸ λαλομένου ὑπὸ τῶν προφητῶν ἐγνάτευ τὸν τρόπον ρήματος. Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὡς ὣς ἐρράτον ζωή τοῦ θεοῦ γραφή λέγεται πλὴν τοῦ λογίου τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ ἅγιου. Καὶ οὐκ ἐστιν ἐστίν ἀλλὰ καίρια γεγραμμένη ἐν τῇ γραφῇ ὅτι τῶς ἐπισταμένων χωρίζει τὰ δυνάμεις τῶν γραμμάτων οὐκ ἐγνάτευσιν τὸ τρόπον τῆς ἐργασίας (Homolos. 39 = Phil. 10, ed. HARL, 366.13-368.20).

22 Ἐις γὰρ τινα δύναμιν ἐν ἡμῖν, ὑπὸ οὗ μὲν κρείττονες διὰ τόσαν τῶν σοὶ ἐπιθυμῶν τρέφονται συγγενεῖς σοὶ αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἡμῖν μὴ νοοῦσιν οἴκειν τὰ δυνάμεις νοοῦσα τὰ λεγόμενα διανυστάται ἐν ἡμῖν γίνεσθαι πρὸς τὸ συνεργεῖ τῷ ἡμῶν ἔμπνευσι (Homolos. XX = Phil. 12, ed. HARL, 388.17-390.21). For M. HARL, "ces puissances ont reçu les âmes en partage: ce sont donc des envoyés divins, anges ou démons. Elles sont capables de 'comprendre' les incantations alors que l'intelect ne les comprend pas et, si elles prênnent force, elles 'coopèrent à la vie de l'âme" (ibid., 396).

We could compare this psychic condition with the platonic idea of a "demon" speaking through Socrates' interiority: "Cette voix divine, qui, dit-il, parle en lui et le retient de faire certaines choses" (P. HADOT, Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?, 1995, 63).

23 Εκεῖνο τὸ παράδειγμα λαβέω εἰς τὴν γραφήν, ἢς ἀναγνωσκομένην καὶ μὴ νοούμενην, εἰκότε αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἐκ-
the notion of inspired Scriptures necessarily implies an overall utility for their readers, even when they do not experience it immediately. The benefits will become manifest later on, like a medicine that displays its positive results only after a time. In this way Origen is pleading once again for the advantages of the "mere act of reading", though connecting it in different terms to the idea of inspiration. It is once again an unconscious experience, as we assumed in Philo, IV, 1, 6, but the recognition of the inspired character of the Scriptures now emerges only in the long run, not as the apparently immediate fruit of a kind of "ecstatic" experience.

The Scriptures compared with Plato: the meanness of the letter and the might of the Spirit

After reviewing some further examples of Origen's conception of biblical inspiration and its effects, we can now examine the few occurrences of ἐνθουσιασμός and ἐνθουσίασμα in his other writings. Only one passage in CC 6, 5 puts forward the same thematic connection between the act of reading and inspiration. It is indeed a significant context, inasmuch as Origen has committed himself to refuting Celsus' vindication of the superiority of Plato's doctrine on God when compared with the Christian message and its idea of a revelation. There is another apology for the "mean style" of the Bible, in reaction to its rejection by the pagan author, in the name of a sociability that is assumed to be alien to Plato's concerns. According to Origen, Plato's thought, despite the truths he managed to discover about God and the ways we can know him, results in a teaching for just a few educated and philosophically trained people, whereas Christianity addresses everybody. It was because of this missionary audience that inspired authors adopted such a "mean style", in a rather similar way to the choice Epictetus made in contrast to the selective λέξεις of Plato. Yet the Alexandrian defends himself from "saying this in criticism of Plato ("for the great world of mankind has derived help from him also") at the same time, he declares his intention to clarify the meaning of 1 Cor. 2, 4-5 thus: "The divine scripture says that the spoken word, even if it is true in itself and very persuasive, is not sufficient to affect a human soul unless some power is also given by God to the speaker and grace is added to what is said." Only such a power of the Spirit can explain the fact that the Jewish-Christian Scriptures, in spite of their "mean letter", have led those who read them "with a genuine mind" to "participate in their divine inspiration" (ἐνθουσίασμα), an effect that Plato's writings were not able to produce. Their "truth" did not even lead their author to practice true piety.

