

Research Article

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‘You Are Gods’ (Ps 81:6): Jerome and the Legacy of Origen’s Anthropology

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Abstract: The paper discusses Jerome’s attack against the belief that human beings share the same substance as the heavenly powers and even as the Trinity, according to the dignity (*dignitas*) of the soul: in polemical texts such as *Ep.* 124.14, Jerome attributes this belief to Origen. Jerome’s intent clearly to demarcate the difference in nature between human and divine beings is also reflected in his exegetical writings, especially when dealing with Psalm 81, where human beings are addressed as “gods.” The paper investigates Jerome’s understanding of the *dignitas* of humanity as it emerges from his *Homily on Psalm 81*: the comparison with Origen’s own passages on Psalm 81 reveals that Jerome closely follows Origen’s exegetical argument. However, through a careful definition of human *dignitas* Jerome intentionally distances himself from Origen when it comes to associating human beings with immortal beings, most notably Christ.

Keywords: dignity, deification, participation, exegesis, Arianism, consubstantial, logos, translation, Psalm 81, Rufinus

1 Aim of the article

The paper concerns Jerome’s *Epistle 124* (*Ep.* 124),¹ written around 409 to an otherwise unknown Avitus, and Jerome’s *Homily on Psalm 81* (*Tract.81Ps.*),² which has been dated either to around 397,³ or after 410.⁴ Both the epistle and the homily reveal the influence of a text by Origen: the letter is written by Jerome specifically to discuss the heretical views in Origen’s treatise *De Principiis* (*Princ.*), which he argues were concealed in the Latin translation made by Rufinus in 398;⁵ the homily shows significant connections with Origen’s own *Homily on Psalm 81* (*Hom.81Ps.*).

¹ All abbreviations of the titles of ancient works, Scripture, and book series in this article are from the *Society of Biblical Literature’s Handbook of Style* (2014), 141–216; the quotes from the Old Testament follow the Septuagint.

² For an overview of the scholarly debate concerning the attribution of the *Homilies on Psalms* to Jerome, cf. Scardia, “Sinedoche,” 115–8.

³ Stefanelli, “Cristiani,” 103–4. If we accept this early dating, Jerome’s homily would be the first extant Latin homily on Psalm 81, as Augustine’s two sermons dealing with this Psalm, i.e. the *Sermon Dolbeau 6* (*Serm.* 23B) and the *Homily on Psalm 81* (*En.81Ps.*), are dated to 404 and around 415, respectively. However, even if we do not accept Stefanelli’s dating and instead believe that at least Augustine’s *Serm.* 23B preceded Jerome’s homily, it does not automatically follow that Jerome could have been influenced by Augustine’s sermon, even though in *Ep.* 112.6.20 (CSEL 55, 390) Jerome shows that in 404 he was aware of Augustine’s works on Psalms. As we will see in Section 3 of this paper, Jerome’s *Homily on Psalm 81* shows significant connections with Origen and does not have much in common with the anti-pagan argument found in Augustine’s *Serm.* 23B.

⁴ Capone, “Scomposizione,” 147–8.

⁵ Hier. *Ep.* 124.1.1 (CSEL 56, 96).

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In both the epistle and the homily, Jerome mentions *dignitas*, “dignity,” attributed to humanity: he clarifies that, although human souls have been endowed with a great dignity at their creation, his definition of *dignitas* does not entail that human souls may share the same substance or nature as the angels, or as God or Christ. The clarification that human beings are markedly different from Christ because as creatures they do not share the same substance of the Father, as Christ does, is important to Jerome’s polemic against Arian subordinationism.⁶ Arianism associated Christ with creatures and downplayed his divinity: the necessity to fight this belief was especially pressing for the exegetes of Psalm 81, where human beings are addressed as “gods.”

The paper investigates the significance of Jerome’s use of *dignitas* in the context of his reception of Origen’s views on humanity and its relationship with God, with the aim to assess Jerome’s strategy in dealing with Origen’s controversial legacy. The paper intends to show that Jerome is deeply aware of Origen’s exegetical discourse (as exemplified by their respective interpretations of Psalm 81), but that he polemically reconsiders Origen’s views on the theme of the participation of human beings in the divine through Christ. I will argue that Jerome’s use of *dignitas* in his *Homily on Psalm 81* reveals both his reception of Origen’s universalising views on humanity and his eagerness to present himself as a defender of the *homoousios*.

2 Rufinus’ translation of Origen, *Princ.* 4.4.9 and Jerome, *Ep.* 124.14

Princ. 4.4.9 is part of the final recapitulation of the most important points raised in *De Principiis* and concerns the theme of the immortality of human souls.⁷ The text is not extant in the original Greek, but, according to Rufinus’ translation, in *Princ.* 4.4.9 Origen defends the immortality of the soul based on the principle of participation of all reasonable beings in the divine.⁸ Origen claims that “everyone who partakes (*participiat*) of anything is without doubt of one substance and one nature with another who is a partaker of the same thing.”⁹ The terms *substantia* and *natura* are used in this text by Rufinus as synonyms,¹⁰ as he often does in the treatise.¹¹ In this context, *substantia* and *natura* may be the translations of *ousia*, understood as the common nature or essence, not as the individual, personal substance: in the case of *Princ.* 4.4.9, *natura* and *substantia* refer to the fact that different beings (i.e. the heavenly powers and human beings) all share the nature of intellectual or reasonable creatures.¹² Origen argues that if both human beings and the heavenly powers participate in intellectual nature – albeit not to the exact same degree, but rather “in a similar manner” (*simili modo*) – it logically follows that human beings and heavenly powers must be of one nature (*unius sine dubio debet esse naturae*). Thus, if the heavenly powers are immortal, then human beings must also be immortal. Furthermore, because every reasonable creature (*universa creatura*) participates – albeit with different intensity, depending on each one’s intellectual

⁶ For a historical and theological assessment of the various stages of the Arian controversy, cf. Simonetti, *Crisi*.

⁷ For the structure of *De Principiis*, cf. Behr, *Principles* (hence B.), xxvii–xlvi. For passages in the treatise where Origen claims that reasonable creatures, including human souls, are immortal, see for instance *Princ.* 3.1.13; Fernández, *Principios* (hence F.), 602.

⁸ For Origen’s notion of participation of the creatures in God through Christ, see Crouzel, *Origène*, 130–7. For more recent articles on the intermediary role played by the Logos, the Son of God, and by the human soul of Christ in the creation, fall, and restoration of reasonable creatures in *De Principiis*, see Evers, “Salvation,” 40–6; and Fernández, “That man.”

⁹ F. 960; transl. B. 581.

¹⁰ Cf. Edwards, “One Origen,” 92–3.

¹¹ Cf. Orig. *Princ.* 1.1.6 (F. 148); 1.2.4,6 (F. 176,182); 1.5.5 (F. 272); 1.8.3 (F. 314). *Substantia* and *natura* are also sometimes used as synonyms by Jerome, as for instance in *Ep.* 15.4 (CSEL 54, 65–6) where the Trinity is made of one and the same *natura* or *substantia* and of three *personae*.

¹² For the human soul as part of the reasonable substance of created beings, cf. Orig. *Fr.Jo.* 45 (GCS 10, 519). For the meaning attributed to *ousia* in Origen’s works and its philosophical background, cf. Limone, *Origene e la filosofia*, 257–95.

capacity – in the immortal nature of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, it follows that every reasonable creature must also be immortal.

