

Andrea Bianchi

HETERODOXY AND RATIONAL THEOLOGY

Jean Le Clerc and Origen



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**THE HISTORY OF HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIGNITY
IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION**



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Origenes by Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) courtesy of Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino

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Preface

The present book is the fruit of my PhD research. I am grateful to my supervisor, Elena Rapetti, my most important scientific companion, for her advice and the challenges she has posed to my analysis. Her encouragement to always strive for deeper and more complex layers of analysis has given much direction to my work. Errors remain my own.

I acknowledge and am grateful for the funding I have received from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 676258. This funding has allowed me to conduct my research in the best possible conditions. I would also like to thank the whole ITN "The History of Human Freedom and Dignity in Western Civilization" consortium of which I was part. This has been a very supportive Europe-USA wide community of scholars. I am especially thankful to Alfons Fürst for his feedback on my work during my time in Münster, for his comments and editorial notes on the manuscript and for accepting it in his "Adamantiana" book series.

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A special thanks goes also to Marylin Lewis for her kind support throughout the PhD process. Not only has she provided very useful links and insights from her research and crucial advice in the early stages of the process, her suggestions to improve my academic English writing have been precious for every page of the present work. I sincerely hope I was able to follow her guidelines, at least in part. Her enthusiasm for learning and for theology have been inspiring for me.

Finally, the biggest thanks go to my life companion, my wife Emanuela, to which this work is dedicated. Her love and the very numerous joyful moments spent together these years have fuelled my research. Her companionship in times of difficulty or distress has been incredibly important for the success of this work, and her careful listening has helped me look at things, scientific and not, from a different perspective. I thank her also for her ability and willingness to move from country to country for prolonged research periods during these years. Without her encouragement that I should embark on a PhD while it was only a dream, the present work would have probably never started in the first place.

Berlin, August 2020

Andrea Bianchi

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present work is to provide a detailed study of the reception of the thought of Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 – c. 253), especially his conception of freedom and its related theological doctrines, in Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736). In contrast to the case of a work on Plato, Descartes or Thomas Aquinas, for example, I think it is beneficial to start the present analysis with a justification of the choice of topic under scrutiny and the scholarly potential it offers.

Why Le Clerc?

Academic research has become increasingly inclusive in its choice of research subjects in the last few decades, and it now seems fully acceptable to the scientific community to have a detailed study dedicated to some intellectual figure of the past who had been branded as “minor.” This is of course not only applicable to female intellectuals of past centuries, but to all those who, in one way or another, are increasingly recognised for their contribution to the intellectual development of their age, regardless of how big or small this is judged to be. Leaving aside Origen for now, who is far from a “minor” of the past, this is indeed the case with Jean Le Clerc, the leading character of the present study.

While it is true that Le Clerc was very popular throughout Europe in his time, only a handful of scholarly articles have been specifically dedicated to an exploration of his thought in recent centuries, some of which we will review in the present work, and only three monographs. The seminal monograph by Annie Barnes, *Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736) et la République des lettres*, published in 1936, is still the most authoritative work on Le Clerc’s biography, while Samuel Golden’s *Jean LeClerc*, published in 1972, has mainly an introductory character. Part of the Twaynes World Authors Series (TWAS), it was the intention of Golden that this work would provide only a survey of the subject. The excellent work by Maria Cristina Pitassi, *Entre croire et savoir: le problème de la méthode critique chez Jean Le Clerc*, published in 1987, focused on Le Clerc’s exegesis and covered many other aspects related to Le Clerc’s epistemology. This is the most recent monograph dedicated to Le Clerc’s thought and is very authoritative in its content.

Although it is clear that Le Clerc’s thought and production is an under-researched topic, or is at least less researched than deserved,¹ the reason for such

1 DONI GARFAGNINI, *L'uso della critica* 113.

scholarly neglect is far less clear. It is certainly obvious that part of his status as a forgotten personality of the past is due to the fact that Le Clerc did not – at least apparently – propose a radical new way of understanding the world, or at least the world of philosophy, be it metaphysics, epistemology or natural philosophy. He has thus often suffered the much more visible presence of a Descartes, a Spinoza or a Locke, not to mention a Leibniz, a Malebranche or even a Newton, and many more. And yet, by recovering many facets of Le Clerc’s thought, I hope in this work to make a case – if not to convince the reader – that a serious study of Le Clerc is a worthwhile effort.

A reader approaching the present monograph might already be aware of Le Clerc’s importance for intellectual history. However, if not, or if the reader is only interested in the reception of Origen, I hope to show him a different perspective. That I make a case for studying Le Clerc’s works might sound obvious coming from the author of the present monograph, but aside from the fact that I hope that the pages of this work will speak for themselves, I think there are a number of perspectives that support my statement from the start.

My claim is not that we should approach Le Clerc as we do traditionally with Locke or Descartes, for example, but that Le Clerc’s possible contribution to scholarly research becomes more evident if we focus on early modern intellectual history. That is, to follow Sarah Hutton, we can consider intellectual history and the history of philosophy not solely for the ideas they provide, but as a conversation among contemporaries of Le Clerc that we can “tune in” to.² This is not to say that Le Clerc had nothing relevant to say that is worthy of note in a traditional history of philosophy or of theology of the period, as I will show. This is true particularly on the specific Cartesianism and empiricism that he practised. I believe, however, that it will be increasingly evident throughout the present work that it is in the domain of intellectual history that Le Clerc’s star shines the brightest.

Le Clerc’s relevance for intellectual history can be easily substantiated: most prominently through his vast and influential journalistic activity,³ which helped shape the early modern European mind,⁴ but also through his more than 800 let-

2 HUTTON, *Intellectual History* 935–937.

3 He directed three learned journals, the *Bibliothèques*, and authored most of their articles. The *Bibliothèques* appeared as *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* (BUH), in 26 volumes, from 1686–1693; as *Bibliothèque choisie pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle* (BC), also known simply as *Bibliothèque Choisie*, in 28 volumes, from 1703–1713. The last title of the journals was *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne pour servir de suite aux Bibliothèques Universelle et Choisie* (BAM), also known simply as *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne*. It appeared in 29 volumes from 1714–1727. The final volumes of these *Bibliothèques*, containing general indexes, appeared respectively in 1718 (BUH and BC) and 1730 (BAM).

4 BOTS, *L’esprit de la République des Lettres* 43–57.

ters to and from learned men from all corners of Europe.⁵ Le Clerc was, besides this, also a key figure in the intellectually fervent Netherlands of the 17th century for the role that he earned through his large production of treatises, manuals and biblical and non-biblical critical editions, most of which we will review in this work. Some of his works were republished multiple times well into the 18th century.

Granted that Le Clerc had an influential place in European intellectual history, the present work will be especially, although not solely, concerned with his contribution to the development of a notion of Christian orthodoxy in his time. This applies to Protestant Christianity but can also be of interest from a Roman Catholic point of view. Not only was Le Clerc a literate, but also a pastor, and although he was ordained as a Reformed pastor in his birthplace, Geneva, he later joined the Remonstrant (Arminian) Church in Amsterdam, whose main doctrines had been condemned in the synod of Dort in 1618–1619. Le Clerc thus became an “outsider” figure in the Calvinist Low Countries. Accused of Socinianism throughout his life, as we will visit again in the next chapters, he was also kept at a distance in his own church and in the Arminian-friendly wing of the Church of England, which was so dear to him. He had thus to defend and justify himself and his reputation on many occasions.

The present study is thus a contribution to the intellectual history of Europe, but more specifically to the history of the development of the concept of orthodoxy in early modern Protestant debates. The study of the reception of Origen, himself also considered an “outsider”, condemned in two Christian councils at Alexandria and Constantinople, is an excellent focus point through which a study of intellectual history and the practices of orthodoxy construction can be approached.

The close-up on Le Clerc’s relationship with Origen shows us a frame in the development of the European critical spirit or the crisis of the European mind, as Paul Hazard called it many years ago. Within this frame, we can experience from a closer point of view the intricacies of early modern argumentative practices in inter-confessional and intellectual debates regarding, among other things, the formation of orthodoxy and relate them to the more general intellectual developments of the time.

5 Mario Sina and Maria Grazia Sina Zaccone have travelled throughout Europe for many years in order to collect, edit, and publish all known letters sent by or to Le Clerc. These have been published in four volumes from 1987–1997 by L. S. Olschki in Florence as *Jean Le Clerc: Epistolario*.

Why Origen?

The choice of Origen is not casual, nor has it been critically influenced by reasons extrinsic to Le Clerc's production. My choice was dictated by Le Clerc himself. In 1706, in the midst of one of his many learned debates, Le Clerc had exclaimed *Dieu est bon!* in the introduction of the 9th volume of his *Bibliothèque Choisie* when referring specifically to his articles against the famous Pierre Bayle (1647–1706).⁶ This was an important chapter in the dispute between the two learned men, which had featured something like a puppet show of a Manichean and an Origenist battling for the winning argument. At stake was nothing less than the problem of evil and its (rationally conceivable) compatibility with human freedom and God's justice and goodness. While Bayle, generally speaking, considered the Manichean solution as the only rational one but really pleaded for a fideistic attitude, Le Clerc believed that he could come to the rescue of God with the help of Origen's arguments.⁷

In what followed, it was easy for Bayle to accuse Le Clerc of Origenism, a word that at that time included different layers of meaning, the most superficial of them simply being "heretic."⁸ It was similarly straightforward for Le Clerc to reject such an accusation and point to his only fictitious use of Origen's argument.⁹ The dispute faded away eventually, with Bayle's death in 1706 and Le Clerc's response to Bayle's posthumous work, but the two perspectives remained strongly consolidated. We will review this debate in much more detail in the final chapter of the present work, but for now it is sufficient to say that there appeared to be good reasons for Bayle's claim; Le Clerc's rational defence of theodicy was strongly based on a form of Origenism.

Le Clerc had even argued at one point that: "Il est hors de doute qu'il vaudroit mieux être Origeniste, que Deïste, ou Athée, ou Manichéen."¹⁰ Bayle's objections and Le Clerc's actual practices have thus given the first input to the present research. This debate, but also the fact that Le Clerc had at times supported his theological views on original sin, grace and predestination, and eschatology with a reference to Origen, render the Alexandrian the perfect focus point to uncover early modern argumentative practices, especially regarding orthodoxy formation, and provide fruitful insights for a study of early modern intellectual developments. This study will not be solely concerned with the Bayle–Le Clerc exchange and the

6 LE CLERC, BC 9 (avertissement) [7].

7 See, for example: BAYLE, Dictionnaire 2/2 (1697) rem. H 'Pauliciens' 761–762; LE CLERC, Parrhasiana 301–303. This debate will be reviewed closely in the final part of the present work and many more related references will be provided.

8 BAYLE, Reponse 4 22–23; Entretiens 20.

9 LE CLERC, BC 9, 107.

10 Id., Parrhasiana 314.

role of Origen in it, but this debate shows the importance of setting sail on this quest.

The focus of the present study and first indications on the state of the art

Once the rationale of the present analysis and its scholarly potential have been defined, it is possible to further clarify the research questions. Within the main research goal of an understanding of Origen's reception in Le Clerc, with a view on his practices of orthodoxy construction, the most important aspect I will engage with in the present work will be the role of Origen's arguments and doctrines in Le Clerc's theology, especially those related to freedom. The aim will be, in other words, to discover if Bayle's accusation can be substantiated and generalised to the whole of Le Clerc's thought. Was Le Clerc really an "Origenist", or was Le Clerc's defence and disavowal of Origenism rather genuine and more coherent with his overall thought? What, then, were the reasons behind his use of Origen's arguments? This challenging subject is especially worthy of effort, as in Bayle's accusation there is a large portion of a common history of ideas that is still unexplored. The present study will be the first monograph dedicated to this question, but not the first attempt to put this issue under sharper light. Excellent but only preliminary reflections have been made in the past and have reached different conclusions.

Luisa Simonutti did not handle the question of Le Clerc's Origenism specifically, but she discussed Le Clerc's early epistolary conversations with his fellow Arminian friend and teacher Philipp van Limborch (1633–1712) on the possible place for dissimulation in religious matters. Whereas Limborch was against it, Simonutti has shown that such a possibility was contemplated by Le Clerc in particular circumstances.¹¹ From this reflection we can infer that a sort of hidden Origenism in Le Clerc was a plausible possibility, at least in Le Clerc's early years. A conclusion in this direction was reached by Daniel P. Walker, who explicitly considered Le Clerc as a sort of disguised Origenist on eschatological matters.¹² Walker's reflection was mainly based on a particular work by Le Clerc, the *Parrhasiana*, written in his mature years.

Mario Sina has argued for a more "sincere" Le Clerc. He pointed out that Le Clerc was willing to express his genuine thought even in circumstances where it was clear that it would have been received with hostility.¹³ In an article dedicated to the discussion of Le Clerc's Origenism, Sina concluded that certain aspects of Le Clerc's thought prevented him from being a true Origenist, but rather that Origen's thought became part of Le Clerc's arguments if it was in agreement with

11 SIMONUTTI, *Arminianesimo e tolleranza* 30–42.

12 WALKER, *The Decline of Hell* 188–195.

13 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1, xvi–xviii.

certain truth canons he believed to be the best.¹⁴ Sina based his reflection on Le Clerc's philosophical/epistemological beliefs and his Cartesian/critical spirit, as expressed in both a selection of his main works and his epistolary. He came thus to somehow different conclusions from Walker and Simonutti. If we follow Sina, we must take Le Clerc's disavowal of Origenism seriously and must find other ways to understand Le Clerc's references to Origen in the debate with Bayle. These other ways, again, if we follow Sina, must be in agreement with Le Clerc's epistemological outlook.

Stefano Brogi arrived at a similar conclusion and argued that Le Clerc's methodological framework prevented him from being a full Origenist, especially Le Clerc's idea that only what is clearly revealed in Scripture must be believed. Yet, Brogi focused his reflection on the debate between Bayle and Le Clerc and also argued that a certain sympathy for Origen in Le Clerc, especially on the doctrine of universal salvation, was undeniable and in line with his Arminian theology. He has thus contended that Le Clerc's caution on Origenism with Bayle was more dictated by his need to defend himself from accusations of heterodoxy than from personal conviction.¹⁵ The result of this analysis thus points in two different directions: Le Clerc cautiously appropriated parts of Origenism but at the same time his epistemological framework prevented him from a full adhesion to Origenism. What is certain is that for Brogi, at least in the debate with Bayle, Origen was instrumental for Le Clerc in avoiding the final defeat of rational theology.¹⁶

A rather critical attitude of Le Clerc towards Origen has been detected by Gaetano Lettieri, who, again, based his reflection mainly on the *Parrhasiana*. He considered Le Clerc's use of Origen against Bayle as a polemical device and argued that Le Clerc's Origenian eschatology was dictated by a rational preference in comparison to a strictly Reformed eschatology as put forward by Bayle, but not in absolute terms.¹⁷ This is only partly close to the reflection of Brogi. Only a few years ago, Michael W. Hickson completed an English edition of the last work of Bayle dedicated to his debate with Le Clerc, the *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*, and in the long introduction to this work he sketched the contours of the debate. In his analysis, based on Le Clerc's works involved in the debate, he showed how Le Clerc exploited Origenism as a device, thus reaching conclusions that were partly similar to those of Lettieri and Brogi.¹⁸

Finally, another recent study, this time by Scott Mandelbrote, also highlighted Le Clerc's polemical use of Origen against Bayle. Mandelbrote also added the interesting remark that Le Clerc considered Origen favourably as a (biblical) ed-

14 SINA, *Origenismo e anti-agostinismo* 421–440.

15 BROGI, *Teologia senza verità* 192 f. 199.

16 *Ibid.* 201–203.

17 LETTIERI, *Origenismo* 318.

18 HICKSON, *Introduction* 43–50.

itor.¹⁹ In sum, the available research on this particular question is useful for the present work as an indication of different aspects of and possible answers to the main question. Yet, research has argued in various ways on this topic, and Origen's role for Le Clerc has not been examined in depth. This past research acts, therefore, as an excellent springboard for this present study, which seeks to enrich it with new insights.

Method and limits

This study adds unexplored layers to the problem through a different methodological perspective. It not only reviews previously analysed material but, most importantly, makes use of a much larger basis of references to Le Clerc's production compared to previous scholarly literature. It includes not only a comprehensive analysis of Le Clerc's works, but also of his epistolary correspondence and, even more interestingly, of his journalistic production. To embark on a research project on the reception of Origen in Le Clerc is promising because of the frequent appearances of Origen in Le Clerc's work, and not all reception quests can boast such a departure point. It could be tempting to stop at that, but besides these references I will also organically take into account his many other works and the intellectual-religious background of the time. Le Clerc's production is vast, and it was not possible to review every single work with the same depth, even if I touched upon, albeit briefly at times, every published work of his of which I am aware. However, I am confident about the results of the present analysis, but I am sure it could be further enriched by new insights in the future or even corrected in some of its parts. This is even more true if we take into account continuous developments in early modern intellectual history and the rise of digital humanities and the progressively increasing availability of large amounts of data.

Past personalities did not exist and write in a vacuum, and I will not present Le Clerc as a personality detached from his cultural and religious surroundings. The present research will thus try to also consider the intellectual background which helped shape Le Clerc's thought and to relate it mainly to Descartes, Locke or Le Clerc's fellow Arminians as well as learned debates of the time. I will not attempt, however, to extend the findings of the present research to Dutch Arminians of the time as a whole or other religious groups or philosophical currents. Much will still remain to be done, for example, on the reception of Origen in Dutch Arminianism, even after the present work. This latter would have been a wholly separate challenge to which one or more future studies could be dedicated.

A significant number of scholars, especially from the 60s of the last century onwards, have reflected on the possibilities and the limits of reception research, and it is clear that the identification of the reception of an author in another later

19 MANDELBROTE, Origen against Jerome 132.

author is a highly complex endeavour.²⁰ To mention just the most evident problem, it can easily become a biased quest in which research on the reception of Origen finds Origen everywhere, as with Augustine, Jerome, Scholastics, Cartesianism and much more.²¹ Reception research owes much to developments in philosophy and literary studies, as with Hans Georg Gadamer, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, who have criticised an overly positivistic approach to the past. Through their reflection, the focus in classical and literary studies has shifted from an excessive attention to understanding the author and the text, to including the reader of the text and what the reader does with the text.²²

The approach of reception research has been criticised from a post-modern and post-structural point of view for its seemingly arbitrary choice to focus on the reader rather than other factors, but Karla Pollmann has claimed that this criticism has not invalidated the approach. According to her, this critique has rather fostered the refinement of reception research, prompting an awareness of the personal beliefs which are at work in those committed to it.²³ Her definition of reception research is that it is:

“An approach to texts that concerns itself first and foremost with *historical* actualisation(s) of a text by one or more reader(s), be it by way of precise quotation, more or less precise paraphrase, or the mere apostrophe of the author as authority, and be it for rather mundane doxographic purposes, for political or other very specific concrete aims, or in wider interpretative contexts. [...] Reception studies [...] seek to understand textual interpretations as they have been produced historically in different times by various readers and analyse the process of producing interpretations rather than to provide them.”²⁴

It is this approach and its evident empirical component (“who reads what, how, and why”)²⁵ that I will use as my own throughout the present work. Pollmann has spelt out possible ways in which reception can happen at this more practical level and various strategies at work in the reception of a text.²⁶

The broad spectrum of material I will cover in the present analysis and the reflections on the wider cultural-religious background in which it was placed seek

20 For an introduction to the questions on and the various approaches to reception theory, see HOLUB, *Reception Theory*; KNIGHT, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, esp. 137–146; SEGERS, *Dynamics and Progress*.

21 POLLMANN, *The Proteanism of Authority* 8.

22 MARTINDALE, *Thinking Through Reception* 3; id., *Reception* 298. For an interesting reflection on the “old” and the “new” way of reading past texts and a suggestion for a balance approach of the two, see THOMPSON, *Reception Theory* 248–272.

23 POLLMANN, *How to Do Things with Augustine* 34 f.

24 *Ibid.* 32 f.

25 *Ead.*, *The Proteanism of Authority* 8.

26 *Ibid.* 12 f.

to mitigate the risk of either reading too much reception into a text or simply deterministically interpreting this reception according to my own beliefs. The importance of context in the case of reception studies is fundamental. As Lorna Hardwick has pointed out, reception studies “are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural processes which shape and make up those relationships.”²⁷

Another methodological distinction is important at this point. I will often refer to Origen as a “Church Father” throughout the present work, even if it would have been more correct to label Origen an “early Christian thinker.” Not that Origen’s importance as a giant of the Early Church can be doubted. Recent years, as well as the 20th century, have witnessed a rise in the interest in Origen. However, the fact that he was condemned by two councils remains a controversial factor. Hence, I have deemed it more appropriate to call Origen a “Church Father” on most occasions, because this is what Le Clerc did. Le Clerc’s reflections on the Church Fathers included Origen and it would have therefore been too confusing not to follow Le Clerc’s lead.²⁸ After all, in French-speaking countries the concept of who was a Church Father was very fluid and was tailored to the various needs of the various confessional groups.²⁹

A last point is my use of gender in the text. I use the traditional masculine “he” and “his” whenever I refer to the reader. I am well aware that this is only a limited choice and that my readership will be only partly represented through this linguistic device. I made this choice for reasons of convenience and to avoid overcomplicated language. I am grateful for the reader’s understanding.

Current research on heresiology, patristics and the reception of Origen

The question of Le Clerc’s Origenism, as I have argued before, is part of the larger research question on early modern practices of orthodoxy formation, at least from the angle I think is more advantageous to see it. The intellectual consequences of early modern heterodoxy, it has been claimed in a recent publication dedicated to the topic by Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, have been so far largely neglected.³⁰ Their work has provided useful insights in that direction, with two essays dedicated to Arminians, in particular Grotius, in their relation with Reformed and Socinians.³¹ Despite the many other excellent essays in the same

27 HARDWICK, *Reception Studies* 5.

28 An example can be drawn from the preface of Le Clerc’s *Ars Critica*: “Origenes, & plerique alii Græci Patres, Platonicis dogmatibus maximè addicti fuerunt.” LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1697), præfatio 6.

29 QUANTIN, *Le Catholicisme classique* 48–61.

30 MORTIMER/ROBERTSON, *Nature, Revelation, History* 1.

31 BLOM, *Styles of Heterodoxy* 47–73, MORTIMER, *Human and Divine Justice* 75–94.

volume dedicated to various other authors of the time, much needs still to be done, especially in the case of Le Clerc.

Irena Backus, a scholar specialised in the reception of patristics, and Philippe Bütgen, have also signalled a general gap in the study of heterodoxy in the early modern time compared to the abundance of studies on the reception of the Fathers.³² They have further highlighted that there exists a close relationship between the study of the reception of the Fathers and the study of early modern heresy. They have pointed out that although there existed different criteria for defining heresy among Christian confessions, at the same time, both Roman Catholics and Protestants used the same strategy to prove their orthodoxy. They defined their orthodoxy with a reference to the old, true, Church, in an attempt to negate the same orthodoxy of the other party. This was the *moyen par excellence* of the time, they claimed, to marginalise the confessional opponent.³³

Considered from this perspective, a short reference to current research on the reception of the Church Fathers in the Reformation and early modern time becomes important to better assess the findings of the present study and its contribution to scholarly research on early modern intellectual history. I believe that current research has shown a number of ways in which Christian confessions related to the Early Church, the more common and traditional being the polemical one, where Fathers were used as authorities in religious debates.³⁴

A good example from the early 16th century has been given by Andrea Villani, who discussed the polemical (and almost paradoxical) use of Origen against Luther by two Roman Catholics, Ambrosius Catharinus (c. 1484–1553) and Albert Pighius (1490–1542).³⁵ He also showed that this use did not mean a full commitment to the authority under question – and this could not have been true with Origen in any case – but a selective use of Origen targeted to what was most useful in the polemic.³⁶ Villani has also argued that such use of the Early Church was by no means exclusive to Roman Catholics, but that a similar approach was present also in Protestantism.³⁷ Backus and Johannes van Oort have shown that this was the case with Calvin, for example.³⁸ Calvin followed the traditional medieval

32 BACKUS/BÜTTGEN, *L'argument hérésiologique* 13.

33 Ibid. 14–17. QUANTIN, *The Fathers in Roman Catholic Theology* 984, has argued that, although such a polemical use of the Fathers was common early on in 17th-century Roman Catholicism, this changed during the century with a greater stress on Church authority.

34 For an introductory article on the medieval use of Church tradition as 'authority', see BOUGEROL, *The Church Fathers* 289–335.

35 VILLANI, *Origène* 223–255.

36 Ibid. 228–238.

37 Ibid. 223 f. This has been confirmed also in BACKUS, *The Early Church* 291–303. Similarly, KEEN, *The Fathers* 738, has argued that whereas Roman Catholics focused on Patristic agreement, Protestants preferred individual Fathers.

38 BACKUS, *Calvin* 275 f.; VAN OORT, *John Calvin* 697–699.

method of authorities “at least stylistically”, but he was no acritical follower of Church tradition.³⁹ Other reformers like Luther and Melancthon also recurred to the Fathers on some occasions,⁴⁰ and later on the early Arminians like Armin and Grotius referred to Augustine in a polemical way to discharge themselves from accusations of Pelagianism. Aza Goudriaan has shown how these early Arminians employed what he called “strategies.” They stressed their closeness to Augustine in certain times, but their closeness to the pre-Augustinian church in others.⁴¹

This relationship with the Early Church in Protestant Christianity was still actual in the time of high orthodoxy, that is in the long 17th century. Augustine was still instrumental for the Reformed to prove their orthodoxy, for example.⁴² This was so despite critical voices within their ranks, for example of André Rivet (1572–1651), who pleaded for a critical assessment of the Fathers. Backus has pointed out that Rivet did not propose an entirely new approach, but that his reflection was still very different from that of his predecessors.⁴³ Still, at times Rivet also used the Fathers polemically in the traditional sense and according to his practical needs.⁴⁴ This ambiguity in the use of the Fathers, traditional-po-

39 BACKUS, *ibid.* Calvin’s appropriation of Augustine’s theology was later detected by Jansen and his interpretation was criticised, even if Jansen’s primary confrontation was with the Jesuits and their interpretation of Augustine. On this, see KEEN, *The Critique of Calvin* 405–415.

40 QUANTIN, *Le Catholicisme classique* 65 f. A further example of this kind from the early Reformers comes from the Protestant use of the exegesis of the Fathers on the discussions concerning the canonicity of the book of Revelation, especially with Beza: BACKUS, *The Church Fathers* 661. 662–665. Again, a similar example on Calvin and Zwingli can be found in *ead.*, *L’Exode* 319–322.

41 GOUDRIAAN, *Arminians* 363–379. In another essay, GOUDRIAAN, *Augustin Asleep* 51–72, showed how Armin preferred the “awake” Augustine to the “sleeping” Augustine (the late thought). He was surely better served by the early Augustine. STANCIU, *Augustine’s Legacy* 168 f., has claimed that there was a proper reception and influence of Augustine in Armin and she has highlighted some points of agreement among the two authors. As with all reception research, I think further research will be able to evaluate this claim further, taking into account a larger source base than this study.

42 WISSE, *The Teacher of the Ancient Church* 45–55.

43 BACKUS, *The Fathers and Calvinist Orthodoxy* 839–841. 857–861. An example of a positive but critical reception of the Fathers many years before Rivet could be found for example in Erasmus. He was very passionate about the Fathers and studied them a lot, but he was still critical towards them to a certain degree: DEN BOEFT, *Erasmus and the Church Fathers* 537 f.

44 BACKUS, *ibid.* 865. Ambiguity towards the Fathers, as QUANTIN, *The Fathers in Anglican Theology* 1005 f., has pointed out, was also part of the Anglican experience. This reflected the different streams within it, something that had changed from the early part of the century. Initially, Laudian and English Arminian circles had considered the *consensus patrum* as a source of doctrinal truth together with Scripture, but this had been later confronted with a more critical approach to the Fathers. Such a critical approach was, however, again overturned after the Restoration. The result was that the Fathers became at times instru-

lemical but also critical, was still present in the later part of the century with François Turretini (1623–1687), but Eginhard Meijering has also shown that later orthodox Reformed used the Fathers in a much more speculative way compared to the early Reformers.⁴⁵ Mandelbrote has also argued for a more speculative use of the Fathers in the 17th century. The Fathers, he added, became like “quarries for contemporary argument and debate.”⁴⁶

The place of Origen within this patristic discussion was, of course, much more complex than that of Jerome and of Basil, for example. In recent years, a significant amount of research has been dedicated to the study of the reception of Origen and “Origen’s freedom” in the Renaissance and early modern time.⁴⁷ One of the most interesting reflections is that, starting with the Renaissance, there has been a “rediscovery” of Origen’s conception of freedom. This is not to say that Origen’s exegesis or spirituality was not present in medieval times, but Alfons Fürst has claimed that Origen’s conception of freedom and its metaphysical implications was at times an important inspiration for the Renaissance and the early modern focus on the individual.⁴⁸ He has shown how this happened, for example, in the case of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494).⁴⁹ Furthermore, Origen has been recognised as influential in Erasmus⁵⁰ and, going back to the article by Villani, in the case of the Roman Catholic Pighius it seemed appropriate to refer back to Origen and claim that, on free will, the Alexandrian had supported the golden middle between Pelagianism and Protestant predestination.⁵¹

mental in the traditional way, but that this was mainly restricted to the High Church. For other parties of the English Church, such an approach was considered with scepticism because it seemed too close to Roman Catholicism.

45 MEIJERING, *The Fathers in Calvinist Orthodoxy* 869. 884 f. A further example from the late 17th century is Bayle. DINGEL, *Kirchenväter bei Pierre Bayle* 32 f., has shown that his relationship with Christian antiquity was also at the service of polemics, it was part of a tactic. However, she has also highlighted an additional interesting use of the Christian antiquity in him. For Bayle, Christian antiquity became a way to criticise the present Church, be it Roman Catholic or Protestant.

46 MANDELBROTE, *Origen against Jerome* 135.

47 For a short overview of the reception of Origen from the medieval to the early modern time, including a preliminary bibliography, see LETTIERI, *Origenismo*. See also FÜRST, *Origen’s Legacy* 3–27. Within the present book series *Adamantiana*, dedicated to the study of the reception of Origen, a number of publications have dealt specifically with the reception of Origen in the Renaissance and early modern time: FÜRST/HENGSTERMANN, *Autonomie und Menschenwürde*; id., *Die Cambridge Origenists*; id., *Origenes Humanista*; id., *Origenes Cantabrigiensis*; FÜRST, *Origenes in Frankreich*.

48 FÜRST, *Origenes. Griechen und Christ* 171.

49 *Ibid.* 173–179. On Pico della Mirandola, see also the already mentioned FÜRST/HENGSTERMANN, *Origenes Humanista*.

50 FÜRST, *Origenes. Griechen und Christ* 179–181; GODIN, *Érasme lecteur d’Origène*.

51 VILLANI, *Origène* 246 f.

Despite the renewed interest in Origen, which was also fostered by the edition of his Latin and Greek works in the 16th and 17th centuries,⁵² Origen was still a highly controversial personality of the Early Church, and the French debate on the salvation of Origen is an excellent example of that.⁵³ Protestant scepticism towards Origen was also widespread.⁵⁴ Yet, following Mandelbrote, it can be said that, generally speaking, the perception towards Origen changed during the 17th century. Due to various circumstances, he became much more acceptable as a figure, despite the well-known unorthodox doctrines attributed to him. Le Clerc, Mandelbrote has argued, had been a driver in that change of perception.⁵⁵ In some other circumstances, as Sarah Hutton has shown, interest in the thought of Origen became real enthusiasm, as with the “Origenist” revival in English theology, advanced by Cambridge Platonism.⁵⁶

There was, in sum, a varied and changing attitude towards Origen during the 16th and 17th centuries. This was at times well within the canons of the general polemical attitude towards the Fathers. Yet, Origen’s thought, and in particular “Origen’s freedom”, seemed to be given special consideration in particular circumstances. This happened despite Origen’s “heretic” reputation. One of the results of the present analysis will be greater clarity regarding how some of the considerations I have made on the general reception of the Fathers and of Origen will apply, or not, to Le Clerc and the Arminian case. The background presented in this section provides a much needed wider perspective on the relationship between Le Clerc and Origen.

Chapter synopsis and final remarks

This work is divided into three main parts. In part one I pose the foundations for the rest of the analysis. This part provides sketches of Le Clerc’s intellectual profile, especially those traits that are more relevant for an understanding of his relationship with Origen. In the first chapter I analyse the epistemological foundations upon which Le Clerc’s considerations are based: his relationship with the thought of Descartes and Locke and his conception of Scripture. I then look at the epistemological but also theological consequences of such an approach. In the second chapter I uncover Le Clerc’s relationship with the concept of intellectual authority and with both the Christian and pagan traditions. This includes an analysis of Le Clerc’s relationship with the Church Fathers more generally.

52 FÜRST, Origenes. Grieche und Christ 181–183.

53 See DE LUBAC, *La controverse sur le salut d’Origène* 5–29. 83–110. For a more recent review of the debate, see RAPETTI, *French Debates* 47–65.

54 MANDELBROTE, *Origen against Jerome* 122.

55 *Ibid.* 122. 125. 135.

56 HUTTON, *Henry More and Anne Conway* 113.

The second part focuses on Le Clerc's multi-faceted reception of Origen and seeks to understand from a higher point of view how Le Clerc considered Origen. Its three chapters are dedicated to a study of multiple sides that Le Clerc saw in Origen. In the first chapter of this part I investigate the reception of the "philosophical" Origen, including Origen's Platonism. In the second chapter I consider how Le Clerc evaluated Origen's biblical scholarship. In the third chapter I look at the role of Origen as historical testimony and compare Le Clerc's practices in this area to those of other historians of the time.

The third and final part deals with Le Clerc's relationship with Origen's conception of freedom in theological debates. In chapter one it is the turn of the doctrine of original sin, in chapter two I investigate the doctrine of predestination and grace, and in chapter three I conclude with the debates surrounding theodicy. In this final chapter the role of Origen within the debate with Bayle, which I sketched in this introduction, will be further clarified.

