



Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil (AAR ACADEMY SER)

By Mark S.M. Scott

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Journey Back to God explores Origen of Alexandria's creative, complex, and controversial treatment of the problem of evil. It argues that his layered cosmology functions as a theodicy that deciphers deeper meaning beneath cosmic disparity. Origen asks: why does God create a world where some suffer more than others? On the surface, the unfair arrangement of the world defies theological coherence. In order to defend divine justice against the charge of cosmic mismanagement, Origen develops a theological cosmology that explains the ontological status and origin of evil as well as its cosmic implications. Origen's theodicy hinges on the journey of the soul back to God. Its themes correlate with the soul's creation, fall and descent into materiality, gradual purification, and eventual divinization. The world, for Origen, functions as a school and hospital for the soul where it undergoes the necessary education and purgation. Origen carefully calibrates his cosmology and theology. He portrays God as a compassionate and judicious teacher, physician, and father who employs suffering for our amelioration.

Journey Back to God frames the systematic study of Origen's theodicy within a broader theory of theodicy as navigation, which signifies the dynamic process whereby we impute meaning to suffering. It unites the logical and spiritual facets of his theodicy, and situates it in its third-century historical, theological, and philosophical context, correcting the distortions that continue to plague Origen scholarship. Furthermore, the study clarifies his ambiguous position on universalism within the context of his eschatology. Finally, it assesses the cogency and contemporary relevance of Origen's theodicy, highlighting the problems and prospects of his bold, constructive, and optimistic vision.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Journey Back to God* frames the systematic study of Origen's theodicy within a broader theory of theodicy as navigation, which signifies the dynamic process whereby we impute meaning to suffering. It unites the logical and spiritual facets of his theodicy, and situates it in its third-century historical, theological, and philosophical context, correcting the distortions that continue to plague Origen scholarship."--*Reading Religion*

"[T]he great achievement of this book is found in how he [Scott] skillfully holds together the pastoral and speculative dimensions of his [Origen's] thought throughout. Those interested in patristic studies or the problem of evil will find this book worthwhile. But the true merit of this book reaches much further, for this study penetrates to the very heart of Origen's theology. This is, indeed, a welcomed and much needed study."--*Studies in Religion/Science Religieuses*

"Scott's volume makes a contribution to both Origen studies in particular and to theological studies in general. A critical engagement with Origen's thought and a lucid style make the book a good introduction"--*Journal of Early Christian Studies*

"Theologically astute and historically informed... [S]tudents in both theology and patristics will find the book informative and worthwhile."--*Religious Studies Review*

"*Journey Back to God* focuses...on the manner in which one of the early church's greatest intellectuals vindicated God amidst the horrors of evil and suffering...[The book] is an argument crafted not only out of history but also out of generous measures of theory and philosophy...Scott helps us understand how a towering figure in the Greek patristic tradition wrestled with the same conundrum." --*Marginalia Review of Books*

"An erudite review... Scott himself achieves more originality when he defines theodicy as a navigation for which the charts are furnished by experience... Scott is none the less better than his word." --*Journal of Theological Studies*

"Mark Scott focuses upon the problem of evil as an instructive perspective from which to assess the full range of Origen's views. Placed in a speculative and cosmic narrative they are primarily designed as pastoral

guidance, and they are not so much a solution to the problems of human suffering and sinfulness as a set of speculations enabling humans to navigate their way toward God with hope and freedom." --Rowan A. Greer, Professor of Anglican Studies Emeritus, Yale Divinity School

"By arguing that Origen does not so much explain away our pain and suffering as provide a spiritual map that helps us move forward through it, Mark Scott gives us a book on a major early Christian theorist on a topic of perennial value that will be of great interest to a wide variety of readers." --Paul R. Kolbet, author of *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*

"Scott skillfully navigates his way through Origen's treatment of the complex issues surrounding the presence of evil, suffering, and death in a world held to be created by a good, omniscient, and omnipotent God. He shows that Origen, one of the most important and controversial figures of the early Church, uses an overarching framework of pedagogy to hold all these elements together, not without tension and ambiguity, but in a way that provides insights still valuable today." --V. Rev. Dr. John Behr, Dean, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary

"This volume offers a well-written and clear tracing of Origen's treatment of the problem of evil...[it] rewards the attentive reader far beyond expectation" --*Heythrop Journal*

About the Author

Mark S. M. Scott is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Thorneloe University.

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