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**Origen. *Homilies on Joshua*, translated by Barbara J. Bruce, edited by Cynthia White (The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation,105), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington/D.C. 2002, pp. VIII+232.**

In this slim volume, Origen's *Homilies on Joshua* (*Hom in Jos*) are presented for the first time in English translation. A brief introduction is prefixed to the twenty six homilies, covering Origen's scriptural theology, his deprecation and reappraisal, Rufinus's Latin translation, and the general ideas of the *Hom in Jos*. It is rightly pointed out that a controlling factor of Origen's exegesis is the unity of Scripture from beginning to end. Origen wishes to be a peacemaker, i.e. a person who can demonstrate the concord and peace of the OT with the NT (p. 7). The goal of Origen's interpretation is to see unity recovered, as God's image is restored within a person through the meditation on Scripture, when God comes to the one who trembles at his Word.

In an all too brief essay on Origen's *Nachleben*, the author gives the wrong impression when she skips from Origen's alleged anathematization in 553 to the year 1486, when the humanist Pico della Mirandola "ventured to suggest it was more reasonable to believe Origen was saved than damned." Then came Erasmus with his great admiration of Origen, who caused the tide to turn in Origen's favor with his Latin edition of Origen's writing in 1536. In my judgment this presentation is somewhat simplistic and misleading. In fact, as de Lubac has shown, Origen never fell out of favor in the West, even after 553, but became the "grand master" of exegesis throughout the Middle Ages. Neither Pico nor Erasmus really mark turning points so much as continuity with their own Catholic heritage. It is certainly true that Erasmus admired Origen, and his *Enchiridion*, for example, is completely infused with thoughts taken from these very homilies.

However, his support of Origen was mild compared with Jacques Merlin's whose 1512 Latin edition of Origen's writings contains a spirited apology for Origen's complete orthodoxy, something Erasmus never asserted. On the other hand, the editor does correctly point out that von Balthasar, Bouyer, de Lubac and Crouzel are among the modern giants whose work has proven beyond any doubt that Origen's churchmanship and spirituality are among his most important characteristics. The Introduction also contains an important discussion of Rufinus's translation method where it is shown that Origen's *Hom in Jos* were translated literally and reliably, in distinction with some of Rufinus's other translations. The Latin syntax depends on the Greek, and scholars such as Jaubert have confirmed the accuracy of Rufinus's text by various means. Significantly, this accuracy includes texts where Origen discusses the "Trinity" (Hom 3).

The content of the *Hom in Jos* is extremely edifying and interesting. When preaching through the Book of Joshua, Origen was convinced that Paul's words in 1 Cor 10.11: "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come," need to be taken seriously. Following the pattern laid down by his beloved mentor, the Apostle Paul, and by Jesus himself, Origen personalizes the fortunes of Israel and interprets the conquest of Canaan by "Jesus son of Nun" as an image of the Christian's struggles of the spiritual life, from baptism to resurrection. Jesus son of Nun prefigures Jesus the Son of God and is a symbol of the future mystery. Without dismissing the historicity of the Book of Joshua, Origen believes that these narratives were preserved by the Church in order to teach us spiritual lessons. Therefore, Origen says, the heretics are wrong to accuse the God of the OT of cruelty based on these violent stories, and the Jews are wrong when they base their justification of violence in the name of religion on these narratives. It is worth mentioning that Erasmus had noticed that the Catholic Church of his day was following this Jewish direction of interpretation and justified violence against Jews, Turks, and heretics by a literal reading of texts such as Joshua. He tried hard to inject Origen's spiritualizing

interpretations into the theological forum so that violence might be exercised against the vices of Christians rather than against the bodies of the Church's enemies.

There are many memorable passages in these homilies. Here is a gem from Hom 1 which is vintage Origen: "Not at that time only did my Jesus make the sun to stand, but also, and in a much greater way, at his coming.... He is not only with us for a doubled day, but 'he is with us for all days until the end of the age,' until we prevail over our adversaries." For Origen, the sun really stood still by a divine miracle during the life of Jesus son of Nun, but there is a deeper spiritual meaning in the event (Hom 11). Hom 3 is full of interest. It contains what appears to be an authentic Origenian discussion of "Trinity," which is confirmed in Greek texts. Also, Rahab is discussed and, as in 1 Clement, the scarlet thread from her window is interpreted as a pre-figuration of the blood of Christ. Her house represents the Church. Origen then gives this striking warning on the obligation to enter the Church in words that are reminiscent of Pius XI's encyclical *Mortalium animos*: "Let no one deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved (*Extra ecclesiam, nemo salvatur*). If anyone goes outside, he is responsible for his own death." Origen, not Cyprian or Augustine, is apparently the source of this ancient warning to schismatics of the perilous consequences of leaving the Catholic Church.

Hom 4 offers a brilliant explication of the parting of the waters of the Jordan (Jos 3.16): The Jordan represents baptism. The waters from it that flow into the bitter salty sea represent those who receive baptism but surrender themselves again to affairs of the world and the lures of pleasure. They perish in salty billows. The other watery division symbolizes those who continue steadfast and hold firmly the gift of God they have received. Hom 6 contains a revealing discussion in which Origen distinguishes the degrees in the *ordo cognoscendi*: a) profane learning, symbolized by the food from Egypt; b) knowledge of the divine law and Scripture, symbolized by manna; and c) the knowledge of the elect, symbolized by the fruit of the palm tree. The reader observes the low esteem in which the preacher Origen holds profane culture, reminding us of

Chadwick's description of Origen as an "illiberal humanist."

In Hom 7 are found Origen's famous words expressing his wish that the whole Church rise up and cut him off if he ever teaches anything "against the Church and the rule of the Gospel." The Church in the West, at least, has always refused to carry out this wish, precisely because of the manifest intention of orthodoxy that such an exclamation reveals. Hom 9 contains material of historical interest, since Origen refers to a great and universal persecution of the Christians decreed by the senate, people and leaders of Rome. It is worth noting that these homilies were among the last Origen gave before his torture and death during the Decian persecution of 254. Hom 20 contains an interesting discussion of the divine power that is manifest when the Scripture is publicly read at daily Mass. By the hearing alone, as if by a certain *ex opere operato* effect, the poison of demonic powers is expelled. The reading is beneficial and strengthening, even if we do not understand what has been read.

In this latest Fathers of the Church volume, we have been given a most readable and supple English translation of Origen's famous *Homilies on Joshua*. The translation is accompanied with helpful and informative footnotes, a brief subject index and a scripture index. This is a spiritual feast from the heart of Adamantius himself. The road of interpretation Origen treads in these homilies is the road taken by the Church, beginning with Jesus and Paul, and in distinction from that of the heretics and the Jews. Accordingly, the God of the OT is identical with the God of Jesus, but the dispensation has changed through the incarnation of the Son. Now, the Church's way of reading the OT under Jesus' tutelage has supplanted the Jewish way. As Origen states in Hom 9:

Therefore, Jesus reads the Law to us when he reveals the secret things of the Law. For we who are of the Catholic Church do not reject the Law of Moses, but we accept it if Jesus reads it to us. For thus we shall be able to understand the Law correctly, if Jesus reads it to us, so that when he reads we may grasp his mind and understanding.

Barbara Bruce and Cynthia White have placed students of Origen in their debt by providing us with a translation of Origen's very important homilies. The significance of these brief sermons is increased when we remember the difficult OT text they explicate. As a final word of recommendation, I can personally testify that any Fathers of the Church translation that has been edited by Joel Kalvesmaki, as this one has, has been subjected to a most rigorous scrutiny, and its faithfulness to the original can be taken for granted.