PH Martyria

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW 1

***Martyria* 1 (2026): 67–70**
https://doi.org/10.15664/j9nn7d72

Micah M. Miller, *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 208 pp., £80.00, hardback (ISBN 9780198895749).

This book is a strong contribution to the study of early Christian pneumatology. Although Origen of Alexandria stands at the centre of scholarship on early Christian theology and Trinitarian discourse, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit has often been treated briefly, folded into broader accounts of his Trinitarian theology, or judged too quickly through later pro-Nicene categories. Micah M. Miller seeks to correct that imbalance by offering a sustained study of Origen's pneumatology across the extant corpus. The result is a learned and careful book that significantly advances discussion of Origen on his own terms.

The governing thesis is clear. Miller argues that, for Origen, the Holy Spirit is dependent on the Father and the Son for being and attributes, ranked below them yet above all other beings, and that this ontological ordering grounds the Spirit's salvific activity. In Miller's reading, Origen's pneumatology is not a loose collection of passing remarks but a coherent theological account shaped by scriptural exegesis. Jewish, philosophical, and earlier Christian traditions do enter the picture, yet they do so in the service of biblical interpretation rather than as an alternative to it. This framing is one of the book's great strengths, because it keeps Origen's pneumatology tied to the exegetical practice from which it emerges.

The volume has five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 treats the Father and the Son as necessary groundwork for understanding the Spirit's place within Origen's theology. Chapter 2 turns to the generation of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's attributes. Chapter 3 examines the unity and multiplicity of the Holy Spirit, particularly in relation to the sevenfold Spirit. Chapter 4 studies the Spirit's activity in giving gifts, sanctifying, interceding, and inspiring scripture. Chapter 5 considers the Spirit's role in salvation, above all in relation to Christ and the saints (pp. 10–11). The thematic arrangement is judicious. Rather than following a strict chronology, Miller gathers relevant passages from across Origen's corpus and thereby reconstructs a fuller account than would be possible through a narrow concentration on a few familiar loci.

One of the book's principal contributions lies in this comprehensiveness. Miller repeatedly shows that earlier scholarship has privileged *Peri Archon* 1.3 and sections of the

Commentary on John, with the consequence that Origen's pneumatology has often been reduced to a handful of themes: the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son, revelation, and sanctification (pp. 2–5). By widening the evidential base, Miller demonstrates that Origen's thought is both richer and more internally textured than such summaries allow. This broader reading also enables him to address tensions in the evidence without forcing them into artificial harmony. The book is particularly good at showing that ambiguity in Origen is not always a sign of confusion—at times it reflects the complexity of a theological project articulated across different works, genres, and textual states.

Another major strength is the book's methodological seriousness. Miller is properly alert to the textual difficulties involved in any study of Origen, especially the problems posed by the Latin translations and the possibility of doctrinal reshaping by Rufinus. His discussion of method is among the most useful parts of the volume. He neither dismisses the Latin evidence wholesale nor accepts it uncritically. Instead, he works with the Greek wherever possible, compares Greek and Latin witnesses where appropriate, and marks passages where the wording remains suspect (pp. 6–9). That procedure inspires confidence and makes the book more useful for future scholarship, since Miller shows what evidence can responsibly sustain his conclusions.

Closely related to this is Miller's refusal to read Origen primarily as a precursor to later orthodoxy. He insists, rightly, that Origen should first be understood within his own third-century setting. The repeated attempt to vindicate Origen against later charges of subordinationism has often obscured more than it has clarified. Miller's treatment is historically more exact. He shows that hierarchical language in Origen must be interpreted within a pre-Nicene theological world in which such ordering was not yet a marker of heresy in the later sense. This allows Miller to take Origen's language seriously instead of domesticating it, and it gives the book a historiographical sharpness that extends beyond the immediate topic of pneumatology.

The study is also impressive in the way it relates ontology and economy. Miller's account of the Spirit's activities—gift-giving, sanctification, intercession, inspiration, and assistance in the interpretation of Scripture—is not left as an appendix to a more abstract metaphysical argument. Rather, those activities are shown to follow from the Spirit's ordered relation to the Father and the Son. The conclusion in particular is effective in drawing together the book's central threads through the exegesis of John 1:3, Isaiah 11:2–3, and 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (pp. 156–64). Here Miller makes a persuasive case that Origen's account of the Spirit's rank, multiplicity of gifts, and common operation with the Father and the Son forms a coherent whole. Even readers who may wish to press against particular points in the argument will have to reckon seriously with the

synthetic force of the case he presents.