In Rufinus' translation of *Princ.* 4.4.9, Origen focuses on what he calls the “inner human” (Rom 7:22), i.e. the part of the human being that is endowed with reason or *logos* since its creation “in the image” or Logos of God (cf. Gen 1:26–7)¹³ and is thus capable of receiving the knowledge of God. Because human beings were negligent in the pursuit of God,¹⁴ this capacity of the human mind to know God is now dormant, but all human beings always retain in themselves the possibility to awaken this intellectual potential and progress in the knowledge of God. Hence, it would be “impious” to believe that the “intellect that is capable of receiving God should receive the destruction of its substance” (*Princ.* 4.4.9):¹⁵ this would be like saying that the relationship with God is not enough to grant immortality.

On the other hand, the version of *Princ.* 4.4.9 transmitted by Jerome, *Ep.* 124.14.3,¹⁶ says that the Trinity, the angels, and the various heavenly powers, as well as the “inner human” created in the image and likeness of God, all “perceive,” or “are conscious of,” intellectual or reasonable nature. Hence, God and the creatures “are in some way of one substance.” This version of the text is much stronger than Rufinus' translation of *Princ.* 4.4.9: Rufinus merely stated that the fact that all reasonable creatures, to different degrees, participate in intellectual divine nature means that their substance cannot be corruptible and claimed that human souls were consubstantial with other reasonable creatures such as the angels. In Jerome's version of Origen, all creatures, including human beings and angels indistinctly, are somehow of one substance with God himself. Jerome comments that for Origen “even the human beings themselves according to the dignity of the soul are of one and the same substance” with the creator.¹⁷

In a work composed at the same time as the *Epistle 124*, namely his *Commentary on Isaiah*,¹⁸ Jerome proves that he believes that human souls created in the images and likeness of God possessed *dignitas* and were immortal. However, Jerome shows in *Ep.* 124.14.2 that he finds the idea, which he attributes to Origen, that the dignity of the soul could entail that the soul shares the same substance as God scandalous and unacceptable. Jerome explicitly declares that he wants to show the “impiety” of Origen's treatise, and also its lack of consistency, because, according to him, the same Origen who in another section of *De Principiis* went as far as to deny that the Spirit and the Son share the same substance as the Father and therefore have the same dignity,¹⁹ is now awarding the substance of the creator to the creatures, including human souls, by virtue of their dignity.

Because the original Greek text of *Princ.* 4.4.9 is not extant, we cannot say for certain which version is closer to Origen's original text. Thus, it is not clear whether Origen himself envisioned the dignity of human

¹³ The “image” of God is identified by Origen with the Logos and Son of God in *Princ.* 1.2.6 (F. 180–4). For the relationship between the divine Logos and the human *logoi*, cf. Maspero, “Logos.”

¹⁴ For the sin of “negligence,” cf. Orig. *Princ.* 1.4.1 (F. 240–2); 2.9.2 (F. 470–2). For the different intensity of the sin of human beings compared to other creatures, see *Princ.* 1.6.2 (F. 280).

¹⁵ F. 962; transl. B. 583.

¹⁶ Hier. *Ep.* 124.14.3 (CSEL 56, 116–7): *Intellectualem, inquit, rationabilemque naturam sentit deus et unigenitus filius eius et spiritus sanctus, sentiunt angeli et potestates caeteraeque virtutes, sentit interior homo, qui ad imaginem et similitudinem dei conditus est, ex quo concluditur deum et haec quodam modo unius esse substantiae.* This passage is considered by modern editors of *De Principiis* as a parallel for Rufinus' translation of *Princ.* 4.4.9 (F. 960–2): *Omnis mens, quae de intellectuali luce participat, cum omni mente, quae simili modo de intellectuali luce participat, unius sine dubio debet esse naturae. Si ergo caelestes virtutes intellectualis lucis, id est divinae naturae, per hoc quod sapientiae et sanctificationis participant, participium sumunt, et humana anima eiusdem lucis et sapientiae participium sumit, erunt et ista unius naturae secum invicem uniusque substantiae;* cf. B. 580; SC 268, 424.

¹⁷ Hier. *Ep.* 124.14.2 (CSEL 56, 116): *Et ne parum putarem inpietatem esse eorum, quae praemisera, in eiusdem voluminis fine coniungit omnes rationabiles naturas, id est patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum, angelos, potestates, dominationes caeterasque virtutes, ipsum quoque hominem secundum animae dignitatem unius esse substantiae.* Note that this sentence is presented by Jerome as his own remark on Origen, whereas the following sentence, containing the expression *quodammodo* (see my note 16), is presented as a quote from Origen.

¹⁸ Hier. *Comm. Isa.* 14 ad 51:12–3 (CCSL 73A, 568): *Iuxta LXX, ad omnem credentium dicitur animam, quod creata ad imaginem et similitudinem dei, suam ignoraverit dignitatem, sed timuerit hominem et filium hominis, qui solum potest corpus occidere, et immortalem se esse nescierit.*

¹⁹ Hier. *Ep.* 124.14.4 (CSEL 56, 117); cf. *Ep.* 124.2 (CSEL 56, 97–8).

souls created in the image of God as it emerges from Jerome, *Ep.* 124.14, i.e. as determining the consubstantiality between humanity and God. Fernández²⁰ compares the sentence “God and these (*scil.* the creatures) are in some way of one substance,” transmitted by Jerome, with Greek passages by Origen referring to “a certain kinship” between the reasonable soul and God.²¹ This comparison shows that the use of moderate expressions such as *quodammodo*, “in some way,” is typical of Origen’s language when discussing the natural affinity or kinship between human and divine: Jerome himself remarks that Origen added *quodammodo* “so as to escape the charge of sacrilege.”²² According to Fernández, although Jerome’s presentation of Origen’s overall argument in *Princ.* 4.4.9 is not accurate, the sentence “God and these are in some way of one substance”²³ is a real quotation from Origen and not a polemical paraphrase by Jerome. Fernández concludes that, in order to prove his – likely incorrect – point that Origen argued for the consubstantiality between creature and creator, Jerome selected a sentence by Origen which, when read correctly, in fact confirms that Origen maintained that there is *some* natural affinity between the reasonable soul and God, rather than fully achieved consubstantiality.²⁴

Simonetti²⁵ and Karpp²⁶ are also of the opinion that Jerome’s account of the text of *Princ.* 4.4.9 is not completely accurate. They point out that Jerome’s version interrupts the flow of the argument in *Princ.* 4.4.9 by not maintaining, as Rufinus does, the separation between two distinct claims on the immortality of the human soul. In Rufinus’ translation, Origen argues first that as they both participate in intellectual nature, heavenly powers and human beings must have the same substance,²⁷ and second, that because the intellect of human beings, created in the image of God, may be enlightened by God, then it must be fundamentally incorruptible.²⁸ The distinction between these two arguments is not as clearly demarcated in the version of the text transmitted by Jerome. Hence, even if a statement similar to “God and the creatures are *in some way* of one substance” might have been present in Origen’s Greek text,²⁹ overall Jerome’s account of *Princ.* 4.4.9 is not necessarily preferable to Rufinus’ translation, because it is possible that it puts together different parts of Origen’s discourse.

