Participation and Polemics: Angels from Origen to Augustine*

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Introduction

When I shared an earlier draft of this article with a colleague who spends much more time in the modern theological world than I do, his reply was simple: "So, angels are a thing? And people want to talk about them?" Angels receive fairly short shrift in most twentieth- and twenty-first-century theology, but in late antique Christianity they certainly were "a thing," if by "a thing" we mean an essential part of religious discourse, manifest in textual and material sources that testify to the significance of angels in theological speculation, popular piety, and ascetic practice.[1]

For modern historical theologians, angels have been "a thing" in several ways. First, older, more confessional authors like Erik Peterson and Jean Daniélou worked to legitimate traditional Catholic angelologies by demonstrating scriptural warrant and continuity in the Christian tradition.[2] Moving beyond confessional concerns,

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[1] In the review that follows, I highlight scholarship on angels only in early Christianity. Readers interested in angels in other periods or contexts should consult the following: Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); C. D. G. Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959).

[2] Erik Peterson, *The Angels and the Liturgy* (trans. Ronald Walls; New York: Herder and Herder, 1964); originally published as *Das Buch von den Engeln: Stellung and Bedeutung der heiligen Engel im Kultus* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1935). Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church* (trans. David Heimann; Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957). Daniélou repeats many of these same themes, focused primarily on the angelic role in the governance of the nations and the economy of salvation, in *Origen* (trans. Walter Mitchell; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 220–45. See Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 6–8.

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more recent historians have emphasized both development and divergence in early Christian theologies of angels. This trend emphasizes angelic language in second-temple and early rabbinic Judaism, as well as the adaptation of that tradition within Christian understandings of God and God's Son, Word, Wisdom, Spirit, and so forth. Thus, we now have a much deeper appreciation for the varieties of angelic or angelomorphic pneumatologies and Christologies in figures such as Justin Martyr and texts like the *Ascension of Isaiah*.[3]

In her recent monograph, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, Ellen Muehlberger also explores how angels were "a thing" for early Christians, but, in lieu of a purely theological approach, she advocates a socio-cultural methodology to show that "angels were intrinsic to late ancient Christianity, rather than separable from it."[4] She describes angels as "culturally operational," that is, real to early Christians in a powerful way, even as the use and imaging of angels shifted within different social, political, rhetorical, and ecclesial contexts.[5] To parse these different and often overlapping contexts, Muehlberger proposes two general cultural categories: cultivation and contestation. The former signifies the angelic discourse primarily rooted in ascetic practice and epitomized by Evagrius of Pontus (c. 345–399). The latter discourse, epitomized by Augustine of Hippo (354–430), signifies angelic discourse as it develops in public theological conflict aimed at securing ecclesial and imperial legitimation.

Muehlberger further illustrates the socio-cultural significance of the cultivation/contestation distinction by highlighting a major difference in the angelic discourses of Evagrius and Augustine. While Evagrius's ascetic approach emphasizes the instability of the angels who can still rise to God or fall away, just like human minds, Augustine's angels possess a level of stability and security in their eternal

[3] Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Ledien: Brill, 2009); Michel Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *AugStud* 29 (2008) 169–86; R. M. M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Silke-Petra, "Qualifying 'Angel' in Justin's Logos Christology," *StPatr* 50 (2003) 353–57; Alan Segal, "'Two Powers in Heaven' and Early Christian Trinitarian Thinking," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, S.J., and Gerald O'Collins, S.J.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 73–95; Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 114–19; Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); idem, "The Prophetic Spirit as an Angel according to Philo," *HTR* 88 (1995) 189–207; idem, "The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism," *SBLSP* 34 (1995) 464–93; Loren Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995); Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); Guy G. Strousma, "Le couple de l'ange et de l'esprit: traditions juives et chretiennes," *RB* 88 (1981) 42–61; Christian Oeyen, "Eine frühchristliche Engelpneumatologie bei Klemens von Alexandrien," *IKZ* 55 (1965) 102–20; 56 (1966) 27–47.

[4] Muehlberger, *Angels*, 28.

[5] Ibid., 19.

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heavenly city that stands in contrast to the temporal earthly city of this unstable life. This is, Muehlberger notes, a "novel understanding of angelic nature,"[6] a fact she attributes to Augustine's particular social context. As a religious authority in an unstable world, Augustine establishes a totalizing discourse, "an authoritative account of the world and of world history, circumscribed" by the City of God with the eternal stability of the angels whose happiness Christians will one day share.[7]

This contrast between instability and stability in the angels is the focus of the present article. I believe that Muehlberger's socio-cultural explanation of this phenomenon, though helpful, obfuscates the more explicitly theological reasons behind the shift that appears in Augustine.[8] I propose that a more fruitful approach to understanding angelic stability and instability in early Christianity is to trace the use of the concept of participation as it relates to the angels within a series of distinct yet interrelated polemical contexts. This approach suggests a historical theological narrative in three acts.[9] In Act 1, Origen (c. 185–254) develops language of angelic participation in order to refute competing theological systems associated with Marcion (c. 85–160), Valentinus (c. 100–160), and Basilides (fl. 117–138). Here, language of participation highlights the instability of angels in order to preserve moral freedom and divine goodness. In Act 2, Athanasius (c. 296–373) and Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398) adapt Origen's language of angelic participation to defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit against those who would maintain an older angelomorphic pneumatology. Both pro-Nicene authors contrast the stability of the participated-in Holy Spirit with the ontological instability of the participating angels. This middle act illustrates both the influence and the ambiguity of Origen's legacy around angelic participation language and therefore provides an illuminating counterexample for the quite different appropriation Augustine will make of the same language and legacy. In Act 3, Augustine redefines angelic participation to be a source not of instability but of stability because, following the

[6] Ibid., 54.

[7] Ibid., 57.