The analysis I propose in the remainder of this work will, in sum, fill various knowledge gaps in early modern intellectual history. Because it combines intellectual history with the history of philosophy and history of theology, the present analysis will appeal to a number of scholars. This will be beneficial not only to those interested in Le Clerc as such or in the reception of Origen, but also to those interested in early modern dynamics of orthodoxy construction and in rational theology. My hope is that these new insights will result in an improved understanding of our contemporary world and its intellectual dynamics.

PART 1:
SKETCHES OF LE CLERC'S
INTELLECTUAL PROFILE

These two chapters of the first part are of an introductory nature and are dedicated specifically to a discussion of fundamental parts of Le Clerc's thought that will be essential for the understanding of the overall argument of the present work. It will be increasingly clear as the present analysis progresses how important it is to focus on Le Clerc's epistemological outlook, and many of the elements presented in this chapter aim to correctly frame Le Clerc's relationship with the thought of Origen. Whether it will be the epistemological value of Origen's theological ideas considered as conjectures or the weighing of Origen's most daring theological doctrines, or if it will be the case of the "respect owed" to early Christian giants or their theological affinity with Scripture, it will become evident in the last part of this work how these elements are strictly interconnected in any attempt to understand the reception of Origen in Le Clerc.

1. Epistemological Foundations and *Modica theologia*

This chapter provides insights into Le Clerc's epistemological framework and his biblical hermeneutics. Le Clerc attempted an eclectic synthesis of Cartesian rationalism and Locke's empiricism and made use of it in his exegetical work. This epistemological framework, combined with his stance on Scripture, shaped what was his particular version of the *modica theologia*. The next pages will be structured around these three topics, with first the Cartesian–Lockean framework, then the Scriptural and finally a reflection on what constitutes essential theological doctrine. The result will clearly point to an attempt to redefine the canons of orthodoxy and to the definition of what constituted, for Le Clerc, the value of evidence and conjecture in Scripture and in religion.

1.1 Descartes, Locke and Le Clerc

While still in Geneva, Le Clerc had been a student of both Jean-Robert Chouet for philosophy and Louis Tronchin for theology.¹ Chouet in particular, but also Tronchin, had introduced a form of Cartesianism in the Genevan academy which had an important influence on Le Clerc. Neither of the two Genevan professors could be considered a “Cartesian” in the fullest sense of the word, and we should remember that the philosophy of Descartes had been prohibited in Bern before Chouet’s instalment in Geneva.² Studies on the Cartesianism of Chouet highlighted that he was only a moderate Cartesian, and that his philosophical teaching was formally traditional-scholastic, but Cartesian whenever he saw fit (especially Cartesian physics and with a decided refusal to discuss theological questions).³ He had inherited a particular openness to new philosophy from his teachers, Kaspar Wyss (1635–1668) and David Derodon (c. 1600–1664).⁴ Michael Heyd has pointed out that Chouet did not ground his epistemology in the radical doubt of Descartes, albeit considering it a primary principle of knowledge – and Sina has further stressed the importance of this point for Chouet, something that really distinguished him from his teachers.⁵ Similarly, Tronchin remained an orthodox Reformed theologian, but his Cartesian tendency was visible in his rationalism and his appropriation of the principle of clear and distinct ideas in theology. This was part of Tronchin’s apologetic eclecticism.⁶ In contrast to Chouet, in which his

- 1 BARNES, Jean Le Clerc 40; FATIO, Louis Tronchin 630; SINA, *La corrispondenza di Chouet* xxi.
- 2 PITASSI, *De l’orthodoxie* 25; ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment* 33. The relationship between Cartesian philosophy and orthodox Reformed thought had been a troubled one. Descartes’ sceptical point of departure seemed especially problematic to many, for example to Gijssbert Voet (1589–1676), as well as what was perceived as a sharp distinction between philosophy and theology, to mention just two examples: VAN ASSELT, *Scholasticism* 138–141; VAN ASSELT/BAC/TE VELDE, *Reformed Thought on Freedom* 18; MULLER, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 241–243; LAPLANCHE, *Débats et combats* 138 f.
- 3 PITASSI, *ibid.* 24; HEYD, *Jean-Robert Chouet* 143–145. 153; SINA, *La corrispondenza di Chouet* xxiv–xxv. See also PITASSI, *De la censure à la réfutation* 154; STAUFFENEGGER, *Église et société* 380–382. On Chouet’s refusal to use philosophy to discuss theological questions and his debate with Malebranche on this subject, see HEYD, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment* 76–78. 86. It should also be remembered that Étienne de Courcelles (1586–1659), a key figure in early Arminianism, contributed substantially to the introduction of Cartesianism in Arminian thought. He was a friend and translator of Descartes: STANGLIN, *Arminian* 393.
- 4 SINA, *La corrispondenza di Chouet* xxiv–xxvi.
- 5 HEYD, *Jean-Robert Chouet* 150; SINA, *La corrispondenza di Chouet* xxviii.
- 6 PITASSI, *De l’orthodoxie* 27. 44 f.; *id.*, *De la censure à la réfutation* 154.

closeness to Cartesianism was much more evident, the philosophy of Descartes was important for Tronchin only up to a point.⁷

Maria Cristina Pitassi has provided valuable insights on the development of Le Clerc's Cartesianism (and his later departure from it), starting with the influence of his Genevan professors.⁸ She has shown that, in his early years, Le Clerc had employed the Cartesian conception of individual essence, a break with the scholastic substantial essence, to provide a philosophical explanation of the dogma of the trinity.⁹ She has also pointed out that Le Clerc would later abandon this form of affiliation to Cartesianism and proceed to a "mitigated Cartesianism", concerned only with Cartesianism as a methodological tool.¹⁰ This "methodological Cartesianism", where the influence of his Genevan professors was felt, but also and most importantly of Malebranche and Port-Royal,¹¹ was already present in the first part of Le Clerc's scholarly career, in the *Entretiens* of 1685. Here, Cartesianism was clearly described as a logic of reasoning: "Les regles que les Cartésiens nous donnent pour nous empêcher de nous égarer dans nos raisonnemens, sont assurément excellentes. Ils ont divers Principes tres-veritables."¹² One of the main methodological rules drawn from Cartesianism and the most relevant for the present work was that evident knowledge was true, as he later fully expressed it in the *Logica*,¹³ and that, as we will now see, the rule of evidence was based on clear and distinct knowledge.

7 STAUFFENEGGER, *Église et société* 380–382. For a more detailed analysis of Tronchin's Cartesianism, see FATIO, Louis Tronchin 317 f. 336.

8 PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 2 f.

9 *Ibid.* 4 f.

10 *Ibid.* 92.

11 PITASSI, *ibid.* 49 f., highlighted the crucial mediation of Malebranche and Port-Royal in this case, a mediation that Le Clerc himself had acknowledged in the *ad lectorem* of the various editions of his *Logica* [3], as she pointed out. She stressed the fact that the rules adopted for the search for truth in Le Clerc and in the Malebranche of the *De la recherche de la vérité* (evidence, progression from the easy to the difficult, reasoning based on clear ideas) were the same. The originality of Le Clerc lay in the fact that he applied this method to the study of texts and of history, where Malebranche had restricted its use only to the mathematical and physical domain.

12 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 209. Le Clerc stressed his only general attachment to Cartesianism also in his *Parrhasiana*. Speaking in the third person, he concluded, *Parrhasiana* 342: "Pour la Philosophie, quoi qu'il eût été instruit dans celle de *Descartes*, il ne le suit que dans ses principes généraux, qu'il juge admirables, & dont il croit que *Descartes* ne s'est éloigné, quand il est entré dans le détail; que pour avoir trop dépêché, dans l'envie de donner un Système complet, avant que de mourir."

13 In *Logica*, Le Clerc confirmed: "*Igitur Evidentia veritatis est κριτήριον, eaque demum vera censere nos oportet, quibus necessario adsentimur. Nam hoc est quoque Evidentiae proprium κριτήριον, ut adsensum necessario eliciat. Quaecumque ergo evidentiter cernimus consentanea esse rebus, de quibus agimus, ea vera esse censenda sunt. Contrà ubi Propositionem esse contrariam natura rei, de qua sermo est, evidentiter videmus, eam falsam merito*

In *Entretiens*, Le Clerc made an important addition to the Cartesian principle of clear and distinct knowledge. He was inspired in this, once again, by Malebranche, and he claimed that this principle of evidence was applicable only to the type of knowledge which was useful or necessary for salvation.¹⁴ This had important consequences for Le Clerc's approach to doctrinal truth. Clear and evident principles applied to objects not conceived by God to be known through human faculties would ultimately lead to erroneous conclusions.¹⁵ This argument was proposed again in a letter to Chouet of the same year, in which Le Clerc used Origen's doctrine of pre-existence as an example. He objected that Origen, on that occasion, had sought to know what was not useful or needed for salvation and therefore that God did not want to be known by human beings. This made Origen's doctrine a simple conjecture, even if the principles from which he had derived it were clear.¹⁶

Le Clerc had claimed that one must suspend his own judgment if unable to arrive at a certain knowledge,¹⁷ again an influence of the Cartesian methodical doubt, but he had clarified in the *Logica* the rules of plausibility which had to be distinguished from truth and falsity.¹⁸ Conjectures were part of that plausibility. What seemed really problematic for him were "complex" conjectures (*conjectures complexes*) where error was not limited to a single proposition but touched many different aspects of a question.¹⁹ What was the solution? He wrote: "Conjecturer le moins qu'il se peut, et ne tirer guere de consequences de ce qu'on a conjecturé."²⁰ He also added the principles to be used with conjectures:

dicimus": LE CLERC, *Opera philosophica 1 Logica* (1700) 96. Among the reasons for such a conclusion was that God was a guarantor of the truth of evidence: *ibid.* 95.

14 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 333–336. We find this addition also in the fifth volume of *BUH*, published in 1687, in an article intended as a review of the *Entretiens*. Here, LE CLERC, *BUH* 5 (art. 11/2) 193, repeated that "comme nos sens ne nous ont été donnez que pour la conservation de nôtre corps, & que c'est par rapport à cela qu'il faut juger de leurs dépositions, & ne pas s'imaginer d'en apprendre davantage par leur moien: ainsi les lumières de la raison ne nous aiant été données que pour nous conduire au bonheur éternel, on ne doit pas s'attendre qu'elles nous instruisent clairement de ce qui n'a aucun rapport à cette fin, ou qui n'a pas une liaison nécessaire avec les choses qui y ont du rapport; de sorte que sans le connoître on ne puisse s'instruire de ces dernières veritez." Chouet had already noted the influence of Malebranche on this point. He had expressed his objection to Le Clerc's extension of the principle of Malebranche, conceived for sensual knowledge, to the realm of rationality: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario 1* (letter 92 of 16 June 1685, Chouet to Le Clerc) 346. On this, see also IOFRIDA, *Note sul pensiero* 1502.

15 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 215 f. 227. 233.

16 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario 1* (letter 103 of October 1685, Le Clerc to Chouet) 391 f.

17 For this principle applied to doctrinal controversies, see for example LE CLERC, *De l'incredulité* 199.

18 *Id.*, *Opera philosophica 1 Logica* (1700) 97–111.

19 *Id.*, *Parrhasiana* 360.

20 *Ibid.* 360 f.

“1. Il faut que toute conjecture soit vrai-semblable: 2. Il faut qu'elle soit la plus simple qu'il est possible: 3. Il faut s'abstenir d'en tirer des conséquences: 4. Il en faut parler tout autrement que de ce qu'on fait assurément; c'est à dire en doutant: 5. Il ne faut point se croire engagé d'honneur à la défendre, ni faire difficulté de l'abandonner: 6. Si on croit la devoir soutenir, il ne faut pas recourir pour cela à de nouvelles suppositions.”²¹

Conjectures were not absent in Le Clerc, but it was the truth claim of these conjectures that Le Clerc had disputed and which followed the Cartesian rule of evidence. Thus, with Origen's pre-existence doctrine, the conjecture was not the problem, but the truth claim.

This last point was of a particularly sensitive nature for Le Clerc because, if one did not recognise it, it exposed Cartesian philosophy to the same criticism Le Clerc had applied to traditional philosophy in general. The idea behind some of Le Clerc's chapters in the *Entretiens* was to show the fallacy of most metaphysical knowledge, and this critique to conjecture brought him to criticise not only traditional scholastic philosophy but also Cartesian philosophy itself. Again, another example, this time applied directly to Cartesianism, was concerned with Descartes' voluntarist conception of divine will, to which he opposed Malebranche's doctrine of eternal truths independent from divine will. He concluded that: “C'est ainsi que la témérité des Philosophes fait naître des disputes qui nous seroient tout à fait inconnues, s'il s'étoient tenus renfermez dans les bornes de ce qu'on peut connoître clairement, & de ce qu'il nous est utile de savoir.”²² Thus Cartesian philosophy had to be utilised with an awareness of its limits. There was a degree of trust by Le Clerc in the ability of the human mind to grasp at least certain truths, even if in other realms of knowledge, a form of scepticism seemed at times the only option.²³

In his reply to Le Clerc on the latter's idea that only what is necessary for salvation can be known evidently, Chouet observed on this point that Le Clerc's principle of usefulness was not sound. He also claimed that Le Clerc had wrongly confused Cartesian philosophy with the philosophy of Malebranche and with Scholastic philosophy in his generalised attack against metaphysics.²⁴ But Le Clerc insisted:

21 Ibid. 362 f.

22 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 256.

23 So LE CLERC, BC 2 (art. 2) 129 f., noted in an article dedicated to Ralph Cudworth's (1617–1688) theory of plastic natures, where still much doubt remained: “Le premier degré de la connoissance est celui de ceux, qui sont exactement instruits de la Verité, mais quand on n'y peut pas parvenir, le second est de ne se tromper pas, en croyant savoir ce qu'on ne sait point. Si nous ne pouvons pas atteindre au premier, il faut au moins tâcher de parvenir au second. C'est là toute la consolation que nous pouvons avoir; dans les ténèbres qui nous environnent ici bas.”

24 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 92 of 16 June 1685, Chouet to Le Clerc) 343–347.

“Au reste, Monsieur, en me plaignant des Cartésiens et en les enveloppant avec les autres, je n'ay pas prétendu n'en excepter personne; mais il est vrai que les Cartésiens de Hollande ont si fort abusé des Principes de Descartes, qu'il en est tombé un grand nombre dans l'Atheïsme, et qu'il y en a une infinité qui s'en servent pour défendre les sotises et les impietez de la Theologie ordinaire. Il est dang<er>eux [sic] qu'avec le temps cette Philosophie, qui autrement est incomparable, ne fasse beaucoup plus de mal que celle de Platon et d'Aristote. On doit tâcher de prévenir ce malheur, sans néanmoins rejeter ce qu'il y a de bon dans la Philosophie moderne, comme j'ay tâché de faire.”²⁵

Le Clerc's was thus aware of the dangers of Cartesianism but considered it negatively only to the extent that it was misused.²⁶

Le Clerc's methodological Cartesianism obviously presupposed that rationality could, and actually should, be used in theology. As Simonutti has pointed out, the “rationalist” approach in Le Clerc followed Descartes to a certain extent and Tronchin but differed from Chouet. She has argued that his rationalism was also a debtor of Spinozism and was not discordant with Arminianism and its rationalist Erasmian tradition.²⁷ Le Clerc's conviction was that the Christian religion was fully rational and his firm belief was that “l'on n'est incrédule que parce qu'on raisonne mal.”²⁸ In the treatise *De l'Incrédulité*, he claimed that: “de quelque coté que j'aie tourné la Religion Chrétienne, elle m'a toujours paru fondée sur des Preuves inébranlables, comme il m'a semblé que sa doctrine est parfaitement conforme à la droite Raison, & pour tout dire en un mot, digne du Createur du Ciel & de la Terre.”²⁹ The reasonableness of religion, as is evident from this last quote and in many other passages of Le Clerc's work, was both factual and speculative. It was factual in the sense that the Christian religion was supported by historically established facts narrated in Scripture, especially in the Gospel, and the related miracles.³⁰ It was not mere credulity of a story which had been invented, which was the

25 Ibid. (letter 103 of October 1685, Le Clerc to Chouet) 394. On this debate between Chouet and Le Clerc, see also HEYD, *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment* 79 f.

26 Again, in another example, this time from the third volume of the *Ars Critica*, LE CLERC, *Epistolæ criticae et ecclesiasticae* (ep. 8) 221 f., criticised the use of Cartesianism in the interpretation of Scripture which ultimately was instrumental to a support of the own theology: “*Quin & hodie, postquam Aristotelis auctoritas fermè concidit, & magis adridere cæperunt Ren. Cartesii aliorumque recentiorum inventa, ex illis iam cæpimus Scripturam interpretari. [...] Attamen abstinendum esset ab eorum consuetudine, qui ex detorta Scriptura Philosophiæ suæ dogmata, firmare conantur; cum satis sit eam Veritati nihil contrarii habere, nisi fortè interdum cum vulgo loquatur.*”

27 SIMONUTTI, *Arminianesimo e tolleranza* 5. 45. 50 f.

28 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 416. This quote was taken from a passage where Le Clerc was discussing the plan behind his treatise *De l'Incrédulité*.

29 Id., *De l'incrédulité* (avertissement) [1 f.].

30 A detailed defence of the truthfulness of miracles against the attack of Spinoza was at the back of his *De l'incrédulité*: ibid. 353–376.

accusation Le Clerc applied to stories of pagan oracles, for example.³¹ In the right conditions, historical facts earned for Le Clerc the same degree of evidence as geometrical-mathematical knowledge.³² The rationality of the Christian religion was also of speculative nature because it comprised that its doctrines necessary for salvation (but all other doctrines were not excluded) were in accordance with “the right reason” (*recta ratio*).³³ The “right reason” to which Le Clerc appealed was common sense reason. This was a general capacity to think and recognise degrees of evidence united with an understanding of common linguistic notions.³⁴

Although Le Clerc’s presupposition was that the Christian religion fully conformed to general rationality, it needs to be pointed out that, as we saw earlier, for him, human reason had limits that had been set by God. Le Clerc was no overconfident rationalist (or deist, for instance) but believed that still much of religion was also a mystery. In matters of religion, reason was capable of acquiring certain knowledge only up to a point, especially on speculative matters. An approximate knowledge of speculative matters was, in fact, enough to be saved:

“Ce n’est pas que nous comprenions entièrement toutes les choses, dont les Apôtres nous parlent, telles que sont, par exemple, les propriétés divines; mais au moins nous nous en formons quelque idée, qui n’est nullement contraire à la Raison; & il n’est pas besoin que

31 Id., BC 13 (art. 3) 188. Le Clerc took part in the dispute between Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), who had criticised pagan oracles on the basis of Anton Van Dale’s (1638–1708) work (*De oraculis veterum ethnicorum dissertationes duæ*, 1683), and Jean-François Baltus (1667–1743), who believed in the demonic nature of pagan oracles. LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 2) 106–171; BC 13 (art. 3) 178–282, took a middle position and, although he recognised that many pagan oracles were simply fraudulent, he did not exclude the possibility that some of them were of demonic nature. The problem, he claimed, was that we are not able to know which are the true and which are the false ones.

32 Id., *Opera philosophica 1 Logica* (1700) 105: “*In hac porrò verisimilitudine rerum ab alio narratarum, quò plures aut pauciores ex memoratis circumstantiis occurrunt, eò minor aut major est. Imò ubi contingit omnes, aut longè plurimas occurrere, tanta est vis juncturarum earum circumstantiarum, ut animos nostros æquè afficiant ac maxima evidentia. Exempli gratiâ, qui legit Historias rerum à Romanis gestarum non magis an fuerit Julius Cæsar, anve Pompeium vicerit, quàm an lineæ à circumferentia circuli ad centrum ductæ sint æquales, dubitare potest.*”

33 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 588, expressed the same thought towards the end of his scholarly career within a discussion of the rationality of religion: “*Religio Christiana nititur factis, quorum Veritas, non aliter ac ceterarum Historiarum, etiam indoctis, demonstrari potest. Habet dogmata præcepta cum recta ratione omnino consentientia; quod, pro hominum captu, cuivis ab homine perito demonstrari potest.*”

34 Id., *De l’incrédulité* 245: “Au contraire, ils [speaking of the intention of the Apostles when writing the New Testament] supposent par tout que l’on doit examiner ce qu’ils disent, & ne s’y rendre qu’après avoir reconnu qu’ils n’avançant que la Vérité. Ils supposent aussi, que nous sommes raisonnables, & capables de donner un bon sens à leurs paroles; en nous servant de tout ce qu’on a accoutumé d’employer pour entendre le langage des autres.”

nous en ayons une idée complete & exacte, pour être sauvez. [...] il faut se souvenir que nous n'avons pas des idées exactes de tout, & ne juger que de ce que nous connoissons."³⁵

For the reader familiar with the work of John Locke and knowledgeable about the fact that Le Clerc and Locke maintained a long-lasting friendship from the time when Locke had been in Amsterdam,³⁶ this last quote echoes some of Lockes' attitude toward religion. Le Clerc stressed the inability to come to a fully rational understanding of the truths of Christian religion but at the same time pointed out that these truths were not contrary to reason. This was the "above reason" of Locke, (but equally shared by Jaquelot, an agreement expressed by Le Clerc himself)³⁷ where religion was considered fully rational in all its forms, even if many of these reasons escaped human rationality. In those cases, revelation was sufficient to establish truth.³⁸

Proof of Le Clerc's direct attachment to Locke's system is not hard to find in Le Clerc's writings. An extract of Locke's *Essay* appeared in *BUH* as early as in 1688, and in chapter 19 of the extract, Locke discussed the relationship between revelation and reason. He contended that, in case of probable rational knowledge, revelation is able to silence reason but that, still, revelation must be in accordance with the clear and evident principles of our reason.³⁹ The same argument can be found some years later in the treatise *De l'Incredulité*, where Le Clerc contended that:

"L'on ne peut pas nier cette proposition: *Qu'il peut y avoir des choses de fait, dont la nature humaine n'est pas capable à présent de savoir la manière, quelque effort de méditation quelle fasse.* Il faut bien remarquer que je ne dis point, qu'il peut y avoir des choses contraires à nos connoissances distinctes; ce qui est impossible; mais seulement qu'il peut se faire que nous n'ayons pas les lumières nécessaires, ni les moiens de les acquérir, pour venir à la connoissance de certaines choses, qui ne sont point d'ailleurs contraires à ce que nous connoissons assurément. [...] Nous ne pouvons croire ce qui est effectivement contraire à nos connoissances claires; mais nous croions une infinité de choses, quoi que nous ne sâchions pas comment elles arrivent."⁴⁰

35 Ibid. 246.

36 POCOCK, *Barbarism and Religion* 1, 56 f.; BARNES, *Jean Le Clerc* 116.

37 So Le Clerc expressed when discussing Jaquelot's *Conformité de la foi avec la raison* (1705): "Quoi que je ne serois pas de son sentiment sur la définition de la Liberté, sur l'Ame des Bêtes & sur quelques autres choses; néanmoins il faut avouer qu'il a ramassé ici tous les principes nécessaires [...] pour établir la Conformité de la Religion avec la Raison." On Jaquelot's conception of the relationship between rationality and revelation, see HICKSON, *Introduction* 69 f.

38 SINA, *I dibattiti sulla religione rivelata* 665, has traced back the Lockean distinction between above reason and contrary to reason to Robert Boyle.

39 LE CLERC, *BUH* 8 (art. 2) 138 f.

40 Id., *De l'incredulité* 273 f.

The resemblance with Locke's argument in Le Clerc's previous extract is evident. The link with Locke on this point is even more clear in *Parrhasiana*, published only a few years later, where Le Clerc discussed the belief in the immortality of the soul. He claimed that such belief could not be proven rationally because, in this following Locke's empiricism very closely, we are not able to clearly know the essence of substances.⁴¹ However, Le Clerc argued reason must resort to revelation for the proofs of the goodness of God, who has created human beings to be eternally happy, thus immortal. As further support to his argument, Le Clerc quoted a paraphrased translation of an argument put forward by Locke as a response to Stillingfleet. He discussed it in the same way in a more extended fashion.⁴² Inability to rationally fully determine a certain idea or doctrine was thus for Le Clerc not a mark of it being irrational; one could be satisfied with a vague approximation.⁴³ Scripture itself, the source of revelation, was based on our understanding of language and, taking up Locke's conventionalist conception of language (this was one of the further elements of influence of Locke in Le Clerc, but there were more),⁴⁴

41 Id., *Ars critica* 1 (1712) 107f.: "*Nulla notio est, quæ non possit clara, aut obscura dici. Obscuræ, exempli causâ, sunt notiones omnium substantiarum; claræ simplices omnes. Licet autem perspicuitas & obscuritas, haud aliter ac dies & nox, diversæ sint, mirum est quàm frequenter clara obscura ab hominibus censeantur, & vice versâ obscura clara.*" As is to be expected, Tronchin posed a typically Cartesian objection to Le Clerc on this point and he stated that substances can be known: FATIO, Louis Tronchin 633.

42 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 387–391.

43 Ibid. 417: "Il y a, selon lui [meaning Le Clerc himself] comme selon tous ceux qui n'ont pas perdu le sens, une infinité de choses dans Dieu & dans les choses divines, que nous ne comprenons point du tout, ou que nous n'entendons que très-imparfaitement. Mais il ne faut point confondre cette obscurité, avec ce qu'on appelle contradiction, qui ne se trouve point dans ce qui est vrai. Il ne faut pas non plus s'imaginer d'en savoir plus, que ce qui nous a été révélé, mais se contenter de cela, sans y rien ajouter." This "approximated knowledge" was better than full obscurity, and in this sense revelation had been much needed because every philosophy, Le Clerc had claimed, had been subject to much error in matters of religion, *Historia ecclesiastica* 86: "*Nulla fuit secta Philosophica, quæ multis erroribus non laboraret; nec facile fuit, imò prorsus supra vulgi Captum, discernere ubique falsum à vero, verumque undequaque decerptum colligere, in iis quæ ad Religionem & mores spectant; ac proinde non satis idonei magistri fuerunt Philosophi, ut homines ab omnibus erroribus revocarent, aut alii ut veritatem ipsi invenirent; unde sequitur Revelatione Divina Humano Generi prorsus opus fuisse.*"

44 Scholars have identified some further elements of influence of Locke in Le Clerc and his adhesion to Locke's philosophy. There was, for example, Le Clerc's abandonment of deductive Cartesianism in favour of Locke's empiricism in the explanation of nature, as BOTS, Jean Leclerc as Journalist 62, has pointed out and as confirmed by IOFRIDA, *Note sul pensiero* 1050f., and PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 55 (Pitassi claimed that Locke was responsible for the whole gnoseology of Le Clerc). See also BROGI, *Un nouvel Erasme* 52. Connected to this we can see also a refusal of Cudworth's innatist explanation of the origin of the idea of God, which Le Clerc considered more a product of tradition and good reasoning. LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 1) 32, quoted Locke as proof of this. A further element

our understanding of it could only be an approximation.⁴⁵ Still, a certain form of common sense rationality was needed to grasp the general meaning of Scripture and so, even in the case of the “above reason”, reason was never completely obfuscated.⁴⁶ We will find this attitude towards religion crucial in the debate with Bayle, presented in the final chapter of the present work, and where Le Clerc's reference to the thought of Origen was at its peak. In the next section we will continue our

of overlap between the two authors, highlighted by IOFRIDA, *ibid.* 1518, was the theory of ideas as expressed in Le Clerc's *Logica*. Le Clerc himself, in the *Ad lectorem*, had acknowledged his dependence on Locke. Again, another point of conjunction between the two authors was in the definition of the cause of error that, as PITASSI, *La théologie au XVII^e siècle* 343 f., has pointed out, in Locke as in Le Clerc was the result of education of the character, of passions and more. The result of this was that even the most evident truth was not able to overcome mental constraints. If everything we have reviewed so far shows an influence of Locke in Le Clerc, such influence was at times also in the opposite direction. SINA, *Testi teologico-filosofici Lockiani* 64 f., has claimed that Locke was close to but not a full adherent of Le Clerc's theory of Scriptural inspiration. POCOCC, *Barbarism and Religion* 5, 95–102, and *id.*, *Historiography and Enlightenment* 86 f., has argued that Locke had influenced Le Clerc in an almost sceptical manner. Common to Locke and Le Clerc, Pocock argued, was the idea that we can never know directly the object of perception and so texts are radically dependent on language. What seems like a sceptical reading of Le Clerc's epistemology does not take into account, I believe, the fact that for Le Clerc, as we have seen, it was common sense that was a guarantor of our understanding of texts. In the case of Scripture, this was even clearer because the language of Scripture had been accommodated by God to the general human understanding. It did not mean for Le Clerc, as we have seen, that we are able to fully grasp the meaning of all parts of Scripture, but that did not exclude the fact that some passages, notably those concerned with human salvation, were clearly accessible. As is evident from the following note on Le Clerc's conception of language, Le Clerc was far from a fully sceptical position.

45 This is made clear by LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 109. Already the title of the section (placed first within the rules of interpretation) is telling: “*Linguas sibi invicem non satis respondere.*” Le Clerc clarified that, *ibid.* 109 f.: “*Is censetur Scriptorum intelligere posse, qui callet Linguam, quâ Scriptor usus est. Eum autem adcuratè loquentes callere Linguam dicimus, qui dum legit, aut audit alium loquentem, habet animo observantes easdem notiones, quæ à loquente aut scribente vocibus quibus utitur subjectæ sunt. [...] Quod re ipsâ rarò contingit, cum perpauca conveniat in omnibus notionibus compositis; dum aliis alii pauciores aut plures notiones simplices unâ voce designant; aut dum clariores, vel obscuriores, aliqua ex parte, uni observantur, quàm alteri. Cum verò sæpè vix ac ne vix quidem rescire possimus, an aliis eædem planè objiciantur notiones ac nobis, nisi plurimis interrogationibus, & in multis ne hac quidem ratione; ut ostendemus, ubi agemus de notionibus simplicibus; sequitur nos sæpissimè scire non posse, an nos invicem intelligamus. Sed cum ad summam ἀκρίβειαν pervenire nequeamus, oportet nos modicâ intelligentiâ contentos esse. Itaque eum callere Linguam dicemus, qui eatenus eam intelligit, ut habeat similes notiones loquentium notionibus; adeò ut si is verbis suis incipiat loquentium sententiam exprimere, ipsi sint sensum suum in ejus verbis agnitori, postquam suis explicuerint.*” The Lockean derivation of Le Clerc's linguistic conventionalism has also been confirmed in ISRAEL, *Enlightenment Contested* 421.

46 LE CLERC, *De l'incrédulité* 245.

review of Le Clerc's epistemological framework with a particular focus on his relationship with Scriptural truth.

1.2 Scriptural Evidence

Le Clerc's relationship with biblical texts is one of the most explored areas of his thought. He has been considered one of the most important biblical scholars of his time. His analysis of Scripture was considered important by the Remonstrant church.⁴⁷ Historical research has underlined the contribution of his exegetical method and practice to the development of modern exegesis.⁴⁸ In this method, which he fully expressed in his *Ars Critica*, he has been closely linked to the historical-critical approach to Scripture proposed by Spinoza⁴⁹ and also with the exegetical method of Erasmus and Grotius.⁵⁰ His historical-critical biblical herme-

47 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 287 of 2 June 1698, Le Clerc to van Limborch) 269.

48 So VON REVENTLOW, *Bibelexegese als Aufklärung* 19: "Jean Le Clerc (Johannes Clericus) ist es in mancherlei Hinsicht wert, daß man sich mit ihm beschäftigt. Wenn es um die Geschichte der Bibelkritik geht, ist er vor allem durch seine beiden anonymen Schriften als an einem bemerkenswerten Wendepunkt der Auslegungsgeschichte stehende Figur von besonderem Interesse." See also VOELTZEL, *Jean Le Clerc*, esp. 51; JAUMANN, *Critica*, esp. 179.

49 This is something Le Clerc himself acknowledged, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 9 of 6 December 1681, Le Clerc to van Limborch) 31: "*Certe quod dicit [Spinoza, in the Tractatus] de auctore Pentateuchi, et alia eiusmodi quae ad Historiam et Criticem pertinent pleraque non modo sunt vera, sed et clara iis qui rem sine praëconceptis opinionibus expendunt: imo etiam necessaria ad multorum Scripturae locorum intelligentiam.*" On this point, see also MIRRI, *Richard Simon e il metodo storico-critico* 107 f.; VERNIÈRE, *Spinoza et la pensée Française* 72–90; SIMONUTTI, *Arminianesimo e tolleranza* 50–52.

50 Le Clerc often praised Erasmus and Grotius for their biblical exegesis. For example, in a letter to the count of Pembroke, he wrote, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 244 of 21 October 1695, Le Clerc to Thomas Herbert count of Pembroke) 181: "*Erasmus et Grotius [...] suffisent pour me consoler. Jamais personne ne travailla plus qu'eux à éclaircir l'Écriture Sainte, et à établir la vérité de la Religion Chrétienne, et n'eut tant de qualitez pour y réussir.*" Le Clerc was the editor of a new edition of Erasmus's *Opera Omnia* in 10 volumes from 1703–1706, and in the preface of the first volume his evaluation of Erasmus's philological work was mainly positive, although he did not spare a degree of criticism. Le Clerc had also edited Grotius' *De veritate religionis Christianae* in 1709 and, as SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 244 of 21 October 1695, Le Clerc to Thomas Herbert count of Pembroke) 182 n. 2, have pointed out, he also held very much in consideration Grotius' various biblical *Annotationes*. A further reference for Le Clerc's biblical exegesis was Henry Hammond (1605–1660), whose *A paraphrase and annotations upon all the books of the New Testament* of 1659 he had translated into Latin. Le Clerc was aware of Hammond's originality as well as of the fact that the English divine had made much use of the work of Grotius and of another giant of Arminianism, Simon Episcopius (1583–1643): LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 2) 124. See also BROGI, *Il logos eretico* 23; KLAUBER, *Between Protestant Orthodoxy*

neutics included a great stress on the importance of the source text⁵¹ written in the original biblical languages,⁵² of the original context and the intention of the author.⁵³ This method was part of Le Clerc's conviction that the first source of knowledge on the Christian religion should be the biblical text itself and that the text should be read without confessional or, in general, theological-philosophical mediation.⁵⁴ Le Clerc believed that the source of disputes and errors in matters of religion had been the human mediation of the biblical text.⁵⁵ This was based on the assumption we reviewed in the previous section, that Le Clerc was convinced that the biblical text could be understood with the aid of common sense. Reading Scripture did not need a philosophical preparation.⁵⁶

Such an approach was obviously different from mainstream Protestant exegesis of his time, since it did not take into account the *regula fidei*, a crucial aspect of Protestant exegesis. Le Clerc shared with Locke (and also with Richard Simon,

618. On Hammond, see the introductory article MCGIFFERT, Henry Hammond. Le Clerc's method of biblical interpretation was, in turn, influential for the Genevan Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1671–1737): PITASSI, Arminius Redivivus 154f. On the influence of Origen on Erasmus's biblical scholarship, see SHECK, Origen and the History of Justification 134–137.