20 F. 963, n. 85; cf. Fernández, “Gli interventi,” 36–7.

21 Orig. *Mart.* 47 (GCS 2, 42–3): “The rational being of the soul, which has a certain kinship (τι συγγενές) with God” (transl. Greer, *Exhortation*, 76); *Cels.* 3.40 (VCSuppl 54, 183): “The rational soul, which at once recognizes that which is, so to speak, akin to it (ὡςπερὶ τὸ συγγενές ἐπιγνοῦσα), (...) assumes its natural affection for the Creator” (transl. Chadwick, *Celsum*, 156). Cf. Rufinus’ translation of *Princ.* 1.1.7 (F. 159, cf. n. 37): “There is a certain affinity (*propinquitatis quaedam*) between the intellect and God” (transl. B. 37); *Princ.* 4.4.10 (F. 966): There is “a certain kinship” (*consanguineitatem quandam*) between God and the reasonable creatures made in his image. The claim that reasonable creatures are “akin” to God is found without mitigating expressions (such as “so to speak” or “somehow”) in the Greek text of *Princ.* 3.1.13 (F. 602) as preserved in the *Philocalia* (ἄφθαρτον γὰρ φύσιν πεποίηκε τὴν νοερὰν καὶ αὐτῷ συγγενῆ); in Rufinus’ translation: *Incorruptibilem namque fecit esse rationabilem naturam, quam et ad imaginem suam ac similitudinem* (Gen 1:26) *condidit*. In *Hom.81Ps.* 1 (GCS NF 19, 512), Origen claims that the immortal spirit within all human beings “has kinship with God” (συγγένειαν ἔχον πρὸς θεόν); however, unlike *Mart.* 47 or *Cels.* 3.40 this passage does not refer to the human soul, as here the spirit (πνεῦμα) is markedly distinct from the human soul (ψυχή), which is capable of sin. Cf. *Hom.73Ps.* 2.1 (GCS NF 19, 238): There is a “kinship” (συγγένεια) among the souls of worthy human beings, even if they are not related by blood, because as they receive the “spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15) they all share the same Father, i.e. God.

22 Hier. *Ep.* 124.14.4 (CSEL 56, 117; transl. B. 581).

23 Hier. *Ep.* 124.14.3 (CSEL 56, 117).

24 Scott, *Stars*, 153–4 notes the importance of this distinction in Origen’s thought on the relationship between the creatures and God: reasonable souls have “a certain kinship” with God, but not “substantial identity.”

25 Simonetti, *Principi*, 561–2, n. 70; cf. id., “Dio (Padre),” 121–2: According to Simonetti, the sentence reported by Jerome is truly from Origen, and it indicates that for Origen God and the reasonable creatures share an intellectual nature, albeit to a different degree, and in this sense they “are *in some way* of one substance.” However, according to Simonetti, Origen does not argue for the full consubstantiality between creatures and creator, as claimed by Jerome: Origen maintains that only God possesses Being in his own substance, while the creatures only receive their being from God.

26 In Görgemanns, *Prinzipien*, 815 n. 69; 816 n. 70.

27 Orig. *Princ.* 4.4.9 (F. 960–2, 19).

28 Orig. *Princ.* 4.4.9–10 (F. 962, 20–966).

29 If this sentence was truly present in the Greek text of *Princ.* 4.4.9, as reported by Jerome, we do not know why Rufinus chose not to translate it here. On the one hand, in other Latin translations that Rufinus made of Origen, for instance *Hom.38Ps.* 1.10 (SC 411, 362) or *Hom.Exod.* 6.5 (GCS 29, 197), it is clearly stated that the *substantia* of human beings can be associated with that

It is doubtful that Origen argued for the full consubstantiality between creatures and creator, as he was accused by some of his detractors such as Jerome and Theophilus of Alexandria,³⁰ but not by others such as Epiphanius.³¹ Jerome himself is not consistent in his claims that Origen argued for the consubstantiality between creatures and creator.³² Furthermore, outside of Jerome's *Ep.* 124.14, the notion of the natural affinity between the intellect within human beings and the pure intellect of the divine is as far as we know not explicitly expressed by Origen in terms of human beings and God being of one and the same nature or substance.³³ Even in Greek passages where Origen discusses the kinship between the divine Logos and the reasonable substance of the human soul, such as *Orat.* 27.9,³⁴ his argument is closer to the discourse in Rufinus' version of *Princ.* 4.4.9, namely, that human souls are immortal because of the participation of reasonable creatures in God through the Logos, rather than indicating that all creatures are of one and the same substance with the Father. In fact, in *Hom.15Ps.* 2.8, Origen remarks on the difference between the human soul of Christ and the divine *ousia* of the Logos,³⁵ and the "consubstantiality" between the "unbegotten nature" of God and the creatures is condemned as "the greatest impiety" in *Comm.Jo.* 13.25.149.³⁶ This passage is explicitly directed against the Gnostic Heracleon, who, according to Origen, maintained that only some human beings were naturally endowed with divinity and thus predestined for salvation since their beginning;³⁷ conversely, as we will see in the next section, Origen maintains that all human beings are naturally capable of pursuing divinity as the end of their progress.

So, in *Ep.* 124.14, Jerome does not deny the existence of a dignity specific to human souls. He sees as highly problematic the idea, which he attributes to Origen, that this dignity entails that human souls share the same substance of God and of the heavenly powers. In the next section, we will see how Jerome defines the extent of the dignity bestowed on humanity by God, and how this correlates with Origen's views on the relationship between human beings and Christ.

of the angels but never with the *natura* or *substantia* of the creator. Thus, Rufinus might have felt that the sentence "God and the creatures are in some way of one substance" in *Princ.* 4.4.9 was unacceptable. On the other hand, passages in the treatise such as those mentioned in my note 21 show that Rufinus was in fact willing to include in his translation of Origen the indication that God and the reasonable creatures share some degree of natural affinity.

30 At least according to Jerome's translation of Theophilus, *Ep.* 98.14 (CSEL 55, 198–9).

31 Epiphanius accuses Origen of not recognising the consubstantiality between Father and Son and attacks Origen's views on the pre-existence of souls (*Pan.* 64.4.4–6; GCS 31 2nd ed., 410–1), but he does not indicate that Origen attributed to human beings the same substance as God.

32 In Jerome, *Jo.Hier.* 21 (CCSL 79A, 33), the view that the soul is the substance of God is attributed to Mani rather than to Origen, and it is clarified that Origen's supporter John of Jerusalem does not hold this belief; cf. *Ep.* 126.1.2 (CSEL 56, 143), *Jov.* 2.29 (PL 23, 326). While the works against Jovinian and John of Jerusalem were written by Jerome in the 390s, the *Epistle 126* was written only a couple years after the *Epistle 124*, so it is noteworthy that in *Ep.* 126.1.2 Jerome explicitly distinguishes between those who, like Origen, believe that souls are fallen from heaven (with no mention of the substance of God) and those who, like the Manicheans, believe instead that souls are an emanation of the substance of God.

33 Cf. Orig. *Cels.* 5.23 (VCSuppl 54, 339): the fact that God allows deserving human beings to attain a "more divine nature" (ἐπὶ φύσιν θειοτέραν) is something that goes beyond normal human nature (ὑπὲρ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν); *Cels.* 3.28 (ibid. 174): human nature (φύσις) becomes divine only through the mediation of the incarnated Christ.