The book also stands out for its scholarly positioning. Miller's survey of previous scholarship is concise but substantive. He identifies the older judgement, associated above all with Adolf von Harnack, that Origen had little room for the Holy Spirit in his theology, and he also distinguishes this from more recent attempts either to emphasize hierarchy too strongly or to soften Origen's language by reading him through later doctrinal categories. These pages do more than survey prior work. They frame the intervention of the book with precision and make clear why a fresh study is necessary. In that respect, the book succeeds not simply by collecting more passages, but by changing the terms in which the question is asked.

There are, however, a few limitations. The first is bound up with the very method that makes the book strong. Because the study proceeds thematically, questions of development across Origen's career necessarily remain somewhat subordinate. Miller acknowledges this difficulty and judges that Origen is, on the whole, fairly consistent, with only a few possible shifts in emphasis (pp. 6–7). That may well be correct, yet some readers will want a fuller testing of the claim, especially in relation to the dating of particular works and the comparative weight assigned to earlier and later evidence. The thematic approach is justified, but it leaves a residue of chronological questions that are not entirely resolved.

A second reservation concerns the book's wider patristic horizon. Miller is excellent at identifying antecedents and conceptual resources, but the broader afterlife of Origen's pneumatology is treated more briefly than some readers may desire. The conclusion does indicate how the book contributes to the history of trinitarian theology more broadly (pp. 156–64). Even so, a somewhat fuller account of how Origen's positions anticipate, diverge from, or are reworked by later fourth-century authors might have sharpened the significance of the study further. This is less a defect than a matter of scope, but it remains a point at which the reader may wish for more.

One might also question whether the language of hierarchy occasionally becomes so dominant in the exposition that other organising features of Origen's theology risk receding from view. Miller certainly does not ignore sanctification, scriptural inspiration, or the economy of gifts; some of the book's strongest discussions concern precisely those themes (pp. 101–55). Nevertheless, the argument is so tightly arranged around ontological ordering that one sometimes wonders whether alternative centres of gravity within Origen's pneumatology might have been explored more fully. That said, the pressure point may lie less in Miller's interpretation than in the evidence itself, and the fact that the question emerges is a sign of the book's seriousness rather than superficiality.

These reservations do not substantially diminish the book's achievement. *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* is a serious and persuasive study. It combines philological caution, doctrinal sensitivity, and historical discipline. For specialists in Origen, it will become a standard point of reference in work on pneumatology and trinitarian theology. For students of early Christianity more broadly, it offers a model of how to read a major patristic author across the whole surviving corpus, within the author's own intellectual and doctrinal context, and without surrendering either historical precision or theological acuity.

In sum, Miller has not merely filled a lacuna in scholarship; he has provided a persuasive framework for understanding the Holy Spirit in Origen as a coherent and scripturally grounded theological topic. The book deserves a wide readership among scholars of patristics, historical theology, and early Christian biblical interpretation. It is a book of real value, and it will likely shape future discussion of Origen's pneumatology for some time.

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REVIEW 2

***Martyria* 1 (2026): 70–72**
https://doi.org/10.15664/vw468q06

Alister McGrath, *Why We Believe: Finding Meaning in Uncertain Times* (London: OneWorld Publications, 2025), 272 pp., £18.99, hardback (ISBN 9780861549214).

This book sets out to argue "for the recalibration of the notion of 'belief', and a more nuanced understanding of the positive role this plays in the lives of individuals and communities" (p.6). In doing so he hopes to defend the importance of the notion of belief and its prevailing relevance in our modern world. He is largely successful as he succinctly explores different aspects of beliefs ranging from scientific to religious. Yet, a more nuanced, grounded and expanded comparison of the various beliefs would have benefitted the book.

The book's central focus is the innate human aim to find both certainty and meaning in life. Alister McGrath explains how the natural human capacity to search for answers to the big questions of life, those related to the meanings and aims of a good life, exists simultaneously with the human want for certainty and clarity (p. 11). However, as McGrath stresses throughout the book, it is impossible to find definitive responses to the meaningful questions in life (p.15). In the conclusion, McGrath draws on John Keats to note that the fact we cannot find certain

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