[8] Muehlberger is certainly not ignorant of the relevant theological issues. In particular, her second chapter, "Locating Christ in Scripture," covers some of the same theological topography that I will explore. However, her categories of cultivation and contestation, though illuminating elsewhere, do not do full justice to the theological trajectory and diverse polemical contexts that I hope to outline from Origen to Augustine. Thus, I do not intend to diminish Muehlberger's work but to complement and enhance it by offering an alternative—but not incommensurate—narrative of angelic discourse that more adequately accounts for the theological shift we see in Augustine.

[9] Readers will note that Evagrius disappears from my analysis of angelic discourse. This is due only to the fact that he does not explicitly use the language of "participation" for his angels and therefore does not offer a clear example of the specific trend I want to trace. However, given his place within "Origenism" and the role that the Origenist controversy will play in my reading of Augustine, Evagrius can be seen to fit within the larger polemical contexts I describe.

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initial fall of the demons, the remaining angels are given a sure sharing in God's eternity. Why does Augustine overturn the traditional implications of angelic participation? Ironically, I will suggest, it is because of his own polemical context in the burgeoning Origenist controversy.

Ultimately, I argue, Augustine's unique emphasis on angelic stability is less about his authoritative desire to establish a totalizing discourse of spiritual hegemony than about his place within the fraught theological legacy of Origen. We can see this by studying how the particular theological language of angelic participation is deployed in a series of distinct yet related polemical contexts.

Act 1: Angelic Participation and Moral Cosmogony in Origen

Christian discourse on angelic participation begins with Origen in the context of his polemic against those we used to call "Gnostics." Before turning to Origen's discussion of angels and participation in the cosmology of *On First Principles* (*Princ*.) 1.6, however, I want to highlight what that polemical context looks like in order then to appreciate how his angelology makes sense within that context. In *Princ*. 2.9.5, Origen identifies those who would raise objections to his Christian cosmology as "coming from the schools of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides."[10] This trio represents Origen's archetypal triumvirate of heresy. They appear repeatedly throughout his corpus as examples of dangerous theological errors that distort what he takes for the core truth of Christian teaching as represented in the rule of faith and the apostolic tradition.[11]

Origen consistently depicts the legacies of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides—whether listed all together or in paired permutations—as threatening two key Christian commitments: 1) the goodness, justice, and perfection of God the Creator and 2) moral freedom and responsibility. In summarizing their views, Origen connects these two concerns to conflicts over cosmology and creation:

> [They ask,] "If God the creator lacks neither the will nor the ability to accomplish the greatest good in his works, what reason could there be that in creating rational natures—that is, those of whose existence God himself is the cause—he should make some of higher position, and create others in second or third position, and many others in an even more inferior and degenerate position?" Next they further object concerning the fate of those on earth

[10] Origen, *Princ*. 2.9.5 (*Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* [ed. Herwig Görgemanns and Heinrich Karpp; Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985] 408). All translations of Greek and Latin sources are my own. For precision, I give the Greek or Latin for significant terms or phrases where appropriate. Due to issues of recension, it is notoriously difficult to know what is truly from Origen and what is redacted by his Latin translators, most notably Rufinus. In what follows, I hope to mitigate that difficulty by drawing not simply from *Princ*. but also from Origen's more reliable Greek corpus, such as *Against Celsus* and the *Commentary on John*.

[11] See, inter multa alia, Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 1.18.3, 2.7.4, 2.10.2, 4.12.1, 8.8.7, 8.11.2; *Cels*. 5.61–62, 6.52–53; *Hom. Luc*. 29.4, 31.3; *Fr. Luc*. 166; *Hom. Jer*, 10.5.1, 17.2.1. For my appreciation of Origen's engagement and use of this trio, I am indebted to Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 111–18.

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> because a happier lot comes to some at birth . . . . Therefore they ask us, "If this great diversity and so varied and diverse conditions of birth, in which the faculty of free choice has no cause (for no one chooses for himself where or in what condition he is born), if therefore," they say, "diversity in the nature of souls does not cause these things, that is, that an evil-natured soul is destined for an evil nation, and a good soul for a good nation, what else remains but to believe that it comes about by chance or accident?" If this is accepted, it would no longer be believed that the world was made by God or is ruled by his providence, and consequently it would seem that the judgment of God upon everyone's deeds is not to be hoped for.[12]

In short, Origen sees Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, despite whatever diversity may exist between their schools,[13] as all highlighting the theodical problem of diversity. The wide variety of conditions into which humans are born—not to mention the relative positions assigned to ranks of angels and hordes of demons—seems to render moot any meaningful moral accountability. Either the God who creates these beings and places them in their conditions is capricious, unjust, impotent, and even downright evil, or the moral quality of individuals, be they angels, humans, or demons, is intrinsic to their very nature, and irrevocable determinism replaces any meaningful moral freedom. Origen understands his trio to promote the latter view as a way to preserve some semblance of moral order in the cosmos, even at the expense, as Origen sees it, of self-determination.[14]

For our purposes, the questions of whether or not Origen accurately represents the teachings of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, as well as whether he is right to group them together, are irrelevant. Though he knew the Valentinian teacher Heracleon's work on the Gospel of John, Origen probably had little extensive exposure to actual texts from these schools.[15] Yet, given the repeated focus he gives to them, these competing traditions had a significant impact on his own thinking.[16] What Origen and others would have known of these "heretics" is less a consistent theological system or discrete writings, than different mythoi expounded by self-appointed teachers in "study sessions" outside of—but viewed

[12] Origen, *Princ*. 2.9.5 (Görgemanns and Karpp, 408–10).

[13] On the notion of *hairesis* and "schools of thought" in the context of early Christianity, see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) 71–72; Roland Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 48–64.

[14] See esp. Origen, *Princ*. 3.1.8; *Comm. Rom*. 2.7.4, 2.10.2, 4.12.1, 8.11.2.

[15] On this claim, see Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 111 n. 19.