34 GCS 3, 369: Each soul is nourished by the Logos according to its individual needs; the Logos benefits the soul because it is "akin" (συγγενής) to its reasonable nature or substance, thus making it possible that souls receive a share of the immortality of the divine Logos; cf. Perrone, *La preghiera*, 219–29.

35 GCS NF 19, 108.

36 SC 222, 112.

37 The polemic against the heretical view that only some human natures are predestined for divinity is a focal point of Origen's thought on freedom of choice as developed in texts such as *Princ.* 3.1 (cf. Norelli, "Marcione"); however, Berglund, *Origen's References*, 221–4 suggests that in *Comm.Jo.* 13.25 Origen might have misinterpreted Heracleon's thought on human nature, cf. pp. 316–7.

3 Jerome's exegesis of Psalm 81 and its predecessors

Although Jerome's claim that for Origen human beings shared one and the same substance with God can be doubted, it is true that Origen indicates in Rufinus' translation of *De Principiis* that, because of their creation in the image or Logos of God, human beings could attain a very high level of participation in God through his Son. In *Princ.* 1.3.8,³⁸ Origen claims that all human beings received, through Christ as reason, that they are reasonable beings; additionally, God gave them the possibility of progressing in their participation in Christ as justice and wisdom, until, by the grace of the Spirit, they become "worthy of God." In *Princ.* 3.6.1,³⁹ Origen says that all human beings received, through Christ as image of God, a "dignity of the image" that gives them the possibility of progressing in their participation in Christ until they become "like God;" by the intercession of Christ, finally in the eschaton human beings are made "one" with God.

In a text that Origen produced about two decades after *De Principiis*⁴⁰ and was preserved in the original Greek, the *Homily on Psalm 81*, Origen makes an even bolder statement. He claims that all human beings received, through Christ as God, a "gift" that allows them to become gods. Then, because of sin, human beings "fell down" (Ps 81:7) from the status of divinity into that of humanity, but those human beings who turn away from sin and receive in their soul the God Logos can be made gods again.⁴¹ The verses in the Psalm that support Origen's view that human beings were originally gifted with the possibility of achieving divinity through Christ are Ps 81:1a, "God stands in the assembly of the gods," and Ps 81:6, "I said: 'You are gods, and all children of the Most High'."⁴²

Christian exegetes from the second and early third centuries offered a multifaceted interpretation of the titles "gods" and "children" in Psalm 81. Some emphasized the universal dimension of these titles, bestowed on humanity at creation: for Justin,⁴³ since all human beings were indistinctly endowed with the possibility of becoming "gods" and "children of God" if they keep God's commandments, every one of them will be judged by God like Adam and Eve if by breaking the commandments they do not fulfil this possibility.⁴⁴ Other exegetes, such as Clement of Alexandria,⁴⁵ stressed the element of worthiness, presenting the titles of "gods" and "children" in Ps 81:1,6 as attained by exceptionally progressed individuals, rather than as originally attributed to all of humanity, at least as potential.

For Origen, the title "gods" in Psalm 81 refers, on the one hand, to the entirety of humanity, and on the other, only to righteous human beings: all human beings are capable of restoring their divinity, but only the righteous deserve to be called "gods" when they actually fulfil this possibility by detaching themselves from the sins of the flesh and by receiving the Logos in themselves.⁴⁶ From this perspective, we may understand

³⁸ F. 236–40.

³⁹ F. 766.

⁴⁰ Perrone, "Dating" suggests that the *Homilies on Psalms* were possibly delivered around 249; as for *De Principiis*, the dating varies from 215 to 230; recent scholarship tends to favour a later dating to around 229/230, cf. B. xvii.

⁴¹ Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 1 (GCS NF 19, 510–2; transl. FC 141, 440–1): Τί δὲ ποιεῖ ἡμᾶς ἀνθρώπους, ἵνα πεσόντες ἀπὸ τῆς θεότητος ἀπολέσωμεν τὴν δωρεὰν τὴν καλοῦσαν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὸ γενέσθαι θεούς; This "legacy calling us to become gods," which "ought to be received with the whole soul," is identified in *Hom.81Ps.* 1 with the Logos: ὁ μὲν λόγος ὑμᾶς ἐκάλεσεν, ἵνα ᾗτε θεοί. Origen explains: ἐρχομένην δωρεὰν θεοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, τὴν ποιοῦσαν ἡμᾶς θεούς, δεόν παραδέξασθαι ὅλην ψυχῆν, οἱ ἀμαρτάνοντες οὐ παραδεχόμεθα, ἀλλὰ ἐκβάλλοντες καὶ ἀπωθοῦντες τὴν θεότητα, παραδεχόμεθα τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονήματα (...). Θεὸς λόγος, ἐὰν γένηται ἐν ψυχῆν, θεὸν ποιεῖ τὴν παραδεξαμένην ψυχὴν. Cf. *Comm.Jo.* 32.18.233–4 (SC 385, 284–6).

⁴² Compared to the interpretation of Ps 81:6 produced by Origen, Mosser, "Psalm 82" argues that earlier Greek Christian exegetes, namely Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement were more interested in the declaration that human beings are "children" of God, rather than focusing on "you are gods."

⁴³ Justin. *Dial.* 124.4 (PTS 47, 285).

⁴⁴ Cf. Gers-Uphaus, *Sterbliche Götter*, 214: if for Justin in theory all human beings are worthy and can aspire to be called "children" of God, in practice this is achieved only by Christians.

⁴⁵ Clem.Al. *Paed.* 1.6.26 (VCSuppl 61, 17); *Protr.* 12.123 (VCSuppl 34, 177); *Strom.* 2.20.125; 4.23.149 (GCS 52, 181; 314). Cf. Iren. *Haer.* 4.38.4 (SC 100.1, 958): Ps 81:6 refers strictly to the eschaton, and not to the creation of humankind.

⁴⁶ Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 7 (GCS NF 19, 519–20); cf. *Comm.Rom.* 3.1.10–1 (VL 16, 198–9); *Comm.Cant.* 3.5.5 (GCS 33, 180), *Hom.Ezech.* 1.9 (GCS 33, 333): the entire human race has received the title "gods" at its beginning.

why in texts other than the *Homily on Psalm 81* Origen had interpreted the “gods” in Psalm 81 as referring not to humanity but to angels and heavenly powers.⁴⁷ This interpretation does not deny that the Psalm may at the same time also refer to the human species, which possesses divinity as a potential: for Origen there was no difference in nature between the souls of human beings and the other reasonable creatures, such as the angels.⁴⁸ In passages on Psalm 81, such as *Cels.* 4.29,⁴⁹ Origen explains that it is up to human beings to either progress through the Logos in virtue and reason until they deserve the title of “gods” (Ps 81:6) that the angels already possess, or to give in to sin and thus remain “human beings” (Ps 81:7).⁵⁰

Princ. 4.4.9 and *Hom.81Ps.* 1 are among the many passages where Origen describes the progress of human beings towards a close relationship with God as an achievement made possible in the future by an existing element of communion with God.⁵¹ This element is understood by Origen as an intellectual capacity or potential that all of humanity received at creation through the Logos or “image” of God; furthermore, Origen indicates that the help of the Logos as well as individual merit is necessary to activate this potential in every human soul. In Origen’s Greek writings and in the Latin translations, we find the concept of the human capacity to pursue a higher degree of participation in the divine expressed in many ways: for instance, in *Hom.81Ps.* 1,⁵² Origen refers to a “gift” (δωρεά) that calls human beings to become “gods” through Christ.

