

[This is the pre-peer reviewed version of the following article: “Review of John A. McGuckin (ed.), *The SCM Press A-Z of Origen*,” *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 15.3 (2008): 425-426, which has been published in final form at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9418.2008.00391_14.x/abstract>.

The SCM Press A-Z of Origen, by John A. McGuckin (ed.), SCM Press 2006 (ISBN: 0-334-04103-1) xix + 228 pp., pb £22.99.

As its title indicates, *The SCM Press A-Z of Origen* aims to give a complete overview of Origen’s life, thought, and influence in alphabetical order. After summaries of Origen’s life and work by editor John A. McGuckin, the book takes on an encyclopedia format. The individual entries vary, both in quality and in their mandate for existing. For instance, it is appropriate to place great emphasis on Origen’s pioneering work in biblical scholarship, over against the early philosophico-theological speculations that caused such controversy in the centuries after his death. Nevertheless, one is left asking whether it was necessary to have separate articles for Scripture, Scriptural Interpretation, Old Testament, New Testament, Paul, *and* John the Theologian (more commonly known as John the Evangelist). Such overlapping articles lead to substantial repetition.

Additionally, though the variety of perspectives is valuable to a certain degree, many of the articles spend a disproportionate amount of space either attempting to vindicate Origen against (anachronistic) charges of heresy or else praising his unique genius—all of which ill serves the audience of beginners at which this “A-Z” series is presumably aimed, throwing students into the middle of arguments with which they are, by definition, unfamiliar. The encyclopedia format has the positive side-effect of creating a kind of quasi-index of themes in

Origen's writings, but since the editor did not set out to provide such an index, the set of references is necessarily incomplete. The list of secondary works at the end of each article is helpful, but the same effect could be achieved with an annotated bibliography—and achieved more elegantly, since the existing format requires much flipping back and forth.

Overall, it is unclear to me what advantage the encyclopedia format offers over a traditional introductory text—indeed, the clearest and most informative sections of the book are McGuckin's synopses of Origen's biography and his extant works. The "A-Z" format perhaps makes sense for the topics of the other extant volumes of the series, such as Roman Catholicism, but for an individual theologian, it introduces a distinct element of confusion and repetitiousness without any obvious upside.

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