[16] See Brakke, *Gnostics*, 128–32; Holger Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System: Zur Rezeption der valentinianischen Gnosis bei Origenes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Henri Crouzel, *Origen* (trans. A. S. Worrall; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 205–18; Allain le Boulluec, "Y-a-t-il des traces de la polémique antignostique d'Irénée dans le *Péri Archôn* d'Origène?" in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers Read at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies* (ed. Martin Krause; Leiden: Brill, 1977) 138–47; Jean Daniélou, *Origen* (trans. Walter Mitchell; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 191–208; Hal Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis: Studien über Origenes und sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1932) 14–17.

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by many Christians as consistent with—the Sunday worship experience presided over by "official" priests and bishops.[17] At the very least, what Origen knew of such mythoi included the general schema of cascading intermediate beings (aeons, emanations, etc.) between the supreme God and the ignorant, wicked, or defective creator "god" responsible for this material creation, as well as explanations for the relative condition of humans and other rational beings within a multi-layered cosmos. Given the porous and pluriform nature of Christian intellectual discourse in early third-century Alexandria, we may follow David Brakke in seeing Origen as offering an alternative, ostensibly orthodox cosmogonic myth that addresses the issue of diversity in such a way that defends the goodness, power, and justice of God in creation and safeguards moral freedom and accountability.[18]

Origen's anti-"Gnostic" mythos of the origin and fate of the cosmos focuses on the condition of created rational beings.[19] Thus, we come finally to his discussion of angelic participation in God. According to Origen's cosmogony, the different degrees of angels, humans, and demons were all originally ontologically identical as created minds. The circumstances in which a particular angel, human, or demon finds itself presently are a result of that particular mind's own failure to participate perfectly in God. Origen describes this process in the following way:

> Goodness does not belong to them [created rational beings] essentially (*substantialiter*), as it does to God and God's Christ and the Holy Spirit. For goodness belongs essentially (*substantialiter*) only to this Trinity alone, who is the source of all; however, the rest have it as an accident and as something that fades (*ceteri vero accidentem eam ac decidentem habent*), and they are only blessed when they participate (*participant*) in holiness and wisdom and in deity itself. But if they should neglect and ignore this participation (*participatione*) . . . then each would be made the cause of his own lapse or plight. . . . Certain ones of those who endured in the beginning . . . have been appointed to the rank of angel, others the rank of powers, others the rank of principalities. . . . The divine providence by impartial and just judgment has conferred these things upon them according to their merit and the progress they have made in imitation of and participation in God (*in dei participatione*).[20]

[17] See David Brakke's description of "the salons of wealthy and intellectually inclined Christians in Alexandria" (*Gnostics*, 128; see also 116 and 125).

[18] Brakke, *Gnostics*, 128–32. See also Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System*, 210–70.

[19] Beyond this general description of determinism associated with Valentinus, Marcion, and Basilides, Origen also takes specific aim at the theory of μετενσωμάτωσις, which he sometimes associates with Basilides (*Comm. Rom.* 5.1.27; *Cels.* 1.20, 4.17, 5.49, 8.30; *Comm. Jo.* 6.64–66, 6.86). While Origen seems to offer a similar understanding of transmigration—one of the key errors that Augustine will later condemn him for—his version does not allow rational minds to be embodied in non-rational creatures, i.e., an angel would never become a gopher (see *Princ.* 1.6.2 below). For more on Basilides and μετενσωμάτωσις, see Clement, *Strom.* 4.12. For other early Christian rejections of μετενσωμάτωσις as a general heretical dogma (along with the related term μετεμψύχωσις), see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.33; Tertullian, *An.* 31–35.

[20] Origen, *Princ.* 1.6.2 (Görgemanns and Karpp, 218–22).

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With respect to theodicy and moral freedom, Origen's cosmology preserves both the goodness of God and the self-determination of rational agents by diagnosing embodied diversity to be the just consequence of each individual mind's own free failure to participate in God in its particular degree.

Because of his larger polemical context, Origen's discussion of participation is about more than angels; it is about created rational beings in general, and angels represent simply one class of (slightly) fallen minds. As the doctrinal and polemical context shifts in the following centuries, however, Origen's legacy, including his language of angelic participation, is appropriated in new ways. Therefore, I want to highlight three particular themes of Origen's understanding of angelic participation at *Princ*. 1.6.2 that will either change or be amplified in future discussions of the topic.

First, we see Origen's own theological concern: to safeguard the good providence of God by making created rational beings morally responsible for their own higher or lower conditions. Second, as he does elsewhere, Origen emphasizes that the angels, like every created rational being, lack intrinsic goodness in their natures and can obtain it only through participation in the essential goodness of God.[21] Finally, because they are not essentially good, created rational beings are inherently mutable, able to fall, and, Origen will later clarify, rise through changes in their degree of participation. While in our next context, that of the fourth-century trinitarian disputes, the first feature drops out of the discussion as the latter two themes are emphasized, when we come to Augustine, we will see the issue of moral responsibility and freedom again take center stage, ironically this time in the context of the Origenist controversy.

Act 2: Angelic Participation and the Holy Spirit in Athanasius and Didymus

For Origen, the status of angels derives from the inherent instability of created minds who all have the freedom to rise or fall in their participation of God. This allows him to counter the moral determinism of competing Christianities, most explicitly those associated with Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion. Angelic instability next arises as a key theological theme in a polemical context that owes much to the ambiguous legacy of Origen: the fourth-century trinitarian conflicts.[22] Here, Athanasius and Didymus both deploy language of angelic participation with its attendant feature

[21] This assertion becomes problematic when Origen claims that the Son participates in the Father and the Spirit in the Son. See below, pp. 430–31.

[22] On Origen as background to 4th-cent. disputes, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 20–31; Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 117–58.

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of instability to defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.[23] Whereas Origen was concerned to establish a general account of creation that explained the diversity of rational beings alongside a just and providential God, Athanasius and Didymus use the language of angelic participation to draw a line between the created, mutable, and participating life of the angels on the one side and the uncreated, immutable, and participated-in life of the Holy Spirit on the other. As with Origen, however, I turn first to the polemical context before examining what Athanasius and Didymus have to say about angels.