The belief that humanity received from God the possibility to progress in their relationship with God through Christ is also shared by Jerome: in his *Homily on Psalm 81*, Jerome refers to the high status bestowed on humanity as *dignitas*, which in his view stems from the fact that human beings may deserve to be adopted into the divine filiality of Christ.⁵³ However, as we will see, Jerome’s definition of human *dignitas* in the *Homily on Psalm 81* shows significant differences from Origen’s views on the relationship between human beings and Christ.

In an epistle addressed to Augustine,⁵⁴ Jerome enumerates the Christian exegetes who dealt with the Psalter. Of the Greek authors Jerome mentions, we can now read only two complete works focusing on Psalm 81, namely the *Homily on Psalm 81* by Origen and the *Commentary on Psalm 81* by Eusebius of Caesarea, plus a few references to Psalm 81 in Didymus’ extant commentaries on other biblical texts. Of these works, Jerome’s *Homily on Psalm 81* is closest to Origen’s homily. Capone argues that the influence of Origen on Jerome’s exegesis of the Psalter does not only mean that Jerome adopts some exegetical solutions by Origen,⁵⁵ but also that he directly challenges his views:⁵⁶ Jerome’s *Homily on Psalm 81*, compared to the one by Origen, confirms this.

In most of his works, Jerome refers Ps 81:1 or Ps 81:6 to angels or to exceptionally worthy human beings. In *Comm.81Ps.* ad 1a,⁵⁷ written before 393, Jerome had interpreted the “gods” in Ps 81:1 and Ps 81:6 solely as angels or saints; in *Comm.Zach.* 1 ad 3:6–7,⁵⁸ he interprets them as prophets, apostles, and other saints in

47 Cf. Orig. *Cels.* 5.4 (VCSuppl 54, 321).

48 Orig. *Princ.* 1.8.2 (F. 308).

49 VCSuppl 54, 242.

50 Cf. Orig. *Hom.37Ps.* 2.3 (SC 411, 312); *Comm.Jo.* 20.27.242; 20.29.266 (SC 290, 276; 286); *Comm.Matt.* 16.29; 17.32 (GCS 40, 573–4; 679); *Comm.ser.Matt.* 24 (GCS 38 2nd ed., 40), cf. Cocchini, “Discorsi,” 26–7. In *Hom.67Ps.* 1.5 (GCS NF 19, 188–9), the identification of the “gods” in Ps 81:6 with those who have received Christ in themselves, and of the “human beings” in Ps 81:7 with the sinners, is connected to the theme of the resurrection.

51 Cf. Orig. *Hom.Exod.* 9.4 (GCS 29, 242).

52 GCS NF 19, 510–1; see my note 41. In his assessment of the theme of the deification of human beings in Origen’s writings and especially in the *Homilies on Psalms*, Perrone, “Et l’homme,” demonstrates the key role played in Origen’s argument on deification by the idea of the participation (μετοχή) of human beings in Christ; see also Perrone, *Omélie*, 68–71.

53 Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 6 (CCSL 78, 86).

54 Hier. *Ep.* 112.6.20 (CSEL 55, 390), see my note 3.

55 Cf. Orlandi, “Aspetti;” Perrone, “Mysteria.”

56 Capone, *Omélie sui Salmi*, 15–6; for examples of comparisons between specific exegetical arguments by Jerome and Origen’s *Homilies on Psalms*, cf. Capone, “Vim facere;” and Scardia, “Tractatus.”

57 CCSL 72, 220.

58 CCSL 76A, 774.

the Church,⁵⁹ much like Didymus did in his own *Comm.Zach.* ad 3:6–7.⁶⁰ In *Tract.115Ps.* 12 and *Tract.135Ps.* 2,⁶¹ Jerome refers Ps 81:6 to those human beings who are so holy, so progressed in the truth of God and removed from human sins, that they are not called human beings anymore, but gods.⁶² In some cases, Ps 81:1 or Ps 81:6–7 are interpreted by Jerome as referring to people who possess the authority to judge other people: for example, in *Comm.Ezech.* 13 ad 44:23–4,⁶³ Jerome interprets the “gods” in Ps 81:1 as the priests, who were authorized by God to judge other human beings in this life, and who should be impartial because their actions will then in turn be judged by God himself.⁶⁴ Jerome’s interpretation of the title “gods” as referring primarily to a few selected human beings⁶⁵ is in line with the general tendency of the exegesis of Ps 81:1,6 as developed in the second half of the fourth century by both Greek and Latin authors, who tended to emphasize that the title denotes exceptionally progressed individuals, rather than highlighting how the Psalm may also refer to a universal human capacity for divinity.⁶⁶

However, in Jerome’s *Homilies on Psalms*, we also find passages suggesting that the title “children” of God in Ps 81:6 was originally bestowed by God on humanity as a whole.⁶⁷ Jerome, *Tract.89Ps.* 16, conveys that because of sin, human beings have collectively lost their previous status as children of God,⁶⁸ so they should all pray to God to guide them in the right direction until they return to be children of God again. Furthermore, in his *Homily on Psalm 81*, Jerome interprets also the title “gods” in Ps 81:1,6 as referring to humanity in general: of all the extant texts by Jerome or others dealing with Psalm 81, this homily is the only one that features *dignitas*. Jerome exclaims: “Behold the dignity of the human being (*vide hominis dignitatem*). (...) He (scil. God) gives to us the name (scil. of gods, Ps 81:1), so that he may give also the reward,” and: “Behold how great is the dignity (*videte quanta sit dignitas*): we are called ‘gods’ and ‘children’ (Ps 81:6).”⁶⁹

Jerome remarks that God bestowed this dignity of gods and children equally on all human beings, as indicated in Ps 81:6. Jerome explains that God gave equally to all human beings divinity and adoption,⁷⁰

⁵⁹ Cf. Hier. *Qu.hebr.Gen.* 6.2 (CCSL 72, 9).

⁶⁰ SC 83, 310. Cf. Did. *Comm.Gen.* ad 16:12 (SC 244, 226; 230).

⁶¹ CCSL 78, 242; 293.

⁶² Cf. Orig. *Comm.Matt.* 17.19–20 (GCS 40, 638–42), offering a similar interpretation of Ps 81:6 but with explicit eschatological connotations, i.e. as referring to the culmination of the progress of the creatures, when they will attain such an intense relationship with God through Christ that the Logos will be manifested to them in his full divinity; cf. *Hom.Lev.* 9.11 (GCS 29, 439).

⁶³ CCSL 75, 665.

⁶⁴ Cf. Hier. *Comm.Ezech.* 9 ad 28:1–10 (CCSL 75, 388). The name “gods” in Psalm 81 is interpreted mainly in reference to the judges also in Eusebius’ *Commentary on Psalm 81* (PG 23: 981–92), but cf. Gers-Uphaus, *Sterbliche Götter*, 275–82; 323–4. For Eusebius’ exegesis of Psalm 81 and the connections with Eusebius’ views on the Trinity, see Curti, “Linguaggio.”

