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ORIGEN FOR OR AGAINST PLATO? AN ANALYSIS OF ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Natalie Runkle

Mentor: Peter Martens

Origen of Alexandria (185-254 CE) was among the first Christian thinkers to rigorously engage with non-Christian Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, as a result of his active discourse with traditions like Platonism and Stoicism, much of Origen's work sparked controversy during his lifetime and after his death. This thesis enters into such controversies by investigating how Origen himself appraised non-Christian thought in his writings. My analyses of key passages from Origen's *On First Principles*, *Against Celsus*, and *Commentary on the Song of Songs* identify three themes in his evaluation of non-Christian traditions: first, their supposed appropriation of concepts from Hebrew scripture; second, what he contends is their dependence upon God; and third, their fall from grace, which he believes was engineered by spiritual entities who led philosophers astray. By examining Origen's stance on non-Christian thinking through the lens of these three themes, I conclude that while he venerates much of non-Christian philosophy, he nevertheless prioritizes his Christian convictions above all else. This conclusion contributes to an ongoing debate in Origen scholarship as to whether he accepted non-Christian philosophy at the expense of Christianity, or whether he held fast to Christianity while repudiating non-Christian philosophy. My thesis takes a middle route by building on previous scholarship and offering potentially corrective interpretations of key texts. My conclusions may also help clarify assessments of Origen's supposed orthodoxy or heresy, which tend to be clouded by the condemnations of the Council of Constantinople in 553 CE. By bringing to light Origen's multidimensional assessment of non-Christian philosophical schools, this thesis reveals the need for investigation of his relationship to these traditions and, by extension, of the interplay between early Christianity and non-Christian philosophies of the era.