In 358, Serapion, bishop of Thumis in the eastern Nile delta, sent a letter to Athanasius, recently of Alexandria, who, in one of his numerous exiles, had to receive it "in the desert."[24] Although this letter does not survive, we know from Athanasius's first response that Serapion was distressed that "certain ones have gone away from the Arians because of their blasphemy against the Son of God, yet they set their minds against the Holy Spirit, saying not only that he is a creature but also that he is one of 'the ministering spirits' (Heb 1:14) and differs from angels only in degree."[25] Serapion thus notifies Athanasius of a new polemical front in the post-Nicene conflict. A new group, which Athanasius later terms *tropokoi* or *pneumatomachi*, accept the Nicene language of *homoousios* for the divinity of the Son but refuse to apply such language to the Spirit. Instead, they assert, the Spirit ought to be understood as either the highest of the angels or at least more similar to angels than to the fully divine Father and Son.

Famously, the original creed of Nicaea (325) offers no elaboration on the nature of the Holy Spirit, simply listing him as also believed in. It is not until 381 that the Council of Constantinople extends the pneumatological article to affirm that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father" and is worshipped along with Father and Son. Thus the "angelic" or "angelomorphic"[26] pneumatology of the *tropokoi* represents an attempt to negotiate what proper appropriation of Nicaea should look like. That

[23] As Muehlberger herself notes, Athanasius (as with other Nicenes) often works to distinguish the Son from the angels in order to defend his fully divine status in opposition to older angelic Christologies (see esp. Muehlberger, *Angels*, 62–69; Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1.55–57, 3.12–14). However, in none of these discussions does he use the technical language of participation to demarcate the angelic from the divine. It is only in his later pneumatological disputes that this language occurs. Even though I focus on those texts that use this language of angelic participation, it is important to recognize that they are part of a larger theological trend regarding angels' relationship to the Trinity.

[24] Athanasius, *Ep. Serap.* 1.1.1 (*Athanasius Werke I/1. Die dogmatischen Schriften. 4. Lieferung. Epistulae I-IV ad Seraption* [ed. Dietmar Wyrwa and Kyriakos Savvidis; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010] 449). For the dating, see *Works on the Spirit* (ed. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres; Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011) 25–29. The question of dating for these letters is a contentious issue. For other options, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 59–60.

[25] Athanasius, *Ep. Serap.* 1.1.2 (Wyrwa and Kyriakos, 450).

[26] For this term, see Jean Daniélou, "Trinité et angélologie dans la théologie judéo-chrétienne," *RSR* 45 (1957) 5–41.

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is, the polemical context of Serapion's letter and Athanasius's response addresses not only the debate over the correctness of Nicaea but, more importantly, the correct way of interpreting and glossing it.

This angelic language of the *tropokoi* is not a new phenomenon in Christian pneumatology; rather, it has deep roots as far back as second-temple Judaism.[27] Bogdan Bucur has recently argued that angelomorphic pneumatology "constitutes a relatively widespread phenomenon in early Christianity,"[28] a claim he supports with passages from Justin Martyr, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement of Alexandria, and others. Bucur's argument focuses on early Jewish and Christian exegesis of texts like Zech 4:10 and Isa 11:2–3 in relation to the seven primordial spirits/angels known as the πρωτόκτιστοι. This tradition provides a fertile interpretive field for early Christians making sense of who or what the Holy Spirit is. In addition, surrounding the specific tradition that Bucur traces, we see the broader cosmological context in which a number of intermediary beings, including a Spirit or spirits, operate as, or appear quite similar to, angels. We find this exemplified in the pseudipegriphal Christian text *Ascension of Isaiah*, which repeatedly refers to the "angel of the Holy Spirit" who is worshipped alongside the Father and the Lord.[29]

Given this polemical context—both the immediate claims of the *tropokoi* and the larger tradition from which they draw—it is not surprising that part of Athanasius's argument against the *tropokoi* distinguishes between the uncreated divinity of the Spirit and the created nature of angels. He wants to draw a clear line of demarcation between the divine and the angelic, the Creator and the created. Here, he deploys Origen's language of angelic participation to demonstrate that ontological divide:[30]

> For again, from these things anyone would be able to see how the Holy Spirit is participated in (μεθεκτόν) but does not participate (μετέχον). . . . But the angels and the other creatures are participating (μετέχοντά) in the Spirit himself. On account of this it is possible for them to fall away from the one in whom they participated (μετέσχον), but the Spirit is always the same. For he is not one of those who participate (μετεχόντων), but all things participate (μετέχει) in him. But if he is always the same and participated in (μεθεκτόν), and creatures are participating (μετέχοντά) in him, then in no way can the Holy Spirit be either an angel or a creature.[31]

[27] See esp. Levison, "The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism"; idem, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism*; Barnes, "Early Christian Pneumatology."

[28] Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology,* xxiii. Bucur's argument builds upon the earlier work of Christian Oeyen, *Eine frühchristliche Engelpneumatologie*.

[29] See Barnes, "Early Christian Pneumatology," 175–76.

[30] Although I say "Origen's language," there is not necessarily a genetic dependency. Given what we see below in Didymus, who certainly did know Origen's work, it is likely that this language of angelic participation was at the very least "in the air" of fourth-century Alexandria, which was in general highly influenced by Origen.

[31] Athanasius, *Ep. Serap.* 1.27.1–2 (Wyrwa and Savvidis, 517–18).

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As with Origen, Athanasius connects this language of angelic participation to the mutability of the angelic nature, not only in this quoted passage but also in the sections that precede it.[32] For Athanasius, though, angelic participation is connected to the argument of the Holy Spirit as the undiminished giver. Lewis Ayres has traced the history and legacy of this argument in pro-Nicene accounts of the Spirit,[33] but for my part I want to note how Athanasius adapts Origen's language of angelic participation within a new polemical context. Instead of explaining something about created rational beings in themselves, Athanasius uses angelic mutability and participation to point away from them and toward the immutable divinity of the Spirit in whom they participate.