51 This is again a clear link with Erasmus, as BROGI, *ibid.* 19, has also pointed out.

52 LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 73–93. On the parallel importance of respecting the source text written in the original language, even in pagan literature, see *id.*, *Æschinis Socratici (præfatio)* [1].

53 Biblical hermeneutics was for him not simple philology or textual criticism, this was in fact one of his accusations to Richard Simon's (1638–1712) famous *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 1680. Historical analysis also included for Le Clerc a recovery of the original plan of the author of the text, the circumstances of the text's composition and the historical references found therein: *id.*, *Sentimens* 6f. This added element of "literary criticism" has been considered to a certain degree original for the time and surely a large shift from Simon's position: VOELTZEL, Jean Le Clerc 51. Le Clerc was well aware of the problematic nature of such an analysis, because the text had been written several centuries earlier and in various specific historical contexts. He believed that this problem could be solved through working with the biblical text itself and with the help of pagan historical literature. LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 8: "la lecture des Livres mêmes & les fragmens des plus anciennes Histoires que nous ayions dans les Auteurs Payens, nous peuvent fournir des lumières très-importantes pour percer ces ténèbres sacrées." The use of pagan antiquity in biblical interpretation was not new but shows us a Humanist side of Le Clerc: VON REVENTLOW, *Bibelexegese als Aufklärung* 8f.

54 Speaking in third person on the occasion of the publication of his translation and commentary of the Pentateuch, LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 398, claimed: "il n'y mêla [in his work on the Pentateuch] aucune controverse, & ne s'appliqua qu'à rechercher le sens littéral; sans en tirer de conséquences Théologiques qui pussent choquer aucune Société Chrétienne. Il chercha la Verité; avec aussi peu de préjugés, que s'il eût été le premier, qui eut entrepris un semblable travail." See also *id.*, *Le Nouveau Testament* 1 (præfatio) [11]; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 413 of 28 March 1706, Le Clerc to Dodwell) 10.

55 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 341.

56 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 340.

in practice if not in theory) this particular aspect of his hermeneutics, a rejection of “confessional exegesis.” This aspect he had also inherited from Grotius, albeit in a less radical form, and was considered by his opponents dangerously close to Socinianism.⁵⁷ As Pitassi has pointed out, a non-mediated exegesis was a redefinition of the notion of Scriptural truth and its relation to theology.⁵⁸ At least in theory, the critical study of texts became in Le Clerc and some of his contemporaries the driver of the study of the Bible and of confessional disputes, not the other way around.⁵⁹

The result of this approach was that Le Clerc could claim that if a religious doctrine was confuted by Scripture or was not in Scripture, it could not be considered true.⁶⁰ In a letter to Jacques Lenfant, Le Clerc had responded to the argument of Lenfant, who, according to him, had contended that, metaphysically speaking, the orthodox Reformed doctrine of absolute predestination had won in confessional debates. Le Clerc’s answer was: “*Non quæritur hic an Metaphysici faveant illis nec ne. Sed an dogma eorum [of the orthodox Reformed] sit in Scriptura; quæ nisi id doceat, dogma nullo modo ad Religionem pertinebit quantumvis Metaphysicis verum videatur.*”⁶¹ He then continued, ironically:

“*Sed et in ipso Prædestinationis articulo experiamur quid possit. Docet nos Deum non esse fallacem, nec proinde posse simulare se alicui bene velle quem decrevit perdere. Hoc clarum est. Evangelium ergo non est a Deo, nam nobis ita Deum describit quasi velit omnes homines servari, cum decreverit longe maximam hominum partem perdere, ut nos Metaphysica justa te docet.*”⁶²

We thus see Le Clerc’s full reliance on the Scriptural text, decisive over any possible human reasoning. Scripture became for him a powerful source of evidence on religious dogma and the only really authoritative source of knowledge in Christian doctrine. It was, however, not a coincidence that his Scriptural interpretation, as we will witness in many parts of the present work, followed very closely his

57 PITASSI, La notion de communication 46–48; id., Entre croire et savoir 74–77.

58 Id., La notion de communication 46–48.

59 HARDY, Criticism and Confession 399. As PITASSI, *ibid.* 38 f., has pointed out, this was at times not only theory but also practice. Epistolary exchanges were sometimes directed at improving exegesis and did not take into account confessional barriers.

60 An example of this attitude can be seen in a letter of Le Clerc to John Sharp, archbishop of York. Le Clerc defended himself from accusations of heterodoxy coming from England and argued that Nestorianism was an error. Because Christ was the creator of all things (as Scripture teaches in the Gospel of John), the two natures had to be strictly connected as one in him. Still, the mode of this conjunction remained unknown to him, because, *tacente Scriptura*, it could not be defined: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 361 of 29 April 1704, Le Clerc to John Sharp) 438.

61 Id., Epistolario 1 (letter 64 of 9 November 1684, Le Clerc to Lenfant) 258.

62 *Ibid.* 259.

Arminian doctrinal beliefs and was considered obscure in all those areas where his particular theological stance pointed towards heterodoxy (for example concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, or eschatological issues). Thus, whether he deconfessionalised exegesis only in theory but not in practice, remains for now an open question which will be clarified in the remainder of his work. For the moment it remains critical for our understanding that Le Clerc looked philologically-critically at Scripture as the primary source of religious knowledge, at least in his intentions and methodology.

For Le Clerc, Scriptural evidence was comparable to the assured evidence of geometrical-mathematical knowledge, an approach that resembled that of Tronchin.⁶³ This could be confirmed by the way Le Clerc dealt with Scripture throughout his life, especially in confessional disputes. Elements of this kind will resurface in various chapters of the present work, but a passage from his *Sentiments* shows this clearly already. Le Clerc had rejected Simon's idea of the composition of the Pentateuch: at stake was the authority of the biblical text itself.⁶⁴ He compared Simon's idea to the astronomical theories of Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe and Copernicus. What Simon had in common with them was that all of them, according to Le Clerc, tried to make sense of their observations by building hypotheses. Simon's case was different because, for Le Clerc, one was not able to verify astronomical hypotheses – nobody could navigate space and confirm or disprove the different hypotheses (especially that of Tycho Brahe versus Copernicus). However, one could verify Simon's idea. This could be rejected with a reference to different biblical passages.⁶⁵ The crucial part for Le Clerc was that while in astronomy and in philosophy (he had Cartesian physics in mind) conjectural knowledge was acceptable, in the most important matters of religion:

“Il ne suffit pas de proposer une Hypothese vrai-semblable, lors qu'il s'agit d'un dogme que l'on regarde comme étant de la dernière importance [the divinity of Scripture]. On ne peut tirer d'un principe de cette nature, qu'une consequence vrai-semblable, & il faut prouver évidemment la verité, lors qu'il est question du salut.”⁶⁶

The crucial tenets of religion had to be based on evident truth.⁶⁷ This is different from speculative parts of religion, in which approximation and conjectures were still acceptable. To Simon's idea of the composition of the books of the Penta-

63 FATIO, Louis Tronchin 334 f.

64 This was Simon's theory of the “public writers” (“*écrivains publics*”) which, besides Moses, had written parts of the text: SIMON, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* 15–21. See ROGERSON, *Early Old Testament* 838–843.

65 LE CLERC, *Sentiments* 91 f.

66 *Ibid.* 93.

67 On this, see also MIRRI, *Richard Simon* 101.

teuch, Le Clerc opposed his own, that they had been composed by the *Sacrificateur Israélite* who appears in 2 Kings 17:27–28. His conclusion seemed to posit this in form of conjecture, but the fact that it was scripturally grounded seemed to Le Clerc a good basis upon which to build its certainty:

“C'est là, Monsieur, la conjecture d'un de nos Amis [Le Clerc himself] touchant l'Auteur du Pentateuque, & le temps auquel il a vécu. Il ne suppose rien qui ne soit fondé sur l'Histoire Sainte; & si sa conjecture n'est pas vraie, on peut dire, que non seulement elle n'est pas hors de la vrai-semblance, mais qu'il faut nécessairement qu'il y ait quelque chose de semblable.”⁶⁸

The risk of a reading of Scripture without philosophical and theological mediation was obvious to Le Clerc's correspondents. In a letter to Le Clerc in response to the latter's attack on metaphysics, Lenfant rejected Le Clerc's aversion to the use of metaphysical reasoning in religion. He contended that metaphysics was needed for a correct interpretation of Scripture. Under “metaphysics” he understood a classic deductive reasoning: “*methodum res quaslibet examinandi per principia rationis a sensuum et imaginationis testimonio seclusæ.*”⁶⁹ He insisted:

“*Aduersus te retorqueo argumentum de incertitudine Metaphysices ad incertitudinem Scripturæ. Et si Paulum exhortantem fideles ad pietatem ipsi Paulo in octauo ad Romanos v. 30 loquenti opponam probabo ipsum docere et non docere prædestinationem. Et ita de aliis.*”⁷⁰

The ambiguity of Scripture could not be overcome, according to Lenfant, without metaphysical reasoning. To this letter, Le Clerc replied with a reference to his first essay in the then newly appeared *Entretiens*, in which he showed once again the problematic nature of metaphysical knowledge and where he stated that the competence of our mind is limited only to what is useful and needed for salvation.⁷¹ In this reply it was implied that the study of Scripture combined with a knowledge of original languages and of the historical-geographical context, Le Clerc's method, was able to lead to a correct interpretation of biblical passages. In cases where Scripture was not clear, where passages were not needed for salvation, not even indirectly, Le Clerc saw two possibilities: the first was to suspend judgment altogether and keep the fundamentals of religion, the second was to try to make sense of Scripture, since Scripture was rational, even if this might incur an erroneous

68 LE CLERC, Sentimens 130. Le Clerc will later return to a more classical attribution of the Pentateuch, that is to Moses. For a discussion of this development, see VOELTZEL, Jean Le Clerc 47–51; PITASSI, Entre croire et savoir 22–35.

69 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 69 of 6 December 1684, Lenfant to Le Clerc) 270.

70 Ibid. 271.

71 Ibid. (letter 77 of 10 March 1685, Le Clerc to Lenfant) 302.

interpretation. Conjectural speculation, also in Scriptural interpretation, was thus admitted in certain circumstances. Although he considered this last option sound despite its possible erroneous result, he preferred the first option.⁷² The choice of example he used in this circumstance is telling: it was Origen's apocatastasis. This became thus partially justified by Le Clerc. We will review this in the final chapter of the present work in conjunction with the discussion on theodicy.

Le Clerc himself was aware of the dangers of an exegesis without confessional boundaries and philosophical framework. In a letter to Pierre Allix (1641–1717), he stressed the importance of carefully interpreting Scripture so as to avoid that the opposing faction is able to find scriptural support for its own doctrine. The disputed topic was, again, the doctrine of predestination, and Le Clerc was openly critical towards Allix's *De Prædestinatione* in that it was too short and serrate. He pleaded instead for a more elaborated explanation of scriptural passages, together with a more accurate linguistic description of the terms “ἐκλέγειν” (to choose) and “ἐκλεκτός” (to be chosen). God's choice did not have to be conceived of as an eternal and universal decree, like the Reformed believed, but as a divine action that continues in time.⁷³ This shows in practice part of Le Clerc's antidote to the dangers of a non-confessional, non-philosophical exegesis, but follows, at the same time, his Arminian beliefs.

Problems of interpretation – in what concerned the essentials for salvation – were thus reduced to problems of technical nature, solvable through an accurate historical-critical method.⁷⁴ This consideration of the biblical text, which became the warranty of a sort of Scriptural evidence, was close to Locke's empiricist beliefs: combined with Cartesian methodology, Scripture became one of the main sources of truth.⁷⁵ Conjectures were allowed in Scriptural interpretation, but only on unclear passages not necessary for salvation. In the final section of this chap-

72 LE CLERC, BC 6 (art. 6) 418–422: “Quand même on se tromperoit, dans le sens qu'on lui donneroit, [through an attempt to rationally interpret Scripture] il n'y auroit pas grand danger; parce que l'on ne seroit dans l'erreur, que par respect pour la Révelation, appuyée d'ailleurs sur des fondemens solides. [...] Au reste, le premier parti me paroît le plus sage & le plus sûr.”

73 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 43 of 6 April 1684, Le Clerc to Pierre Allix) 159 f.

74 That Le Clerc was confident in his skills as a biblical scholar is evident from his correspondence. In a letter written to Locke before the publication of his commentary on Genesis, he made no secret of the esteem he had for his own new biblical commentary because of the precision of his own work, superior to its predecessors. SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 199 of 26 August 1692, Le Clerc to Locke) 79: “Je me flatte que ce livre [his *Genesis*] ne vous déplaira pas, ma manière d'expliquer l'Écriture étant, comme je me l'imagine, beaucoup plus conforme aux plus severes regles de la Critique, que quoi que ce soit de cette nature, qui ait paru.”

75 This is close to the argument of ELLIOTT, Jean Leclerc 473: “It might not be too simplistic to see the combined elements of Cartesian doubt and Lockean empiricism at the heart of his [Le Clerc's] approach [to biblical interpretation].”

ter, we will review the practical theological consequences of the epistemological framework presented so far in this chapter.

1.3 *Modica theologia*

The idea that Christian dogma could be reduced to a number of fundamental articles was a common and very important Protestant theme, which was intrinsically linked to the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture – a central point of debate with the opposing counter-reformation camp. For the Reformed and Lutheran party, all those articles were considered fundamental which could be derived from clear biblical passages. In contrast, Arminians and Socinians included among their fundamental articles only those doctrines which were considered as necessary for salvation by Scripture itself.⁷⁶ The number of articles Arminians proposed as fundamental was thus fairly limited, a *modica theologia*, even compared to their Reformed peers. This concept of a *modica theologia* had been present already and most notably in Erasmus and was also later supported by the Anglican-Reformed John Hales (1584–1656) and the Reformed theologian Isaac d’Huisseau (1607–1672),⁷⁷ who notably strived to reach a union of Christian churches by means of fundamental articles.

In the case of Le Clerc, his adoption of the general terms of the *modica theologia* is without doubt. This was clearly dependent on his affiliation to the Arminian church and his particular esteem for Grotius. The latter surely played a pivotal role for Le Clerc in this question.⁷⁸ Le Clerc had edited and republished three times Grotius’ *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, in 1709, 1724 and 1734. In the *dedicatio* of the 1724 edition, this edition and the following were dedicated to the “lovers of truth and virtue”, Le Clerc clarified what he considered the goal of Grotius’ work and at the same time his reason for publishing it several times: “*hoc opus [...] eò tendit ut Veritatem Evangelicam, ab omnibus partibus ac factionibus alienam, in clara luce collocet.*”⁷⁹ The *De Veritate* contained, in sum, the fundamentals of the Christian religion; it was an exposition of the main tenets on God, Christian morality and the value of Christian holy books, with a rejection of pagan, Jewish and Muslim theology.

Le Clerc had also been in contact with the intellectual milieu of Saumur from his early years, something which brought him into contact with the work of D’Hu-

76 KLAUBER, Between Protestant Orthodoxy 614–617. On this point, Klauber made an explicit reference to the work of Otto Ritschl in *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*.

77 KLAUBER, *ibid.* 618; SIMONUTTI, Arminianesimo e tolleranza 15. 46. 53; BROGI, Il logos eretico 38; FLITNER, Erasmus im Urteil seiner Nachwelt 128 f.

78 KLAUBER, *ibid.*; VON REVENTLOW, Wurzeln der modernen Bibelkritik 54.

79 LE CLERC, *De veritate religionis Christianæ* (*dedicatio*) [1].

isseau⁸⁰ and had additionally reinforced his attitude on the fundamental articles through his encounter with the *Tractatus* of Spinoza.⁸¹ Recent scholarship has cast doubt on the actual weight of the sources of Le Clerc's conception of fundamental articles and it has been claimed that Le Clerc was not simply a link in the chain leading back to Erasmus through Grotius, but that it has been his peculiarity to be even more minimalist than his predecessors.⁸² I think this is true in general if we consider Grotius' ecclesiology, as it has been pointed out,⁸³ but it is not as clear cut in case of Limborch's *Theologia Christiana*.⁸⁴

It is true that Le Clerc's predecessors had been at times far less minimalist than Le Clerc, yet the influence of the Humanist heritage of Erasmus,⁸⁵ of the early epistolary exchange with Limborch⁸⁶ and of the work of Grotius, was still felt strongly on this point. Surely, the philosophical-intellectual landscape to which Le Clerc was exposed had changed dramatically from the time of Grotius and this makes it possible, if not plausible, that Le Clerc had his own peculiarity on this point. Again, Le Clerc's youth in strict Calvinist Geneva⁸⁷ and his later dream to move to tolerant England,⁸⁸ hindered by continuous accusations of heterodoxy, explain in part the fact that Le Clerc took the *modica theologia* particularly seriously. However, I think that Le Clerc was following quite closely the footsteps of

80 KLAUBER, *Between Protestant Orthodoxy* 620.

81 *Ibid.* 622.

82 HARDY, *Criticism and Confession* 376 f.

83 *Ibid.*

84 LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 911, agreed on the centrality of a minimum of fundamental articles of faith as the basis for inter-confessional peace: "*Quando ergo de necessariis ad salutem quærimus, solummodo intelligimus necessaria ad salutem juxta normam Euangelii, hoc est, necessaria ad fidem. Addimus: Necessaria ad fidem etiam sola necessaria esse ad communionem Ecclesiasticam; quoniam quos saluari fide præditos credimus, communionem nostrâ arcere non licet.*" However, he did not clearly delimit which of the articles of faith had to be considered as necessary for salvation but argued that it was far better to leave this question open. To the self-posed question: "*Determinanda ergo illa necessaria sunt, ut sciamus quousque tolerantia hæc extendi debeat*" he replied: "*ex indicibus antea à nobis indicatis [at p. 901–902, but they were only general considerations, the only concrete example was the death and resurrection of Jesus], si quis iudicium adhibeat, necessaria facile à non necessariis discerni posse*" (*ibid.* 912). He also added: "*præcise autem determinare velle de omnibus, quid & quousque creditu sit necessarium, nec utile, nec necesse puto*" and among other arguments, he referred back to the centrality of Scripture on this matter (*ibid.* 906). It is clear, however, that ecclesiological matters were not fundamental tenets for Limborch.

85 The Erasmian influence on the conception of fundamental articles was felt, according to PITASSI, *Figures de l'Érasme* 114–119, also by Bayle, despite many differences.

86 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 8 of 3 October 1681, van Limborch to Le Clerc) 28 f.

87 BARNES, *Jean Le Clerc* 19–48.

88 *Ibid.* 162 f.

his predecessors, even if he was selective and appropriated their thought to fit his purpose.

Le Clerc's peculiarity on this point, I believe, was related to the fact that he was more minimalist than his predecessors, if their thought was considered in their entirety. But he was also more coherent for the way in which he remained attached to the *modica theologia* throughout his life, the motives behind it and the more elaborated philosophical-hermeneutical framework that he had developed around it.

If we look at Le Clerc's own conception of fundamental articles, we cannot fail to recognise his closeness to Grotius's *De Veritate*. In the appendix to Grotius' work, he had published a small treatise, the *De Eligenda, Inter Dissidentias Christianos Sententia*, in which he had mentioned as the principal tenets of Christianity the unity of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, Christian commandments and the existence of a judgment in the afterlife.⁸⁹ These were also the main points in Grotius's work. The same we find in a summary of Grotius' articles, composed by Le Clerc, where he had presented the fundamentals of the Christian religion in another small treatise, a further appendix to the 1734 edition of the *De Veritate*.⁹⁰ This conception of the fundamentals of faith was, again, in line with his earlier thoughts on the subject.⁹¹

The "new philosophy", Cartesianism and empiricism, and the related approach to biblical hermeneutics, helped shape Le Clerc's own radical approach to the fundamental articles because they provided a more rigorous framework for Scriptural interpretation, as we saw in earlier sections, and this also applies to the distinction of the fundamental articles. As has also been argued by Martin Klauber, biblical criticism and a limited set of fundamental articles went hand-in-hand for Le Clerc, since a philologically and historically sound interpretation of Scrip-

89 LE CLERC, *De eligenda* 316–319.

90 Id., *Contra indifferentia religionum* 360: "*Nobis hic res non est cum spreitoribus omnis Religionis, quos satis confutavit, in superiore Opere, vir maximus HUGO GROTIUS; quod quisquis animo Veri cupido legerit, dubitare non poterit quin Deus sit, qui ab hominibus coli vult, & nunc quidem eo cultu, qui est a Christo præscriptus; & sui cultoribus æternam beatitatem, post hanc mortalem vitam, pollicetur.*"

91 Id., *Sentimens* 40 f.: "Mais pour nous renfermer dans le Nouveau Testament, on ne peut pas nier que tout ce que Jesus Christ & ses Disciples nous y apprennent, ne tende uniquement qu'à nous obliger à croire en Dieu & en Jesus Christ, & à obeir à l'Evangile. [...] Tout ce que Dieu nous commande dans le Nouveau Testament, aussi bien que dans le Vieux, se rapporte aux devoirs que nous devons rendre directement à la Divinité; à ceux qui nous regardent nous mêmes; & enfin à ceux ausquels nous sommes obligez envers nôtre prochain. [...] Pour se confier en Dieu, il faut être persuadé, qu'il y a un Dieu, que c'est lui qui nous a parlé dans l'Escriture- [sic] Sainte par le Ministère de Jesus Christ & de ses Apôtres; que ce Dieu est misericordieux; qu'il aime la Vertu, & qu'il hait les Vice; qu'il n'est point menteur; qu'il est tout puissant, & qu'il ne cessera jamais d'être, & de nous pouvoir rendre heureux-s'il [sic] veut. Il n'en faut pas savoir davantage pour lui obeir."

ture provided a (limited) solid basis for religion despite its many difficulties.⁹² The Bible remained for Le Clerc a sure ground for a *modica theologia*, notwithstanding the increasing pressure on it created by advancements in literary criticism, because Le Clerc believed that providence had secured the Scriptural basis of the few necessary doctrines and even facilitated our focus on them. As Le Clerc wrote in a famous letter to Simon:

*“At ideo debemus gratias divinæ Providentiæ agere non quod absque mendis Codices Sacri ad nos pervenerint, sed quod hominum aut incuriâ aut malitiâ fieri non potuerit ut fides Christiana obliteraretur, quod quidem eo facilius factum esse capimus quo pauciora sunt fidei Christianæ prorsus necessaria capita. Si multa essent, et in rebus obscurissimis nec nisi magno ingenii acumine assequendis sita posset forte aliquid Scripturæ deesse, sed cum ea pauca sint numero et clare ac pauculis verbis exprimi possint, nemini mirum videri debet si omnia ac illibata ad seram posteritatem pervenerunt. Adde quod ex generalibus dictis ac præceptis quæ claris Phrasibus et sæpius repetuntur, ideoque ubique corrumpi nequaquam potuerunt facile possemus dignoscere, si quod aliquem in locum illatum esset venenum.”*⁹³

This conception of the fundamental articles of religion was based on Le Clerc's assumption on the purpose of religion, which he considered twofold: to show us where the highest beatitude is and the means to attain it.⁹⁴ Le Clerc was sure that Scripture had provided us with the essential instructions for that purpose.⁹⁵ That said, what was implied in this conception of *modica theologia* was firstly that a great deal of flexibility had to exist on all non-essential articles. In a reflection which was part of his review of Limborch's *Theologia Christiana*, 1686, Le Clerc added that inter-Protestant controversies, he believed, were mainly on non-essential points of doctrine:

*“Plusieurs Controverses qui nous divisent ne sont pas sur des choses, dans lesquelles l'Écriture ait décidé clairement en faveur de l'un des partis. Les erreurs, que les Protestans s'attribuent les uns aux autres, ne regardent souvent que la manière des choses, que l'Écriture ne nous a point révélée, ou ne sont point si dangereuses qu'elles ne soient compatibles avec la piété.”*⁹⁶

92 KLAUBER, *Between Protestant Orthodoxy* 622.

93 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 63 of 5 November 1684, Le Clerc to Simon) 246 f.

94 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 38: “La seule raison nous apprend, que la Religion ne peut consister qu'en deux choses; l'une est de nous dire où se trouve le souverain bonheur, auquel nous aspirons naturellement: & l'autre de nous montrer les moyens d'y parvenir. On ne peut rien concevoir dans la Religion, qui ne se rapporte à ces deux Chefs. Tous les dogmes, tous les commandemens, toutes les promesses de la Religion Chrétienne tendent à cela, soit qu'on en tire une partie de la Tradition [this passage was part of a polemic discussion with Simon on the value of tradition], soit qu'on veuille tout tirer de l'Écriture.”

95 *Ibid.* 39–43.

96 *Id.*, *BUH* 2 (art. 3) 23.

It is interesting that the context of this last passage was part of a review of a work on systematic theology, but it was precisely the intention of the book, in Le Clerc's opinion, to attempt not to exclude other confessions, at least not without reflection. The *Theologia Christiana* had been written: "pour ne pas condamner témérairement, comme des gens exclus du salut, ceux qui pourroient être aussi bons Chrétiens que nous, s'il se trouvoit que leurs erreurs ne fussent pas dangereuses."⁹⁷ This required for Le Clerc, quoting Limborch, a distinction between fundamental articles, indifferent articles and articles useful but not necessary for salvation.⁹⁸ Without confessional divisions, Le Clerc claimed, such a study would have been superfluous because the Gospel alone would have sufficed as the rule of life.⁹⁹

The *modica theologia* meant also that for Le Clerc the definition of what constituted doctrinal orthodoxy had a much narrower basis than in orthodox Reformed circles because it excluded explicitly all that was not fundamental for salvation and not clearly revealed in Scripture. The essence of what constituted "orthodoxy" was thus redefined: the only true guarantor of orthodoxy on non-fundamentals was God. A cautious definition of orthodoxy could be found already in Limborch,¹⁰⁰ but Le Clerc confirmed:

"Quelques Théologiens ont beau dire qu'ils ne les jugent pas *orthodoxes* [Le Clerc's theological convictions]; puis qu'ils savent bien qu'il n'y a que Dieu, qui puisse juger souverainement de la véritable *orthodoxie*, en matière de dogmes speculatifs; & que l'égalité, où tous les hommes sont à cet égard, ne leur donne que le droit de se réfuter honêtement, & par de bonnes raisons."¹⁰¹

Such a conception of orthodoxy included most of the Christian confessions and its aspiration was that this would serve the purpose of establishing new relations among Christian churches, such had been the plan of d'Huisseau, for example.

The natural consequence of this position would seem a general tolerance towards all those who share these fundamental articles, but this was true for Le Clerc only indirectly and it applied only to Limborch's conception of tolerance. This latter excluded only Roman Catholics because he accused them of idolatry (he preserved only a sort of civil tolerance for them) but included all other Chris-

97 Ibid. 22.

98 LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 906, had written of three classes of dogma: "*Alia nec Scripturà clare exstant, nec ullam cum pietate habent connexionem [...]. Alia sunt non quidem absolute necessaria, sed tamen cum praxi pietatis dogmatibusque absolute necessariis magnam connexionem habentia [...]. Alia sunt absolute ad salutem necessaria, in Scriptura clare cum addita necessitatis nota expressa.*"

99 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 21 f.

100 VAN LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 888–890.

101 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 436.

tian groups who believed in Scripture as their sole source of faith.¹⁰² Le Clerc's position, although he agreed with the idea that fundamental tenets could serve as a basis for tolerance, was based on a different ground. In a letter to Limborch, he argued that if the Roman Catholic Church had not been so despotic in the imposition of dogma, a secession would have not been needed at all, and a state of tolerance as in the Early Church, where apostles and Jews shared the same temple peacefully, would have been possible.¹⁰³ In other words, the worship of Roman Catholics would also have been allowed in public, something that Limborch was not ready to accept.

For Le Clerc, tolerance was more politically and ethically motivated, not unlike Locke, whose *Epistola de Tolerantia* he had translated into French and which was published in the *Œuvres Diverses de Monsieur Jean Locke* in Rotterdam in 1710.¹⁰⁴ The crucial elements of Le Clerc's conception of tolerance were the respect of civil law and a moral behaviour. Even if somehow reluctantly, this meant that Le Clerc's tolerance included Socinians and also atheists and sceptics, provided

102 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 8 of 3 October 1681, Limborch to Le Clerc) 28: "*Verum videtur et Pontificios tolerantia sua comprehendere [he referred to the work of D'Huisseau]; qui cum idolatriæ non excusandæ se reos faciant, non video quomodo in unam cum illis Ecclesiam Reformati coalescere possint. Velim ego tolerantiam hanc circumscribere, ut solos excludat Pontificios, omnesque ab Ecclesiâ Romanâ separatos comprehendat. Hi omnes commune habent principium, Scripturam S., quam agnoscunt unicam fidei morumque normam, omniaque ad salutem necessaria plene ac perspicue continere. Ex communi hoc et utrinque concesso fundamento posset tolerantia quam suademus deduci: et meo quidem iudicio, hac ratione. Ut primo in genere demonstretur discrimen inter dogmata ad salutem creditu præcise necessaria, aliaque non absolute necessaria.*" In his review of Limborch's *Theologia Christiana*, while discussing Limborch's conception of tolerance, LE CLERC, BUH 2 (art. 3) 46, both commented and clarified: "C'est le dogme [tolerance] dont les Rémonstrans se font principalement honneur, qu'ils pressent le plus dans tous leurs livres, & en conséquence duquel ils se croient obligés de regarder comme leurs freres tous les Chrétiens qui reçoivent tous les articles fondamentaux, qui ne veulent tyranniser personne, & qui ne sont ni idolâtres, ni de mauvaises mœurs." That LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 888–898, did not include the Roman Catholic Church within the "tolerated group" did not mean that he pleaded for the use of force or a complete prohibition of (private) worship; this was not the case, not even with so called "heretics" (among which he identified again the Roman Catholics). The exclusions from the brotherhood meant that a sort of civil tolerance was still in place.

103 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 18 of 7/17 October 1682, Le Clerc to Limborch) 77: "*Præcipuus est, ut mihi videtur, Tyrannis qua non licet in Rom. Ecclesia vivere nisi errores eius profitando, quod secessionem legitimam fecit, nam si libertas esset aliter sentiendi et a superstitiosis cultibus abstinendi, publicamque eius rei professionem faciendi, quantumlibet erraret ab ea secedere non deberemus, edocti Christi et Apostolorum exemplo, qui unicum Templum cum Pharisæis et Sadducæis colebant.*"

104 LOCKE, A Letter Concerning Toleration xxxvi–xxxvii. On Le Clerc's conception of tolerance, see also SINA, La tolérance 205–214.

their moral behaviour was faultless.¹⁰⁵ His conception of tolerance was based, firstly, on the conviction that: “l’erreur [in religious matters] n’est pas un un crime, lors que ceux qui y sont engagez observent d’ailleurs les Loix de la Societé Civile, & ne sont point punissables pour aucunes mauvaises mœurs.”¹⁰⁶ Nobody would punish a mathematician for a wrong calculation, he clarified.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Le Clerc was convinced that tolerance benefited the state and the public good more generally. He granted that tolerance might cause social *turbas*, at times, but he also argued that those *turbas* were destined to last only for so long and that it was rather persecution that caused the most important problems to the state.¹⁰⁸ In the *dedicatio* to his Arminian church of his translation of Henry Hammond’s *A Paraphrase and Annotations Upon All the Books of the New Testament*, 1681, he concluded: “*Regnum nullum (quid enim vetat nos verum dicere?) beatius est Britannico, in quo nonnulla opinionum varietas fertur; Respublica nulla florentior, hac Vestra Fœderati Belgii, in qua paullò etiam major est libertas.*”¹⁰⁹

Le Clerc’s tolerance must not be interpreted as a form of religious scepticism. It would not be helpful to consider Le Clerc as a proto-deist, because the fundamentals of religion, the *modica theologia*, were based on scriptural revelation and remained a constant thought throughout his life, even if he did not believe that these had to be defended through the use of force.¹¹⁰ In the *Contra indifferentia religionum liber* he made clear that serious study was required to ascertain the truth in religion:

“*Ac proinde cum sit non una Christianorum familia, inde sequitur dandam esse operam, ut cognoscamus, quænam earum sit maxime dogmatibus & præceptis a Christo relictis consentanea. Neque enim omnes possunt eodem loco haberi, cum sint quædam inter se ita*

105 LE CLERC, BC 12 (art. 5) 326; id., A Letter from Mr. Le Clerc xiii. In this text, Le Clerc responded to an accusation that he had mistreated Augustin in his text. This was an occasion for Le Clerc to discuss the two “evils” that Augustin had been the first to bring about: God’s decree and the persecution of heretics. Le Clerc somehow excused the first “evil”, since it was not directly harmful to others, but he was very critical of the second, because it did harm others (ibid. xvii–xviii).