⁶⁵ Jerome interprets Ps 81:6 as referring to the righteous (and Ps 81:7 as referring to sinners) in *Comm.Eph.* 2 ad 3:5–7 (PL 26, 479); *Comm.Matt.* 1 ad 6:14 (SC 242, 132); 3 ad 16:13 (SC 259, 12); *Comm.Gal.* 1 ad 1:11–2 (CCSL 77A, 25); *Comm.Mic.* 1 ad 2:12e (CCSL 76, 455); *Comm.Soph.* ad 1:2–3 (CCSL 76A, 660), cf. Did. *Comm.30Ps.* 20cd (Gronewald, *Psalmenkommentar*, 110).

⁶⁶ Cf. Basil.Caes. *Hom.Ps.* ad 115:2b (PG 30, 108–9); Greg.Naz. *Orat.* 40.6 (SC 358, 208), Hil.P. *Tract.135Ps.* 5–6 (CCSL 61B, 165).

⁶⁷ It is not entirely clear what Jerome means when he speaks of a previous status of humanity that was lost and must be regained. In his assessment of the evolution of Jerome’s views on humanity as compared to those of Origen, Caruso, *Ramusculus*, 379–620 argues that throughout his life Jerome expressed a distaste for Origen’s notion of the pre-existence of souls, and preferred the view that souls are created one by one; for Jerome, all human beings are sinners because their bodies make them prone to temptation, not because of a collective original sin. So, while the argument in Origen, *Hom.81Ps.* 1 (GCS NF 19, 511) that human beings have fallen from divinity is understandable in light of his views on the sin of the pre-existent soul, the discourse in Jerome, *Tract.89Ps.* 16 (CCSL 78, 126) that human beings “have lost” (*perdidimus*) the fact that they are children of God, hence they must “be made again” (*rursum ... efficiamur*) children of God, is harder to interpret.

⁶⁸ A similar view on Ps 81:1 is expressed by Ambrose in *Parad.* 13.61 (CSEL 32, 322): human beings originally were “almost” gods (*quasi dii*) but then with the sin of Adam and Eve they lost this extraordinary grace and ceased to be “like” gods (*sicut dii esse homines desierunt*).

⁶⁹ Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 1 (CCSL 78, 84); *Tract.81Ps.* 6 (ibid., 86).

⁷⁰ Hier. *Tract. 81Ps.* 6 (CCSL 78, 86): *Non dixit: ego dixi: dii estis, reges et principes, sed omnes: quibus aequaliter corpus dedi et animam et spiritum, aequaliter donavi et deitatem et adoptionem.*

and that: “We are all born equal (*aequaliter*), emperors and paupers; and we die as equal, for the creation is equal (*aequalis enim conditio est*).”⁷¹ Capone translates the term *conditio* in this sentence as indicating the status of created beings; other translators understand *conditio* as the common “condition” or “quality” of all human beings.⁷² Given that *conditio* indicates the creative act of God,⁷³ this sentence by Jerome can be understood as indicating that all human beings (and not all creatures in general) are created equal by God, and therefore equally share the *dignitas* of being called “gods” and “children” by God, regardless of their social status as “emperors” or “paupers.” Origen makes a similar observation: everyone is called by God to become god, not just “bishops, presbyters, and deacons” but also laypeople.⁷⁴ This observation that Ps 81:6 does not refer to the differences in social status⁷⁵ is only found in the two homilies by Jerome and Origen, and not in the other texts on Psalm 81 mentioned in this article. Jerome and Origen agree that the Psalm conveys that God wants human beings – all human beings – to become gods through Christ (as Jerome puts it: “I created the human being for this purpose, that from human beings they may become gods”),⁷⁶ and for Jerome this great favour that God bestows on humanity signals the high status or dignity (*dignitas*) of humanity.

However, Jerome feels compelled to clarify what exactly this *dignitas* of humanity entails: compared to Origen’s *Homily on Psalm 81*, Jerome appears more interested in stressing the distinction between the divinity that Christ possesses and the divinity that Christ bestows on human beings.⁷⁷ Origen describes the relationship between Christ and human beings as the one between a teacher and his disciples.⁷⁸ For Origen, the common objective that both the teacher and the disciples aim to achieve is that the disciples truly become what the teacher already is, by imitating him.⁷⁹ Hence, in this homily Origen does not produce definitive theological statements on the difference between the divinity of Christ and the divinity available to human beings. Instead, Origen claims that upon receiving the Logos “the whole human being becomes god,” in spirit, soul, and even body.⁸⁰

71 Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 6 (CCSL 78, 86).

72 Capone, *Omèlie sui Salmi*, 235: “Uguale infatti è lo stato di creatura;” Coppa, *74 Omèlie*, 211: “Pari è la nostra condizione;” FC 48, 106: “Our humanity is of one quality.” Ayroulet, “*Ego dixi*,” 301: “‘Nous partageons également la même condition’ Tout homme partage ainsi la même condition de par une même nature humaine créée.” For Ayroulet, this passage refers to a theology of grace developed by Jerome based on Greek predecessors, mainly Athanasius. According to Ayroulet, *Tract.81Ps.* 6 indicates that for Jerome human beings become saints, called “gods” and “children of God,” not because of their individual merit but solely because of God’s universal grace, expressed through the incarnate Christ. Caruso, *Ramusculus*, 379–620 offers a more nuanced perspective on Jerome’s notion of the interplay between divine grace and human freedom of choice, highlighting how they are both necessary to attain righteousness, or as much righteousness as it is possible for bodily creatures, cf. Squires, “Sinlessness.”

73 See TLL ad loc. The term is used in this sense for instance in Origen, *Princ.* 3.6.1 (F. 764) and in Jerome, *Tract.89Ps.* 1 (CCSL 78, 119).

74 Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 7 (GCS NF 19, 519–20).

75 Differences in status are presented by Jerome, *Tract.81Ps.* 6 (CCSL 78, 86) in political and economic terms (he mentions kings, princes, emperors, and paupers), and by Origen, *Hom.81Ps.* 7 (GCS NF 19, 519–20) in terms of ecclesiastical hierarchies.

76 Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 6 (CCSL 78, 86): *Propterea feci hominem, ut de hominibus dii fiant*. Capone, *Omèlie sui Salmi*, 235; FC 48, 106; and Coppa, *74 Omèlie*, 210 all understand *feci hominem* as “I (scil. God) created the human being.” Ayroulet, “*Ego dixi*,” 298–300 interprets this sentence in *Tract.81Ps.* 6 as “[Christ] made *himself* human, so that human beings may become gods,” and connects it to a similar statement in Athanasius, *Inc.* 54 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, 268). This argument regarding the incarnation of Christ is in fact present in the exegesis of Ps 81:1 offered by Augustine, *Serm.* 23B 1 (Dolbeau and Dulaey, *Sermons*, 268), see Puchniak, “Deification.” However, since Jerome does not explicitly state here that human beings are made gods through the incarnation of Christ, as do Athanasius and Augustine, in this case I will use the more literal translation of *feci hominem* as “I created the human being.”

77 See Hušek, “Rebirth,” especially p. 155–6 for *Tract.81Ps.* 6. Hušek observes that Jerome’s efforts “to avoid the direct language of divinization,” and instead use the language of Paul to describe the “adoption” of human beings through Christ (Rom 8:15), are motivated by the contrast with both Arians and Manicheans (p. 168).

78 Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 1 (GCS NF 19, 509).

79 Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 6 (ibid., 519).

80 Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 1 (ibid., 512).