Writing a few years later,[34] Didymus the Blind makes a similar argument:

> Indeed the angels are said to be holy. . . . But the angels are holy by participation (*participatione*) in the Holy Spirit. . . . If, therefore, the angels are holy not from their own substance (*ex propria substantia*) but from participation (*ex participatione*) in the Holy Trinity, it is shown that the substance of the angels is different from the Trinity. . . . But if the heretics should propose that the angels are holy from the nature of their condition (*ex natura conditionis*), they would consequently be compelled to say that they are *homoousios* with the Trinity and unchangeably holy according to their substance (*inconuertibiliter eos iuxta substantiam sanctos esse*).[35]

Didymus here deploys angelic participation language for the same purposes as Athanasius, but he follows Origen a bit more closely.[36] Like Origen, Didymus emphasizes that the qualities the angels obtain through participation have to be so acquired because they are not intrinsic to the essence or nature of the angels.

Athanasius and Didymus use two of Origen's key points about angelic participation—the essential mutability of the angelic nature and their acquisition of certain qualities through participation in God—to undercut angelomorphic pneumatologies and establish a strict distinction between the participated-in Spirit and the participating angels. Yet it is worth noting that Origen's original understanding of the Trinity and participation did not always draw such a hard line. On the one hand, Athanasius's and Didymus's depiction of the Spirit as participated in but not himself participating fits well with Origen's declaration in *Contra Celsum* that "[God] does not participate but rather is participated in, and he is participated

[32] For more on this see ibid, 1.26.6.

[33] Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver': Didymus the Blind's *De spiritu sancto* and the Development of Nicene Pneumatology," in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008* (eds. D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010) 57–72.

[34] On the range of dating options, see *Works on the Spirit*, 37–42.

[35] Didymus, *Spir.* 25–27 (SC 386, 164–68).

[36] For Didymus' relationship to Origen and the Alexandrian "school," see Richard A. Layton, *Didymus the Blind and His Circle in Late-Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

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in by those who have the Spirit of God."[37] Similarly, Origen claims that "those who are not holy essentially (*substantialiter*) may be made holy by participation in this [grace of the Holy Spirit]."[38] On the other hand, Origen also describes the Son as "less than the Father (ἐλαττόνως δὲ παρὰ τὸν πατέρα)" and "prior to rational creatures alone (φθάνων ἐπὶ μόνα τὰ λογικά)," while "the Holy Spirit is still less (ἔτι δὲ ἠττόνως τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον) [than the Son] . . . so that the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit."[39] Likewise, in his *Commentary on John*, Origen declares that "the Holy Spirit is the most honored and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ," going so far as to say that the Spirit receives his essence "by participation in the *epinoia* of Christ."[40]

While Origen's descriptions of the Spirit participating in the Son and the Son in the Father make sense in his original anti-monarchian context,[41] they would not work for Athanasius's and Didymus's polemical purposes in the post-Nicene context. Thus the two heirs of Origen establish participation as that which distinguishes angels from the divine persons, highlighting their mutability and second-hand holiness. Turning now to the West, we will see how such ambiguities in Origen's legacy also influence Augustine's discourse on angels, in which participation entails a new level of stability.

Act 3: Augustine, Angelic Stability, and the Origenist Controversy

In Athanasius and Didymus we see a redeployment of Origen's angelic participation language within a new polemical context. Further, all three emphasize the mutability of the angelic nature. A necessary correlative of angelic participation in God is the possibility that the angels could, as Athanasius says, "fall away" from the one in whom they participate. When we come to Augustine, however, we find a new emphasis on the stability that the angels enjoy through their participation in God.

This stability lies at the heart of Muehlberger's depiction of Augustine's angelic discourse. In my reading of Augustine that follows, I offer two important corrections to Muehlberger's assessment: First, although Augustine's angels do experience a new level of stability through participation in God, such stability is not, as Muehlberger claims, "natural to them."[42] Rather, it is a gift added to those angels who did not turn from God. As to their natures, Augustine's angels are as mutable as any other created being. Second, Augustine's emphasis on angelic

[37] Origen, *Cels*. 6.64 (SC 147, 338).

[38] Idem, *Princ*. 1.3.8 (Görgemanns and Karpp, 180).

[39] Idem, *Fr. Prin*. 9, preserved in Justinian, *Ep. Men*. (Görgemanns and Karpp, 168).

[40] Idem, *Comm. Jo*. 2.10.75–76 (GCS 10, 65).

[41] Heine, *Origen*, 98–101; idem, "The Christology of Callistus," *JTS* n.s. 49 (1998) 56–91; Crouzel, *Origen*, 155.

[42] Muehlberger, *Angels*, 53.

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stability ought to be read not primarily in light of his general role as a Christian bishop shoring up a totalizing discourse against the competing political and social claims of "pagan" and "heretical" Christian worldviews but as his engagement with the same ambiguous theological legacy we see Origen bequeath to Athanasius and Didymus.[43] In particular, Augustine's primary polemical context for his understanding of angelic participation and stability is the Origenist controversy, in which the bishop of Hippo works to refute the supposed heresies of the very theologian who first articulated a vision of angelic participation.

Unlike previous sections, I turn first to what Augustine has to say about angelic participation and stability before discussing the polemical context. Augustine discusses angelic participation in two major works, first in the *Literal Commentary on Genesis* (*Gen. litt.*),[44] which was begun sometime between 399–404 but not published until 415–416,[45] and then in *City of God* (*Civ.*). His earliest use of angelic participation language, at *Gen. litt.* 4, points toward stability but suggests an underlying potential for change in the angelic condition: "If the angelic nature were turning (*conuerteretur*) to itself and delighting (*delectaretur*) more in itself than in the one by participation in whom it is made blessed (*cuius participatione beata est*), then, swollen with pride, it would be falling (*caderet*) just like the devil."[46] My cumbersome translation reflects the present contrary-to-fact conditional construction of the imperfect subjunctive verbs. The theological significance of this phrasing is a bit ambiguous. While the angels are *not* turning toward themselves in the present, this conditional suggests that in the past such a turning was an actual possibility, as evidenced by the fate of the devil. Further it is unclear whether such narcissistic conversion remains a future possibility for those angels who, at the moment, participate in the beatitude of God. In any case, we see some continuity with Origen, Athanasius, and Didymus: in and of themselves the angels are mutable and their blessedness depends upon participation in God.