106 Id., Parrhasiana 206 f.

107 Ibid. 207.

108 Ibid. 298; HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum 1* (dedicatio, by Le Clerc) [3]. This point was also discussed in a letter to Dodwell, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario 2* (letter 403 of 29 August 1705, Le Clerc to Dodwell) 582: “*bono etiam publico studet, qui solum Evangelium hominibus imponi cupit [...] Quod si addideris Evangelio decreta aut singulorum Episcoporum, aut Synodorum, aut Romani Pontificis; ilicet, actum est de bono publico, nisi libertatem Christianam inter bona publica non habeas.*”

109 HAMMOND, ibid.

110 SINA, *La tolérance* 207–209.

dissidentes, doctrina & cultu, ut se gravissimorum errorum ac vitiati cultus divini vicissim incusent."¹¹¹

The *modica theologia* was a central concept of Le Clerc's thought and it was strongly supported by his general epistemology and the way this latter was applied to his interpretation of Scripture. It allowed him and, in different ways, also his fellow Arminians, to re-discuss inter-confessional relations, and there was also a claim to tolerance included in it. This concept was also useful to a reframing of orthodoxy, something that was central to Le Clerc's interests, and also to a redefinition of the nature of speculative theology. Granted, the choice of the fundamentals of faith remains clearly problematic and, it could be claimed, arbitrary, or, as Pitassi has claimed, somehow contradictory, because no criterion external to religion was invoked to preserve an "impartial" judgment of the matter.¹¹² Still, the *modica theologia* proved fundamental to Le Clerc's enterprise and his appraisal of the theological thought of Origen was much influenced by it, as well as by the epistemological and hermeneutical underpinnings connected to it. In the next chapter we will consider Le Clerc's relationship with authority, Christian and pagan antiquity, which provide the first elements in this direction before we focus our analysis only on the thought of Origen.

2. Authority and Tradition: the Pagan and the Christian Past

Besides the epistemological framework of the previous chapter, another important area I think is crucial to analyse for a study of the reception of Origen in Le Clerc is his relationship with pagan and Christian authorities and traditions. This is not disconnected from the insights of the previous chapter, in that the Cartesian spirit, biblical hermeneutics and elements of Locke's empiricism and linguistic conventionalism resurface in multiple ways. On the one hand, in the analysis of authority and tradition we witness for example a critical approach to pagan and Christian authorities with a focus on the power of rational enquiry. This took at times the form of an almost total disregard for any authority and tradition, but we will see that Le Clerc was more selective than simply destructive in this regard. On the other hand, we find specific complaints voiced by Le Clerc regarding the Church Fathers and other early Christian writers, among others, in what concerns their philosophically (rather than scripturally) informed exegetical production and general forms of argumentation among other elements.

111 LE CLERC, *Contra indifferentia religionum* 360 f.

112 PITASSI, *L'écho des discussions* 266 f.

Again, the present chapter, as the previous one, provides the broader framework within which the specific relationship between Le Clerc and the thought of Origen will be clarified at a later stage. It is important to note already at this point that Le Clerc's reception of Origen had its peculiarities and did not follow the canon of his general reception of Church Fathers. However, the next pages provide some terms of comparison and Le Clerc's self-understanding of what he considered the correct relationship with antiquity, a relationship that will prove more complex in practice than he was probably willing to admit. This chapter will consist of three sections: after a section dedicated to the analysis of Le Clerc's general understanding of the role of authority and tradition, I will review what he conceived as the appropriate and inappropriate uses of ancient authors, in particular pagan ones. I will then focus on his relationship with the Church Fathers and early Christian writers in particular and evidence how his relationship with authority, tradition and, in part, with pagan authors, was consistent with his conception of the role of Christian tradition. This relationship, albeit it evidently served Le Clerc's ends on more than one occasion, was not purely polemical-rhetorical.

2.1 Authority and Tradition

A classic of 20th century scholarship on the subject, Hazard's *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680–1715)*, is a perfect start for a reflection on the role of authority in the early modern time. His claim, as is known, was that the intellectual landscape of Europe changed dramatically in the final quarter of the 17th and the first quarter of the 18th century. A mark of this intellectual change was a critical attitude towards intellectual authority, dogmas and a rejection of received knowledge.¹¹³ Yet, later scholarship has challenged this view. Heyd has claimed that the intellectual landscape preceding the “intellectual revolution” of the 17th century was far less monolithic than normally assumed and that the later developments in science were less a radical break with the previous scientific approaches than commonly believed. For example, he pointed out that Descartes was indebted to scholastic philosophy and also that scholastic philosophy itself had been sometimes critical of its sources, for example Aristotelianism.¹¹⁴ To take the case of Arminius – and the time referred to in this case is the later 16th and early 17th century – as another study had shown, in his writings we already find a critical attitude towards the authority of Augustine, albeit this was valid only in particular circumstances.¹¹⁵

113 HAZARD, *La crise de la conscience* (préface).

114 HEYD, Jean-Robert Chouet 125–129.

115 GOUDRIAAN, Augustin Asleep 64.

An adequate reframing of the issue would therefore consider the intellectual development that led to the enlightenment not as the result of a sudden change of direction in early modern intellectual life, but more as the outcome of an organic maturation which saw its more visible flowering in the second part of the 17th century.¹¹⁶ In such a mixed and varied intellectual landscape it is therefore crucial, I believe, to turn to the specific way in which Le Clerc approached the question of authority and tradition.

On authority and tradition, Chouet and Le Clerc shared a general rejection of authorities considered in the more classical sense. For Chouet, philosophy had to be based on the search for truth and should not take into account philosophical authorities as authorities.¹¹⁷ Still, in a letter to Le Clerc, Chouet's first remark on Le Clerc's essays contained in the *Entretiens* was related to the way in which Le Clerc had dealt with Malebranche, Augustine and scholastic theologians more generally. Chouet pleaded for a moderation of tone, even if he agreed that Le Clerc had had every right to examine the arguments of these authors; still, Le Clerc had been too harsh, in his opinion.¹¹⁸ Le Clerc's reply, which included an acceptance of Chouet's remark and the promise to take that into account eventually in a second edition, explained that the "quelques traits un peu satiriques" and the parts where one finds "de piquant" against theologians of the past and of the present, had been written in that way for a purpose.¹¹⁹ He justified himself in the following way:

"On nous dit simplement que S. Augustin l'a dit, et l'on fait un grand argument de son autorité seule. Ainsi il semble nécessaire de faire comprendre aux gens qu'on regarde cet homme là du même œil que tous les autres, c'est à dire comme un Auteur sujet à tomber dans de grandes erreurs: et en cette occasion un mot un peu cavalier est quelquefois d'une admirable utilité pour accoûter les esprits à ne respecter pas si fort des gens qui n'ont souvent rien de considerable que la multitude de leurs écrits, et l'éloignement du temps auquel ils ont vécu."¹²⁰

In some of the passages Chouet would have had in mind,¹²¹ Le Clerc's rejection of authorities had been very strong. Le Clerc had, for example, almost nullified Augustine's exegetical skills.¹²² Even if the actual arguments of traditional authorities

116 On the development of the "Republic of Letters" and the reframing of the concept of authority in the 17th century, see also BOTS/WAQUET, *La République des Lettres*; GARFAGNINI, *L'uso della critica* 113–142.

117 HEYD, Jean-Robert Chouet 151.

118 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 92 of 16 June 1685, Chouet to Le Clerc) 342.

119 *Ibid.* (letter 103 of October 1685, Le Clerc to Chouet) 389.

120 *Ibid.*

121 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 359. 368 f.

122 For an analysis of Le Clerc's critique of Augustine as presented in his *Appendix Augustiniana*, published in 1703, see FLASCH, *Jean Leclerc über Augustinus* 243–253. For a short introductory article, see VISSER, *Appendix Augustiniana* 233–236.

were the final target of Le Clerc's attack as it would have been in the case of Chouet, Le Clerc believed on this occasion that to also criticise the personal qualities of the authors considered most authoritative, including their technical knowledge and competence, would further show the weakness of their arguments. In this we already find a difference between the two authors.¹²³

In other works of Le Clerc we find at times a similar pattern. On the one hand his claim was that the object of examination should not be the authority of the person who had formulated a certain argument, but the argument itself; in this he was in line with many of his contemporaries.¹²⁴ It was also Le Clerc's aspiration to be able to be impartial and judge objectively only facts, without taking into

123 On the importance of personal qualities in early 18th century debates, see Fox, *Manners and Method* 98–124.

124 So LE CLERC, *A Letter from Mr. Le Clerc* vii–viii, on his translation of Hammond, highly regarded in England, and for which Le Clerc had been harshly criticised – but this reflection could be extended to better focus the way in which he understood his relationship with and duty towards intellectual authority: “there are others, who whether really or seemingly, affirm that I am not indeed to be blamed for translating Dr. *Hammond*; but for annexing those things to his Annotations, wherein I often charge him with Error, or do otherwise contradict his Opinion; as if I were bound to assent to all that he says, or ought to have so great a reverence for his, as to be afraid of professing that I think he was mistaken in his interpretation of some Passages. [...] Which of the two ought to be most valued, Dr. *Hammond*'s Honour, or Truth? The Reputation of a Man long since dead, and whose Opinions no Law divine or humane obliges us to follow; or the defence of immortal Truth, which we cannot forsake without offending both God and Men? If they are of that humour, that they had rather maintain the Honour of a learned Divine, as I before said, but subject to error, than Truth, they are not fit to be spoken with. [...] But the Errors, they say, of great Men, ought to be conceal'd, rather than aggravated. I answer, I have not aggravated any thing, but confuted him in the softest terms, whenever I supposed him in a mistake. However, I don't think the greatest Mens Faults ought to be conceal'd, who the greater they are thought to be, the more liable unwary men are to be deceived by them, and therefore whenever they are out of the way, they ought above all others to be set right again. It is just we should forgive their Mistakes, and bear with their Defects, [...] but we ought not to let Error pass under the disguise of Truth.” On this point, see also PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 86; GRAFTON, *What Was History* 13–18. With his critique of authority, LE CLERC, *Opera Philosophica 1 Logica* (1700) 122 f., targeted also Church authority and Church restrictions, something that had been part of his life experience in Geneva but also later in Amsterdam in a different form. (Church) authority was among the main errors of plausibility. LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 448 f., was critical not only of the Roman Catholic imposition of dogma, but also of the similar behaviour of Protestant confessions. He mentioned in particular the Synod of Dort in which, according to him, Remonstrant theology had been condemned because it had not been in agreement with the Reformed catechism. The synod should have rather reviewed the agreement of the Remonstrant position with Scripture. See also a passionate review by LE CLERC, *BAM* 16/2 (art. 4/2) 431, of the book *Dissertatio de moderatione theologica, deducta ex principis religionis protestantium* of Daniel Maichel (1693–1752). In it he stated again the fact that human authority was weak because it was prone to error and therefore could not be a warranty of truth.

account their authors or the general tradition about them.¹²⁵ On the other hand, however, this intention was sometimes also joined with various remarks on the competence and the personality of the author of the argument. For Le Clerc, adequate technical/critical skills and a distinguished personality could no longer be taken for granted in case of ancient authorities but had to be part of the rational examination. The case of Jerome illustrates this point.

Le Clerc took up the occasion of the first two volumes of a new Maurist edition of the works of Jerome,¹²⁶ in particular the preface of the editor, to discuss the praise given to Jerome by its editor. Among the real reasons for such praise, Le Clerc claimed, were the justification of the big scholarly efforts required for such an edition and the intention to render the work more commercially attractive.¹²⁷ These reasons had influenced even Erasmus in his positive judgment of Jerome, Le Clerc admitted, but he believed that Jerome did not deserve them. Le Clerc's judgment on Jerome was harsh (and a consistent part of his book, *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ*, 1700, was dedicated to proving this judgment):

*“Si enim seponas multam Græcorum & præsertim Latinorum lectionem, conjunctam cum facultate acriter declamandi, aut declamatoriè scribendi, pro ejus ævi palato; cetera omnia sunt mediocria. Non modò Hebraicæ, sed & Græcæ Linguae modica cognitione fuit tinctus. Theologiam ceterasque disciplinas degustaverat, potiùs quàm exhauserat. In inventione quidem nihil propemodum habet exquisiti; in ordine, nihil fermè accurati. In ratiocinatione verò & collectione consectoriorum, plus multò pompæ rethoricæ atque exaggerationis invenias; quàm roboris, & judicii, nisi velis Dialecticæ valedicere.”*¹²⁸

125 This aspiration of impartiality beyond bias was, according to VON REVENTLOW, *Bibel-exegese als Aufklärung* 18, a mark of the upcoming enlightenment in Le Clerc. So LE CLERC, *Compendium historiæ universalis* (præfatio) [4], on the writing of Church history: “*Scriptores plerique, quasi ex compacto, laudant quidem ac probant per omnia eos quibus res ex voto ceciderunt; contrà verò omnia fermè damnant & convitiis inurunt in iis, qui numero suffragiorum victi sunt; quasi secundior eventus, aut multitudo consentientium certissima essent veritatis argumenta, aut quicumque laudati sunt olim, digni laudibus: ut qui damnati, sotes fuissent. Nos verò nec absolvimus, nec damnamus hîc quemquam, nisi quos res ipsa manifestò absolvit aut damnat; & ut plurimum etiam rem dumtaxat narravimus, cum non quæramus hîc quæ dogmata falsa aut vera sint, sed quæ verè contigerint, ac falsa fuerint.*” This approach was further connected with his aim, expressed more fully in the *Ars Critica*, to develop a method to free the meaning of a text without inquiring if the meaning which had been grasped was true in itself or not. As PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 90, had pointed out, this aim, although true in theory, was neglected in practice. See also GRAFTON, *What Was History* 10 f. As we will see, this was the case also with Le Clerc's relationship with authority.

126 MARTIANAY/POUGET, *Sancti Eusebii*; MARTIANAY, *Sancti Eusebii* 2.

127 LE CLERC, *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ* 4–7.

128 *Ibid.* 6 f. It seems therefore highly incorrect to state, as COLLIS, *Reading the Bible* 132, has done on this subject, that Jerome was Le Clerc's exegetical model.

In a later passage of the book he also added that Jerome had been not only too zealous to see truth, but also that he had been inconsistent, for example in the case of his praise and later scorn toward the thought of Origen upon changing circumstances.¹²⁹ All of these elements, Le Clerc admitted, could sound provocative to a reader, *nos propemodum quasi impios ac sacrilegos insectabuntur*,¹³⁰ he added, and, as in the case of Chouet we have just reviewed, they could be perceived as a lack of respect for those who were still somehow considered intellectual giants of the past. For Le Clerc, however, it was just right not only to criticise their conclusions, but also to look at various elements of their person and examine them with the aid of reason. The shared humanity (and thus rationality) between them and Le Clerc and Le Clerc's intellectual experience allowed this.¹³¹ In the end, he claimed, if this was not allowed to him, why would this be allowed to the ancients in relation to those who had come even before them, and how about posterity? How was Jerome allowed to criticise Origen and others?¹³²

Again, Le Clerc's claim to "things themselves" rather than authority, was consistent throughout his work. Even in the preface of his edition of Erasmus he praised him but also highlighted that he had to be read with caution because, after all, Erasmus was only a human being.¹³³ A similar attitude he showed with Grotius, whose philological notes on the fragments of Menander and Philemon's comedies, for example: "*etiam interdum confutavimus; eâ adhibitâ reverentiâ, quæ tanto viro debebatur.*"¹³⁴ However, as is evident from the last example on Jerome,¹³⁵ although this worked, for example, with Erasmus, sometimes it was reasonable to

129 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 237–244.

130 *Ibid.* 8.

131 *Ibid.*: "*Nimirum, quòd homines cùm simus, ac in simili studiorum genere versati, ausimus iudicare de homine, cujus eruditio ad eandem normam ac ceterorum omnium exigenda est; quòd existimemus rectam Rationem pluris faciendam esse, quàm iudicia ex affectu aut ex ignorantia profecta.*"

132 *Ibid.*: "*Quoenim jure, Ratione quidem hodie non licebit nobis uti, in censendis Veterum Scriptis; uti verò olim licuerit Hieronymo erga Origenem & alios, quos audacter reprehendit: aut posthac licebit, erga nos, nepotibus nostris?*"

133 *Id.*, Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera 1 (præfatio) 6: "*Non dicam Erasmus mihi semper videri de omnibus rectè iudicasse; hominem enim eum puto fuisse, non Deum.*" FLITNER, Erasmus im Urteil seiner Nachwelt 123. 128 f., has argued that, although Le Clerc admired Erasmus from many points of view, he was still critical of him in the same way as other Protestants: Erasmus did not want to see or act upon the consequences of his own ideas. Still, Flitner has also added that Le Clerc's originality in that was that his judgment of Erasmus was not based on simple tradition, but upon careful study of Erasmus's work and letters. Over time, Le Clerc came to see what he believed to be the "true" and the "official" Erasmus.

134 LE CLERC, Menandri et Philemonis reliquiæ (præfatio) [3].

135 And here he showed again his desire to overcome the judgment of Erasmus and focus on the evidence of facts, Quæstiones Hieronymianæ 8f.: "*Deinde si iudicium hoc nostrum rebus ipsis manifestò postea comprobabitur, an æquum est majus pondus auctoritati Erasmi*

look at multiple aspects of an author, and as a consequence a general assessment of the author already provided an important background for the judgment on the thing itself. In the case of Erasmus, for example, this also worked in a more positive direction; that is, a positive evaluation of, for example, the philological skills of Erasmus was already a preparatory positive judgment for an evaluation of many of his philological notes, albeit this did not have to be so all the time. In the remainder of the present work it will become increasingly clear how Le Clerc's judgments on a variety of aspects of Origen's technical competence and personal qualities crucially supported with his judgments on some of Origen's arguments and his thought.

In sum: what seems crucial from these last pages is that, notwithstanding the fact that Le Clerc rejected the traditional concept of authority in favour of a rational assessment of "facts", he also at times examined authors holistically. As a result, on some occasions his critique of authorities was particularly strong and total but in some other circumstances this also worked in a more positive way. This attitude allowed that he did not reject altogether the possibility that one could look holistically at an author besides his arguments and find him authoritative in a particular field or on a particular occasion, if the right conditions existed (and in some cases if it was convenient to his intellectual project). Again, the harsh critique on Jerome meant that Le Clerc's operation was particularly radical in its effort to destroy the aura of sacredness of ancient authorities, more radical than many of his contemporaries were probably ready to accept. The double effect of this process was, however, that those authors whom he found worthy of praise from different perspectives, Erasmus and Grotius as examples, gained a positive advantage over other competing figures. This could seem again a sort of "authority" used strategically, but this time it was an authority that, in Le Clerc's Cartesian spirit, was used selectively and had also been chosen as such because it had passed a general test of reason.¹³⁶ After all, as Le Clerc claimed multiple times, the only real authority to be accepted blindly was the one of Jesus and his apostles.¹³⁷

[Le Clerc had mentioned the positive judgment of Erasmus on Jerome in the previous page], *aliorumve tribui, quam ipsi rerum Evidentiæ?*"

136 Id., BC 1 (art. 3) 134; BC 2 (art. 2) 95. Although LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 1) 32 f., had conceded on one occasion that the fact that many support a particular tradition or argument was of *très-grand poids*, he clarified in another that a tradition, even if supported by many, was not worth following just for that fact alone, but had to be examined first: BC 13 (art. 3) 244. A selective use of tradition was also present in Tronchin, who believed that tradition had to be followed when correct but had to be rejected when wrong. It was for his hostility towards authority, BARNES, Jean Le Clerc 47, has argued, that Tronchin had been the preferred teacher of Le Clerc. See also FATIO, Louis Tronchin 332.

137 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [17]; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 413 of 28 March 1706, Le Clerc to Dodwell) 10; LE CLERC, *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 120; HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 1 (dedicatio, by Le Clerc) [5].

2.2 Uses of the Past

Le Clerc's appreciation and use of past scholarship was consistent with his stance on ancient authority. He was surely not of the party of those who believed the past had to be used as model to be imitated but still had many reasons, as we shall see in this section, to selectively exploit the past as a resource. The main difference in the use of the past compared with some of his contemporaries seems to be that he was at times more selective and more critical of ancient sources. Yet, Anthony Grafton has pointed out that the general interpretative framework Le Clerc used to make sense of the past was not dissimilar to authors of Humanism and the Renaissance. Depending on the occasion, Le Clerc would adopt a *historical* reading of the past, where awareness of the temporal distance of the past was taken into account, or an *ahistorical* reading of the past, where such distance remained unacknowledged and the past was simply brought into the present (and often criticised accordingly).¹³⁸

Grafton has also claimed that this double framework could be a general feature of every Humanism, and that the application of one interpretative framework over the other was dependent on the various needs that a certain text was supposed to cover.¹³⁹ A historical reading of the past could have been reserved, for example, to technical works, and an ahistorical one for commentaries and teaching material, although such restriction of domains, he assured, was hardly conceivable in a context of harsh disputes.¹⁴⁰ Nicholas Hardy has discussed this further and has argued that Le Clerc's choice of interpretative framework was dependent on his goals in confessional disputes and that he therefore applied a different interpretative framework if the object of enquiry was the Bible (historical) or profane literature (ahistorical).¹⁴¹ The historical framework seemed to serve confessional disputes better. I believe that this point can be partially confirmed if we consider what Le Clerc regarded as the different uses of the pagan past, which were all conceived in an ahistorical way, as we will see in the next pages. This was still a mark of Le Clerc's Humanism despite the fact that the influence of the "new philosophies" was visible in the critical and linguistically aware examination of the past. His approach to the early Church was, on the other hand, a rather blended approach, with elements of both frameworks, as will be evident from the next section.

An additional factor we should take into account to better understand Le Clerc's choice of interpretative framework of the past was, I believe, that Le Clerc

138 GRAFTON, *Renaissance Readers* 25–42; id., *Epilogue* 225–227.

139 Id., *Renaissance Readers* 42–46.

140 Ibid. 41.

141 A discussion of the reasons behind both approaches, which highlights the confessional-religious debates of his time, can be found in HARDY, *Criticism and Confession* 395–398.

had dedicated more efforts in his career to the philological-technical study of biblical texts than to pagan and even Christian antiquity more generally. He was therefore more prone to a historical discussion of biblical passages and aware of their historical component than in the case of other works of antiquity. Although this is not a decisive element to exclude a purely polemical use in the choice of interpretative framework, it certainly testifies to the overall centrality of religious discourse in Le Clerc compared to purely philological-scholarly interests.

Again, the reasons behind his study of the Bible show that there was more at work than only confessional polemics in Le Clerc's choice of interpretative framework of the past. One should not forget, I believe, that his interest in an analysis of the Bible was much more dictated by his *modica theologia* approach, which needed a secure foundation, and his interest in a redefinition of orthodoxy and with it in the possible achievements of his tolerance and irenic goals. Le Clerc's choice of interpretative framework was thus influenced by the possible consequences at stake that were much more pressing for him in the case of religious topics, not necessarily due to confessional polemics. This required a historical analysis, a kind of analysis which was not equally required in other domains, for example in the consideration of the pagan past, as we will now see.

A concise and general statement by Le Clerc on what he considered the correct use of the past expressed the need to value antiquity only for the good it had to offer. In Le Clerc's own words:

“Pour moi, je la [antiquity] respecte & je l'honore, dans tout ce qu'elle a de bon & de raisonnable; mais je ne l'écale pas à la Verité & à la Raison. Ce ne sont que ces deux choses, qui la font estimer, lors qu'elles l'accompagnent, & qui lui donnent tout le lustre qu'elle peut avoir. Sans elles, l'Antiquité n'est qu'un vain phantôme; & des choses déraisonnables, ou fausses, qui ont passé jusqu'à nous au travers de deux mille ans, ne sont pas plus excusables, que si elles avoient été inventées hier.”¹⁴²

The example that preceded the passage we have just reviewed was concerned with Justin Martyr (100–163/167) and his wrong attribution of a statue in Rome. He had attributed it to Simon the Wizard, but it was in reality a statue of Hercules. Even Justin was prone to error! That this general statement on the use of antiquity could be further applied to antiquity in general, not only to Justin's example, seems not only appropriate from the way Le Clerc's reflection was presented but also by what followed it. He commented on his love for English scholarship contemporary to him and for England but claimed that this was not sufficient to blindly accept everything that English authors have written.¹⁴³

142 LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 2) 122 f.

143 Ibid. 123: “Il n'y a personne de deçà la mer, qui ait tant dit de bien des Auteurs Anglois, que moi, & qui estime davantage leur nation; mais mon estime ne va pas jusqu'à me persuader

Among the “good and reasonable things” one can gain from the past, a place of prominence in Le Clerc’s thought was taken by history, not only for its obvious factual content, a topic we will analyse in more detail in a later section and that I will leave aside for the moment, but mainly for its moral-educational value.¹⁴⁴ A classic theme, still commonplace during Humanism and the Renaissance, the purpose of history for Le Clerc was to show the way to a better understanding of the present and to be a guide for life, even of daily life.¹⁴⁵ Le Clerc was averse to not only a polemical use of history¹⁴⁶ but also to histories that were intended purely as entertainment. He was therefore critical of Homer and Virgil, and as an additional factor he contended that the moral value of the Iliad, Odyssey and Aeneid, if any, was dubious because the lessons one could find in these classical works could be interpreted in contrary ways.¹⁴⁷ Le Clerc was also critical of ancient, highly regarded historians like Herodotus and Livy (he was, however, amazed by the impartiality of Polybius):¹⁴⁸ their pure and clear style should be praised, but not their histories overall; they were not perfect.¹⁴⁹

A history that had some – mainly moral – educational value for the present was for Le Clerc a clearly written history based on selected sources and on impartiality. This history he had himself written in abbreviated form, covering

qu’il faille sacrifier la Verité & le Bon-Sens aux Auteurs Anglois, comme la populace de cette Ile, & le rebut de ses Colleges, se l’imaginent quelquefois; ou que ce soit un attentat à un homme d’une autre nation, de relever avec douceur de grosses fautes commises par un Anglois.”

144 GARFAGNINI, Jean Le Clerc 40–53, has convincingly shown another layer of Le Clerc’s interest in history, which is that the truths of history can be the fundament of the reunion of churches and so of lasting peace. I think, however, that this was not specific to history, but a similar intention could be found also in Le Clerc’s exegetical efforts, for example. At the same time, if we consider Le Clerc’s conception of history more generally, Le Clerc seemed clearly interested in the moral-educational value of history and he stated this goal to his readers and friends. The intention to unify churches and lasting peace remained his final goal, we could even say one of the main goals of his entire production, but so was his ethical-pastoral effort which was connected to the idea of merit and personal freedom and so of the reward and punishment in the next life.

145 This is the reason his *Compendium historiae universalis* had been written, according to LE CLERC, *Compendium historiae universalis* (præfatio) [1f.], with the correct number of pages so that it could be learned by heart. It is too bad that the book is more than 200 (8°) pages long! On this, see also id., *Ars critica* 1 (1697) (præfatio) 9–11; id., *Joannis Clerici Oratio inauguralis* 5–12; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 4 (letter 738 of 28 March 1723, Le Clerc to Jean-Alphonse Turretini) 200.

146 LE CLERC, *Vie d’Armand Jean* 1 (avertissement) [1–3].

147 Id., *Parrhasiana* 52–72. PITASSI, *Histoire de Dieux* 133, has argued that Le Clerc considered Greek antiquity as amoral and so negatively and this explains in part his aversion to classical epopees of ancient Greece.

148 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 152–166.

149 *Ibid.* 145 f.

the period from the creation of the world to the empire of Charlemagne and in a longer form covering the history of the Church of the first two centuries.¹⁵⁰ That history had a special role in Le Clerc's thought and in his pastoral efforts could be further shown by the fact that he had spent a considerable amount of time in the last years of his scholarly career, setting aside other important works, to also compose a history of the Low Countries with a similar intention in mind.¹⁵¹ He had also written a history of the negotiations of the peace of Westphalia and in the preface he had laid out what he considered the principles of natural law. He stated for example that the natural state of relations between human beings is a state of friendship and mutual help (thus in opposition to Hobbes) that if a damage is caused it should be repaired, that in some cases forgiveness is more reasonable than the claim to justice and much more.¹⁵² He then clarified at the end of this digression, that he had composed his history of the peace negotiations to support his ideas of natural law and show how his ideas had actually worked in practice.¹⁵³

Again a similar role for the past, this time the past as part of the *Belles Lettres*, was for Le Clerc the education of the spirit (including style of expression)¹⁵⁴ and of the will: "cette espece d'étude peut beaucoup servir à former l'esprit, & à régler les mouvemens du cœur."¹⁵⁵ Le Clerc had asserted multiple times his educational purposes for his editions of classical authors: they had been published mainly for the youth and non-professionals.¹⁵⁶ Knowledge in general, including knowledge gained through a study of the *Belles Lettres* seemed to Le Clerc of the utmost importance for the establishment of morality: "l'ignorance est la mere de la déprava-

150 The short treatise was the just mentioned *Compendium historiae universalis* and the longer work on the first two centuries of the church was the *Historia ecclesiastica*.

151 LE CLERC, *Histoire des Provinces Unies* 1 (preface) [2]; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 4 (letter 738 of 28 March 1723, Le Clerc to Jean-Alphonse Turretini, and letter 752 of 10 September 1723, Le Clerc to Wake) 199. 228. See also GARFAGNINI, *Jean Le Clerc* 61.

152 LE CLERC, *Negotiations secretes* 1 (avertissement) [3–5].

153 *Ibid.* [16].

154 *Id.*, *Parrhasiana* 344.

155 *Ibid.* 343. In *Ars Critica* 1 (1697) (præfatio) 11, Le Clerc had also written: "*Ope humaniorum litterarum, expolitur ac emollitur animus, naturâ suâ rudis & tenax earum rerum, quibus primùm imbuitur aut percillitur; quod in rusticis deprehendimus, qui non modò rudes sunt & ignari eorum, quæ in villa sua non viderunt; sed etiam pertinacissimè plerumque adhærent consuetudinibus & opinionibus ab infantia acceptis.*" This was characteristic of both the Renaissance and Humanism: VAN ASSELT, *Open Hand and Fist* 73 f.

156 LE CLERC, *Hesiiodi Ascræi* [1]; *id.*, *Æschinis Socratici* [1]; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 487 of 12 July 1709, Le Clerc to James Saint Amand) 210. Confirmed also in SINA, *Vico e Le Clerc* 31. A further reason in Le Clerc's edition of classical authors, that is that he did not consider adequate previous Humanist editions, has been highlighted by ISRAEL, *Enlightenment Contested* 414 f. For an overview of other possible reasons for an edition of classics, commercial purposes, for example, not necessarily applicable to Le Clerc, see GARFAGNINI, *Antonio Magliabechi* 146.

tion des mœurs, & [...] le véritable savoir est la source de la vertu la plus solide.”¹⁵⁷ The past had thus, once again, the role of the moral teacher and again we are still in a rather Humanist – ahistorical – conception of the use of the past.¹⁵⁸ Yet, *Belles Lettres* alone could not reach such a goal, Le Clerc claimed, because they had to be joined by a study of philosophy – philosophy understood in a Cartesian sense as a methodology for rational enquiry.¹⁵⁹ In this way, *Belles Lettres* and philosophy, Le Clerc claimed, one was able to be selective with antiquity: “Par là, on se met en état de profiter de ce que les Anciens ont de bon, sans être en danger d’admirer leurs défauts.”¹⁶⁰ If further joined with theology, philosophy and *Belles Lettres* would together contribute to the advancement of true religion, to the understanding of Scripture, and so lead to a respect for the moral laws dictated by it.¹⁶¹

For Le Clerc, the past as well as the present could also be useful to illustrate, clarify and support an argument. He expressed this thought as part of the above reasoning on philosophy and *Belles Lettres*, and argued that:

“Si les discours des Philosophes étoient pleins d’exemples importants, tirez des Auteurs Ecclesiastiques & Profanes, ausquels on appliqueroit les Réglés de l’Art de raisonner; cette manière d’enseigner ferait comprendre l’usage de la Philosophie, qui est autrement toute renfermée dans les murailles d’un Auditoire, & que l’on rend ainsi digne de mépris.”¹⁶²

He expressed this thought again in an article in the *BC*, in the occasion of his first review of the *True Intellectual System* of Cudworth. Here he showed his appreciation for Cudworth because this latter had avoided two opposite approaches to the work of past authors: those who read and simply summarise ancient authors and those who only select very few sources and argue following their own reasoning. Cudworth’s book was worth reading, Le Clerc claimed, because he had been able to use a vast array of ancient authors profitably, overcoming the two opposites.¹⁶³ In what exactly that profit consisted was not immediately available to a reader of this passage, but if one analyses the many articles dedicated by Le Clerc to this work of Cudworth,¹⁶⁴ one can easily discover in many instances that the past had both an illustrative and supportive function to the different arguments proposed.¹⁶⁵ A role for the past that Le Clerc, evidently, did not dislike at all.

157 LE CLERC, Parrhasiana 344.

158 HARDY, Criticism and Confession 397 f.

159 LE CLERC, Parrhasiana 342 f.

160 Ibid. 343 f.

161 Ibid. 344–346. 349 f.

162 Ibid. 348.

163 Id., BC 1 (art. 3) 64 f.

164 A total of 13 articles between 1703–1706, all in *BC*.

165 See, for example, KORS, Naturalism and Unbelief 272–278.

In conclusion, it is useful to stress that, as in the previous discussion on authority, Le Clerc did not leave the past unchallenged. He was not only willing to engage with the past but found many good reasons to do so: some that were closer to a common Humanist framework, some that were less so and could be more serving of his confessional or his tolerance and irenic goals. The prerequisite of this engagement was an honest examination of the past, in the certainty that his method of rational examination was the key to a correct relationship with it.¹⁶⁶ In the next section we will review how Le Clerc's approach to the past and his disregard for any sort of authority was also expressed in his consideration and use of Church Fathers.

2.3 The Christian Tradition: Church Fathers and Early Christian Writers

Le Clerc's interest in Christian antiquity was not sparked by his appointment to the chair of ecclesiastical history after Limborch's death, as Sina has claimed.¹⁶⁷ Not only was Le Clerc generally knowledgeable about the Fathers from the early years of his career, as we will now see, but he had also nurtured a scholarly interest in their writings years before his appointment in ecclesiastical history. This is evident, at least in what concerns the Apostolic Fathers, in the new edition of the monumental work of Jean Baptist Cotelier (1626–1686), the *Ecclesiae Græcæ Monumenta*, published originally in four volumes between 1677 and 1682. Le Clerc's chosen title was *SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt*. He published it in 1698 and combined the material in only two in-folio volumes. The material was arranged in a completely different way compared to Cotelier, and many new notes, including some that he had written himself, were added to it. This shows that Le Clerc did not simply re-edit Cotelier's work but took great care and efforts in producing almost a new piece of work.¹⁶⁸

In the preface of the first volume of his *SS. Patrum*, Le Clerc did not articulate in depth his intentions with his new edition of Cotelier but clarified instead that the value of those ancient Christian writers had no need to be highlighted because it was self-evident. He wrote: "*Ecclesiasticorum Scriptorum antiquissimos, secundum Apostolos, eosque celeberrimorum virorum vigiliis illustratos denuo pro-*

166 So LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 351 f., in the final passage of his discussion of the value of the joint action of philosophy, theology and *Belles Lettres*: "S'il ya quelque chose à reprendre dans la manière, dont on se sert souvent de la connoissance de l'Antiquité; il y auroit des moiens, comme je viens de le dire & comme je l'ai déjà marqué ailleurs, de relever cette sorte de Science, en s'y prenant autrement."