Origen offers no further explanation here with regard to the meaning of ἐνθουσίασμα, apart from spiritual disposition, already emphasised above, and the moral and religious consequences determined by the Word of God. We can still observe, at any rate, the connection with the act of reading, though the action of ἐνθουσίασμα appears elsewhere in CC 6 in a different light as originally linked to prophetic activity in the NT.

As the starting point of his refutation, Origen accuses Celsus of directing his criticism of the Bible also to aspects that could capture even the cultivated reader: κοινοποιοῦντα τα δυνάμεα ἐλένεν τινα καὶ συνετών ἐκ τῶν λεπρῶν γραμμάτων. (CC 6, 1, 5-6).

CC 6, 2, 19-20 (p. 317). With regard to Celsus' quoting Timaeus and Ep. VII, 341 C, Origen admits the beauty of such passages, but at the same time criticizes Plato's restraint: "It is 'holding down the truth', as our scripture testifies, when they think that the highest good cannot at all be expressed in words, and say that 'it comes suddenly by long familiarity with the subject itself and by living with it, like a light in the soul kindled by a leaping spark, which after it has come into being feeds itself' (6, 3, 25-20 [p. 318]). Plato's contradictory conduct is then stressed by Origen in a sort of counterpoint with Rom 1, 20-25 (cf. 6, 4). Moreover, the prophets since Moses were thoroughly familiar with the idea that the highest Good cannot at all be expressed in words'. The same can be said of "the idea that 'a light suddenly arrived in the soul as though kindled by a leaping spark'." It was known before Plato by the Word" (6, 5, 1-2 [p. 319]). Origen's argument results in a synkrisis, a true "comparison" between Plato and the Scriptures.
On this well-known theme of Judeo-Hellenistic and patristic literature see H. LEWY, Sobria ebrietas.

See Celsus' sentence in CC 1, 50, 9 and its quotation by Origen in 1, 51, 8.

The relation between ἐνθουσιασμός and ἐκτάσεις is thus explained by P. PFEIFER, Enthusiasmus, in Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, V, 456: "Der Enthusiasmus ist wie die Ekkte eine πάθος τῆς φυσῆς und eine Bewegung (κίνησις). Wenn der in der Ekkte befindliche Mensch von der Gottheit besessen und Gottverflucht ist, hat die Seele ihn keineswegs verlassen, sondern sie hat sich nur verändert, dadurch, daß die Seele ihn keineswegs verlassen, sondern sie hat sich nur verändert, dadurch, daß die Seele ihn verdrängt, das klare Bewusstsein betäubt ist".

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33 See Celsus' sentence in CC 1, 50, 9 and its quotation by Origen in 1, 51, 8.

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35 Such an "intellectualistic" concern on the part of Origen reappears a little later, when the Logos as "wine" is distinguished from the Logos as "bread". It is not the "ethical teachings" (i.e. the "bread") but the participation in "the ineffable and hidden theorems (θεωρήματα)" that produces ἐνθουσιασμός.

36 On the other hand, this statement can be taken as a synthetic definition of the prophetic role, so that we are now led to a closer examination of the relationship between prophetic inspiration and the act of reading and interpreting the Scriptures.

The prophet and the reader

Even a brief analysis of Origen's conception of prophecy brings us nearer to understanding what he expects the reader's "experience of inspiration" to be, while observing again a polarity in his thought that he was not able to suppress completely. For Origen, the exercise of prophecy demands that the person
invested by God with this task should first possess a purity of heart, resulting from the practice of virtue and asceticism, in other words an already realised sanctity. These are the necessary prerequisites for divine "possession" (κατακωμή) through which inspiration is given to the prophet. In opposing Celsus' criticism of the Jewish-Christian idea of revelation, Origen particularly emphasises the moral and religious presuppositions of the biblical prophecy as distinguished from the practice of divination in the pagan world. Not only are the protagonists of prophetic activity in paganism devoid of such qualities, as demonstrated for Origen especially by the "indecent" way the Pythian prophetess delivers her pronouncements at the Delphi oracle. They are also moved, first and foremost, by demons, for Celsus the privileged intermediaries between God and men. In contrast, as Philo had anticipated, the prophets of Israel were either "wise" before they received the inspiration or they became so thanks to the intervention of the Holy Spirit. To justify his view from every perspective, Origen among other things is at pains of explaining why God elects Balaam, a gentile and an evil-doer, to predict Christ's coming.

