

ORIGENE. Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques. Introduction, Traduction et Notes. Dom O. Rousseau. (Sources Chrétiennes 37; Cerf; Blackfriars).

Origen is the first Christian commentator on the Canticle of Canticles whose works are still extant. His two short homilies and his much more developed commentary on this theme passed into the Latin West via the translations of St Jerome and Rufinus. In expounding the Canticle as an allegory of love between Christ and the Church, Origen was using an interpretation already traditional among the Christians of his day, and this tradition itself was a natural transposition from the Jewish explanation of the Canticle as the marriage song between Jahwé and the Chosen People. But Origen added to these two themes yet a third, that of the love between the Word and the Soul, and it was this theme, with its Neo-Platonic overtones, which was to influence so greatly St Bernard and the other twelfth-century commentators of the Cistercian school, who were immensely interested in the psychology of the soul. It is remarkable, however, that Bede, whose commentary on this theme was also destined to be influential in the twelfth century, since it formed the basis of the *Glossa Ordinaria* on the Canticle, relied very little on Origen and certainly omitted anything that might be called Neo-Platonic.

In this edition, then, of the Homilies on the Canticle, Dom Rousseau has made easily accessible to us one of Origen's most influential works; and he has prefaced it with an interesting and instructive introduction; the section on the hidden allusions to the Canticle in the New Testament being particularly suggestive. The translation is, on the whole, clear and pleasantly readable. The word 'accendatur' appears to have been accidentally omitted from the second line on page 65. The excellent footnotes contribute much towards enabling one to appreciate the text, and this is specially true of those allegorical allusions which would otherwise be missed by the modern reader, who is usually unaccustomed to the Patristic and medieval habit of regarding the words of Scripture as the flesh veiling the hidden spirit within. A section explaining the four senses of Scripture would have been a useful addition to the introduction and might, perhaps, have replaced that section (pp. 28-30) dealing with a thesis put forward by A. Nygren in his book *Eros and Agape*. Though Nygren's thesis is important and extremely interesting, any consideration of it, beyond a footnote, seems to me to be outside the scope of the work under review. As it is, Dom Rousseau's treatment of this thesis and its relation to Origen's thought is too superficial for the expert and yet somewhat confusing for the layman.