167 This has been claimed by SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (introduzione) viii.

168 On Le Clerc's editorial work on Cotelier, see PITASSI, *Jean Le Clerc éditeur* 279–292.

*ferentibus laudatione nihil opus est. Nemo, præter homines planè barbaros atque illiteratos, præstantiam atque usum horum librorum ignorat.*¹⁶⁹ He then spent the rest of the preface describing the actual edition rather than arguing for the value of its content.¹⁷⁰

Such a statement was surprising if we consider that Le Clerc's relationship with the early Church was not as traditional and straightforward as we could imagine from reading these lines.¹⁷¹ In his very first letter to Limborch in 1681, when he was still in Saumur, Le Clerc showed that he shared with the Arminians, and with Étienne de Courcelles in particular, the belief that the Fathers could err and that the authority of their thoughts should not be left unexamined. He felt, instead, that *hisce oris*, such an attitude was considered dangerous and the idea that Fathers could err was rejected.¹⁷² Despite the developments of the reformed theologians Jean Daillé (1594–1670) and Rivet on this subject and the resulting new awareness in the use of Fathers, orthodox Reformed theologians still used the Fathers at times as *testes veritatis*. This was especially needed in a time where the Fathers were important to counter the Anti-Trinitarians, for example.¹⁷³

The major point of critique that Le Clerc moved to an excessive consideration of the Fathers and that became a thread that spanned throughout his life, was the fact that their authority had been one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, for the loss of the original message of the Gospel. This thought was already present in Le Clerc's first book, in which he told the story of the simplicity of the

169 LE CLERC, SS. Patrum 1 (præfatio) [i].

170 Another relatively minor example of the fact that Le Clerc had an interest in the Fathers early on in his career can be found in a letter to Le Cène from 1685. Le Clerc did not agree with a new edition of a treatise that Le Cène had composed, titled *De l'état de l'homme après le péché et de sa prédestination au salut*, published in 1684. He found it more useful to add to it a dissertation where he showed that the Fathers before Augustine differed from him in their conception of the original corruption of human beings and their predestination to salvation: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 100 of 20 August 1685, Le Clerc to Le Cène) 374 f.

171 Le Clerc was obviously far from the Roman Catholic doctrine of tradition. His main point of criticism was the fact that the Roman Catholic Church had no sure criterion to confirm the tradition is so strongly supported. While part of the Jewish tradition was confirmed by ancient prophets, LE CLERC, Sentimens 53–55, claimed, the same could not be said of the Roman Catholic Church. A strong statement against tradition in general: "Il n'y a rien de moins assuré que la Tradition, & que si l'on jugeoit du sens de l'Ecriture, par les sentimens que l'on a eu en divers temps parmi les Chrétiens, il n'y auroit rien de moins assuré, ni de plus changeant" (ibid. 49).

172 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 4 of 10 August 1681, Le Clerc to van Limborch) 14. We can also refer to an example reviewed in the first section of this chapter, in which Chouet had reproached to Le Clerc the extreme freedom he had taken with Augustine.

173 A discussion of this point is offered in the introduction of the present work. See also VAN ASSELT, Scholasticism 134 f.; MEIJERING, The Fathers in Calvinist Orthodoxy 867–869. 876.

Apostolic message that was lost due to the little Scriptural knowledge of the early Church, but this was a recurrent message also found in some other books. For Le Clerc, the Fathers interpreted Scripture wrongly from the beginning, adapted the evangelical message to the philosophy of the time (especially Platonism) and focused a lot more on rhetoric¹⁷⁴ than on the content itself.¹⁷⁵ Philosophy was so deeply embedded in their theology that a knowledge of Platonism and Neoplatonism (Plotin) was a prerequisite for a comprehension of their writing.¹⁷⁶ When the first Roman Emperors became Christian, an even stronger accent was set on rhetoric and philosophising than on Scriptural interpretation, and this continued over the centuries. The capacity to interpret Scripture was gradually lost and the theologians of later centuries had to go back to the (erroneous) interpreters of the first centuries.¹⁷⁷ This became a model for the next generations and that original erroneous interpretation was passed on unquestioned:

*“Hinc factum ut Christiana Reigio [sic] simplicitatem illam primævam paulatim amiserit, & Apostolorum scripta initio tam facillè intellecta obscura tandem evaserint. Hinc ortæ immanes circa eorum [of the Fathers] interpretationem [sic] controversiæ, & Christianismus in tot sectas divisus ac dilaceratus. Qui enim erudiebantur ut alios docerent, à teneris unguiculis rationem illam scripturæ interpretandæ imbuebant. Nemo illos styli Apostolici & Religionis Christianæ verum edocebat Genium. Ita denique præconceptionibus opinionibus occæbantur, ut cùm adultiores scripturam legebant, conarentur potiùs Magistrorum suorum sensa in ea reperire, quàm genuinum ejus assequi sensum.”*¹⁷⁸

The authority of the Fathers remained unquestioned, Le Clerc clarified in *Parrhasiana*, due to the fact that they were the most (scholarly) capable men of their time and that they were at times *très-redoutables*.¹⁷⁹ The praises to Church Fathers, Le Clerc added: “sont venuës de main en main, jusqu’à nous, & nous ne sommes que

174 Rhetoric was considered on some occasions negatively by Le Clerc as a sort of enchantment of the reader that would leave erroneous thoughts unnoticed. This was also the case, he argued, with the Fathers, especially the Latin ones, LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 8 f.: “On lit, en quelques endroits, les Peres de l’Eglise, surtout les Latins; dans une forte résolution de les trouver beaux & solides, & de leur sacrifier humblement toute sa Raison; après quoi on fait non seulement quartier aux fausses pensées, & aux méchants raisonnemens dont leurs Ecrits sont pleins; mais peu à peu on les admire, & on les imite. [...] Tout raisonnement, qui a quelque legere apparence, passe pour bon.”

175 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 363; LE CLERC, *Opera Philosophica* 2 *Pneumatologia* (1698) 90; id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 529 f.

176 Id., *Oratio inauguralis* 27.

177 Id., *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [7–12]; id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 124 f.

178 Id., *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [12].

179 Id., *Parrhasiana* 117. He mentioned also the *cabale* (obscurity) of the Fathers and their authority in general as further elements that led to their becoming part of an unquestioned tradition.

les Echos, pour ainsi dire, de siècles ignorans & barbares; sans vouloir examiner si ce que nous disons après eux est vrai, ou non.¹⁸⁰ If one were to produce a scholarly work similar to them in his century, Le Clerc concluded, he would be criticised from all sides. This was a sign that a doubtful standard of reasoning was applied to the judgment of the works of the Fathers.¹⁸¹

The transmission of the unquestioned authority of the Fathers over the centuries fostered for Le Clerc the appearance of religious disputes and the creation of the so-called “heretics.” Over time, instead of the Apostles and Jesus, the Fathers became the only sources of religious truth, the *solī Christianorum doctores*.¹⁸² What made the process even more complex and detrimental for the Church was that even the thought of the Fathers was later misunderstood: *sic errorem alius error traxit*.¹⁸³ This vicious cycle should not surprise the Christian, Le Clerc thought, because Jesus had left open the possibility that error would creep in so that the believer would have a genuine choice in what to believe and would be rewarded or punished accordingly.¹⁸⁴ With the help of divine providence, but only with the Reformation and its focus on Scripture, a new era began, so Le Clerc. However, this work had to be continued.¹⁸⁵

When he criticised the Patristic tradition for the damage it had allegedly done to the original message of Jesus and to the whole Church, Le Clerc was convinced of the little reliability of the Fathers in religious matters; this was based on a number of reasons. I have already mentioned Platonic philosophy as one of them. This was a sign that content foreign to revelation had been introduced into Christianity and this addition had to be regarded with distrust. To make matters worse, however, the Fathers’ intention to integrate philosophy and revelations was combined, according to Le Clerc, with a non-existent or very small knowledge of Hebrew on their part and very poor philological-exegetical skills.¹⁸⁶ This was so at least up to the time of Jerome and with the exception of Origen, who nonetheless had only a very modest knowledge of Hebrew,¹⁸⁷ as we will see in more detail in another chapter.¹⁸⁸ A fundamental criterion to trust the Scriptural interpretation and so the teachings of the Church Fathers, the fact that they had a privileged access to Scripture, was for Le Clerc invalid. They had no better instrument for exegesis

180 Ibid. 118.

181 Ibid.

182 Id., *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [13 f.].

183 Ibid. [14].

184 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 179 f.

185 Id., *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [15–17]; id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 125.

186 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 527–531. A summary of these pages was part of a review in *BAM*, see: id., *BAM* 6/2 (art. 3/2) 331–333.

187 Id., *A Letter from Mr. Le Clerc* vi.

188 See chapter 4.

than early modern interpreters and they were rather lacking in fundamentals, that is languages and philology, as just discussed.¹⁸⁹

A further fundamental reason not to trust the Fathers for Le Clerc was their scarce application of the rules of logic and dialectic. This was his harsh critique to the Fathers' arguments:

“Leurs discours & leurs ouvrages sont pleins de raisonnemens de cette nature, qui ne souffriroient pas plus l'examen de la Logique, qu'un métal doré ne souffriroit l'épreuve de la Coupelle. Si on les réduisoit en syllogismes, & que l'on prît garde avec soin à l'ambiguité des mots, & aux principes qu'ils supposent; on s'appercevroit d'abord, que ce ne sont que de purs sophismes, fondez sur des équivoques ou sur des suppositions insoutenables. On verroit qu'en raisonnant de la sorte, il n'y a rien qu'on ne pût combattre, & que l'on ne pût prouver.”¹⁹⁰

Le Clerc was aware of the possible criticism he would have attracted with this argument: if the Fathers reasoned in a certain way, it could have been claimed, it was a strong proof that such argumentative logic was correct.¹⁹¹ However, he rejected such a statement with an appeal to a sort of universal logic that was not dependent on consensus or authority and which was the sole rule of judgment to be applied for an evaluation of an argument:

“Quiconque les viole [the rules of logic] est condamnable, devant le tribunal des Logiciens; fût ce même un Concile Ecumenique, confirmé par plusieurs autres. Il n'y a point d'autorité au monde, qui puisse faire des loix arbitraires du bon raisonnement, ou changer un sophisme en un bon syllogisme, ou faire qu'un raisonnement juste devienne sophisme, sans y rien changer.”¹⁹²

A faulty logic was something not specific to Christian authors, Le Clerc clarified, but was also shared among pagan philosophers, from whom the Fathers had learned their dialectic style.¹⁹³ Le Clerc was ultimately not totally dismissive of the Fathers' argumentative logic but conceded that it could have been useful in a few

189 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 118 f.

190 Id., *Parrhasiana* 77f. A similar argument can be found in id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 530: “*Si qui caruerunt adflatu Spiritûs Sancti, adcuratæ ratiocinationis canones scivissent & diligenter observassent; numquam à Vero aberrassent, aut certè rariùs multò. Sed cùm non satis, in hac arte, essent versati, nec regularum ejus observantes; passim factum est ut quasi vera & explorata ratiocinando sumerent, quæ erant aut falsa, aut incerta & obscura; tum etiam, cum consequentias nectere nescirent, multa è positis deducerent, quæ ex iis non consequebantur.*” See also id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 115.

191 Id., *Parrhasiana* 78.

192 Ibid. 79.

193 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 530: “*Nec mirum à Christianis rectæ Dialecticæ leges ignoratas, aut parum observatas fuisse; cùm similia possint jure Ethnicis Philosophis objici, à quibus Dia-*

cases as a start to overcome prejudice and passion from the audience.¹⁹⁴ Such logic should not be considered the norm, however.¹⁹⁵ As a result of the Fathers' lacking dialectic and logic, their thoughts became quite obscure.

I have already mentioned that for Le Clerc the fact that the Fathers were misunderstood in later centuries was considered a further step in the process of creating distance from the original message. On many occasions he criticised them for the way they expressed their thoughts. That Scripture was obscure at times, so Le Clerc, did not mean that the Fathers were clearer, in reality: "si l'Écriture n'est pas claire dans les choses controversées, les Peres sont encore plus obscurs."¹⁹⁶ His favourite examples, for reasons that will be explored during the present work, were the doctrines of the Trinity and of predestination.¹⁹⁷ An even stronger attack on the Fathers due to the obscurity of their writings can be found in *Parrhasiana*,¹⁹⁸

lecticam didicerant, quæ, ut nunc omnes norunt, parum adcurata, aptiorque ad litigandum, quàm ad Veritatem inveniendam, erat." Also in id., *Parrhasiana* 78.

194 It was the case of *raisonnemens foibles*, poor reasoning, that could nonetheless impress the audience in such a way as to open the way to being listened to when stronger arguments were presented. It was an initial dissimulation for strategic reasons: id., *Parrhasiana* 82–84. A practical example of this argumentative strategy can be found in the discussion of the truthfulness of pagan oracles. Although Origen and Eusebius did not believe that pagan oracles really had the power to predict, so LE CLERC, *BC* 13 (art. 3) 201 f., they did not entirely dismiss their supernatural power in order to be better able to convince pagans of their position at a later point. Israel's remark on this, that Le Clerc "doubted whether the truly wise could ever approve such devout manipulation", he supported with a passage from the latter's *The Lives of the Primitive Fathers*, ISRAEL, *Enlightenment Contested* 424: "Several people believe that the want of sincerity of some Christians, and the credulity of some others, did very much contribute to the keeping up of Paganism." See LE CLERC, *The Lives of the Primitive Fathers* 204. I believe, however, that the passages from *Parrhasiana* and the *BC* show that he was less critical of this approach than it would seem from the passage mentioned by Israel. In another passage from the same book, again mentioned by Israel, *ibid.* 50 f., Le Clerc softened again his critique of the Fathers' dissimulation in a historical manner: "But 'tis the Custom of many Antients, to make use of all sorts of Arguments and Books, to bring over Men to their Opinions. If any should use the same Method now, they would presently be accused of Simplicity, or want of Honesty: But every Age hath its Customs. However, 'tis certain that the Rules of Good Sence have always been the same." It seems therefore reasonable to believe that for Le Clerc the Fathers' dissimulation was excusable, after all, for historical reasons and was therefore not a viable alternative for the moderns.

195 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 84: "Mais on n'en doit jamais venir là, que par force; c'est-à-dire, lors que la Verité seroit d'abord rejetée, si elle paroissoit telle qu'elle est en elle même."

196 Id., *Sentimens* 45. See also id., *BUH* 3 (art. 5) 107.

197 Id., *Sentimens* 45–47; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 446 of September–October 1707, Le Clerc to Nicholls) 89; LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1697) 322–324; id., *Oratio inauguralis* 21.

198 Id., *Parrhasiana* 112: "La plûpart des Peres Grecs & Latins [...] harangent presque tous-jours, & [...] évitent les expressions nettes & propres, avec autant de soin que les Orateurs Atheniens les recherchoient. Aussi presque tout est déguisé & enflé chez eux, d'une

even if this was partially justified in the end through a reference to forms of rhetoric contemporary to them: "Ainsi il leur [the Fathers] faut pardonner ce défaut [obscurity], mais on doit bien se garder de l'imiter."¹⁹⁹ The authority of the Fathers in matters of religion and Scripture was not recovered, but at least the blame on them on this point was softened.

In a reflection which appeared in the third volume of the *Ars Critica*, Le Clerc brought into sharper focus the question on the *reverentia* that was due to the authors of books, which he wanted to consider separately from the regard that could be given to the book itself. He sketched three criteria that, according to him, justified a particular regard to certain authors. These were: *mores*, *eruditio* and *dignitates seu munera*.²⁰⁰ He applied these criteria to the Church Fathers to review whether, according to these criteria, they were worthy of special regard. Starting with the last criterion, ecclesiastical dignity, he contended that although the Fathers were in possession of a certain dignity due to their ecclesiastical status when alive, such dignity disappeared with their death, as is the case with kings, who can be freely judged once dead.²⁰¹

On the Fathers' erudition, Le Clerc clarified that erudition was different from fame, *quæ fallax sæpe est*. Erudition had to be based on their writings alone.²⁰² He brought back some of the points we have just reviewed: the Fathers' lacking knowledge of biblical languages, their poor style and the obscure content of their writings.²⁰³ All of this taken into account, Le Clerc argued, the Fathers were not worthy of particular regard due to their erudition. In fact, modern biblical interpreters were superior to them.²⁰⁴ He concluded, softening the tone of his analysis: "*si verò, quamvis Recentioribus pares non sint, ad eruditionem quod adinet, Veteribus tamen suam quoque reverentiam tribuendam contendant; non intercedo quidem, modò ne nimia exigatur.*"²⁰⁵

The final point, the Fathers' *mores*, was also not considered a valid justification to regard the Fathers in a particular way. Even supposing that the Fathers had

manière si extraordinaire, qu'on a toutes les peines du monde à les entendre; quand il s'agit d'une matière, qui est un peu obscure en elle même. Quelquefois ils outrent si étrangement les choses, qu'on ne sait s'ils parlent sérieusement, ou s'ils ont dessein d'imposer seulement à la populace. C'étoit à la vérité le défaut du temps, autant que celui des personnes; car l'Eloquence de ces temps-là étoit aussi différente de celle des anciens Orateurs Atheniens, ou Romains: qu'une femme fardée & accablée, pour ainsi dire, de parures excessives l'est d'une femme vêtue modestement."

199 Ibid.

200 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 100.

201 Ibid. 100–102.

202 Ibid. 102.

203 Ibid. 102–111.

204 Ibid. 111.

205 Ibid.

conducted a holier life than his contemporaries, Le Clerc clarified that this was no guarantee to give special consideration to their writings: “*Sanctitas ac constantia non sunt necessariò cum summo iudicio inscribendo, summáque adcuratione conjunctæ.*”²⁰⁶ This was even more so, Le Clerc added, because the number of holy people had not been less in the 16th century than in the early Church due to the martyrs of the Reformation.²⁰⁷ Le Clerc also contended that, after all, the Fathers had not been impeccable models of morality and had disregarded the commands of Jesus.²⁰⁸ One was still free to praise them for their holy life when it had actually been the case, Le Clerc continued, but this was a different kind of reverence than the one deserved to the *docti*.²⁰⁹ In the end, the Fathers were still human beings and so prone to error: “*solus Christus fuit immunis, ut omnis erroris, ita & omnis vitii.*”²¹⁰

Given this analysis, Le Clerc concluded that, rather than the Fathers, it was actually modern authors who deserved significantly more (scholarly) regard: “*Quæ dixi hactenus eò spectant, ut intelligatur haud paullò major deberi reverentia viris magnis, quos patrum nostrorum & nostra hæc ætetas tulit; quàm priscis, quos omni eruditionis genere multum superârunt.*”²¹¹ The erudition of an author was thus the sole criterion upon which to base a positive judgment on him as a scholar, and for Le Clerc, as is clear, the Fathers were really *longè inferiores* to the moderns, especially in their knowledge and their skills for Scriptural interpretation.²¹² A similar reflection he had presented in abbreviated form in his *Défense des Sentimens*. Here the chosen criteria to consider an author worthy of special respect were two: his virtuous behaviour and his erudition. So Le Clerc:

“Plus elles sont grandes [the virtuous life and erudition], plus on a de respect pour ceux en qui on croit les remarquer, & au contraire ce respect diminuë nécessairement, à mesure que ces qualitez paroissent moindres. La vertu & l’érudition sont en ceci les seuls fondemens de nôtre estime, & nôtre estime est l’unique régie de la vénération que nous pouvons avoir pour les Auteurs.”²¹³

Le Clerc’s criticism of the Fathers due to the influence of Platonic philosophy on their thought, their doubtful logical/dialectical capabilities and the resulting obscurity of their writings, seemed already to draw a rather unfavourable picture

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid. 111 f. On this point see also id., *Défense des Sentimens* 355.

208 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 112 f.; id., *Historia ecclesiastica* (præfatio) [2]; id., *Défense des sentimens* 364–371.

209 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 112.

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid. 113.

212 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* (præfatio) [1 f.].

213 Id., *Défense des sentimens* 351.

of them. This reflection received further support through the fact that, as we have just seen, Le Clerc's analysis of the reasons to consider the Fathers more worthy of scholarly consideration had resulted in the realisation that it was actually the modern scholar who should be regarded in such a way.²¹⁴ We can thus understand why Le Clerc not only did not see the need to imitate the Fathers,²¹⁵ but he seemed at times too dismissive of their work and was accused of disrespect towards them, as we saw earlier.

Again, the above considerations show the fundamentals upon which Le Clerc based his critique of the Fathers and the resulting disregard for the classical notion of the authority of the early Church. Still, his rationalism also played an important role on this point, following which the arguments of the Fathers had to become the subject of rational scrutiny, with no special treatment compared to modern works.²¹⁶ This approach to the works of the Fathers is witness to the fact that Le Clerc made use of a mostly ahistorical interpretative framework in his critique of the Fathers, despite the fact that he introduced some scarce clarifications now and then that also evidenced an awareness of the historical distance that was between his century and their writings.²¹⁷

The impression gained by the reader of some passages of Le Clerc's works in which he discussed the Fathers, a rather negative one, is certainly justified but clashes also with the fact that Le Clerc was editor of Cotelier, as we saw earlier, and

214 A further example of this can be found *ibid.* 360.

215 *Id.*, BUH 12 (art. 6) 209. This was especially true of their rhetoric style, as we saw earlier – even if this consideration was also in line with his overall conception of the use of the past, as we saw in the last section.

216 *Id.*, *Epistolæ criticae et ecclesiasticae* (ep. 4) 114f.: “*Legentes Opera Patrum, de ratiocinationum vi & ordine, ex legibus Dialecticæ judicabimus, stylumque ad Rhetorum canones exigemus. Ratiocinationes omnes, in quibus ex perspicuis aut demonstratis enunciationibus necessariò colligetur quidpiam, probabimus, amplectemur, laudabimus. Si sint tantum credibiles enunciationes, aut collectio minus necessaria, eas inter credibilia referemus; at non ita eis adsentiemur, quasi res perspectæ essent. Quod si collectio prava sit, aut enunciationes ex quibus deducitur ne verisimiles quidem haberi queant, totam ratiocinationem spernemus. Uno verbo ut omnia complectar, non magis infirmas collectiones, aut paralogismos Patribus condonabimus; quàm Recentiori cuivis, è media turba, Scriptori.*” Rather than authority, true judgment was the result of a rational analysis, *ibid.* 117: “*Atqui in hujusmodi negotiis non auctoritate Veterum adfirmantium, sed rebus ipsis movemur. Iis credimus, non quia sunt Antiqui; sed quia eorum judicium omnibus Veritatis indicium est ornatum.*” And on the fact that ancients and moderns were to be judged through the same rules, *ibid.* 119: “*Quotiescumque res agetur, de qua judicium ferri nequeat, nisi ope Grammaticæ, verbi gratiâ, & Logicæ; pondus judicii non ex antiquitate judicum, sed ex recto usu utriusque illius Disciplinæ pendeat; nec gravius habebitur in Veterum, quàm in Recentiorum Libris, nisi fortè meliùs Grammatica & Logica sint usi.*” For another example of this kind, see *id.*, BC 13 (art. 3) 246.

217 See, for example, *id.*, *Défense des Sentimens* 357.

that his works are full of references to different Fathers.²¹⁸ The case of Origen, discussed in the remaining chapters of the present work, will show this clearly. This leads us to inquire further on what he considered to be the actual role of Church Fathers in scholarship and in theological discussions more specifically.

To first restate what the role of the Fathers was not, for Le Clerc, it should be clear at this point in the argument that he abolished the *consensum patrum* as a certain proof of the truthfulness of a theological position in confessional controversies. Although this seems obvious for a Protestant, it was not fully so in reality; also, for the Protestants, the Fathers, as mentioned earlier, became at times instrumental in confessional controversies, even if tradition was in theory only valuable when in line with Scripture. In this conclusion, Le Clerc followed closely the work of Daillé. Not only was the theology of the Church Fathers different from modern theology, but Le Clerc contended that the Fathers could be easily manipulated in controversies.²¹⁹ Again, a consent, even if it was a consent of the early Church, he argued, was not able to overturn the rules of logic and grammar,²²⁰ and even decisions of the early Councils were no sure guarantee of proof, because they were only taken in a certain time and because Scripture had more authority.²²¹ The idea that the early Church had been the depositary of an oral tradition which came directly from the apostles was also no guarantee of the truthfulness of the early Church, Le Clerc concluded. This tradition was prone to being interpolated and polluted, especially by philosophy.²²²

218 Id., Oratio inauguralis 20 f.

219 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* (præfatio) [1]: “*Tum verò falsò etiam ea credidisse censentur Veteres, quæ sunt consentanea iis, quæ sibi quisque vera esse persuasit; eorúmque dicta torquentur, ne cum receptis partium, in quas hodie lacerata Christiana res est, sententiis pugnent. Vel maximè dissidentes contendunt ex æquo à partibus suis stare Patres, qui sæpe ab hodiernis omnibus Theologis dissenserunt. Jactatur falsò cum nostris doctrinis eorum consensus, qui ab omnibus Christianis, quorum hodie distincti sunt cœtus, longè dissident, aut certè ab iis qui maximè omnium eos sibi favere dictitant.*” See also id., *Défense des Sentimens* 358 f.; id., BUH 1 (art. 25) 340.

220 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 4) 119: “*Consensus ad evertendas rationes grammaticas, aut dialecticas nihil facit; statim enim animo occurrit ratio consensûs, petita ex communi ignorantia rerum, quibus ab errore consentientes potuissent revocari.*”

221 Ibid. 120: “*An satis est unâ ætate consentire plerosque Christianos, quamvis de ceterorum consensu non constet, ut sciamus quidpiam esse verum? An omnium sæculorum consensus est probandus? An Christi & Apostolorum auctoritas, si eorum sententia manifesta sit, satis gravis non est, ut controversia dirimatur; quamvis sequentium sæculorum suffragia ignota sint? Quod si nec Christus, nec Apostoli quidquam statuerunt de re, quæ in controversiam vocatur; an sequentes ætates jus habent iudicii ferendi, quod sine examine sit admittendum?*”

222 Ibid. 123: “*Multi deinde Græci, non tantùm eruditi, & adcurati inquisitores Veritatis, sed etiam rudiores in Ecclesiam Christianam ingressi sunt; nec contenti simpliciter narrare quæ à magistris acceperant, ea, prout poterant, interpretabantur, ornabântque & tuebantur contra Ethnicos, aut Hæreticos. Philosophia Ethnica veluti succenturiata venit Theologiæ Christianæ, eámque non parum vitiavit, ut exemplo Clementis Alexandrini ostendi.*”

Le Clerc's purpose with the Fathers was not their final annihilation as intellectual references of early Christianity.²²³ He agreed on many points with Daillé's work, but not in its entirety and not primarily because it took away the aura of reverence from them.²²⁴ Instead, the intention of Le Clerc's approach to the Fathers was one of balanced critique or praise of them, as applicable: "*quid esset verum dumtaxat quæsiui; nec Patres proinde aut supra merita laudandos, nec infra honorem, qui eis debetur, habendos umquam censui.*"²²⁵ His praise for or critique of the Fathers, Le Clerc claimed, was determined by the degree of agreement between the Fathers and Scripture and/or reason: "*quæ duæ solæ sunt faces, à Deo ad homines demissæ, ut in hujus mortalis vitæ tenebris nobis illuceant, utque ad earum lucem dogmata, dicta, præcepta, facta omnia expendamus.*"²²⁶ His own approach, he added, concluding, was not dissimilar from that of the Anglican Church. The Anglican divine William Cave (1637–1713), with whom Le Clerc had disputed matters regarding the Fathers,²²⁷ would not be in disagreement with him on this point, he claimed.²²⁸

Going back to where we left at the beginning of this section, it is now clear that it would be too simplistic to believe that Le Clerc had followed the Protestant tra-

223 This was recognised also by his correspondent Antoine Epis, who was critical of Jean Barbeyrac's (1674–1744) disrespectful treatment of the Fathers and who, instead praised Le Clerc's moderation and acknowledged that Le Clerc had treated the Fathers *avec de l'estime*: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 4 (letter 681 of 16 April 1721, Epis to Le Clerc) 83.

224 LE CLERC, Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ (ep. 4) 99 f.

225 Ibid. 100.

226 Ibid. 129. He had already expressed this thought in the Sentimens 372 f.: "On loüe ce que l'on y trouve de raisonnable, & l'on rejette sans façon ce qui paroît contraire au bon sens, & à l'écriture. Si un Pere prouve quelque chose par un raisonnement solide, on l'imite avec plaisir; mais s'il raisonne mal, ce qui n'est pas fort rare, on ne se rend pas à sa seule autorité. [...] Enfin on les regarde comme on fait les Auteurs, par exemple, du siècle passé & de celui-ci, & l'on en use de même à l'égard des Anciens, qu'à l'égard des Modernes. Vous n'avez qu'à relire l'excellent Ouvrage de M. Daillé *de Usu Patrum*, pour voir que ceux qui en usent ainsi n'ont pas le plus grand tort du monde." While in Lyon, Tronchin had also discussed directly with Daillé on the correct use of Church Fathers: FATIO, Louis Tronchin 128–130.

227 On this point, see the long notes in SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 n. 4 f. 288 f.

228 LE CLERC, Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ (ep. 4) 129–[130]. "*Non puto eos qui Patrum auctoritatem, apud Anglos, tuentur eam velle ultra hosce limites proferre. Quare nulla mihi cum illis lis est; nec proinde cum viro erudito Gulielm. Caveo, qui numquam probabit me prudentem certè ac scientem, repudiare Patrum scita, ubi consentiunt cum Scriptura, aut cum recta Ratione, ac proinde debitam eis venerationem à me non deferrî.*" Le Clerc had been aware of the particular relationship of the Anglican Church with Christian antiquity since his early scholarly years. For a reference concerning the Anglican Church during Laudian times, see id., BUH 1 (art. 25) 337. For an analysis of the relationship of Le Clerc with the Anglican Church, see BROGI, Jean Le Clerc et l'Église Anglicane 117–143. For a study on the relationship of the Anglican Church with Christian Antiquity in the 17th century see QUANTIN, The Church of England.

dition of considering the Fathers as *testes veritatis* when useful. He was too critical of their authority and of their thought to be able to adopt such a framework. Once we grant that Le Clerc considered the Fathers, in general, as all other authors, modern and ancient, and thus liable to rational scrutiny, as we have just seen, it follows naturally that their possible role, as all other ancient and modern authors, was in some cases to illustrate and explain further a particular argument. Their other role was that of historical witnesses. Only when the Fathers were superior to modern writers in these areas did they become worthy of being preferred to the latter. Le Clerc summarised this point neatly:

“Il n’y a que deux choses qui puissent faire préférer les Écrits des Anciens, à ceux de nôtre siècle, c’est, s’ils ont mieux traité dans le fonds quelque sujet, que l’on ne fait présentement, ce qui doit faire le véritable prix de toute sorte de Livres: ou si on les regarde comme de simples témoins de ce qui est arrivé de leurs temps, ou des sentimens qui étoient dans les lieux où ils vivoient; encore faut-il prendre de grandes précautions pour ce qui regarde ce dernier usage, que l’on peut faire de leurs Écrits. Il est visible qu’à l’égard de cet usage, on les doit préférer généralement parlant, aux modernes, seulement à cause de leur antiquité: mais lors qu’il est question du fonds des choses, la date de leurs Écrits n’y sert de rien.”²²⁹

The fact that the Fathers were part of the early Church did not give them any significant advantage over modern authors, Le Clerc believed. Only when the Fathers excelled in argumentation – if this was in line with Scripture and reason, as we saw earlier – or were fundamental as historical testimony, did they become really useful for the modern scholar.²³⁰

229 LE CLERC, *Défense des Sentimens* 354.

230 This reflection had been also made in *Sentimens* in the previous year, *Sentimens* 372: “Je connois des gens qui n’ont pas plus de curiosité de savoir ce qu’a crû un tel, ou un tel Pere, que de savoir ce que croient les Chinois, & qui ne lisent les Ouvrages des Anciens, que comme on doit lire tous les Livres, où il n’y a rien que d’humain. Ils y cherchent l’Histoire & les coûtes de leurs temps, comme on cherche l’Histoire & les coûtes de la Grèce dans les Auteurs Grecs. On loüe ce que l’on y trouve de raisonnable, & l’on rejette sans façon ce qui paroît contraire au bon sens, & à l’Ecriture. Si un Pere prouve quelque chose par un raisonnement solide, on l’imite avec plaisir; mais s’il raisonne mal, ce qui n’est pas fort rare, on ne se rend pas à sa seule autorité.” In an article in *BAM*, Le Clerc reviewed the second edition (1722) of the *Dissertatio de moderatione theologica* of Maichel. He presented what for Maichel were the main points of agreement among Protestants, and one of these confirmed Le Clerc’s point, *BAM* 16 (art. 4/2) 430, “que les témoignages des Peres & des autres Docteurs peuvent bien servir à illustrer, mais non pas à prouver ce qu’il faut admettre de foi divine.” Although it was not Le Clerc’s own thought because it was also in the original work of MAICHEL, *Dissertatio de moderatione theologica* (*Conspectus generalis*) [2], Le Clerc praised the book in multiple parts of the article and highlighted how Maichel pleaded for inter-confessional tolerance, making thus indirectly a case for his own stress on religious tolerance: LE CLERC, *ibid.* 435 f.