Moreover, Origen does not restrict the notion of prophecy to the prediction of future things, but connects it more fundamentally with γνῶσις, the knowledge of God and his mysteries. In this sense, Abraham is a prototype par excellence of the prophets as "seers" of divine things. The patriarch, having a "pure heart", is admitted to the vision of God, though "heart" to a large extent means for Origen platonically the "eyes of the souls" or the "intellect". We should keep this term - the νοῦς - in mind, since it is precisely the aspect that makes Origen's ideas on prophecy and the related act of inspiration different. In contrast to Philo's interpretation of prophecy as an ecstatic mood (apparently influenced by Plato's view of prophetism) as well as the Montanist, Gnostic and pagan views of that phenomenon, he emphasises the ethical aspects of prophecy, conceived as a free co-operation of man with God. As such, it demands the full involvement of his mind. For this reason inspiration does not leave room to a dispossession of the intellect. The enlightening action of the Spirit exerts itself on the ἀγέλεμακρόν of the prophet, who remains conscious of that and expresses in words the revelation he has been endowed with. Inspiration therefore does not imply of itself an "ecstatic" condition in the true sense of the word, though Origen occasionally has recourse to this concept. Even in such cases he remains convinced that this kind of ekstasis has to be seen in terms of sobria ebrietatis. A conscious ecstasy is for him the only divinely inspired form of ecstatic, despite being faced with evidence of another nature, for instance, Pauline mysticism. As we may expect, this is a consequence of Origen's peculiar intellectual-

40 CC 7, 1-7: Τῶν δὲ ἐν Ιουδαίοις προφητών ὃι μὲν πρὸ τῆς προφητείας καὶ τῆς θείας κατακωμῆς ἂν σοφοί, οἱ δὲ ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς προφητείας φωτισθέντες τῶν νομῶν τικότατοι γεγονοῦσι, ἀφεθέντες ἵππο τῆς προφανείας εἰς τὸ πεπιστευθήναι τὸ θεῖον πνεῦμα καὶ τοὺς ἄπο τοῦτού ἐργάζεται διὰ τὸ τοῦ δέος διδος-μίτων καὶ σφόδρα ἑυθεῖων καὶ ἐλευθερῶν καὶ πάντως πρὸς διανοῦ καὶ κυδώνων ἀκατάληκτων.
42 See H'Gen 4, 3. For the "pure heart" as the organ through which the vision of God is given, see also CC 6, 4 and above n. 32. As noted by G. FILORAMO, Profezia, 377, Origen generally associates this biblical motif with the Platonic theme of the "eyes of the soul" (for instance, in ComRom. 9, 31). On account of FrCor 55, C.P. BAMMEL gives the following definition of prophecy: "Prophecy is the art of indicating things that are unseen by means of words" (Origen's Definitions of Prophecy..., 490), while in CatHe 23 Origen formulates it in a narrower sense as τρίφνης τῶν μελέτων.
43 According to J.R. BASKIN, despite the common emphasis they lay on the ethical presuppositions of prophecy, Origen and Philo depart from each other on the idea of a dispossession of the mind through God: "Philo's view of prophecy had its origins in Greek philosophy. Following Plato's Timaeus, Philo held that a man is incapable of inspired or true prophecy when in his right mind. Prophecy is a power of the irrational mind; it comes only when the power of understanding is inhibited by sleep or when a man is in an abnormal condition owing to disease or divine inspiration. But not everyone is worthy of such a visitation. For Philo, prophecy is a mark of moral distinction; it marks another way station on the path to divine comprehensiveness. Although prophetic possession is an act of grace, it must be prepared for by diligent study and the acquisition of wisdom" (Origen on Balaam..., 24). The polemical context of Origen's view of prophecy, especially with regard to Montanism, is emphasised by T. SARDELLA, Prognosis e Mantiki in Origene, in "Augustinianum", 29 (1989) 191-221.
44 HomGen. 3, 2.
45 According to J.R. BASKIN, Origen on Balaam..., 26, "while a few passages in his writings suggest that he occasionally adopted the 'ecstatic' view of how the Holy Spirit inspires his agents, on the whole he rather believes that inspiration does not remove or paralyse the prophet's control of his rational faculties". This conclusion is shared by T. SARDELLA, Prognosis e Mantiki..., 303-304: "... se il profetismo cristiano, estraneo per Origene a qualunque forma di alienazione o di perdita della personalità, può dare anche luogo, sulla linea del pensiero paolino, a stati più vicini all'estasi, in realtà si tratta di una sobria ebrietatis che, pur nel superamento dei limiti propri alla condizione umana, è, insieme, e soprattutto, consapevolezza di un'esperienza eccezionale".
alism, though surprisingly aimed also at rejecting a notion of prophecy supported by Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle or Celsus.