[43] Obviously the different contexts cannot be completely separated, and the Origenist controversy was itself greatly shaped by the socio-political landscape. But I believe the emphasis ought to be put on the theological legacy of Origen to explain *why* Augustine redefines the consequences of angelic participation.

[44] Because Muehlberger does not engage this text, I will spend a little extra time unpacking what it has to say on angelic participation and stability in order to give a fuller view of Augustine's thought.

[45] Roland J. Teske, "*Genesi ad literram liber, De*," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 376–77; A. M. Vannier, "*Creatio," "conversio," "formatio" chez S. Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1991) 88; P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, *La Genèse au sens littéral* I-VII (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne*; 76 vols.; Paris: Brepols, 1972) 48:25–31.

[46] Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 4.24.41 (CSEL 28.1, 124). For the relationship between Augustine's angelic speculation and his aporia regarding the meaning of "days" in creation, see Agaësse and Solignac, "La connaissance angélique et les jours de la création," in *La Genèse*, 645–53.

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But does this understanding of angelic participation represent instability or stability? While the logic of the conditional points to the angels' underlying mutability as created beings, by the time he gets to book 8 of his commentary, Augustine points more toward stability. Now, describing how the angels operate as ministers of God's providence, he says,

> They are made participants (*participes*) in the eternity, truth, and will of the one who is always without time and place. Yet by his command, and while he does not move temporally, they are moved temporally, but not so that they shrink or fall away from contemplation of him, but at one and the same time they contemplate him without place or time and carry out his commands in the lower spheres, moving themselves through time as bodies in time and place as befits their actions.[47]

Augustine says the angels participate in God's eternity, which suggests a limitation to their mutability or, rather, that they transcend their mutability through participation in the stability of God. Yet Augustine's purpose here is not to speculate on the condition of the angels but to explain how they function as mediating ministers of God's providence. His emphasis is that their participation in God's eternity does not preclude their activity within the temporal, bodily world. Angels, as they usually do, have a liminal status. For Augustine, their participation in God, exemplified by the contemplation of God's eternity, allows them to enact the eternal will and providence of God in the world of space and time.

Even here, though, Augustine does not yet emphasize the stability of the angelic nature explicitly and unambiguously. He will do so when he comes to *Gen. litt.* 11 and his interpretation of humanity's fall. Speaking of the death that came upon Adam and Eve as a result of their disobedience, Augustine explains,

> They lost the wonderful condition, which would have been granted them through the mystical virtue in the tree of life, through which condition they would not be able to be tried by disease or changed (*mutari*) by age, so that, although their flesh was still animal and only later to be changed into something better, it is signified through the food of the tree of life what happens in the angels through participation in eternity—which comes from the spiritual food of Wisdom, of which that tree is a sacrament—with the result that they would not change (*non mutentur*) for the worse.[48]

Here, the stability that the angels receive from their participation represents the very thing that humans would have enjoyed but forsook in the fall. Mutability, or at least the most pernicious consequences of it, is exactly what the angels escape through their participation in God.

These passages from Augustine's *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, all of which discuss angelic participation, evince a developing emphasis on the stability that comes from that participation. This is a shift in focus from what we have seen in

[47] Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 8.24.45 (CSEL 28.1, 263).
[48] Ibid., 11.32.42 (CSEL 28.1, 365–66).

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previous authors who emphasize the mutability of the angels in order either to distinguish them from the divine persons or to account for the morally diverse conditions of created rational beings. As created beings, Augustine's angels are still ontologically mutable,[49] but this mutability is rendered moot through participation in God's eternity, which establishes a new level of stability.

A true appreciation of Augustine's use of angelic participation, however, requires turning to his most significant engagement with the idea, in *Civ.* 11. Here, Augustine puzzles over the relationship between the creation of the angels and the fall of some of them. He begins by speculating that the creation of the angels corresponds to the creation of light on the first day. To elucidate this, he explains,

> Surely [the angels] were made participants (*participes*) in the eternal light, which is itself the immutable Wisdom of God, through which all things were made and which we call the only-begotten Son of God. Illuminated by that light by which they were created, the angels were made light and were called "day" by participation (*participatione*) in that immutable light . . . . "The true light, which illuminates every human coming into this world" also illuminates every pure angel, so that he may be light not in himself but in God. But if an angel should turn away from God, the angel becomes impure, as are all those who are called unclean spirits and are no longer "light in the Lord" but darkness in themselves, having been deprived of participation (*participatione*) in the eternal light.[50]

Many of the same elements from earlier depictions of angelic participation appear here. Augustine emphasizes the immutability of God in contrast to the changeable created nature of the angels.[51] The angels therefore are only "light" through participation and not in themselves. And of course, such mutability raises the possibility that the participant might turn away from the one in whom he participates, as the "unclean spirits" have done. So far, Augustine's version of angelic participation follows the same lines as Origen, Athanasius, and Didymus, as well as the earliest examples from Augustine's own *Gen. litt.*

But the idea of some angels falling away from their participation in God raises a problem for Augustine. In the light of God, the angels see all truth, even about themselves. So does this mean that they shared in wisdom to such an extent as to know that they would fall or persevere in that condition? For Augustine the highest enjoyment of a thing means not only possessing it but being assured of continued possession. Therefore, if the angels who would fall knew that they would fall then

[49] For the significance of ontological mutability in created intelligible matter (such as the angels) for Augustine, see Christian Tornau, "Intelligible Matter and the Genesis of Intellect: The Metamorphosis of a Plotinian Theme in *Confessions* 12–13," in *Augustine's "Confessions": Philosophy in Autobiography* (ed. William E. Mann; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 181–218; William A. Christian, "Augustine on the Creation of the World," *HTR* 46.1 (1953) 1–25; Augustine, *Conf.* 12.6.