Conversely, Jerome specifies that human beings are in fact not “children” and “gods” in a way similar (*similiter*) to how the Son of God is son⁸¹ and god: human beings are gods not by nature (*natura*), but by grace (*gratia*).⁸² Jerome indicates that this distinction is significant to counteract the views on the Son of God and his relationship with the creatures held by Arius and Eunomius. The need to interpret Psalm 81 in a way that defends the full divinity of the Son against Arianism is often expressed by fourth century exegetes: for instance, Athanasius claims that only the Son is truly God as he is one in essence with the Father, whereas human beings are called “gods” in Ps 81:6 not because of their nature, but because of their participation in the Son (οὐ τῆ φύσει, ἀλλὰ τῆ μετουσίᾳ τοῦ υἱοῦ).⁸³

Jerome adopts this perspective also when dealing with Ps 76:14b, “Which god is great like our God?” Because this verse seems to imply that there are multiple gods, both Origen and Jerome associate Ps 76:14b with the reference to the “gods” in Ps 81:1,6;⁸⁴ this association is not found in other homilies or commentaries on Psalm 76, such as those by Eusebius or Augustine. Origen explains that the name “gods” is bestowed by God on the righteous who receive the Logos in themselves, recognize his divinity, and participate in him. For Origen, these just human beings truly “become gods;” he remarks that from a hierarchical standpoint Christ is “incommensurably superior to all of them,”⁸⁵ but Origen does not specify in his homily exactly in which way the divinity bestowed on human beings is different in nature from the divinity of Christ. On the other hand, Jerome briefly explains: “the saints are called ‘gods;’” and specifies: “they are gods depending on grace (*secundum gratiam*), while you,” meaning God, addressed in the Psalm, “are God by nature (*natura*).”⁸⁶ So, while Origen’s main purpose in *Hom.76Ps. 2.5* was to demonstrate that Ps 76:14b and Ps 81:1,6 did not in fact support polytheism,⁸⁷ Jerome’s primary concern is to clarify exactly to what extent human beings may be called “gods,” and what is the difference from the true divinity of God.

The view that Ps 81:6 should not be interpreted as indicating that human beings are gods by nature is also present in Origen’s own *Comm.Cant. prol. 2.34* and *Hom.Exod. 6.5*.⁸⁸ Origen claims that creatures are in the Psalm called “gods” by grace and because of their participation in God, not because they attain the very same nature and power of the uncreated, incorporeal, immutable Trinity.⁸⁹ These passages would seem to disprove the allegations made by Jerome in *Ep. 124.14.2*,⁹⁰ where he accuses Origen of attributing the same substance to God and to human souls. The passages in the *Homilies on Exodus* and in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* are only extant in Rufinus’ translation, but the notion expressed in the Greek homilies by Origen, namely that human beings should strive to become “gods” (Ps 81:6) through Christ,⁹¹ is not necessarily in contradiction to the caveat in the works translated by Rufinus that human beings are called gods by grace and not by nature.⁹² In the Greek texts on Psalm 81, as well as in the Latin passages translated

⁸¹ The concept that Christ is the Son of God in a different way compared to how human beings are children of God is also found in Rufinus’ translation of Origen, *Princ. 1.2.4* (F. 178): only Christ is the Son of God by nature, rather than by adoption.

⁸² Hier. *Tract.81Ps. 6* (CCSL 78, 86); cf. Scardia, “Sineddoche,” 130–1.

⁸³ Athan. *Ep.Serap. 2.4–5* (Savvidis, *Athanasius*, 543). Cf. Basil.Caes. *Adv.Eun. 2.4; 3.5* (SC 305, 22; 164); Hil.P. *Trin. 6.18; 7.10–1* (SC 448, 204; 294–6); Ambr. *Fid. 5.1.21–6* (CSEL 78, 224–5); Aug. *Serm. 23B 2* (Dolbeau and Dulaey, *Sermons*, 270), *En.49Ps. 2* (CCSL 38, 575–6). The notion that human beings may deserve to be called “gods” in Psalm 81, but they are gods by the grace of God and not because of their natural qualities (*ex gratia ipsius, non ex nostra proprietate*) was expressed already by Tertullian, *Herm. 5.4* (SC 439, 92); *Prax. 13.4* (CCSL 2, 1174).

⁸⁴ Orig. *Hom.76Ps. 2.5* (GCS NF 19, 320–3); Hier. *Tract.76Ps. 14* (CCSL 78, 58–9).

⁸⁵ Orig. *Hom.76Ps. 2.5* (GCS NF 19, 323).

⁸⁶ Cf. Ayroulet, “*Ego dixi*,” 302–3.

⁸⁷ The same anti-pagan concern is expressed in a fragment on Ps 76:14 attributed to Origen (PG 12: 1540), without the reference to Psalm 81.

⁸⁸ GCS 33, 71; GCS 29, 196–7.

⁸⁹ Cf. Orig. *Comm.Rom. 7.1.2* (VL 34, 554).

⁹⁰ CSEL 56, 116; see my note 16.

⁹¹ Cf. Orig. *Hom.Jer. 15.6* (GCS 6 2nd ed., 130), *Hom.76Ps. 2.5* (GCS NF 19, 320–3), *Hom.81Ps. 1* (ibid., 510–2).

⁹² This view is also expressed in the Greek *Fr.Luc. 73*, attributed to Origen (SC 87, 524; transl. FC 94, 194): “This (i.e. John 1:12–3) means, not that [Christ] takes us up into God’s nature, but that he gives us a share in grace and bestows his own dignity upon us (οὐκ εἰς φύσιν ἡμᾶς ἀνάγων θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ χάριτος μεταδιδούς καὶ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἀξίωμα ἡμῖν χαρίζομενος). For, he tells us to call God ‘Father.’” In this fragment, the term ἀξίωμα refers to the “dignity” of being called “children of God” and being able to call God

by Rufinus, divinity is presented by Origen as possessed by God and the Logos immutably and eternally, while human beings have lost it and can only regain it through Christ.

The distinction between the divinity that is God, the divinity possessed by the Logos, and the divinity achievable by human beings is further clarified by Origen in *Comm.Jo.* 2.2.17–3.24:⁹³ the Father is *the* God, i.e. divinity itself (ὁ θεός, αὐτόθεος), while the Logos is made God (θεός) immutably by the full participation in the Father.⁹⁴ The reasonable creatures may be assimilated to divinity by participation in the Logos: as in the present time each individual creature participates in the Logos to a different degree, each of them achieves a different degree of divinity. Thus, Origen does not indicate that the difference between the divinity of the Son and the divinity available to human beings is that only human beings attain it through participation, as was later argued by authors such as Athanasius and Jerome in the context of the fight against Arianism. Conversely, Origen states that the Son also receives divinity via participation. Nevertheless, Origen effectively conveys the hierarchy between the divinity of God and the Son, on one side, and the divinity achieved by human beings who “become gods,” on the other, by highlighting the mediating role of the Logos: only the Logos attains divinity eternally and directly from the Father himself, whereas the worthy creatures who imitate Christ attain a mediated form of divinity, through the intercession of the Logos.⁹⁵

