

**Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-c. 253), *On First Principles***

ALL who believe and are assured that grace and truth were obtained through Jesus Christ, and who know Christ to be the truth, agreeably to His own declaration, "I am the truth," derive the knowledge which incites men to a good and happy life from no other source than from the very words and teaching of Christ. Since many, however, of those who profess to believe in Christ differ from each other, not only in small and trifling matters, but also on subjects of the highest importance, as, e.g., regarding God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit; it seems on that account necessary first of all to fix a definite limit and to lay down an unmistakable rule regarding each one of these, and then to pass to the investigation of other points.

As, therefore, our understanding is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is, it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures. God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature, admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts *Μοῦς*, and, so to speak, *Ἐνός*, and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning.

If, then, it is once rightly understood that the only-begotten Son of God is His wisdom hypostatically existing, I know not whether our curiosity ought to advance beyond this. And who that is capable of entertaining reverential thoughts or feelings regarding God, can suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a moment of time, without having generated this Wisdom? And therefore we must believe that Wisdom was generated before any beginning that can be either comprehended or expressed.

Now, in the same way in which we have understood that Wisdom was the beginning of the ways of God, must we understand her to be the Word of God, because of her disclosing to all other beings, i.e., to universal creation, the nature of the mysteries and secrets which are contained within the divine wisdom; and on this account she is called the Word, because she is, as it were, the interpreter of the secrets of the mind.

But it is monstrous and unlawful to compare God the Father, in the generation of His only-begotten Son, and in the substance of the same, to any man or other living thing engaged in such an act; for we must of necessity hold that there is something exceptional and worthy of God which does not admit of any comparison at all. Because His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that He is made a Son, by *any outward act*, but by His own nature.

But the image of the Son of God, of whom we are now speaking, may be compared to the second of the above examples, even in respect of this, that He is the invisible image of the invisible God. For if the Son do, in like manner, all those things which the Father doth, then, in virtue of the Son doing all things like the Father, is the image of the Father formed in the Son, who is born of Him, like an act of His will proceeding from the mind. Our Saviour, therefore, is the image of the invisible God, inasmuch as compared with the Father Himself He is the truth: and as compared with us, to whom He reveals the Father, He is the image by which we come to the knowledge of

the Father, whom no one knows save the Son, and he to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him. And the method of revealing Him is through the understanding.

As therefore the Son in no respect differs from the Father in the power of His works, and the work of the Son is not a different thing from that of the Father, but one and the same movement, so to speak, is in all things, He therefore named Him a stainless mirror, that by such an expression it might be understood that there is no dissimilarity whatever between the Son and the Father.

It remains that we inquire what is the “image of His goodness;” and here, I think, we must understand the same thing which we expressed a little ago, in speaking of the image formed by the mirror. But, as we have already said, the primal goodness is to be understood as residing in God the Father, from whom both the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds, retaining within them, without any doubt, the nature of that goodness which is in the source whence they are derived.

The next point is to investigate as briefly as possible the subject of the Holy Spirit. Of the existence of the Holy Spirit no one indeed could entertain any suspicion, save those who were familiar with the law and the prophets, or those who profess a belief in Christ. From all which we learn that the person of the Holy Spirit was of such authority and dignity, that saving baptism was not complete except by the authority of the most excellent Trinity of them all, i.e., by the naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by joining to the unbegotten God the Father, and to His only-begotten Son, the name also of the Holy Spirit. We must understand, therefore, that as the Son, who alone knows the Father, reveals Him to whom He will, so the Holy Spirit, who alone searches the deep things of God, reveals God to whom He will.

Nevertheless it seems proper to inquire what is the reason why he who is regenerated by God unto salvation has to do both with Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and does not obtain salvation unless with the co-operation of the entire Trinity; and why it is impossible to become partaker of the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit. I am of opinion, then, that the working of the Father and of the Son takes place as well in saints as in sinners, in rational beings and in dumb animals; nay, even in those things which are without life, and in all things universally which exist; but in those persons alone do I think that the operation of the Holy Spirit takes place, who are already turning to a better life, and walking along the way which leads to Jesus Christ, i.e., who are engaged in the performance of good actions, and who abide in God. In this manner, then, is the working of the power of God the Father and of the Son extended without distinction to every creature; but a share in the Holy Spirit we find possessed only by the saints.

Seeing, then, that firstly, they derive their existence from God the Father; secondly, their rational nature from the Word; thirdly, their holiness from the Holy Spirit,—those who have been previously sanctified by the Holy Spirit are again made capable of receiving Christ, in respect that He is the righteousness of God; and those who have earned advancement to this grade by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, will nevertheless obtain the gift of wisdom according to the power and working of the Spirit of God. For, in this way, he who is such as his Creator wished him to be, will receive from God power always to exist, and to abide forever.