[50] Augustine, *Civ.* 11.9 (CCSL 48, 329–30).

[51] It is noteworthy that Augustine "interrupts" this discussion of the angels with a chapter (*Civ.* 11.10) on the pure simplicity of the divine nature. This juxtaposition echoes the themes we have seen in the three Alexandrian authors.

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they could not have experienced the fullness of joy even in their divine participation. Only those angels who knew that they would never fall would be able to participate in God with complete joy. This creates a vicious circle, because the angels who are going to fall are more prone to fall because they know they are going to fall.[52]

Augustine solves this problem by postulating that there was a moment, immediately after their creation, when the angels, by the mysterious dint of their own wills, either clung to their original participation or turned away from God. Because of this,

> Knowledge of their eternal happiness was added to them [the good angels] *after* the ruin of the others . . . . [The devil] had fallen away from the truth in which, if he had stood firm, he would have been made a participant (*particeps*) and would have remained blessed with the holy angels.[53]

Here, we see the real change that Augustine introduces to the motif of angelic participation. Although according to their nature angels are still essentially mutable and liable to change, their participation in God now entails the assurance of eternal perseverance in that state. For the angels, the drama of the fall is a "one and done" event isolated to the moment immediately following their creation. With respect to their continued moral or ontological status, this perseverance renders moot their mutability and establishes a level of stability that has heretofore been absent from discussions of angelic participation.

With Origen, Athanasius, and Didymus, we saw how their polemical contexts shaped their depiction of angels and instability. What, therefore, accounts for Augustine's shift in emphasis toward stability? In answering this, we should note first that Augustine's version of angelic participation establishes stability not only among the angels but in the wider moral cosmos as well. As Muehlberger has suggested, the stability of the angels strengthens the hope of Christians to share in that same eternal bliss.[54] But it also presents a radically different cosmology than Origen's, with which we began. This, I argue, is no accident. Rather, Augustine's transformation of the motif of angelic participation emphasizes stability over mutability precisely because he is responding to issues raised by the Origenist controversy. As before, a new polemical context shapes a new, and significantly changed, appropriation of Origen's legacy. This time the context is explicitly about that legacy itself.

However, this theory requires some support and qualification, given the lack of clarity that still exists about Augustine's knowledge of Origen and engagement with

[52] This argument stretches over *Civ.* 11.11–13.

[53] Augustine, *Civ.* 11.13 (CCSL 48, 333–34) [Italics added]. On this passage see, J. Patout Burns, "From Persuasion to Predestination: Augustine on Freedom in Rational Creatures," in In Dominico Eloquio, *In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken* (ed. Paul M. Blowers et al.;Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 311 n. 36.

[54] Muehlberger, *Angels*, 57.

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the Origenist controversy.[55] Indeed, some conjecture in this area is unavoidable, and, as with much historical argument, I am investigating what seems likely or probable given the evidence we have as well as what interpretation provides the most fruitful insight into the texts at hand. Therefore, while it is not definitive, I do believe we can and should read Augustine's discussion of angelic participation in the context of the Origenist controversy for the following reasons.

First, the texts from *Gen. litt.* and *Civ.* fit within the timeline of Augustine's growing awareness of Origen's work and of the controversy surrounding him. Augustine would have known of Origen through the influence of Ambrose, but direct engagement with his texts would have likely come later and through the translations of Rufinus (c. 345–410) and Jerome (c. 347–420). We know that in 397 Augustine was still pleading ignorance regarding Origen's supposed doctrinal crimes and imploring Jerome to clarify what the alleged errors entailed.[56] In 398, Rufinus rendered both Origen's *Princ.* and Pamphilus's *Apology for Origen* into Latin while in Rome. Augustine may have had access to this soon after, along with Rufinus's *Apology against Jerome*, composed in 401, and Jerome's *Against Rufinus*, composed partly in 401 and partly in 402.[57] By 404, we find Augustine writing to Jerome in an active attempt to heal the rift between him and Rufinus.[58] Therefore, in the period of 399–404, representing the range of dates proposed for the beginning of *Gen. litt.*, we witness Augustine's increasing knowledge of and engagement with Origen and the Origenist controversy, though he still appears as an outsider to the conflict. However, by 415—when he had recently begun *Civ.* and was finishing *Gen. litt.*—Augustine is actively arguing against "the error of Origen" in a work addressed to Orosius,[59] and he will continue to do so up until his death, as evidenced by the inclusion of Origen in the incomplete *Heresies*. This new focus arises in part from the influx of Pelagian refugees into Africa following

[55] For assessments of Augustine's relationship to the Origenist controversy, see Ronnie J. Roombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006) 71–77; Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 227–44; Robert J. O'Connell, S.J., *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987); and Berthold Altaner, "Augustinus und Origenes," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 70 (1951) 15–41. György Heidl, *The Influence of Origen on the Young Augustine: A Chapter in the History of Origenism* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), argues that Augustine had access to some works of Origen as early as 386, but much of the evidence that Heidl presents could be accounted for by the general influence of Origen and Christian Platonism among Augustine's Milan acquaintances.

[56] Augustine, *Ep.* 40.6.9.

[57] Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 140, 160, 164; O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, 79–89.

[58] Augustine, *Ep.* 73.

[59] Augustine, *Priscill.* 4.4.

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the sack of Rome in 410 and Augustine's subsequent resurgent interest in the origin of the soul.[60] Whatever the reason, we can be confident that by the time he was finishing up *Gen. litt.* and writing *Civ.*, Augustine was actively engaged in anti-Origenist polemic.