Apart from the relatively obvious role as historical witnesses, something which we will analyse further in one of the next chapters, the instrumental function of the Fathers' arguments and doctrines was what really distinguished Le Clerc from many of his contemporaries. Rather than considering the Fathers as *testes veritatis*, they had a strategic role for Le Clerc only if they could further elaborate and explain a particular point. This was also different from the greatly admired Grotius, for example, according to whom the Fathers could prove useful to confirm Scripture.²³¹

Le Clerc's understanding of the correct role of Church Fathers in scholarly works was consistent with what he believed was the correct use of antiquity, even pagan antiquity, and his disregard for scholarly or religious authorities, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter. It surely remains an open question, to be explored in the remainder of the present work, whether Le Clerc's intended use of the Fathers, and Origen will be the test case, was also consistent with his argumentative practices, or whether he occasionally or systematically fell back on the more general Protestant framework. After all, the accusation of being a *novateur* in theology was always lurking in the background and the early Church could prove fundamental to reject such a charge.²³² Before we delve into the discussion of these points, we will need to enlarge our view and focus on how Le Clerc conceived of Origen's thought and scholarship. We saw in this last section that a virtuous life and a particular erudition were considered by Le Clerc as worthy of particular scholarly regard. This next part will be important to match the actual theological discussion on Origenian freedom-related doctrines with the overall attitude of Le Clerc towards Origen and thus enable us to better place his supposed Origenism within this context.

231 VON REVENTLOW, *Lexégèse humaniste de Hugo Grotius* 142.

232 For an example, see LE CLERC, *Oratio inauguralis* 20 f.

PART 2: LE CLERC'S RECEPTION OF ORIGEN

I suggested earlier that, if not frequent, the appearance of references to or mentions of Origen in Le Clerc's work has been at least evident and consistent throughout his scholarly career. The chapters of this second part seek to survey the various ways in which Origen made his way into Le Clerc's work. It will be a matter of looking at a variety of styles of "empirical appropriation" of a text or a name. For reasons of simplicity and exposition, the material will be divided into three themes that reflect what we may consider the three main "faces" of Origen according to Le Clerc: the philosophical-theological, the scholarly-exegetical and the historical testimony. It will become clear that the ways in which Le Clerc engaged the different "Origens" followed at times a common pattern, one that saw Le Clerc harshly criticise Origen on the one hand, and praise and trust him on the other. This had, of course, much to do with what was in agreement with Le Clerc's theological and scholarly convictions. Within the main argument of this dissertation, this second part has a key role as it proposes a first one-to-one encounter between Le Clerc and Origen. The key is to provide much-needed context and background to the overall reception of Origen in Le Clerc so as to be able to better assess the reception of Origen's freedom and theological doctrines in Le Clerc.

3. Origen the Thinker¹

We begin with a general consideration of Origen's philosophical and theological thought. Earlier, we touched briefly on the fact that Le Clerc criticised the Church Fathers for their philosophical, especially Platonic, interpretation of the Christian religion and Scripture. This chapter will focus mainly on Origen's Platonism, something that, according to Le Clerc, occupied a major place in Origen's philosophical and theological outlook. The next pages will start with a review of the various influences of Platonism in Origen according to Le Clerc. I will then highlight some of the ways in which, according to the Arminian, Origen contributed to the Hellenisation of Christianity and provide insights on the related debates contemporary to Le Clerc. The chapter will then propose a brief reflection

¹ An earlier version of this chapter has appeared as an article in abbreviated form: BIANCHI, The Case of the Platonism.

on Le Clerc's take on the Hebraisation of Plato, only apparently a side topic, as we will see. As a final step, I will discuss whether Origen's Platonism made Origen's thought unusable for Le Clerc. The reader will not be surprised to see that there were ways in which Le Clerc could recover a place for Origen's thought despite its evident Platonic affinity.

3.1 A Disciple of Plato

That Le Clerc saw Origen as influenced by Platonism can be evinced by various passages in his work. In the preface of the *Epistolæ theologicæ*, he vehemently attacked ancient Christian authors for having distorted the original meaning of the Gospel. He brought forth Origen as *the* bad example, as one who had corrupted the genuine message of Christ with Platonic ideas: "*Exemplo sit ORIGENES qui, quamvis Hebraicè sciret, Platonis sui dogmatibus ita Religionem Christianam inquinavit, ut vix ullum ejus caput reliquerit, quod inde petitis allegoriis non obscuraverit.*"² Years later, in the *Ars Critica*, the statement was even stronger: to be able to understand Origen (and many Greek Fathers), a previous knowledge of Plato was paramount. This reflection was part of an indication of method in the context of the book, where Le Clerc showed how the full comprehension of an author was reached only if there was already clarity regarding the foundations on which the author based his thought. In our specific case, Plato was thus the foundation of Origen's thought.³ Again, in a review article on his own *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the Platonism of the Fathers was once again a debated topic.⁴

The concept of "pre-existence" was one of the salient features of Origen's Platonism, according to Le Clerc.⁵ The main idea was that all souls existed in another dimension before the creation of the world and that only after the sin of Adam were they "sent" to physical bodies. It was one of the ways, for Origen, to substantiate his claims of theodicy, in that the actual this-worldly differences among human beings were explained by referring to the sins or merits earned in a time that preceded the earthly birth.⁶ For Le Clerc, such an idea was part of

2 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* (præfatio) [11 f.].

3 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1697) (præfatio) 6. See also an article in BC 27 (art. 4) 424f. where Le Clerc found support on this point by reporting that, in the book he was reviewing (the *Plan Théologique du Pythagorisme* of Michel Mourgues 1642?–1713), that author had also contended that pagan theology was a must-know to understand the Fathers, because they took it for granted.

4 Id., BAM 6/2 (art. 3). For the related passage, see id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 331 f.

5 Id., BC 7 (art. 8) 351; id., BAM 22 (art. 4) 152f; id., BC 9 (art. 3) 148.

6 MARTENS, *Embodiment* 609–613; CROUZEL, *Origène* 205.

Origen's *réveries Platoniciennes*,⁷ something he dismissed as being without fundament.⁸

Besides the notion of “pre-existence”, the single most important aspect of Platonism in Origen's theology was related for Le Clerc to the doctrine of the Trinity, although this particular Platonic influence he also saw in Christian antiquity more generally.⁹ This doctrine was still very much debated in learned circles in Le Clerc's time and was of a particularly sensitive nature. Doubting the doctrinal soundness of the Trinity was likely to attract strong accusations of heterodoxy, in particular of being a Socinian. And yet, in a review of Eusebius' *Preparatio Evangelica*, Le Clerc followed the path of some of his contemporaries and showed the presence of discrepancies among Church Fathers on the Trinity at the doctrinal level. In particular, he highlighted what he considered parallel beliefs shared both by Platonists and by Church Fathers (including Origen)¹⁰ and he showed that in most cases one doctrine, and its opposite, was held by both.¹¹ This was evident in the relationship between God the Father and the God the Son (in the below example referred to as “the Reason”, more below), specifically on the equality or difference of their status as divinity:

“Pour les Peres, que l'on regarde comme Orthodoxes, ils ne se sont pas éloignés des expressions des Platoniciens; & comme ceux-ci on tantôt dit que la Raison est différente de

7 LE CLERC, BC 7 (art. 8) 351.

8 This dismissal has to be put into context. Le Clerc, as we saw in an earlier chapter, adopted mostly a Cartesian-rationalist approach to theology that, with the aid of Scripture, aimed to consider “secured knowledge” only those concepts that were clearly and evidently proven either rationally or scripturally, but he also allowed some room for speculations. In this specific case, his clear opposition to the idea of pre-existence was, to my understanding, probably less a result of the Platonic and thus non-Scriptural heritage of the concept and more an attempt to ward off the possible consequences derived from it. To accept that souls pre-existed and that their embodiment was a consequence of sin would most probably have meant supporting the Augustinian-Calvinist doctrine of the original depravity of man. From his Arminian standpoint, which tended towards Pelagianism, such a doctrine was untenable. There might also be at play here a concern with the question of the pre-existence of Christ, denied by Socinianism, but which such a doctrine would make possible.

9 This mixture of Christian and Platonic thought, even though Le Clerc also believed that Plato's three principles were originally from Parmenides (and were later adopted by Philo from Plato), had entered Christianity “*propter rei difficultatem, & ambiguitatem vocum*”: Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 307–309.

10 Id., BUH 10 (art. 8) 379–497. References to Origen were made at page 491.

11 By quoting the work of Denis Pétau (1583–1652), Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) and George Bull (1634–1710), LE CLERC, BAM 23 (art. 1) 51, showed how the Fathers could be interpreted as having support for both Nicæan and Arian beliefs. Unsurprisingly, Le Clerc's solution to the dispute on the doctrine of the Trinity was a recommendation to go back to Scripture.

l'Être suprême, & tantôt qu'ils ne sont qu'un: les Peres ont parlé dans les mêmes termes. [...] Quelquefois ils soutiennent qu'ils sont égaux; & ailleurs ils disent que le Pere est plus grand. Les uns croient que le Pere & le Fils sont *deux hypostases, deux natures, deux essences* [...] d'autres le nient."¹²

Le Clerc's claim was thus that the Fathers had appropriated Platonic concepts without finding a unitary agreement. Years later, in the *Ars Critica*, Le Clerc proposed a more mature analysis of different debated points on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³ This time he not only pointed to the doctrinal discrepancies among the Fathers, but also repeatedly exposed the linguistic and conceptual reasons for what he perceived was their general conception of the Trinity that resembled a form of tritheism. The nearly polytheistic conception of the Trinity was the result, on the one hand, of the influence of common practice in ancient philosophy, but especially of Plotinus' Neoplatonic language. Following the latter, a "hypostasis" (*ὑπόστασις*, substance, essence) was to be understood as an individual substance, and "ousia" (*οὐσία*, substance, matter) as a common property. To say that God is "one ousia in three hypostases" meant thus that three distinct substances shared a common property:

*"Qui unam οὐσίαν dicunt, τρεῖς τρόπους ὑπάρξεως, id ipsum hisce verbis expresserunt; ut enim Humanitas, quæ est separatim in Joanne, Petro & Paulo, est una; nec in Paulo differt ab eo quod est in Petro & Joanne, nisi τρόπῳ ὑπάρξεως; ita tre Naturæ divinæ numero diversæ, sed specie eædem differunt tantummodo existendi."*¹⁴

On this point, Le Clerc argued, Christians had long debated, because they interpreted "ousia" in different ways. It could be a substance but also just an accident, to use scholastic terms. Over time, this Greek meaning of "ousia", an accident, was lost and became more "substantialist":

12 Id., BUH 10 (art. 8/1) 409 f.

13 The context of such an analysis was the discussion of the *Regula XIV*, a hermeneutic rule that prescribed an awareness that although different philosophical or religious groups preserved the wordings of their doctrines over time, with time these often changed the meanings contained therein. Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 303: "*Diversas Sectas iisdem sæpe usas esse vocabulis, ad diversa prorsus dogmata exprimenda; & easdem, servatis iisdem vocabulis, lapsu temporis, sententiam mutasse.*"

14 Ibid. 313. On this occasion he also referred to de Courcelles, where he had similarly contended that the term "ousia" had meant for the Fathers a common substrate, like a common rationality, or a common nature, whereas "hypostasis" an individual determination: DE COURCELLES, *Quaternio Dissertationum Theologicarum* 852 f. Contrary to Le Clerc, de Courcelles did not mention the Platonic derivation of such an error.

“*Tandem inter Græcos quidem convenit, ut dicerent τρεῖς εἶναι ὑποστάσεις tres esse modos existendi, μίαν οὐσίαν unam essentia; inter Latinos verò, tres personas, unicam substantiam, seu essentiam; quâ ratione loquendi etiamnun hodie utimur.*”¹⁵

The Fathers did not have this latter meaning in mind, because they were influenced by the way Platonism used the concept of “ousia.”¹⁶ Here, Le Clerc not only asserted that the Fathers had been terminologically Platonic, but also that later Christianity had misinterpreted the Fathers’ Platonism.

On the other hand, another key concept for the definition of the Trinitarian doctrine among the Fathers was the concept of homoousios (ὁμοούσιος, same substance), which the council of Nicaea had established as the official definition of the relationship among the persons of the Trinity. In this case, the early Church had used the concept, according to Le Clerc, in the same way as Platonism and ancient Greek philosophy. This meant, once again, that the persons of the Trinity shared the same substance according to their species, but were numerically different.¹⁷ The modern way of conceiving of the Trinity, stressing the numerical unity of the divinity, was an inappropriate seizure of a term which originally had had another meaning. According to Le Clerc, the Fathers had done so because they were convinced of not distancing themselves from the strict monotheist (also numerically) Jewish heritage.¹⁸ In the end, this was Le Clerc’s subtle critique: present time Christianity was convinced of a doctrine that was not the way the Nicene

15 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 310.

16 One example relating to Origen on the distinction of substance between Father and Son is represented by the contention with Beryllus of Bostra. LE CLERC, *ibid.* 153 f. 294 f., showed that Origen contended that Jesus had existed even before his birth on earth “*discriminatam essentiam*”, with his own divinity (ἐμπολιτευομένην), whereas Beryllus negated a pre-existent Jesus and thus his own divinity as well. Le Clerc connected this with Origen’s *Commentary on John*, especially Origen’s statement of “two Gods”, a God “with the article” (ὁ θεός) and one “without article” (θεός), the latter being the Son (“*participatione illius divinitatis Deum factum*”), the former the Father (“*eum qui est per se Deus*”).

17 *Ibid.* 310. 312 f. Both the pre- and post-Nicene Fathers, according to the Arminian, believed that the Father and the Son were two numerically distinct substances, united by the fact that they pertained to the same species. Le Clerc mentioned that the Nicene creed, stating that the Father and the Son are homoousios, was not to be interpreted as contrary to what Arians believed (the homoiouosios, ὁμοιοῦσιος, similar substance). Nicene and Arians agreed on their conception of consubstantiality, because in Platonic language homoousios meant an equality of species and not of substance – Le Clerc thus equalled the homoousios of Nicaea with the homoiouosios of Arians. According to the Arminian, the dispute between Nicene and Arians was only about the grade of divinity of the two divine essences, Father and Son, but, again, not on the conception of the consubstantiality: *ibid.* 313 f.; *id.*, *Oratio inauguralis* 28 f. On this occasion, he mentioned as support the work of Pétau, de Courcelles and Cudworth.

18 *Id.*, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 315.

Fathers intended it, and these Fathers had conceived it under deep Platonic influence.¹⁹

For Le Clerc, the Fathers had appropriated Plato's three principles in their own particular way as well. This was evident from the fact that the early Christians believed in the coeternity of the first and the second principle (the Father and the Son) but Plato had not admitted it; they also professed monotheism, whereas Plato conceived of three principles.²⁰ Looking at an earlier work, a further consequence of the influence of Platonism on the Christian Trinity which, Le Clerc argued, was later appropriated by the Fathers, concerned the mediating role of Jesus. According to the Arminian, this was understood in the early Church as a sort of Platonic *logos* ("λόγος"), or as a mediator between the creating God and the created world. This *logos* was conceived as the archetype of the world's order so that human beings could be rational only by participating in him. As a clearly Platonist term, this *logos* also implied for Le Clerc the already mentioned distinction of substance between the Father and the Son, so that the Church Fathers' and more specifically Origen's Platonism, he contended, could be rightly considered a form of Arianism before Arius.²¹

On the more cosmological/eschatological side, another element of Origen's philosophy/theology that Le Clerc considered of essentially Platonic brand was the doctrine of the eternal revolution of time. This doctrine foresaw that all things would eternally and cyclically return to their initial state at a set time and was

19 Ibid. 310–312. An even stronger critique of the doctrine of the Trinity is found in an earlier passage of the *Ars Critica*, where Le Clerc discussed the *Regula VIII* or "*Voces esse, quibus nulla subjecta est potestas.*" Here, Le Clerc discussed terms like fortune or chance and, among the examples was also the doctrine of Trinity. Drawing from Augustine, he expressed the impossibility of talking about this doctrine using words. Although he did not expressly argue that the doctrine itself is a chimera, but only its incommunicability; still, the fact that he included it in such a chapter could be taken as a further proof of his Socinianism or, rather, his a-trinitarianism (ibid. 235 f.). For the moment we can say that Le Clerc considered the Trinity an obscure doctrine. On the one hand, Church Fathers expressed themselves unclearly, but also the nature of the disputed doctrine itself was said to be *incomprehensible*: id., BUH 10 (art. 8) 411. 415.

20 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 308 f. On coeternity, Le Clerc had differed in an earlier writing, stating that the Fathers did not have an agreed upon belief on this point, BUH 10 (art. 8/1) 410: "Tantôt ils disent qu'il y a eu un temps, auquel le Fils n'étoit pas, tantôt qu'il est éternel aussi bien que le Père." In the *Ars Critica*, apart from the statement we have just seen and which seems to express that, for LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 311 f., the Fathers agreed on coeternity, his analysis was more precise and he showed that even this point was problematic, because *ἀίδιος* (eternal), could point to something with no beginning or which existed before time (before the creation of the world) but not necessarily "eternal". Whether the Son's hypostasis was eternal in one or the other sense was debated among the Fathers, with Tertullian (c. 155–c. 230) and many ante-Nicene Fathers who believed that the Son had been generated just before the world was created, but who still call the son *ἀίδιον*.

21 Id., BUH 6 (art. 1) 25–27.

connected to one of the most known Origenian doctrines, that of apocatastasis (Greek: ἀποκατάστασις). Apocatastasis was a very “optimistic” eschatological outlook rather than being a clear-cut system of arguments. In its most radical form, Origen believed that the whole of creation (including all human beings and even evil daemons and the Devil) will be eventually saved and will return to God, restoring the original condition of being one in God.²² Le Clerc mentioned this concept of *les révolutions de tout*, besides the doctrine of pre-existence that we have seen above, as typifying Origen’s Platonic background.²³ According to Le Clerc, this doctrine was inherited by Clement of Alexandria (150–215), Origen’s teacher, but Clement had taken it ultimately from Plato, so it could be justly considered another Platonic element in Origen.²⁴

A final but relatively minor facet of Origen’s cosmological Platonism was the notion that the heavenly bodies have a soul and free will, a concept probably more famous in Aristotelianism, but that Le Clerc considered Platonic. According to Le Clerc, Origen believed in this as well.²⁵ The elements just shown represent the contours of the “Platonic Origen”, but as a final remark it is also important to notice that Le Clerc had considered the influence of Platonism and of Greek philosophy and religion more generally on some other areas of Christianity as well, which did not necessarily include a discussion of Origen’s thought.²⁶ We now turn to the way Le Clerc considered the influence of these Platonic elements in Origen on the self-understanding of Christianity.

- 22 SACHS, *Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology* 617–640. It is sometimes disputed that such a reading of Origen’s work understands his thought in a way that is contrary to what Origen had intended. That is: it is claimed that Origen never expressly said that the Devil will be saved. Although this is true, PRINZIVALLI, *Apocatastasis* 24–29, had claimed that scholarship mostly agrees that this interpretation is correct. The Alexandrian, who had claimed in Prin III 6,5 that the “ultimate enemy” will be destroyed, not in its being, but in its evil will, and that this enemy will eventually return to God, had intended the Devil. For the present analysis, it is relevant to note that such interpretation, that evil human beings and the Devil, notwithstanding their actions, will be ultimately saved, was commonplace in Le Clerc’s time and was surely the main problem with accepting such a doctrine. See also WALKER, *The Decline of Hell* 11–18.
- 23 LE CLERC, BC 7 (art. 8) 351.
- 24 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 1) 14 f.
- 25 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 584 n. 25; 585; id., *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi* 539 n. 3.
- 26 This has been observed by GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 57 f., in an in-depth analysis. Further influences of Greek thought in Christianity included for Le Clerc ascetic ideals, the large number of liturgic ceremonies, the *disciplina arcana*.

3.2 The Hellenisation of Christianity

Le Clerc recognised that the encounter of Christ's message with the pagan world could not have happened without some sort of philosophical mediation and it seemed for a number of reasons that Platonic concepts had been the most suitable for this purpose. Platonism proved a good bridge between the revealed message and the pagan world.²⁷ Yet, as we shall see now, Le Clerc's stance towards any form of philosophical mediation of the revealed message was considered rather negatively. This was especially true in every case where Church Fathers in general and Origen in particular abused this approach and distorted the meaning of the revealed message in favour of their own goals by leveraging the fact that Christian and Platonic concepts, in the end, were not that dissimilar.²⁸ Before we look at the process of the so called "Hellenisation of Christianity" as a negative factor in the development of the Church over the centuries, it might be beneficial to review some of the aspects where, according to Le Clerc, contact with Platonism, from a Christian perspective, had been somehow meaningful.

The value of Platonic philosophy for Le Clerc could be mainly considered in its character of a *prisca theologia*, or of a sort of precursor of the Christian message that, after revelation, was perfected. This early form of theology had inadvertently contributed to the spread of revealed religion: "des Philosophes, qui sans y penser ont beaucoup contribué à l'établissement de la Religion Chrétienne; soit en réfutant les opinions vulgaires, soit en disant bien des choses conformes au Christianisme."²⁹ Le Clerc collected the traces of revealed truth in the different philosophical schools of the time, but I will presently limit the analysis to Platonic philosophy.

Starting with the most central concepts of theology, Platonism had believed in monotheism (although Le Clerc seems to contradict himself on this point, as we saw from an earlier statement on Plato's three principles), rejecting traditional mythical polytheistic representations contained in "les fables des Poètes."³⁰ Plato's doctrine of the three hypostases, of which we had a glimpse in the previous

27 This will be shown in the rest of this section. An example which applies not only to Platonic philosophy, but more generally to pagan philosophy and religion, can be found in a review by Le Clerc of Cudworth's work. The discussed topic was the concept of a supreme being in non-Christian philosophies and religions, BC 3 (art. 1) 82 f.: "Néanmoins cet aveu des Philosophes Payens, touchant l'unité d'un Principe, est très avantageux à la Religion Chrétienne, qui fait de cette unité un de ses dogmes fondamentaux. Le consentement des plus habiles d'entre les Payens donne un nouveau lustre à cette vérité, & doit couvrir de confusion nos Athées modernes, qui raisonnent en cela plus mal que les Payens. Ainsi notre Auteur a droit de s'en servir, contre eux." See also id., XVIII. Prima commata 1.

28 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 530.

29 Id., BAM 5 (art. 2) 290–382; id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 323 f.

30 Id., BAM 5 (art. 2) 290–382, id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 324.

section, had also favoured an acceptance of the Christian Trinity. On this occasion, Le Clerc remarked that for Plato, besides a God-creator, there was a second hypostasis, with its own substance, the *logos*, which contained the archetype of everything:

“*NEC dixeiris Rationem illam fuisse perfectionem Dei, ei infinitam, non substantiam, quæ seorsim esset; nam Plato (recténe an secus nunc non quærimus) ita, ut dixi, ratiocinatus est. Rationem, quam & Ideam vocat, quasi substantiam descripsit; qua in re præivit Platoni Timeus, qui Ideam distinguit à Deo & substantiam seorsim existentem, initio operis sui, habet.*”³¹

The third hypostasis was the so called “world soul”, “*cujus vi omnia illa fierent, & totius Mundi machina ageretur*”³² also of divine nature. Le Clerc believed that, due to the similar terminology, this form of Platonism had also helped the spread of the Christian Trinity, so that by pagans “*ne tam avertis animis audirentur.*”³³ This was so even if the other side of this process was that it also caused a misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine, as we saw in the previous section. A further element where Platonism has been somehow beneficial to Christianity was the attributes of God. Platonism had asserted the immateriality of God against competing philosophical schools of the time.³⁴ Even more importantly, Platonism had also defended God’s goodness and benevolent providence. Le Clerc believed that this was one of the reasons why the Fathers had praised Plato.³⁵

Platonist reflections on human beings were also considered positively by Le Clerc within a Christian framework. Platonists contended that the soul is immaterial, also in this case opposing other philosophical factions of the time, and this immateriality proved to be a relatively good step towards also affirming its immortality.³⁶ On this latter point, on the one hand the Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis, or the “transmigration” of souls into different bodies, was valued by Le Clerc since it also somehow prepared the terrain for an acceptance of the immortality of the soul.³⁷ On the other hand, even the way Platonists rationally

31 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 62.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid. 63.

34 Id., *BAM* 22 (art. 4) 129 f. In this case, the reviewed book was the *Histoire de la philosophie payenne, ou sentimens des philosophes et des peuples payens les plus célèbres, sur Dieu, sur l’ame et sur les devoirs de l’Homme* (1724) by Jean Lévesque de Burigny.

35 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 145 f.

36 Ibid. 149. The complex link between immateriality and immortality was, however, not assured by Le Clerc by simply posing the soul’s immateriality. He had discussed this with Bayle, who instead contended that there was a strong link between the two: BIANCHI, 17th Century Cambridge Platonists 170–173.

37 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 66 f.

grounded the soul's immortality seemed to a certain degree solid to Le Clerc. Immortality was strictly connected with the principle of action, so that because the soul was its own principle of movement, it could never become inactive. Le Clerc explained what was meant by "movement" in this case. Distinguishing it from simple local movement, he considered movement as "simple thought", so that, because the soul is the one who causes its own thoughts, this activity cannot end as it is caused by the principle of actions itself. Also, the soul has no other cause but itself in order to be able to produce thoughts. This is in contrast to movement caused by another principle: if the principle ends its prompt, then movement stops.³⁸

Le Clerc compared, on this point, the Christian and Jewish tradition and showed how the latter did not clearly determine the soul's immortality through Scripture but from tradition. He mentioned that, for Flavius Josephus (37/38 AD–100 AD), Jews (especially Pharisees) had received the doctrine of the immortality of the soul not from their own tradition, but from Greek poetry and philosophers.³⁹ These philosophers, he had added, unsurprisingly: "*praesertim quidem Platonici; qui clariùs & frequentius, quàm ceteri, de immortalitate animi, pœnisque & præmiis, post hanc vitam, loquebantur.*"⁴⁰ Tradition or philosophers, Le Clerc was clear that only the resurrection of Jesus had made this certain.⁴¹ In any case, what Le Clerc attested here was that Platonic influences were already present among Jews.

Finally, a last but crucial point, where Le Clerc showed his esteem for Platonism was the problem posed by mechanism, which for him lacked explanatory power, especially if confronted with the regularity of nature. Here, Platonism, which was open to the existence of Gods and humans but also other immaterial entities in-between, was far more Scriptural than mechanism, because Scripture spoke of angels, for example. In this sense, Platonism provided a better alternative than pure mechanism and was closer to Scripture.⁴² In line with this, Le Clerc had found a possible alternative to present-day mechanists in the work of the Cambridge Platonist Cudworth,⁴³ who had conceived the so-called "plastic nature" as supplying immaterial direction to the otherwise physical world.⁴⁴

38 Id., BAM 22 (art. 4) 150.

39 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 43.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Id., BC 13 (art. 3) 213 f.

43 For an introduction to Cambridge Platonism, see the classical PATRIDES, *The High and Aiery Hills* 1–42. See also the more recent article by HUTTON, *The Cambridge Platonists* 851–857.

44 For an introduction to Cudworth's concept of "plastic nature", see ROSA, *Ralph Cudworth* 147–160; HEDLEY, *Cudworth on Freedom* 51 f.

That some elements of Platonism contributed to an acceptance of Christian revelation among pagans did not exclude that for Le Clerc there was a more poisonous and less visible side of this philosophy, and we could see already some of this in the discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity in the previous section. Le Clerc rejected some single items of Platonism, like the existence of a multiplicity of inferior Gods, of evil demons⁴⁵ or the idea of the Platonic “highest good” (“souverain bien”), which for Le Clerc was unattainable because it also included “exterior goods” (“biens extérieurs”). The latter, for example material wealth, was destined for Le Clerc to be lost at the latest at the point of death, and therefore the Christian idea of the good, which did not require those goods, was superior.⁴⁶ We have also seen in an earlier section that Le Clerc saw the Platonic three principles and the Trinity as fundamentally different. His refusal of Platonism in Christianity was however more concerned with a fundamental approach than with single doctrines.

The biggest reproach that he made to Church Fathers in their use of Platonic philosophy, as we have already seen in an earlier chapter, was that they had made obscure the original simplicity of the evangelical message and thus distorted the real meaning of revelation. A message, the one of Christ, that was intended for the illiterate, had been transformed into an obscure theology.⁴⁷ It was because Jesus had envisaged a simple message to be given to everyone without intrusion of philosophy that he had passed on his teaching to illiterate apostles.⁴⁸ For Le Clerc, as we have seen, this was the origin of inter-confessional debates.⁴⁹

An interesting example that he brought to better illustrate this point, although referred to pagan religion more generally and not to philosophy, was about the sacrament of the Eucharist. This had become something reserved only for initiates when the meaning of “mystery” (*μυστήρια*) had been adapted to the pagan use of the word. Such a connotation of the Eucharist included that it came to be understood as a *προσφορά*, an “offer”, in the sense of a sacrificial offer, whereas for Le Clerc, in clear Reformed polemic, that “offer” was only the possibility of a commemoration of Jesus.⁵⁰ This was another way to show how the influence of pagan philosophy and religion had been subtle and had distorted the initial message of Christ.

45 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 61.

46 Id., *BAM* 5 (part. 2, art. 2) 327.

47 Id., *Oratio inauguralis* 27.

48 Id. *Historia ecclesiastica* 639.

49 Ibid. LE CLERC, *BC* 6 (art. 1) 8, also supported his claim in another piece of writing by referring to Erasmus who, according to him, had argued that Platonism and Aristotelianism had been intermixed with the message of Christ and that this had sparked controversies in Christianity.

50 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 532 f.

Within this context Origen was considered as one of the principal culprits of the Hellenisation of Christianity, even more so because of his influential role in the Eastern Church.⁵¹ Not that Origen (or, for instance, the Fathers) had wanted to fully establish a sort of "Christian Platonism." It was clear to Le Clerc that Origen had rejected much from Plato, but for Le Clerc this effort had not been enough. Although Platonism provided a good basis to encounter the Greek-speaking pagan world, and was philosophically useful at times, Origen had abused this bridge, appropriating too much from Plato.⁵²

3.3 Scriptural Platonism: Some Examples

Some additional short examples will help to better grasp how Le Clerc understood the terminological intermixing of meanings influenced by Greek/Platonic philosophy. In the *Entretiens*, he criticised Malebranche for interpreting a passage from the book of Proverbs (8:22 "*Dominus possedit me ab initium viarum suarum antequam quicquam faceret a principio*"), which the Oratorian had understood as a topological reference to Jesus. Le Clerc insisted instead that in this passage, God's possession from eternity was meant to refer to his wisdom. This mistake had been possible, according to Le Clerc, because Malebranche had made use of the Platonic tradition of the Fathers: the Fathers had applied to Jesus all the features that Platonists had used in connection with the concept of *logos* and in this particular case his pre-existence. In other words: because the Fathers considered Jesus and the Platonic *logos* as equivalent, they considered them as having the same properties. The book of Wisdom, with its reference to God's eternal possession, following the Platonic tradition, had been interpreted in this case as a reference to Jesus' existence from eternity in God.⁵³

Similarly, in what concerns a passage from the Gospel: "Vous n'avez qu'un Docteur & qu'un Maître, qui est le Christ",⁵⁴ Le Clerc referred to Matt 23:10 "*magister vester unus est Christus*" and criticised the Platonism of Augustine and of Malebranche, who had followed him. The debated matter was, yet again, of Christological nature. Augustine and Malebranche, according to Le Clerc, had interpreted this passage through the Platonic doctrine of knowledge as reminiscence. Only through participation in the reason – *logos* – of God was knowledge possi-

51 Augustine was also a culprit, for Le Clerc, of the influence of Platonism in Christianity, as well as other Church Fathers. Specifically on Augustine, see also the letter to Pierre Allix of 6 April 1684: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 43) 159.

52 LE CLERC, BC 13 (art. 3) 209 f. Here Le Clerc also shared his belief that there was a large consensus that Origen was highly Platonised. See also id., BUH 1 (art. 2) 50 f.

53 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 350–353, 362.

54 Ibid. 369.

ble, and Jesus had been identified as that universal reason of God. Le Clerc was critical of the fact that, rather than conceiving of this passage of the Gospel as an indication to point to Jesus' *teaching* in the Gospel, Augustine and Malebranche had "Platonised" it by adding an epistemological framework that was not present in the scriptural text.⁵⁵

The prologue of the Gospel of John was a text that presented the greatest difficulties, but also opportunities, in this sense, and provides an excellent example of the concepts that we have just discussed, especially the easy way in which, for Le Clerc, Platonism could sneak into the message of Christ.⁵⁶ Le Clerc had composed an analysis of the first 18 verses of the first chapter of the Gospel of John in the *XVIII prima commata*. Although it was clear that the apostle John had made use of Platonic terminology in his writing, for Le Clerc this had been done with a specific goal in mind: that of rectifying the use of philosophical terms in the understanding of revelation. Le Clerc saw in John a first attempt to preventively "polish" Christianity from Platonism. Moving away from a tradition that saw John's intention in his Gospel as to confute Gnostics, Le Clerc believed that John was confronting Philo of Alexandria (15/10 BC – 45/50 AD) instead, and more particularly his Platonism.⁵⁷

The problem with Platonism in the prologue of John related thus, once again, to "*Christianæ doctrinæ affinia*,"⁵⁸ or the terminological problems we have just seen above, that risked turning the transmission of the original message of revelation in a philosophical direction.⁵⁹ Christological examples of this kind abound. With John 1:1 "*Deus erat ea Ratio*", the Apostle had conclusively negated Philo's

55 Ibid.

56 For a short review on the debate, see BROGI, *Il logos eretico* 133–138.

57 Ibid. 15–21.

58 Ibid. 21.

59 I differ on this with Brogi. BROGI, *ibid.* 152 f., claimed that the prologue of John was an impasse to Le Clerc's scripturalism. This is so, in his view, because the prologue prompted either a restatement of the value of theological speculation or a consideration of the very Gospel of John as corrupted. Both alternatives, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, were non-viable for Le Clerc. However, I believe that Le Clerc's solution, that John's prologue was the object of a linguistic correction of the evangelist, neither fully restores theological speculation nor indicates that the Arminian thought that the Gospel of John had been corrupted. Le Clerc's solution, as we have seen from the above examples, was rather linguistic. Of course, one may object that a linguistic analysis also includes theological assumptions, but this is different from the theological reflections that Le Clerc rejected, which resembled more philosophical-scholastic digressions than textual-linguistic analysis. Rather than an impasse, I believe that this passage shows exactly that Le Clerc's scripturalism was much more than a simple analysis of the literal and most superficial meaning of the text and was much more conscious of the linguistic subtleties of Scripture.