To what extent then may the reader and/or interpreter of the Bible share the ἐνθουσασμός operating in the prophet? We have so far assumed that in PArch IV, 1, 6 the act of reading was implicitly an "ecstatic" experience, especially in view of Origen's conviction of the efficacy of the Scriptures which is so crucial to him. Taking into account his notion of prophecy, we should now rather limit or reconsider the properly "ecstatic" aspects we have tacitly implied. Nevertheless there are deep analogies between the situation of the reader and/or interpreter of the Bible and that of the prophet, since both are called on to disclose the mysteries of God. The prophet certainly has a clearer vision of these mysteries than the reader of the inspired Scriptures can claim, but he too is called upon to participate in the vision of the prophet which has been committed in a veiled form to the words of the Scriptures. Living a "prophetic life" within the church, the authentic reader of the Bible partakes in the same spiritual attitudes that were practised by the prophet and accordingly prepares himself to receive the Spirit and to "see God". The pneumatic interpretation of the Scriptures, which penetrates the veil of the letter, is made possible through the gift of that same Spirit who has spoken through the prophets. We are therefore permitted to speak of the inspired interpreter as a new prophet in the context of the church.

Returning to our initial question, though Origen clearly increasingly distances himself from the Platonic (and Aristotelian) idea of an "ecstatic" experience of divine inspiration or truth, we can affirm that in the last resort his (perhaps not totally consistent) ideas of ἐνθουσασμός (both in the prophet and in the reader/interpreter of the Scriptures) pay more homage to the intellectual tradition of Hellenism than the Alexandrian himself would have been disposed to admit.

46 On the prophets as seers of the divine mysteries, that altogether are to be kept under silence until the manifestation of the Logos, see ComRom 10, 43.
47 Homier. 15, 1. FrLam 116 claims the heritage of the prophets for the church against the Jews: ἵππος τοῦ Ἰωάννη τοῦ Ζωνά, ἐν ἡμῖν οἱ προφῆται, διαλύσεις περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ κρίσεις, ἄλλ' οὐκέτι παρ' ἐκκλησίας, τὰς ἐπὶ καὶ νῦν αὐτῶν τάς ἐνατ- ὥν διαθηραῖς περιβαλλόμεναι, ὅσα μέρη βλασφημοῦσες αὐτῶν.
48 For C.P. Bammel, Origen's Definitions of Prophecy and Gnosticism, this conclusion is supported by Origen's association of prophecy and γνώσης, though the explicit formulation was made later on, with Ambrosiaster: "Origen's definition of prophecy is perhaps reflected in certain remarks of later commentators on I Corinthians. For Ambrosiaster the biblical exegete can be called a prophet, because, like the proclaimer of unknown future events, he reveals what is obscure to many" (p. 493: see Ambrosiaster, In Ep. ad Cor. I 14, 4). As stated by G. Scamesi Gasparro, Ispirazione delle Scritture e divinazione pagana..., this new prophecy rests on the coming of Christ: “soltanto la lettura cristologica operata nel nuovo contesto religioso, attraverso l'esegesi spirituale che a sua volta è percepita come divinamente ispirata facendo dell'interprete scritturistico un nuovo 'profeta' della parola divina, discopre intera la carica messianica e soteriologica dell'antico messaggio giudaico" (pp. 299-300)