Second, Augustine's understanding of Origen's "errors" focuses on his theories of the origins of rational beings, both humans and angels—the very topic within which Origen himself first developed the language of angelic participation. For instance, in his previously mentioned *Heresies*, Augustine condemns Origen's supposed claim

> that those who have finished this life in the greatest outrages, crimes, sacrileges, and impieties, as far down as even the devil and his angels, after a long time, having been purified and liberated, will be restored to the kingdom of God and to the light. And again after a long time, all who were liberated fall back and return to these evils once more. And these alternating exchanges of beatitude and miseries have always been and always will be characteristic of rational creatures.[61]

Whether or not this accurately depicts Origen's own thought, these concerns about the supposed transmigration of souls within an eternal cycle reflect what Augustine would have learned about Origen from Jerome's vitriolic caricatures.[62] Although Augustine does not explicitly discuss Origen's language of angelic participation, it is likely he was aware of it given his familiarity with the theological conversation within which it occurs.

Finally, both of the works that contain Augustine's discussion of angelic participation also include references to these same Origenist "errors."[63] In *Gen. litt.* 6, Augustine rejects "the opinion some people hold, according to which souls sinned, some more some less, and were thrust down into different kinds of bodies, depending on the different degrees of their guilt."[64] This fits with what Augustine

[60] O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, 11–13. Burns, "From Persuasion to Predestination," offers an elegant analysis of Augustine's developing view of human willing, explicitly connecting it to his developing angelology and his rejection of "Origenism." Because he is not concerned with angelic participation per se, Burns covers more ground than I do here. Augustine's use of angelic participation language should be seen as part of that larger narrative that Burns presents. Of particular interest to both Burns and O'Connell is Augustine's discussion of human and angelic volition in *Lib. arb.* 3. It is noteworthy that in this early work Augustine does not use participation language to describe the angels. This further suggests that when Augustine does deploy this language, he does so with an eye to the Origenist controversy.

[61] Augustine, *Haer.* 43 (CCSL 46, 311); see also, idem, *Priscill.* 5.5.

[62] Jerome, *Ruf.*, 1.23, 1.27, 2.12, 2.15; *Ep.* 124.3–4, 8, 11. See also Augustine, *Ep.* 73.3.7.

[63] The passage from *Haer.* 43 even concludes with Augustine saying he has dealt with these errors of Origen in *Civ.*

[64] Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 6.9.15 (CSEL 28.1, 181). See also Augustine's rejection of the idea that "there can be a transference of soul from brute beast to human being" (*Gen. litt.* 7.9.13 [CSEL 28.1, 208]). O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, 201–45, provides a close reading of *Gen. litt.* vis-à-vis the disputed origin of the human soul. On the significance of Origen's legacy for Augustine's anthropological concerns in *Gen. litt.*, see esp. 218–19.

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would have known to be Origen's understanding of the pre-existent minds who fall into various conditions. Thus, when we see Augustine's account of the stability of the angels in the later sections of his commentary, we may assume that he has developed a greater familiarity with controversial aspects of Origen's cosmology and now wants to leave no ambiguity as to the fixed condition of the angels, ontologically mutable though they remain.

As circumstantial and veiled as the reference to Origen in *Gen. litt.* may be, we are fortunate that *Civ.* provides a more explicit and textually proximate connection to Origen. In book 11, the very same book in which he examines the nature of angelic participation and stability, Augustine dedicates an entire chapter to refuting Origen by name. He particularly ridicules the idea that "souls . . . sinned by withdrawing from their Creator . . . and merited diverse bodies like prisons according to the diversity of their sins."[65] Reading book 11 as a whole while taking into consideration the place of angelic participation in Origen's discussions of the fall and rise of created rational beings along with Augustine's wider concern with this aspect of Origen's legacy, it is difficult to separate Augustine's discussion of angelic participation from his engagement with the Origenist controversy.[66]

Therefore, we should read Augustine's version of stable angelic participation within the context of this anti-Origenist polemic. Augustine avoids the alleged Origenist errors by solidifying the status of the good angels and wicked demons as eternally and irrevocably established following that brief moment of volitional ambiguity immediately after their initial creation. In Augustine's cosmology, there will be no ascending or descending up the moral or ontological ladder for these spiritual creatures and therefore no transmigration of souls. Augustine's angels, though still ontologically mutable and possessing holiness only by way of participation in God, are able to rest in their participation, safe in the knowledge of their stability.

Conclusion

Angels are indeed "a thing" for late ancient Christians, as the socio-cultural analysis of Ellen Muehlberger has well demonstrated. Further, she is right to characterize the stability of Augustine's angels as a divergence from the fluid instability of earlier angels. I have suggested, however, that this shift can be better explained as one movement in a drama surrounding the ambiguous theological legacy of Origen as evidenced by an examination of how angels are described as participating in God by Christian authors in different but related polemical contexts. Origen establishes the idea of angelic participation as a way to account for diversity among created rational beings in a morally just universe. In the context of post-Nicene disputes—themselves owing much to the ambiguous legacy of Origen—Athanasius and

[65] Augustine, *Civ.* 11.23 (CCSL 47, 341).

[66] On the significance of *Civ.* 11, see O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, 291–93.

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Didymus deploy similar language to distinguish the mutable, participating nature of angels from the immutable, participated-in nature of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in his appropriation of angelic participation, Augustine stabilizes what he and others saw as the frightening instability of the Origenist cosmos. The story of the shift from instability to stability in the angels, then, is itself a story of instability. As a simple claim—the angels are what they are only by participation in God—migrates through different theological contexts, it evinces both continuity and discontinuity as it is applied to different polemical purposes. While Athanasius and Didymus maintain the traditional emphases of Origen in order to deal with the ambiguities of his legacy, Augustine turns the language of angelic participation back upon Origen himself or, rather, upon the caricature of him that new polemical concerns had created.

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