However, even with the specifications introduced in texts such as *Comm.Jo.* 2.1.17–3.24, in his exegesis of Psalm 81 Origen expressed his conviction that human beings can be assimilated to the divinity of Christ in bolder terms than Jerome ever did in his own writings. An indicator that Jerome is less confident than Origen in associating human beings with immortal beings, such as the devil, or with Christ, is their respective interpretations of Ps 81:2–3, “How long will you judge injustice, and receive the role of the sinner? Judge the orphan and the poor, give justice to the humble and destitute.” Origen first interprets this “role” in the context of the judgement mentioned in the Psalm, i.e. as indicating that, when we give preference to a wealthy sinner rather than to a poor but just person, we “receive the role of the sinner.”⁹⁶ Then, Origen offers another explanation: theatre performers are assigned specific roles that they have practiced; for example, an actor can “receive the role” of a king, a slave, a woman.⁹⁷ Origen explains that, when we have practiced justice, we “receive the role of Christ” and “the role of a holy angel;” thus, we should always aim to “receive the role of God” and never to receive the roles of the devil or his demons due to our sin.⁹⁸

Jerome adopts the interpretation with the trial between the rich sinner and the poor righteous person;⁹⁹ then, like Origen, he adds that there is also a deeper, more recondite meaning¹⁰⁰ to this “role,” which refers to acting. However, while Origen spoke of human beings assuming the role of the devil or of Christ, Jerome speaks in more generic terms of people “receiving the role” of the lion when they are angry, of the wolf

“Father;” human beings receive this dignity from Christ, the Son of God, but they do not become gods by nature. Thus, the use of ἀξίωμα in this text is comparable to Jerome’s use of *dignitas* in his *Homily on Psalm 81*. For the correspondence between derivatives of ἄξιος such as ἀξίωμα and the Latin term *dignitas*, cf. Rankine, “Dignity,” 22–4.

⁹³ SC 120, 216–22.

⁹⁴ Cf. Lee, “Seek,” 458: “Origen seemed to believe that the Son was immutable or fixed in his attributes, different in this way from creation. Therefore, though the Son does not possess his attributes essentially or by nature, they are not accidental to him in the way that they are for creation.”

⁹⁵ Cf. Russell, *Doctrine*, 145; Prinzivalli, “Discorsi.” The view that human beings may be called “gods” in Psalm 81 only because of the mediation of Christ is expressed by Origen in *Hom.15Ps.* 1.5 (GCS NF 19, 81).

⁹⁶ Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 3 (GCS NF 19, 514).

⁹⁷ Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 3 (ibid., 515).

⁹⁸ Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 3 (ibid., 516).

⁹⁹ Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 3 (CCSL 78, 84–5); cf. *Comm.Mal.* ad 2:8–9 (CCSL 76A, 919–20). The interpretation of Ps 81:2–3 as an accusation against the hypocrisy of those who are severe in their judgement with the poor and lenient with the rich is also found in Eusebius’ *Commentary on Psalm 81*; however, unlike Origen and Jerome, Eusebius does not say anything about the performance aspect of “role” (PG 23: 985).

¹⁰⁰ Hier. *Tract.81Ps.* 3 (CCSL 78, 85): *alia interpretatio sacratio*; Orig. *Hom.81Ps.* 3 (GCS NF 19, 515): ἀνακεχωρηκότα ... λόγον. For the comparison between Origen, *Hom.81Ps.* 3 and Jerome, *Tract.81Ps.* 2–3 cf. Perrone, “Ressourcement.”

when they steal,¹⁰¹ of the cruel person when they kill, of the clement person when they give alms, etc. So, Jerome closely follows Origen's exegesis of Ps 81:2, with the double interpretation of "role" in reference both to the judgement and to the actor's performance, but he diverges from it when Origen says that human beings may "receive the role" of Christ or of immortal beings such as the angels or the devil. This is further evidence both of Jerome's reception of Origen's exegesis of the Psalms and of his reluctance to follow Origen when the latter associates human beings with the heavenly powers and even with Christ without clearly establishing a difference in nature.

Additionally, Jerome distinguishes between the nature of human beings and the nature of heavenly powers. Jerome states that the devil was not created as an evil spirit by God; rather, he was an angel by nature and originally placed in heaven. The consequence of the devil's sin was for Jerome different from the consequences faced by Adam: when Adam, a human being by nature, disobeyed the commandment of God, Adam fell and died;¹⁰² conversely, the devil only fell because "the angelic dignity (*angelica dignitas*) cannot receive death, but only fall."¹⁰³ In this text, Jerome further proves that for him human nature and dignity are fundamentally different from angelic nature and dignity.¹⁰⁴ Like Jerome, Origen, Eusebius, and Didymus¹⁰⁵ also identify the fallen ruler mentioned in Ps 81:7b with the devil, the angel who fell from heaven; however, these Greek authors do not mark the difference observed by Jerome¹⁰⁶ between the immortal nature of the angelic order and the nature of humanity.

4 Conclusion

Origen's arguments are often more nuanced and articulated than as presented by Jerome in polemically charged texts such as *Epistle 124*. In particular, Jerome's account of Origen frames the unity between all creatures, Christ, and God as a consubstantiality already achieved in the present, whereas this notion is presented by Origen (in Rufinus' translation of *De Principiis*, but also in Greek works where Origen interprets Psalm 81) as a potential that each one must work to fulfill themselves, with the help of the Logos, who unlike the creatures, participates in God's substance immutably.

This reflects on Jerome's presentation of the dignity of humanity: Jerome believed that human souls created in the image of God were immortal and endowed by God with dignity. In his *Homily on Psalm 81*, Jerome argues that humanity has dignity because God created all human beings with the possibility of deserving the grace of becoming "gods" and "children" of God (Ps 81:6). However, Jerome feels compelled to find a way to speak of this great dignity of humanity without falling into what he presented in *Ep. 124.14* as Origen's error, i.e. merging into one and the same substance God, the immortal angels, and human beings based on the dignity of their soul, and without undermining the Nicene creed, which attributed to the Son the same substance as the Father and thus distinguished Christ from the creatures. Jerome accomplishes this by stating in *Tract.81Ps. 6* that no human being is or will be so worthy as to deserve to truly become "god" and "child of God" in the same way as Christ is, i.e. in substance.

Jerome's interpretation of Psalm 81 largely draws from Origen's *Homily on Psalm 81*, especially in passages where Jerome highlights the universality of the title "gods" in the Psalm, which reveals the high dignity bestowed at creation on all of humankind. However, with his clear efforts to define this dignity

¹⁰¹ Cf. Hier. *Comm.Ezech.* 4 ad 14:4 (CCSL 75, 152) for the depiction of sinners as animals.

¹⁰² For Jerome's interpretation of Adam's sin in this passage and in other *Homilies on Psalms*, see Caruso, *Ramusculus*, 612–4; Malavasi, "Datazione."

¹⁰³ Hier. *Tract.81Ps. 7* (CCSL 78, 87).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hier. *Ep.* 108.23.7 (CSEL 55, 341); *Comm.Matt.* 2 ad 11:9 (SC 242, 220).

¹⁰⁵ Orig. *Hom.81Ps. 7* (GCS NF 19, 522); Eus.Caes. *Comm.81Ps. 7* (PG 23: 988), Did. *Comm.Gen.* ad 3:22 (SC 233, 256).

¹⁰⁶ The distinction between human beings (Ps 81:7a), who experience bodily death, and the devil, i.e. the "ruler" mentioned in Ps 81:7b, is also observed by Augustine, *En.81Ps. 6* (CCSL 39, 1139).

in terms of grace rather than nature, Jerome consciously positions himself as part of an explicitly anti-Arian exegetical tradition on Psalm 81, represented by authors such as Athanasius.

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