(Platonic) subordinationist speculation. John did not make the logos-ratio other than God, but rather wanted to unequivocally state the identity of the two terms.⁶⁰

Definitely not Platonic but still relevant for our discussion is another example, this time of cosmological nature. “*Et sine hac nihil quod existit factum est*” (John 1:3), through which, according to Le Clerc, John had wanted to state his belief that everything was ruled by divine providence and confute Philo, who had accepted instead the existence of a sort of Epicurean chance in noxious things.⁶¹ To return to Platonic terminology, we find in John 1:4 “*Hæc verò vita erat Lux hominum.*” This passage referred to the Gospel, the only real light, and was once again a corrective of Philo’s heritage that had conceived the light as the Platonic *lucem animi*. John did not reject everything from Platonism and Philo more specifically. In John 1:9 “*Lux illa erat vera lux*”, Le Clerc saw agreement on the truth criteria of both John and the Platonics, including Philo, in that only that is true, which “*quæ eximio quodam sensu ita appellari possunt.*”⁶²

Philo’s role in the Hellenisation of Christianity was particularly relevant for Le Clerc. The 8th letter of the third volume of Le Clerc’s *Ars Critica* was fully dedicated to the discussion of Philo’s Platonism. Here we find a clear accusation to Philo of having been a major contributor to the later Platonisation of Christianity, in that Philo, for example, transformed the Platonic doctrine of ideas into scriptural: “*Non satis fuit Philoni Platonicam doctrinam de Ideis suam facere, sed eam etiam Mosis disertè tribuit.*”⁶³ This, in turn, influenced Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius.⁶⁴ Philo was thus a (negative) example of philosophical Scriptural interpretation⁶⁵ that for Le Clerc had the consequence of obfuscating the original message of revelation. Le Clerc’s claim was that Philo’s Platonism was ultimately evident in that, for example, without a Platonic background, Philo would have not been in the place of interpreting God’s *Ratio* hypostatically as a (subordinated) second God.⁶⁶

3.4 Plato’s Jewish Sources

In his critique of the influence of Platonism on Christianity, which for Le Clerc, had had a fundamental role in leading to a misinterpretation of the original mes-

60 LE CLERC, XVIII. Prima commata 26 f.

61 Ibid. 30 f.

62 Ibid. 33.

63 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 8) 215.

64 Ibid. 216.

65 Ibid. 220.

66 Ibid. 222–225. In this regard, Philo had been also discredited by Pétau because of his subordinationism: SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die philologische Zersetzung* 281.

sage of revelation, the Arminian had to confront one important objection, that is that Plato himself had made use of the OT and Jews for his philosophy. Such a statement, which was as old as Justin, Clement and Eusebius,⁶⁷ implied that the “Christian Platonism” that Le Clerc demonised so much was much more Scriptural than he thought and would pose a serious threat to his critique of the Fathers’ Platonism. The Arminian dedicated to the topic the entire *Epistola VII* of the third volume of his *Ars Critica*, also called *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ*. Whereas the other (fictitious) letters of this book were part of an ongoing debate with William Cave, he addressed this latter letter to an ideal correspondent and did not mention the intended interlocutor.⁶⁸ Possible interlocutors could have been the various, Samuel Bochart (1599–1667), Gerrit Janszoon Vos (1577–1649) and, more directly, Gottfried Vockerodt (1665–1727), who, in his *Exercitatio academica de notitia divinarum scripturarum apud Gentiles*, had attempted to demonstrate, among other things, that the ancient Greeks had some knowledge of the Old Testament.⁶⁹ A final, but prominent proponent of a Jewish influence on Plato, although from esoteric Judaism, had been Cudworth,⁷⁰ whose ideas on the possible Jewish origin of the corpuscular theory of matter, ascribed to a certain Mochus or Moschus, Le Clerc had rejected.⁷¹ Le Clerc had also confuted what he believed was John Selden’s (1584–1654) thought, supported by Huet, that this Moschus had been Moses himself.⁷² The authors just reviewed show the relevance of Le Clerc’s effort.⁷³

Le Clerc’s major arguments to disprove a possible Jewish paternity of Plato’s philosophy were various, but the two strongest arguments seemed to be: 1. the

67 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 7) 191.

68 In a letter to Locke on 18 June 1699, Le Clerc mentioned that he was still completing the third volume of the *Ars Critica* and that the first six letters were a response to Cave. Not even in this case did he add anything on the other letters, including the seventh, besides that “j’ajouteraï à cet Ouvrage quelques autres Lettres, touchant Philon, où j’examinerai cette question, s’il doit à la lecture de Moïse ce qu’il dit du Logos, si Platon a pris des Prophetes etc.”: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario 2* (letter 301) 300 f.

69 See VOCKERODT, *Exercitatio academica*, esp. chapter 2. For references to Vos and Bochart, see also BRETAU, Ralph Cudworth 78.

70 Ibid.

71 LE CLERC, BC 1 (art. 3) 73–77. Whereas Le Clerc presented Cudworth’s opinion ambiguously, in the original work, CUDWORTH, *The True Intellectual System* 12 f., spoke clearly in favour of a Jewish origin of the corpuscular theory of Pythagoras. See POPKIN, *The Crisis of Polytheism* 14.

72 LE CLERC, *ibid.*

73 Attempts to make Jewish thought the source of Platonic thought, and philosophy more generally, had also been common in Jewish scholarship of the 17th and earlier centuries: MELAMED, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins* 41–59. Another important name in the debate was, for example, Theophilus Gale (1628–1678), who had also proposed a version of the theory of the Hebraisation of ancient Greece: PIGNEY, *Theophilus Gale* 83 f.

lack of reliable historical testimonies to attest the fact of Plato's knowledge of the OT or Jewish wisdom; and 2. that no scriptural counterpart existed of Plato's philosophical doctrines. On testimonies (and we will cover the role of testimonies in more depth in one of the next chapters), Le Clerc conclusively stated that "*testes fide digni nobis desunt*."⁷⁴ Although many, both Jews and Christians, have claimed that Plato knew the Old Testament, still none of them is an accountable testimony: "*hæc eorum dicta nequaquam sunt testimonia hominum, qui quæ viderant aut à testibus æqualibus accepta narrent*."⁷⁵ From the period before the fall of the Persian empire (around 450 BC), we have no testimonies at all.⁷⁶ On scriptural references in Plato, Le Clerc confuted Justin who had thought that a passage from Plato's *Leges*, where he discussed the *Anima mundi*, had made a reference to its Jewish origin by stating "*ὡσπερ καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος*" (which Le Clerc translated as: "*ut fert etiam antiquus sermo*"). The "*παλαιὸς*" (ancient), could have referred to even more ancient Greek philosophers, not necessarily to Hebrew scriptures.⁷⁷ In a similar way to the doctrine of the Trinity, for Le Clerc the Platonic doctrine of the three principles, (or three hypostases, substances), was not to be found as such in Scripture: "*Ego verò [...] non puto usquam in Vetere Testamento indicium esse ullum plurium numero substantiarum divinarum, quales somniabat Plato, quales Patres credidere*."⁷⁸ If such a statement were true, so Le Clerc, all those who professed one God in three persons in his own time would hold a non-scriptural doctrine!

The Arminian also introduced many other arguments either to directly disprove Vockerodt or make his own case that Plato had not derived his philosophy from the Jews.⁷⁹ If any influence was to be detected, he would have rather thought

74 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 7) 192.

75 Ibid. 187.

76 Id., BUH 17 (art. 6/2) 442.

77 Id., *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 7) 186 f.

78 Ibid. 194 f. This is another very strong statement to support the thesis of Le Clerc's Unitarian sympathy.

79 One of the other major arguments that Le Clerc used referred to the doctrine of the creation of the world. An allusion by Plato in his *Res Publica* to the history of the origin of the world in a Phoenician fable – Phoenicians and Jews were often confused with each other – was taken as an allusion to his awareness of the story of creation narrated by Moses in Genesis. Le Clerc argued that not only would Plato have been incoherent to know the biblical story of creation and then not use it in his own works, because his history of the origin of world in the *Timæus* and other works was different, but also that the fable had been invented by Plato himself for practical-political reasons. The only similarity between Plato's and Moses' creation, Le Clerc argued, was that God created the world, but the two descriptions on how this happened were radically different. Another crucial factor was that in Plato only a minor resemblance with Scripture could be found at times, and that on some occasions the great philosopher had explained certain doctrines better than Jews, like the immortality of the soul, so that he could not have taken his doctrine from

that it had happened in the opposite direction, and that the Jews had made use of Greek terminology and concepts, not to be found among them before but taken over after their return from the exile.⁸⁰ In the end, the attempted “Hebraisation” of Plato had been a strategy adopted by Jews at first to confront the pride of Greek philosophers and to convert pagans, and later, out of imitation, this had been done by Christians (i. e. the Fathers) too.⁸¹ Through these arguments, Le Clerc could strengthen his thesis that the Fathers’ Platonism had contributed to the loss of the original meaning of the Christian message.

3.5 Debates on the Fathers’ Platonism

To return to the influence of Platonism on Christianity, I may add that the elements discussed in the debate on the influence of Platonic philosophy on the self-understanding of Christianity were not new. Also, Le Clerc’s attempt to discuss the matter was not the most explicit and controversial, although some scholars have recognised for Le Clerc a role of absolute prominence in the 17th century in this regard.⁸² Emblematic was, for instance, a treatise by Jacques Souverain (164.?–1699?), *Le Platonisme Devoilé*, published most probably posthumously in 1700.⁸³ In this work, Souverain contended with particular force the anti-Trinitarian thesis that the orthodox doctrine of Trinity originated from Platonism and was ultimately the result of a continued hypostatization process by the Church Fathers, to be seen also in the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–1687) and in the Cartesian Malebranche. Part of this Platonic heritage was, according to

them. Even on these similarities Le Clerc argued that Plato was more likely to have been influenced by other sources, like Egyptians and Chaldeans, than Jews. Finally – but we could continue with more and more examples that Le Clerc brought to show this clearly – one of these similarities, the doctrine of three principles, had only a light resemblance *tenuis similitudo*, with the Christian Trinity. In the case of the third principle, for example, the World Soul, *anima mundi*, was also made up of a corporal part in Platonic language, whereas the respective principle, the Holy Spirit, was totally immaterial. Even if Cudworth had introduced Plotinus’ interpretation that there existed a corporal and an immaterial *anima mundi*, Le Clerc was not convinced of Plotinus’ interpretation. In the work of Timaeus of Locri, which Le Clerc considered a summary of Plato’s *Timæus*, he could not find a trace of the two types of *anima mundi*. As a last remark, I should also add that for Le Clerc, even if a scholar was able to trace the origins of Plato’s thought in either Parmenides or Pythagoras, and then back to Jewish thought, still the same problem persisted, because their philosophies and the content of Scripture were dissimilar: *ibid.* 180–184. 201–204. 206; *id.*, BC 24/2 (art. 2) 323 f.; *id.*, BUH 17 (art. 6/2) 444 f.

80 *Ibid.* 449.

81 *Id.*, *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ* (ep. 7) 188–191; *id.*, BUH 17 (art. 6/2) 444 f.

82 GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 59.

83 SOUVERAIN, *Le Platonisme devoilé*.

him, also the notion of the pre-existence of the soul, which the Fathers had used to explain the resurrection.⁸⁴

Pointing to an old understanding of Platonism (already present in some of the Fathers, like Clement and Eusebius),⁸⁵ Souverain had also clearly distinguished between two forms of Platonism: a more “popular” Platonism (*grossier*) and a more “subtle” (*delié*) one, stating that only the former was responsible for the detrimental effects of paganism on Christianity. Whereas a more subtle Platonism considered the three Platonic principles (or three virtues of God: goodness, wisdom and power, in this case) only allegorically as three gods, popular Platonism had made these into hypostases and thus personified them.⁸⁶ These references were clearly made with a Socinian spirit within the context of the heated debate on the solidity of the doctrine of Trinity that we have just sketched so far and that we will develop a little more in the next paragraphs. What is sure is that these thoughts have had a wide resonance within the history of the debate on the connection of Platonism and the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine.⁸⁷ Although Souverain was not the first to discuss the topic of the Hellenisation of Christianity in his time, as surprisingly some scholars would want,⁸⁸ his contribution to the debate has surely been of primary importance. His work was later (1782) translated into German by Josias Friedrich Christian Löffler (1752–1816), who helped spread Souverain’s ideas in Germany and was critically used by Mosheim.⁸⁹

The debate on the Hellenisation of Christianity, as noted, did not start with Souverain, or Le Clerc. Such a discussion was already present in the 16th century with Erasmus and Melancthon as a parallel debate on the essence of Christianity, although the scope of their critique was fairly limited in nature.⁹⁰ This also resonated in Fausto Sozzini (1539–1604), who had interpreted the prologue of the Gospel of John in an anti-Platonic and anti-Trinitarian key. John’s intention, according to Sozzini but as we have already seen also in Le Clerc, had been to carefully choose words so as to avoid any support to a form of Platonic Trinity. The Evangelist had wanted to clarify that “the Word”, the *logos*, could not be con-

84 SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die philologische Zersetzung* 297. 300.

85 LE BOULLUEC, *Antiplatonisme et théologie* 417, points out that the early modern understanding of Platonism was also already based on a construction, a “doxography” made by the Early Church, which had done so with an apologetic goal.

86 *Ibid.* 427.

87 Gerlitz’s introduction to the history of the development of the Christian dogma of the Trinity starts with Michael Servetus (1509/11–1553) and Souverain before moving on to Melancthon and Schleiermacher: GERLITZ, *Ausserchristliche Einflüsse* 3.

88 ROHLS, *Protestantische Theologie* 127.

89 *Ibid.* 214. See also GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 115–132. 150–176.

90 BETZ, *Neues Testament* 263; GLAWE, *ibid.* 16–20.

sidered as God. In this way, John had intended to clear the way to any possible misunderstanding by anyone with a Platonic outlook.⁹¹

The work of Daillé, *De Usu Patrum*, had been published in French in 1632⁹² and reworked and translated into Latin in 1656 (this latter version was the one which became the most known). This book criticised the Fathers for their having mixed (Platonic) philosophy and theology, for their lack of doctrinal unity and for having proposed unacceptable doctrines (and Origen's "apocatastasis" was an example). Daillé's conclusion was that the Fathers' authority had to be fully reconsidered and that their arguments could not be used in confessional debates.⁹³ It was, however, Pétau in his *De theologicis dogmatibus* who first moved the major critique to the ante-Nicaean Fathers as being essentially heterodox on the Trinity because of their Platonism.⁹⁴ Pétau found in Platonism and later in ante-Nicaean Fathers (including Origen) an early form of the Christian Trinity. The subordinationist character of this pre-Nicaean Trinity had led, according to him, to later Arianism and had therefore to be rejected. Still, he believed in the historical development of revelation, so that such an analysis of the early Church did not compromise for him (a Roman Catholic) the significance of tradition.⁹⁵

Pétau's analysis was kept in very high regard by Le Clerc and he edited Pétau's *De theologicis dogmatibus* (1700).⁹⁶ Le Clerc had followed Pétau in what concerned the heterodoxy of Fathers (the Arminian had also quoted Daillé in other circumstances) but was more nuanced on the linguistic analysis we have seen in the previous section, in that a similar terminology contributed substantially to the confusion and the appropriation of Platonisms in early Christian theology.⁹⁷ It seems, however, coherent to say that Le Clerc's judgment of the Fathers' Platonism was harsher than both in Pétau and Daillé.⁹⁸ Where Pétau had ultimately considered the Fathers as a step in the development of dogma, and Daillé had limited his critique to their authority in confessional debates, Le Clerc's claim, as we have seen in the previous sections, was a fundamental condemnation of their work, which had encrusted the real essence of the Christian message.

Many other learned men also entered the debate on the Platonism of the Fathers, but the discussion was mostly centred on the Trinitarian debate. There were also other aspects connected to a discussion of Platonism, like anti-Roman-Cath-

91 LE BOULLUEC, *Antiplatonisme et théologie* 415.

92 *Traité de l'emploi des Saints Pères*, Geneva 1632.

93 SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die philologische Zersetzung* 278; LE BOULLUEC, *Antiplatonisme et théologie* 423.

94 LE BOULLUEC, *ibid.* 420 f.

95 *Ibid.*; SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die philologische Zersetzung* 279–283.

96 *Ibid.* 283.

97 LE BOULLUEC, *Antiplatonisme et théologie* 422 f.

98 This is also in agreement with the judgment of LE BOULLUEC, *ibid.*

olic stances for example, but this had less to do with a discussion of the Church Fathers.⁹⁹ Christoph Sand (1644–1680) was for example one of those who made use of the variations within ante-Nicaean patristic doctrines of the Trinity to argue in favour of his own anti-Trinitarian beliefs. He considered the Arian subordinationism of Platonic origin as grounded in the belief of some Church Fathers, including Origen. In Sand's case this was a way to support his own neo-Arianism, which conceived the *logos* as God but subordinated to the Father, and the union of the Trinity as a moral union, in opposition to the Socinian position.¹⁰⁰ On the opposite side of the field, the Protestant George Bull attempted to recover the orthodoxy of the Trinitarian doctrine by confuting both Pétau and Sand in their Arian interpretation of the Fathers. For Bull it was enough that the consubstantiality of the Logos with the Father had been asserted by the early Church. Any Arian understanding of that point would be an over-interpretation of the Fathers' thought. In this light, he could also accept Origen's Christology.¹⁰¹

Bull's attempt to leverage the orthodox character of the Fathers must surely be understood in his impossibility, as a Protestant, to draw explicitly from the later tradition of the Church as a *regula fidei*, an option that the Roman Catholic Pétau had used for his own benefit. Other names that surrounded the debate on the Hellenisation of Christianity in the 17th century would be worthy of mention. These were Vos and Jacob Thomasius,¹⁰² Jarig Jelles, Aubert de Versé, Gilbert Clarke and Stephen Nye,¹⁰³ and also, Huet, Henry Dodwell (1641–1711), Étienne de Courcelles and René Rapin that Le Clerc himself had mentioned as support.¹⁰⁴ However, one last indication should be made of the contribution of Ralph Cudworth, whose notion of the Platonic Trinity Le Clerc had reviewed and whose position seems peculiar.¹⁰⁵

Cudworth's interest was to provide an only selective form of anti-Platonism. His goal had been, in fact, to show how the Platonic and the Christian trinities actually *were* in accord with each other and in this way support both the dogma of the Trinity and legitimise the position of the Cambridge Platonists as a whole.¹⁰⁶ Cudworth's anti-Platonism was directed towards later Neoplatonic developments which identified the third Platonic principle of the World Soul with the world

99 GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 87–110.

100 SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die philologische Zersetzung* 283–286; BROGI, *Il logos eretico* 138–141.

101 SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *ibid.* 286–291.

102 GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 87–91.

103 BROGI, *Il logos eretico* 141–148. 150–155.

104 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 529 f. n. 20; *id.*, *Oratio inauguralis* 29.

105 *Id.*, BC 3 (art. 1) 89–106.

106 LE BOULLUEC, *Anti-Platonisme et théologie* 434.

and thus blurred the distinction between creator and created.¹⁰⁷ The Cambridge scholar also opposed Pétau's statements on the Arianism of Christian Platonism. His argument was later resumed by Le Clerc in his *Oratio Inauguralis* and in *Ars Critica*, in that the concept of "consubstantiality" of the Fathers that was later set by Nicaea referred to a unity of species, not of substance: of three distinct hypostases.¹⁰⁸ This implied for Cudworth as in Le Clerc that the three persons of the Trinity were divine and united in one God, like the branches, the stem and the roots form a single plant.¹⁰⁹ The second person of the Trinity was still of divine nature and not a creature in origin, in opposition to Arianism, and, contrary to Sabellianism, the three persons of the Trinity were not only modes of the one substance but real distinct essences. Cudworth placed himself in the middle between the two.¹¹⁰ This still allowed for some subordinationism and differentiation, but only internally within the Trinity, whereas externally the Trinity appeared as one. This kind of subordinationism Cudworth believed to be present also in the commonly accepted version of the Trinity of his time.¹¹¹

This short exposition of some of the trends within the debate on the Hellenisation of Christianity has highlighted different perspectives and problems. If we compare these perspectives with Le Clerc's critique of the Church Fathers' Platonism, we find that it was not fully original, even if its peculiarity came from the more linguistic side and the radicalism with which it was expressed. Walther Glawe, a scholar on the reception of Platonism in Christianity, also added that it was peculiar to Le Clerc's critique that he saw Platonism already at work during the Gospel time.¹¹²

To return to a recurrent topic of this chapter, the debate on the doctrine of Trinity, we can also confirm that Le Clerc did not side openly with any particular position, even if his exegesis of the prologue of John, combined with his subtle critique of the non-scriptural Nicene creed we have reviewed earlier, shows a clear Unitarian sympathy. Again, in commenting John 1:14 "*RATIO autem illa facta est caro*", Le Clerc had explained the incarnation of the wisdom of God (this is what he had understood with *Ratio*) as a union with the humanity of Jesus. He had written of Jesus as a "*homo, cùm esset conspicuus erat, & in quo se præsentem esse Deus demonstravit.*"¹¹³ And in the notes to his French version of the Gospel of John:

107 Ibid. 434. 436.

108 Ibid. 432 f.

109 LE CLERC, BC 3 (art. 1) 96.

110 HEDLEY, *The Platonick Trinity* 235; LE BOULLUEC, *Antiplatonisme et théologie* 433.

111 Ibid. 435.

112 GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums* 59.

113 LE CLERC, XVIII. *Prima commata* 37.

“La Sagesse eternelle est devenue visible non eo [sic] changeant de nature, ce qui est impossible; mais en s'unissant d'une manière toute extraordinaire avec l'humanité de Jesus-Christ, & si erroneement, qu'en consequence de cette Union, les Apôtres parlent de Jesus, comme de Dieu lui-même; & de Dieu, comme d'un homme.”¹¹⁴

Le Clerc's anti-Trinitarian position is surely more complex than that, but it probably seems more appropriate to highlight Le Clerc's undeniable Unitarian tendencies than conceive of his position more generally as “a-Trinitarian,”¹¹⁵ even granted that his particular relationship with theology and scripture would also justify such a statement. In the debate between Cudworth and Pétau on the possibility of a Trinitarian doctrine in Platonism, Le Clerc took a middle way, stating that “l'obscurité de Platon & de ses Disciples donne lieu de soutenir l'un & l'autre.”¹¹⁶ However, Le Clerc's favour for the Jesuit and his belief that Christian Platonism was Arian comes up when he added that Cudworth “ne pourroit pas bien se démêler des objections du savant Jesuite.”¹¹⁷ As we said, Le Clerc had also edited Pétau's work and his critique of the Platonism of the Fathers followed essentially the Jesuit rather than Cudworth.

3.6 Saving Origen

We now return to the starting point of the present chapter: Origen's Platonism. The different aspects sketched in the previous sections have provided background information on Le Clerc's relationship with Christian Platonism. In this light, it has been possible to reconsider the different “Platonisms” that the Arminian found in Origen within a larger framework. According to the analysis we have conducted so far, Origen's Platonism must surely be understood as a stain, in the sense of its contribution to the obfuscation of the original message of Christianity. Mainly Origen, but also other early Christian authors, were deemed culpable for having brought upon the Church such a confusion of truth and falsity that large parts of the message itself had been misinterpreted. Over the centuries, the ideas which spread from the Alexandrian and others have brought the Christian Church to the same state of inter-confessional disputes that existed in Le Clerc's time.

Yet this is only part of the story. I have also mentioned that for Le Clerc, significant portions of Platonism and of philosophical arguments in general had

114 Id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 1 n. 14, 264.

115 BROGI, *Il logos eretico* 152.

116 LE CLERC, *BC* 3 (art. 1) 92.

117 Ibid. 93.

contributed to the establishment and acceptance of the Christian religion – had allowed it, so to say, to “incarnate” in history. Philosophy, in particular Platonic philosophy, was not necessarily considered negatively overall. Surely the points, drawn from Platonism, in which Origen stirred or just contributed to the doctrinal confusion of the centuries to come cannot be neglected. Origen’s Platonism was a stain that could not be washed away, but the adherence to this philosophical school was not an unforgivable sin, because Le Clerc, as we have shown, was also aware of the reasons that could lay behind the favour that such an approach had had.

That Origen’s Platonism did not lead to a total disinterest by Le Clerc for the theology of the Alexandrian can be shown also by a number of other small digressions that the Arminian provided on the subject. I have already mentioned one of the most obvious, which is that, although Origen took much from Plato, he was no Christian Platonist, and had also rejected much from the philosopher, for example the pagan superstition of the philosopher.¹¹⁸ More subtle and nuanced was Le Clerc’s attempt to re-establish Origen’s thought by “de-Platonising” it.¹¹⁹ Save for those doctrines that were clearly Platonic and that we have already presented, such as the pre-existence of souls, Origen could be considered as mainly an orthodox Christian writer:

“Ceux qui ont bien examiné les sentimens d’*Origene*, ont reconuu qu’à quelques réveries Platoniciennes près, que l’on peut retrancher de son systeme, sans y faire aucune brèche; comme la préexistence des ames, les révolutions de tout en certains periodes reglez, & autres choses semblables; le reste a été généralement reçu & estimé de tout l’Orient; [...] d’ailleurs *Origene* a toujours passé pour un membre de l’Eglise Chrétienne, dans laquelle il est mort; après avoir été dans le nombre des Confesseurs, du tems de la persecution de Decius, & témoigné beaucoup de constance & de disposition à souffrir le Martyre. Bien des gens l’ont défendu autrefois, & même dans ces derniers tems; on les pourra consulter, si l’on veut.”¹²⁰

This long quote shows not only that Le Clerc believed that Origen’s theology could stand on its own without its Platonist ideas, thus re-establishing part of it, but also

118 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 64.

119 Le Clerc’s effort of “de-Platonisation” was connected to the dispute between Le Clerc and Bayle that we have seen in the introduction of the present work. Le Clerc had put forward a defence of God’s goodness and justice by explicitly using some of Origen’s ideas and later contended that Origen’s theodicy, “purified” of its Platonisms, would still stand the ground. In response, Bayle had objected that Origen’s Platonic ideas did not weaken the position of the Alexandrian on theodicy and that, therefore, a de-Platonised Origen was no stronger opponent to his objections than a “normal” Origen: LE CLERC, BC 7 (art. 8) 351; BAYLE, *Reponse* 4, 26 f.

120 LE CLERC, *ibid.*

that Origen was generally considered as having been a member of the Church, not a heretic.¹²¹ His martyrdom was proof of his genuine faith.

When he reviewed William Cave's *Apostolici*,¹²² Le Clerc reported a number of works mentioned by Cave that discussed Origen's errors, but these works, besides discussing Origen's errors, were in reality considered by Cave himself as apologetic.¹²³ That Le Clerc also shared the same intent as Cave is clear from the fact that the Arminian added to Cave's list also Pierre Halloix's (1571–1656) *Origenes Defensus*. Following Cave faithfully, Le Clerc reported different apologetic arguments from the past. According to these arguments, Origen was not to be considered a dogmatic, because he had proposed his thoughts "par exercice."¹²⁴ Origen held certain positions in debates, on some occasions, just for the sake of the debate but without real adhesion to the thoughts expressed.¹²⁵ Some of Origen's writings had been intended "for private use only."¹²⁶ In many of his opinions, Origen had to be considered a philosopher, not a theologian. Theologians and councils only unjustly discussed his thought.¹²⁷ And finally, his writings were full of interpolations by heretics.¹²⁸ These remarks served for Le Clerc and for Cave to somehow re-establish Origen, even though Le Clerc mentioned that for Cave, Origen "avoit trop mêlé de Platonisme dans la Religion Chrétienne."¹²⁹ Although we cannot be sure of how much Le Clerc agreed with ancient defences of Origen's conduct as reported by Cave, at least some of these are elements that we will also find in other parts of Le Clerc's scholarly production.

A last angle to consider when speaking about Origen's thought/theology is its official condemnation by the Church in subsequent centuries. Coherently to what we have reviewed so far, Origen's theology, polished of Platonism, was, for Le Clerc, largely considered as approved by the Church. Le Clerc dedicated a relatively long digression to Origen's condemnation when reviewing Antoine Pagi's (1624–1699) edition of Caesar Baronius' (1538–1607) *Annales Ecclesiasticos*.¹³⁰ He believed that Origen's condemnation by pope Theophilus of Alexandria in

121 Id., Parrhasiana 313.

122 The third edition is the one reviewed by Le Clerc.

123 CAVE, *Apostolici* 235, mentioned Huet's *Origeniana* and the *Letter of Resolution Concerning Origen and the Chief of his Opinions* (normally attributed to George Rust).

124 LE CLERC, BUH 6 (art. 1) 53.

125 Ibid. A relatively recurring thought in Le Clerc's production was that disputes have a dialectic logic of their own. Arguments proposed in a debate did not necessarily represent the views of the proponents but served only the purpose to prove the opponent wrong. See, for example, id., BUH 10 (art. 8) 491–493; id., BC 13 (art. 3) 198.

126 Id., BUH 6 (art. 1) 54.

127 Ibid. 53 f.

128 Ibid. 54.

129 Ibid.

130 PAGI, *Critica historico-chronologica*.

400 AD had not been caused by Origen's ideas. He remarked that Origen had been mistreated in that:

“Il paroîtroit étrange, que l'on eût laissé tant d'années les livres d'*Origene*, sans les censurer, & qu'on se fut mis ensuite dans la tête de les défendre, pour quelques opinions Platoniciennes; pendant qu'on laissoit tant de livres, pleins d'erreurs, courir le monde sans rien dire.”¹³¹

A few Platonisms did not justify Origen's condemnation, so Le Clerc. In reality, according to Le Clerc, who drew this story from the ancient historian Socrates of Constantinople (c. 380 – c. 450) and Sozomen (c. 400 – c. 445), this decision was motivated by personal reasons of Theophilus, “homme avare & violent”¹³² and “il est aussi probable, à considerer la chose en général, qu'il n'étoit nullement homme de bien.”¹³³ Origen's condemnation by Theophilus was unjustified and was only the result of the decisions of an individual who had taken them in order to reach his own goals in ecclesiastical politics.¹³⁴

To be just, such a “process on Origen” should have happened for Le Clerc by consulting uninterested examiners who would have clearly indicated which works were free of errors and which had to be consulted with caution, clearly stating which Origenian ideas were erroneous. In this regard, a last passage written by Le Clerc might show even more clearly the positive attitude he had towards Origen's thought, despite the Platonic influence:

“S'il y avoit des rêveries Platoniciennes, en divers endroits de ses Ouvrages [the works of Origen], comme on ne peut pas en douter; il y avoit aussi des endroits si excellens & si bien tournez, qu'on ne pouvoit pas empêcher de les lire, sans faire tort aux Chrétiens. Mais la violence des Egyptiens, pressez par leur Patriarche, ne souffroit aucune moderation.”¹³⁵

In this last passage, Origen's thought was thus fully rehabilitated, even if caution was needed on some parts of it which had been influenced by Platonism. Even more clearly in this last passage, but also in conjunction with all of the other aspects reviewed in this section, it appears evident that Le Clerc attempted to “save” some form of Origenian thought and re-establish the trustworthiness of the Alexandrian, with the obvious caution needed with his Platonic background. We will see in the next part of the present work that Origen's thought was too valuable in confessional debates to be judged negatively for its Platonic background. This appears to us, in sum, as a necessary and continuous operation to be able to find in Origen an important ally.

131 LE CLERC, BC 8 (art. 6) 280.

132 Ibid. 281.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid. See also id., BC 7 (art. 8) 351.

135 Id., BC 8 (art. 6) 283.

4. Origen's Biblical and Non-Biblical Scholarship

In this chapter, we move to another well-known side of Origen, his biblical scholarship, where we continue our exploration of how Le Clerc related to Origen. There are debates at times in Origenian scholarship on whether there exists a “philosophical” and an “exegetical” Origen, side-by-side. It is claimed that such distinction is a distortion of Origen's thought and that it is problematic. While I agree that a holistic view of Origen, where the different sides intermix with each other, is the best possible approach, I also think that, for the present purposes, to differentiate between Origen “the philosopher” and Origen “the biblical scholar” is most suitable. This is so especially because, as we will see in this chapter, Le Clerc himself often discussed the two different “Origenes” in different contexts. I will start with some general remarks on Origenian biblical and textual scholarship in general, move on to his debate with Simon and then consider the way Le Clerc conceived Origen's hermeneutical methodology, especially the strengths of Origen's work. I will subsequently also explore the particular position of Le Clerc regarding the “verbal inspiration” of the Bible and how Origen came to have an important role in that. As a last step, I will take into account how problematic much of the exegetical Origen was for Le Clerc, for example Origen's allegory, despite his esteem for the scholarship of the Alexandrian. I will then conclude with some remarks that are intended to show how these seemingly different evaluations of Origen's biblical scholarship can be coherently understood together.

4.1 Origen's *Hexapla* and the “New Origen”

Among the many disputes fought by Le Clerc, probably the second most popular after that with Bayle is the one he had with Simon, a brief part of which we have covered in an earlier chapter.¹³⁶ Leaving the specific matter of the dispute aside,¹³⁷

136 This dispute is considered highly relevant for the history of biblical criticism and had echoes also in the subsequent centuries, for example in the work of Jean Astruc (1684–1766) and the *Encyclopedists*: WOODBRIDGE, Richard Simon 199f. See also LEINSLE, Sources, Methods, and Forms 25–42. For the exegetical impact of Richard Simon, see REISER, The History of Catholic Exegesis 79–82; MIRRI, Richard Simon.

