

Origen and Apophaticism: The case of ἄσώματον in I.1.1–9 of the ΠΕΡΙ ΑΡΧΩΝ*

Russell P. Morozjuk

Підсумок

У цій статті про безтілесність Божу в творі *Про начала* Оригена (помер прибл. 254), професор Конкордського Університету в Монреалі, Р. Морозюк, дискутує старання олександрійського богослова синтезувати біблійне та філософське мислення в його аналізі духовного ества Бога. Ці старання на думку автора не цілком вдаються, зокрема коли ідеться про спробу Оригена підходити до питання Божого ества вповні апофатично, себто, підкреслюючи неспроможність людини пізнати Бога в Його суцтві (і це не тільки через людські обмеження, але також через саму природу Божественного суцтва). Ориген постійно вживає апофатичні категорії коли черпає з Біблії—аргументує з віри, але переходить до катафатичного мислення коли наводить аргументи з філософії. Отже, Бог з одної сторони є зовсім незбагнений, безмірний, безтілесний, і т. п., але рівночасно, за словами Оригена, Він є «проста мисленна природа». Очевидно, обидва твердження є слупні. Однак, неспроможність Оригена вповні синтезувати їх звертає увагу на складність цього питання, як також на основнішу проблему відношення філософії до богословії.



* Paper presented at *Colloquium Origenianum Sextum: Origène et la Bible*, Chantilly, France, August 30–September 3, 1993.

If the primary concern of apophaticism is the description of God by means of an epistemological process that determines what God is not, then Origen begins *Peri Archon*¹ [PA] in what might be considered classic apophatic fashion. He not only dedicates the entire first chapter of Book I to the defence and explanation of an apophatic term, *asomaton*, but he also gives coinage to a term that was relatively new in apophatic theological vocabulary.²

This study focuses on two points: (1) Origen's understanding of the term *asomaton*; and, more importantly, (2) his illustration both from reason and from faith of its meaning in Book I, Chapter 1, sections 1–9 of *Peri Archon*.

Preliminary Observations

In the Preface Origen suggests that the notion of the incorporeity of God expressed in the term *asomaton* is little known. He writes: “the term *asomaton* is unknown not only to the majority of Christians but also to the Scriptures,” but “we shall inquire whether the actual thing which Greek philosophers call *asomaton* or incorporeal is found in the holy scriptures under another name.”³

The term is found in Philo's *De Confusione Linguarum* where he uses it of light, which he identifies with God.⁴ In the sense of incorporeity *asomaton* is also found in Tatian⁵ and Clement of Alexandria.⁶

¹ PA, I.1.8. The English translation used throughout is the G.W. Butterworth 1973 reprint of the original *On the First Principles* (Harper & Row, 1966). The critical editions noted are: P. Koetschau, *Origenes: Werke Funfter Band. De Principiis (Peri archon)* GCS 22 (Leipzig, 1913); H. Crouzel & Simonetti, *Peri archon: Traites des Principes*, I: 76–110; H. Gorgemanns & H. Karpp, *Origenes De Principiis*, Libri IV, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 82–122.

² Interestingly enough, the term was not used prior to Origen and never gained any extensive acceptance after Origen. The question of incorporeity emerges with the Hellenic Christians who often understood biblical ideas and language in terms of Greek philosophy. The Hellenic and philosophical worldview perceived reality as intelligible/noetic, and sensible/material; whereas, the biblical worldview, which prevailed particularly after Nicaea, conceived reality in terms of the visible/invisible and creator /creature model.

³ PA, I.1.8 and 9.

⁴ “[...] That garden (Eden) was not a garden of the plants of the soil, but of the heavenly virtues, which out of His own incorporeal light, the Planter brought to their rising [...]” (*De Conf. Ling.*, 61). In *Deus Immut.*, 58f Philo notes: “[...] whereas God saw before creation, being Himself His own light [...].” See also Counzelmann under “*phos*” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 9, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

⁵ PG VI, 861a (“Oratio ad Graecos,” 25).

⁶ PG IX, 165b, 176a, 749d (“Stromateis” and “Fragments”).

The reason that the term was little known and little used by Christians and is, furthermore, foreign to the Scriptures is that the Scriptures were guided by different principles in their conceptualizations about God. The most widespread principle was that of unlikeness, and in consequence different images were used for the same meaning.⁷ Origen notes this point a number of times when he uses the Scriptures in the defence and explanation of the apophatic term *asomaton*.

Origen himself uses *asomaton* in several other places of *Peri Archon* and indicates the meaning he attaches to the term. The first instance is in reference to II Cor. 4: 18⁸ when he says: "For the things which are invisible are not only not seen, but do not even possess a nature which admits of their being seen; they are what the Greeks have called *asomata* or incorporeal."⁹ Another instance occurs when he notes that more attention should be paid to the meaning of words or names, rather than to the word or name itself. He writes:

For example, we may inquire whether there exists any substance in which we can discern neither color nor shape nor possibility of touch nor size, a substance perceptible to the mind alone, which anyone can call whatever he pleases. The Greeks speak of this substance as *asomaton*, or incorporeal; but the divine scriptures call it "invisible;" for the apostle declares that God is invisible, when he says that Christ is the image of the invisible God.¹⁰

In these and other less explicit passages,¹¹ Origen uses the term *asomaton* to refer not only to things that are invisible but which may be corporeal, but

⁷ The Scriptures prefer "*aoratos*" (equated with "*pneumatikos*"). See G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 254a.

⁸ "[...] because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (RSV).

⁹ *PA*, II.3.6.

¹⁰ *PA*, IV.3.15.

¹¹ "But the Saviour, being the light of the world, illuminates not bodies, but by His incorporeal power the incorporeal intellect, to the end that each of us, enlightened as by the sun, may be able to discern the rest of the things of the mind." *Commentary on John*, I.24, trans. A. Menzies, *ANF* 10 (297-408); 311; E. Preuschen, *GCS* 10 (1903): 1-574. For other passages regarding light in the same commentary see Books I, II, XIII.