137 To cover in more detail this dispute, which focused mainly on biblical hermeneutics, would require a chapter of its own and lead us far from the main goal of the present chapter. Still, to summarise the most relevant steps of the debate to provide a chronological perspective, I would add that it all started with Le Clerc's response to Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, published in 1685 (second edition). Le Clerc's reply was his book: *Sentimens de quelques theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*. In the next year, in 1686, Simon replied to Le Clerc's work with a new book titled: *Réponse au*

it is relevant for the purpose of this section to note that Le Clerc, in his *Défense des Sentimens*, refers to Simon as “le nouvel Origene de nôtre siècle.”¹³⁸ In the same work, but at the very beginning, he mentioned that Simon “renferme” the person of Origen, among others.¹³⁹ Even in their epistolary exchange, both Simon signed his letter as *Adamantius* (a common appellative for Origen) and Le Clerc addressed his letters to Simon as to *Origeni Adamantio*.¹⁴⁰ This, at first seemingly strange use of Origen's name, finds a suitable explanation in Simon's fame as biblical scholar and in his project of a polyglot bible, exposed in his *Synopsis Novorum Bibliorum Polyglottorum* (1684), in which Simon had used Origen's appellative for himself.¹⁴¹

The fact that Le Clerc endorsed this label is surely a first hint at what Le Clerc himself, and his contemporaries, considered to be one of the main features, if not the quintessence, of Origen. In this regard, it is already apparent that Origen's name was closely interlinked with his *Hexapla*, which the polyglot bible of Simon would have resembled. Yet, this does not tell us much on its own of Le Clerc's consideration of Origen's biblical scholarly/textual skills.¹⁴² Le Clerc was neither fully contrary to nor (by far) completely convinced of Simon's biblical criticism. In a letter to Jaques Lenfant in 1685, Le Clerc had both praised and criticised Si-

livre intitulé Sentimens de quelques theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament, and so did Le Clerc with his *Défense des Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* in the same year. To this, once again, Simon replied in 1699 with a book titled *De l'inspiration des livres sacrés*. The dispute also had an epistolary character, with Le Clerc's letter (letter 63) to Simon on 5 November 1684, Simon's reply at the beginning of December of the same year (letter 67) and Le Clerc's new reply on the 11th of the same month (letter 70): SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1, 235–255. 266–268. 273 f. For an introduction to the dispute, I refer to the work by MIRRI, Richard Simon.

138 LE CLERC, *Défense des Sentimens* 420.

139 *Ibid.* 3.

140 See the already mentioned letters above n. 425.

141 This pamphlet was harshly criticised by Le Clerc, because it drew methodologically from Simon's *Histoire critique*. Le Clerc expressed his criticism in the already mentioned letter to Simon on 5 November 1684: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 63) 235–255. This letter was later also published in LE CLERC, *Défense des Sentimens* 421–459. Simon himself used Origen's appellative with the intent of stressing his critical work, especially of purifying Scripture from all the textual errors that entered it over the centuries: WOODBRIDGE, Richard Simon 201 f.

142 The *Hexapla*, “the six columns”, contained the Old Testament displayed in six parallel columns, starting with the original Hebrew text, various translations into Greek and an annotated form of the LXX (the *Septuaginta*): ALBRECHT, *Hexapla of Origen* 1000–1002. A letter to Le Clerc from Nicolaus Wolff of 12 August 1724 bears witness to the modern common association of Origen's name with, besides other things, the composition of the *Hexapla*. The transliteration of the Hebrew biblical text into Greek letters is said to be “*ad instar quod Origenes fecerat*”: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 4 (letter 774) 274–277.

mon's work: "*cum multa sint in eo utilia et lectu digna, quod non obstat quominus varia vituperanda in eo existimem.*"¹⁴³ Moving beyond Le Clerc linking somehow Simon and Origen, we must thus refer to the way Le Clerc reflected on Origen's *Hexapla*.

The relatively short *Compendium Historiæ Universalis*,¹⁴⁴ which, as we have seen,¹⁴⁵ was meant to be a very compact summary of the most important information from sacred and profane history, helps us in this instance. It is noteworthy that Le Clerc included the *Hexapla* (that he preferred to call here *Tetrapla*) in the *Compendium*, when covering the year 231. Here, he spent more than a whole page (in comparison, many historical occurrences were only briefly mentioned in the space of one or two sentences) describing the structure of this "*utilissimum laborem in Vetus Testamentum*"¹⁴⁶ and showing a graphic example of how it must have appeared.¹⁴⁷ For a textbook intended to be a summary, the significance that Le Clerc gave to Origen's work is surely already considerable.

From Le Clerc's epistolary we can infer that Le Clerc did not have access to most fragments of Origen's *Hexapla*, at least until 1713, when he acknowledged that he was finally in possession of Montfaucon's edition of the *Hexapla*.¹⁴⁸ In a letter to the cardinal Angelo Maria Querini (1680–1755) the year before, he had expressed both his impatience for this work to be published and the hoped-for impact of this work on his own biblical scholarship:

"On attend avec impatience ce que le R. P. de *Montfaucon* promet, et sur tout ses *Hexaples*, qui seront très utiles à ceux qui travaillent sur l'Écriture Sainte, et sur tout à moi, qui suis occupé à travailler sur les livres Prophetiques. Les Fragmens des Anciens Interpretes, me serviront infiniment, pour découvrir la signification de bien des mots et le sens des passages difficiles. Je voudrois que l'on pût déterrer les *Hexaples* sur *Job*, sur lequel j'écris actuellement, et sur lequel je n'ai que la *Catena* imprimée par *Casaubon*, qui me donne quelque lumiere, outre les Fragmens recueillis par *Drusius*."¹⁴⁹

What seemed crucial for Le Clerc in the *Hexapla* was the access to important material from ancient translations of the Bible (notably the translation into Greek by Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion) as a way to clarify the Hebrew text. However, his interest in the *Hexapla* was not limited to their capability of being an excellent textual bridge to other versions of the Bible. In one of the most pas-

143 Id., Epistolario 1 (letter 77 of 10 March 1685, Le Clerc to Lenfant) 303.

144 LE CLERC, *Compendium Historiæ Universalis*.

145 See above n. 201.

146 Ibid. 119.

147 Ibid. 119 f.

148 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 3 (letter 585 of 25 August 1713, Le Clerc to Gisbert Cuper) 454.

149 Ibid. (letter 575 of 18 November 1712, Le Clerc to Querini) 418.

sionate passages we find in this regard, Le Clerc regretted also the loss of Origen's histories of the various versions of the Old Testament and that there was an only imperfect supplement for them:

“Il est fâcheux que l'on ait perdu les remarques, qu'Origene avoit mises à la tête de chaque Version, où il en avoit fait l'Histoire. On peut suppléer, en quelque façon, à cela, par ce que S. Epiphane en a dit, dans son livre des poids & des mesures. Le mal est qu'il y a mêlé beaucoup de choses de son chef, ou qu'il avoit crû trop légèrement, & qu'il a gâté la Chronologie.”¹⁵⁰

From this passage it becomes evident that Le Clerc considered highly the quality of Origen's historical scholarship. According to Le Clerc, a major stain in Epiphanius' work (Epiphanius of Salamis, c. 310/320–403), who recovered and modified Origen's work, is that he intermixed his own remarks with those of Origen. Thus, not only the actual versions of the Old Testament but also their histories composed by Origen fell within the range of interest of the Arminian.

Le Clerc's interest in the *Hexapla* was only a hope initially and a partial esteem, because Le Clerc had praised the *Hexapla* before having seen most of the fragments published by Montfaucon. Such an interest became stronger after Montfaucon's publication: Le Clerc seemed not only keen on discovering new information *through* Origen but also even more interested in Origen's own critical work on the LXX, with his asterisks and *obeloi* signs, as a good reference for doing scholarly work on it.¹⁵¹ In sum: the Origen of *Hexapla*, and thus Origen as a textual scholar, seemed to have had an important role for Le Clerc not only for the texts it disclosed but also for the critical apparatus/historical information contained therein.¹⁵²

Origen's scholarship was not limited only to the *Hexapla*, and Le Clerc was aware of this. Yet, in these other cases, Origen lost some of his prominence and was simply one of the relevant ancient scholars who could be used as an important ancient textual source by confronting the versions which they had access to, but not for his own scholarly work as such. The controversy of the so called “*Testimonium Flavianum*”,¹⁵³ a passage in Josephus¹⁵⁴ where the Jewish scholar had apparently testified of Jesus as “the Christ”, is a good example of this.

150 LE CLERC, BC 27/2 (art. 2) 333.

151 Id., BAM 20 (art. 1) 33. An example of the use of Origen's scholarly remarks as found in *Hexapla* can be found in id., *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi* 190.

152 Id., BC 27/2 (art. 2) 331.

153 For an introduction to the discussion on the *Testimonium Flavianum*, see WHEALEY, *The Testimonium Flavianum* 345–355.

154 Flavius Josephus, *ant. Iud.* XVIII 63f.

The passage where Josephus was believed to refer to Jesus was disputed among scholars, and Le Clerc responded to a work by Carol d'Aubuz,¹⁵⁵ which had proved its authenticity, by bringing counter-evidence. On this occasion, Le Clerc had called Origen in his favour, among other reasons, because the Alexandrian had quoted two passages in his *Contra Celsum* where Josephus mentioned Jesus but said explicitly that he did not believe in him being the Christ.¹⁵⁶ This Le Clerc used as an explanation that Josephus' passage on Jesus as the Christ was not present in Origen's version of the works of Josephus, otherwise the Alexandrian, so Le Clerc, would have quoted it. This supported his idea that the passage had been added later and not that Origen's version had been manipulated by Jews, as Huet had claimed.¹⁵⁷

Again, Le Clerc's doubt on the *Testimonium* was reinforced by the fact that, if Jews had taken out passages from Josephus' work, like the ones mentioned by Origen in *Contra Celsum*, why would they have left in the famous *Testimonium*, which brought much more advantage to the Christian religion than the former passages? His suspicion, once again, was that it had not been there in the first place, but had been written by Eusebius.¹⁵⁸ Such a claim was reinstated years later when Le Clerc reviewed the edition of the Greek ecclesiastical histories by Henri Valois (1603–1676).¹⁵⁹ This example shows clearly how Origen could also be a “reference author” beyond the *Hexapla*.¹⁶⁰ It is important to add that neither was Origen the only author Le Clerc drew on for this, nor was Le Clerc the only one to quote Origen for this purpose.¹⁶¹

The last example should not lead us to think that, besides the *Hexapla*, all other references to Origen would restrict his role to a pure “textual bridge.” At least a few more passages exist in Le Clerc where Origen's own scholarly remarks appeared

155 D'AUBUZ, *Libri duo pro testimonio*.

156 LE CLERC, BAM 7/2 (art. 1) 260–263. Le Clerc's references are to Origen, CC I 47; II 13 (p. 43, 80 CHADWICK).

157 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 261–263; HUET, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 26 f.

158 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 258–260.

159 *Id.*, BAM 16 (art. 2) 94.

160 A similar, less sophisticated, example concerns the version of the prayer of the “Our Father” in ancient manuscripts, that in Lk. 9 was missing some parts as compared to Mt. 6, but which were later added to Luke. This had been proven by Erasmus and Théodore de Bèze, but, Le Clerc added, also in *Origenis ævo* (specifically, in his *De oratione*) those additions to Luke were missing. As a result, Le Clerc maintained, Origen believed that in Luke and Matthew there were two different prayers: LE CLERC, *Défense des Sentimens* 454 n. 8. A further example can be found in the *Novum Testamentum Hammondi* in Le Clerc's edition: HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 1 (1714), commentary by Le Clerc 330 n. 2; HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 2, commentary by Le Clerc 254–256 n. 1.

161 If we only look at other passages in the *Bibliothèques* of Le Clerc, we can find many other passages where the authors he had reviewed had made a similar use of Origen. See, for example, LE CLERC, BAM 26/2 (art. 7) 419; *id.*, BAM 28/2 (art. 4) 354–358.

as valuable. In a review of a work on Greek middle verbs by Ludolph Küster¹⁶² (1670–1716), Le Clerc confirmed Küster's analysis through Origen. According to Küster, middle verbs had a double action: someone does something (the example brought from Küster was about the verb “κείρω” – to cut hair, to shave) but the one who receives the action has to receive it, to submit himself to the one who does it, but this submission is, in turn, a form of activity too.¹⁶³ Le Clerc added Origen's explanation in *Contra Celsum*, reporting Origen's thought that “to be persuaded” – *πειθεσθαι* – would be similar to “to be shaved” – *κείρεσθαι* – involving a double action in the persuader and the persuaded.¹⁶⁴ Also in this latter case, Le Clerc was not alone in his use of Origen as a reference author, as we can see for example from geographical remarks in Richard Ellys' *Fortuita Sacra*, which Le Clerc had reviewed, where the English scholar had, besides other things, utilised Origen's geographical remarks to argue in favour of his conclusion.¹⁶⁵

To conclude: Origen's role was not limited as a means to the end of accessing ancient manuscripts, especially in the *Hexapla*, but also provided further scholarly insights. It seems thus adequate to reinstate that, for Le Clerc, Origen seemed to have had the role of “reference author” both for the access to ancient sources provided through him and for his own scholarly remarks as well. It appears to me that this would presuppose a certain esteem for Origen's textual scholarship and erudition, and this is confirmed by the fact that Le Clerc for example asserted that Jerome and Theophilus of Alexandria and pope Anastasius I, who had condemned Origen's errors, were not erudite enough to accuse Origen of being ignorant.¹⁶⁶ Le Clerc was also astonished that Origen had believed that the sun and the moon had free will, especially because he was “such an erudite and intelligent man.”¹⁶⁷ However, this last example was applied more specifically to Origen's exegesis and it is therefore to this area that we now turn.

162 KÜSTER, *De vero usu*.

163 LE CLERC, *BAM* 2/2 (art. 4) 457 f.

164 *Ibid.* 458. Origen had discussed the verb within the context of a reply to Celsus' remarks on the problem of evil and God's apparent incapability of admonishing and persuading human beings so as to prevent sin: *CC VI* 53 (p. 369 f. CHADWICK). Origen asserted man's responsibility in this and used the grammatical digression to state that persuasion needed a counterpart in the persuaded to be effective: *ibid.* *VI* 57 (p. 372 f.).

165 ELLYS, *Fortuita sacra*. Reviewed in LE CLERC, *BAM* 27/2 (art. 1) 229–258.

166 *Id.*, *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ* 244.

167 *Id.*, *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi* 539 n. 3: “*Mirum est hominem doctum & acutum è figura poética sic esse ratiocinatum.*”

4.2 Biblical Hermeneutics

In what concerns the interpretation of Scripture, we find some passages in Le Clerc where he explicitly showed appreciation for the work of Origen, especially his hermeneutical methodology and the use he made of that exegesis. Origen, according to Le Clerc, had strengthened his faith and his doctrinal beliefs through his interpretation of Scripture (as opposed to “philosophising on religion”) and read Scripture through the use of reason.¹⁶⁸ For Le Clerc, even if Origen’s subordinationist conception of the second person of the Trinity, to return to a popular topic of the last chapter, was tending to Arianism and thus heretical, the very fact that Origen used Scripture as his primary argumentative tool to build his doctrine was worthy of respect. Even if Origen was mistaken, so Le Clerc, his method was correct, and he did not deserve to be treated with disrespect because of his eventual errors.¹⁶⁹

Again, Le Clerc maintained that, in general, if Origen interpreted revelation through the aid of reason in the search for truth, an eventual error could be nearly excused. Even if this process led to a misinterpretation of Scriptural revelation, it was once again the attitude that to Le Clerc seemed most important, not the result in itself. Both the rational side of the process and the fact that it was not a simple “philosophising” but that the search for doctrinal truth was based on Scripture made the overall attitude sound: “Quand même on se tromperoit, dans le sens qu’on lui donneroit, il n’y auroit pas grand danger; parce que l’on ne seroit dans l’erreur, que par respect pour la Révélation, appuyée d’ailleurs sur des fondemens solides.”¹⁷⁰ Le Clerc, even if not explicitly in this passage, expressed here once again his rejection of a religious belief based on philosophy and not on revelation.¹⁷¹

We see here at stake the traditional Protestant doctrine of Scriptural sufficiency, so that Le Clerc’s validation of Origen’s use of Scripture could be seen as a way to strengthen the Protestant position, even if the quoted passage we have just seen was part of the polemic against Bayle’s on the Manichean position and the role of revelation.¹⁷² In his stance against so called “enthusiasts”, Le Clerc was not alone, but accompanied by other Arminians, Socinians and the so called “critical school” in reformed orthodoxy.¹⁷³

168 Id., BC 6 (art. 6) 419 f.

169 Id., BAM 1 (art. 6) 168.

170 Id., BC 6 (art. 6) 419.

171 Ibid.

172 On the Protestant doctrine of Scripture sufficiency, see TREUMAN, *Scripture and Exegesis* 183.

173 This critical school was similarly convinced of the rationality of faith and at the same time supported a critical study of the biblical text. Exponents of this school were, for example,

In another passage, Origen was quoted by Le Clerc once again as a virtuous example of someone who interpreted passages of Scripture with the aid of reason. If an eternal punishment of sinners seemed irreconcilable with the justice and goodness of God, so Le Clerc, then Origen did the right thing in using reason to interpret Scripture differently from what its apparent sense, understood without the aid of reason, may point to:

“Il vaudroit sans doute mieux se ranger à leur opinion, que de croire qu'il faut entendre à la rigueur ce que dit la Révélation, & croire en même tems que la bonté & la justice de Dieu, tant vantées dans l'Écriture Sainte, y sont tout à fait contraires, aussi bien que ce que les plus claires lumières de la Raison nous en apprennent.”¹⁷⁴

The choice of the example, the eternal punishment of sinners, was obviously not without its particular meaning, as was the case above on the Trinity. We will return to the wider significance of this last example in the context of Le Clerc's debate on theodicy in the last chapter. What is relevant for the current argument is that Le Clerc received positively Origen's exegetical skills and use of biblical interpretation not primarily for the content of Origen's interpretations, at least from the brief remarks made so far, but for his own approach to the task at hand.

Interestingly, in another passage, Le Clerc seemed to consider Origen almost as a role model of Scriptural interpretation. This might sound like an exaggeration, as the passage was part of the dispute with Simon, but it seems still important to review it. Le Clerc reported a maxim, which he attributed to Origen, of not distorting Scripture in cases of seemingly contradictory passages: “Qu'il ne faut pas corriger les endroits de l'Écriture, où il semble qu'il y ait un solecisme, & qu'il n'y ait pas de suite, selon la lettre, parce que souvent le sens est bien suivi, pour ceux qui le savent entendre.”¹⁷⁵ Le Clerc here wanted to affirm the centrality of the literal interpretation of Scripture and once again its self-sufficiency, this time in open confrontation with Simon's Roman Catholic claims of the necessity of tradition in order to interpret Scripture.¹⁷⁶

The fact that Le Clerc explicitly favoured Origen's exegetical methodology does not mean that his reception of Origen's biblical interpretation was purely a statement or a strategic claim. A number of different passages, where Le Clerc quoted and supported his own interpretation through Origen, can also implic-

Louis Cappel, Amyraut, Cameron, Jean Daillé: LAPLANCHE, Débats et combats 126–130.

174 LE CLERC, BC 6 (art. 6) 420 f.

175 This is reported in an article of *BUH* where Le Clerc reviewed his own *Défense des Sentimens*: id., *BUH* 3 (art. 5) 118 f.

176 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 36–39, even accused Simon of, on the one hand, claiming that the tradition of the Church was necessary for the interpretation of Scripture, but on the other of already disproving this claim through his textual analysis.

itly validate the *content* of Origen's exegesis. Examples were the interpretation of Gen. 7:2, to establish the actual number of animal pairs to enter Noah's ark, where, besides the LXX, Origen was quoted together with Justin and the Jewish biblical commentator Abraham ibn Ezra (1092–1167). The "seven pairs" of animals meant seven couples, so fourteen animals in total per kind, and not two pairs and one single animal, totalling seven animals, as others had claimed.¹⁷⁷ Also, for the interpretation of Gen. 11:7, that the plural of this verse "come, let us go down" at the time of the Babylon tower, intended God-sent angels to confuse human languages, rather than God's own action, Le Clerc made use of Origen's support, among a few others, most notably Augustine in this passage.¹⁷⁸ Finally, in Job 2:7, to understand what type of terrible disease had taken hold of Job after God had permitted it, Le Clerc recurred to Origen among others.¹⁷⁹

To contextualise these passages a little I should add that Le Clerc's preferred way of doing exegesis was the Reformed orthodox one, based on intertextual references to other books of the Bible or other versions, like the LXX. It is true that he quoted many other authors besides Origen (and Origen does not figure among the most prominent ones, which seem to be more modern scholars), and an eminent precursor of this was Grotius, for example.¹⁸⁰ However, this was standard practice in his milieu and, again, the majority of the work was completed by Le Clerc by following the method of "interpreting the Bible with the Bible", thus following general Reformed practice, as in Rivet, for example.¹⁸¹ References to authors beyond the biblical text were thus not the main focus of his exegesis. Yet, such a reflection does not diminish the intrinsic value of the just mentioned examples of positive reception in Le Clerc of Origen's exegesis.

In contrast to this, at least at a general level, we find Le Clerc's negative evaluation of Augustine as an interpreter of Scripture. Le Clerc disagreed with Simon in this regard. Le Clerc considered Augustine's skills for exegesis way below the required level to be able to master the task. The only reason that Augustine could win in the Pelagian dispute of his time through the use of Scripture, so Le Clerc, was because Pelagians were even weaker interpreters of the Bible who "ne savoient pas tourner en ridicule ces raisonnemens Platoniciens, qu'il tâchoit d'appuyer sur les Ecrits des Apôtres, en les tirant par les cheveux."¹⁸² Thus Augustine was accused of Platonising Scripture, in particular of using Scripture to give credit to his own ideas.¹⁸³ This "Platonising" in Augustine can be understood

177 Id., Genesis 56 f. n. 2.

178 Ibid. 92 f. n. 7.

179 Id., Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi 8 n. 7.

180 VON REVENTLOW, *Lexégèse humaniste de Hugo Grotius* 142 f.

181 LAPLANCHE, *Débats et combats* 120–122.

182 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 358.

183 Ibid. 358 f.

as using only his own intelligence (*solo ingenio*)¹⁸⁴ and philosophical outlook to understand the sacred text, without knowledge of the original languages and thus without reference to the original text.

For Le Clerc, the danger of not knowing biblical languages was that the mind of the interpreter would easily convert Scripture in a confirmation of his own ideas.¹⁸⁵ This was, according to Le Clerc, what happened in Augustinian exegesis. Because Augustine's mind was "infected by metaphysical Platonism" (*"Platonica Metaphysicâ cerebrum infectum habebat"*),¹⁸⁶ he had distorted the meaning of Scripture and initiated a wrong path of Scriptural interpretation: "[Augustine] *omnia Metaphysice intellexit, et nostros omnes post se in errorem traxit.*"¹⁸⁷ Such an evaluation of Augustine seems not particularly characteristic of Le Clerc's circle of intellectuals: Le Cène had made Augustine a model of exegesis, for example, and had him state that Scripture is coherent and self-sufficient. Where Scripture was unclear, so Le Cène, we follow Augustine's proposal that we must suspend judgment, because the obscurity of Scripture resides in our own lack of comprehension.¹⁸⁸

The negative evaluation of Augustinian exegesis just presented did not have Le Clerc refrain from using it at times, as in the example above of Gen. 11:7, where Augustine was even praised for his interpretation. At the same time, the positive comments expressed by Le Clerc on Origen's dealing with Scripture and his active use of Origen's exegetical work must be complemented also by a critical attitude of the Arminian towards them, something which we will review in one of the next sections. Before moving on to that, a recovery of an important aspect of the positive reception of Origen's biblical scholarship in Le Clerc, Scriptural inspiration, must be discussed.

184 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 43 of 6 April 1684, Le Clerc Letter to Pierre Allix) 160.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, Entretiens 38. Protestant scholars had to defend themselves on this, because their Roman Catholic opponents had claimed that Augustine, whom Protestants considered the champion of the beginnings of Protestant theology, had believed in the obscurity of some parts of Scripture. For this reason, Protestant scholars contended that Augustine had believed in the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture, but that this had to be restricted to those truths that are necessary for salvation: LAPLANCHE, Débats et combats 122.

4.3 Scriptural Inspiration

In another element concerning Scripture, Le Clerc reached out to Origen for support: the topic of the inspiration of Scripture. Before introducing the specific reference to Origen, a reflection on Le Clerc's position in this regard helps contextualise the operation of including Origen in the picture. Le Clerc, although otherwise critical towards Simon, as we have seen in a previous section, agreed with Simon on the non-literal inspiration of Scripture, although this was not the common orthodox Reformed position on the matter.¹⁸⁹ In letter XI and XII of his *Sentimens*, he included a *Mémoire* by "M.N.," (but it was Le Clerc himself), where he provided reasons for the fact that Scripture was not fully literally inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁰

Although in a letter of the same year, Le Clerc, commenting on Bayle's critique of the just mentioned *Mémoire*, sided with the orthodox doctrine on the topic of the literal inspiration of Scripture, that it was fully inspired, he stated his argument unconvincingly. He showed that the argument of non-verbal inspiration provided little risk for religion, and quoted Erasmus and Grotius as support of that argument. He also openly rejected the paternity of the *Mémoire*, stating that his intention had been to engage other scholars in a discussion that would end in the rejection of the mentioned ideas.¹⁹¹ However, his paternity of the *Mémoire* was confirmed¹⁹² and the content of the letters XI and XII of *Sen-*

189 The reformers admitted that Scripture was inspired, but in the case of Calvin and Bèze for example, they had distinguished between degrees of Scriptural inspiration, a prophetic, but also a more human side as well. From the council of Trent onwards however, the tendency had been to radicalise those views, partly also because of the pressure exerted by textual scholarship on such a doctrine over the course of the century. Rivet, among others, had elaborated a stricter form of verbal inspiration, where God assumed the ultimate responsibility not only for the subject, but also for the single words contained in Scripture. See TREUMAN, *Scripture and Exegesis* 182–184; LAPLANCHE, *Débats et combats* 118–121. A form of "scriptural dictation" had also been doctrinally confirmed in the *Consensus Helveticus*, which had even established the Masoretic text as the only authoritative one, something which Le Clerc also strongly opposed. Le Clerc argued that not only had Calvin himself felt at ease when changing the Masoretic vowels at times, but also highlighted differences among different manuscripts and questioned the good faith of the Masorettes, quoting also Elies Levita's demonstrations that the Masoretic vowels were of human origin: LE CLERC, *BAM* 25 (art. 6) 157–161; *id.*, *Sentimens* 296. 442 f. On the debate concerning the Masoretic text, see LAPLANCHE, *ibid.* 121; MESGUICH, *Les hébraïsants chrétiens* 90–94. On the doctrine of Scriptural inspiration, positions varied among Arminians, with Limborch close to Reformed orthodoxy and Simon Episcopius, instead, close to what later became Le Clerc's position: ROTH, *Le Traité de l'inspiration* 56 f.

190 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 260.

191 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 94 of 19 July 1685, Le Clerc to Bayle) 352.

192 This is explicitly stated by Le Clerc in two letters to his friend Jacques Lenfant, the one of 26 July 1685 and the one of 4 September 1685: *ibid.* (letter 98) 369–371; *ibid.* (letter 102) 385–387.

timens and other remarks in the later *Défense* clearly argue for the non-literal inspiration of Scripture.

In *Sentimens*, Le Clerc had distinguished between three types of content in Scripture: prophecies, histories and doctrines. 1. Prophecies which followed visions, or something the prophet had heard, did not need God's dictation according to the Arminian, but only an adequate memory on the part of the prophet. Also, prophecies which had been internally inspired would leave freedom to the prophets to use the words they found most useful to express them, because God had transmitted only the general sense of what he wanted to communicate. However, Le Clerc acknowledged the possibility of God's dictation in this latter kind of prophecies, but only admitted it to occur rarely.¹⁹³ A further kind of prophecy, different from the previous ones, which focused on prediction, was one that interpreted Scripture or praised God. This latter kind of prophecy needed for Le Clerc only a spirit of "piety."¹⁹⁴ 2. The accountability of biblical histories was based for Le Clerc on a variety of factors that did not require verbal inspiration (we will review some of these factors more generally in the next chapter) and that did not differ in criteria from the accountability of ancient profane histories. This was made evident, for Le Clerc, by the minor discrepancies among the evangelists, for example, or the lack of exact dates. If verbally inspired, the Gospels would have coincided perfectly in all the details.¹⁹⁵ 3. On doctrines, Le Clerc argued in many different ways for a reinterpretation of John 16:13 and Luke 12:11, which could be interpreted as support for a verbal inspiration. Le Clerc negated a perpetual inspiration of the apostles and restricted a kind of supernatural inspiration only to special occasions, like when in tribunals. At the same time, Le Clerc also added that what was promised to them was that if they believed in the Gospel, they would have such an internal disposition that they would be able to stand a trial without the need for extra assistance. So, the Holy Spirit was equated by him, in this regard, to that internal disposition. Le Clerc admitted a perpetual divine inspiration only in the case of Jesus, who became thus a kind of divine oracle, and for the apostles admitted its possibility in the form of visions and various other ways only exceptionally.¹⁹⁶

Scholars have discussed the interpretation of Le Clerc's doctrine of Scriptural inspiration. Lia Mannarino argued that, concerning the inspiration of Scripture, the difference between Spinoza and Le Clerc was difficult to sense in practice and that Le Clerc even contradicted himself on this point, coming thus even closer to

193 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 222–226.

194 *Ibid.* 230.

195 *Ibid.* 231–239.

196 *Ibid.* 239–257. 260.

Spinoza.¹⁹⁷ Vernière also argued in a similar fashion.¹⁹⁸ In contrast, William Lane Craig¹⁹⁹ seemed to point out as a difference between the two, that Le Clerc reacted to Spinoza because the Arminian had contended that Jesus was to be considered as perpetually inspired, as is found in Le Clerc's text.²⁰⁰ This is not a strong differentiator between the two, I believe, because Jesus was for Spinoza also invested of a particular role in revelation: he was considered the maximum receiver of God's revelation.²⁰¹

If a difference between Le Clerc and Spinoza exists on this point, it seems to me more a matter of quantitatively accentuating the divine origin of the Scriptural text. It is true that Le Clerc restricted a supernatural scriptural inspiration to a minimum, in this being close to Spinoza, but it is also the case that the Arminian referred more than once to the possibility of a supernatural aid to the writing of the Bible. He ruled in the possibility that the apostles had received a special "Esprit des Miracles" in order to strengthen their memory and intelligence to faithfully report what they had seen and heard, even if such aid did not seem necessary.²⁰² Le Clerc also accepted the possibility that divine providence would assist in preserving the essential content (although not the words) of God's message.²⁰³ Moreover, if the apostles had erred in reporting the doctrine, God would have taken away from them the gift of doing miracles.²⁰⁴ We can surely interpret these remarks as a sort of disguise that would help him fend off eventual critics, and thus essentially agree with Mannarino and Vernière. However, I believe that if we accept these remarks by Le Clerc, the position of the Arminian distinguishes itself from the one of Spinoza because the Arminian sought to accentuate more the supernatural origin and assistance, or else the divinity, of Scripture than Spinoza. His strong opposition to Spinoza's belief on miracles,²⁰⁵ which for Le Clerc were supernatural,²⁰⁶ shows also a fundamental metaphysical difference between

197 MANNARINO, *La fantasia degli uomini* 78 f.

198 VERNIÈRE, *Spinoza et la pensée Française* 1, 77.

199 CRAIG, *Men Moved By the Holy Spirit* 168.

200 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 260.

201 SPINOZA, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* 7: "*Quare non credo ullum alium ad tantam perfectionem supra alios pervenisse, præter Christum, cui Dei placita, quæ homines ad salutem ducunt, sine verbis, aut visionibus, sed immediate revelata sunt: adeo ut Deus per mentem Christi sese Apostolis manifestaverit, ut olim Mosi mediante voce aërea. Et ideo vox Christi, sicuti illa, quam Moses audiebat, Vox Dei vocari potest. Et hoc sensu etiam dicere possumus, Sapientiam Dei, hoc est, Sapientiam, quæ supra humanam est, naturam humanam in Christo assumpsisse. Et Christum viam salutis fuisse.*"

202 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 256 f.

203 *Ibid.* 237.

204 *Ibid.* 257.

205 ISRAEL, *Spinoza and Early Modern Theology* 579.

206 LE CLERC, *De l'incrédulité* 353.

the two that might have played a role in the weight that he was prepared to allow to the divine aid to Scriptural scribes. In a subsequent response to Simon in the *Défense*, taking up once again the topic of the inspiration of Scripture, Le Clerc restated strongly that a verbal inspiration did not include the whole of Scripture,²⁰⁷ albeit assuring that God had often dictated to prophets and apostles.²⁰⁸ In any case, it is undeniable that, in general, Le Clerc and Spinoza are very close to each other on this point.

Did Le Clerc demolish the authority of Scripture by showing evidence of the non-literal inspiration of most of its text? This had surely not been Le Clerc's intent because, apart from still admitting the divine origin of many parts of it, even if not dictated, he posed it also on different foundations: historical foundations.²⁰⁹ He considered the apostles, for example, as infallible testimonies of Jesus' message, given their trust as historical testimonies and the miracles which confirmed that, although their expressions had not been dictated by God.²¹⁰ So one had to still faithfully believe everything which Jesus had preached, because it was of divine origin and based on the trustworthy testimony of the apostles.²¹¹ The new foundation of the authority of Scripture was historical, and this applied also to the Old Testament, in as much as it confirmed the doctrine of the New Testament.²¹² This major trust in history had been present already in Grotius' thought and it is therefore unsurprising to find it again in Le Clerc.²¹³

There were various reasons why Le Clerc had held the argument of the non-literal inspiration of Scripture as particularly dear. The doctrine of verbal inspiration was for him in contrast with the findings of biblical scholars of his and the previous century, which had discovered discrepancies, different styles and more philological issues in Scripture. One could not accept both the results of philological analyses and the parallel doctrine of verbal inspiration. The only way to accept philology and textual analysis and still consider the Bible an authoritative

207 Id., *Défense des Sentimens* 226 f.

208 Ibid. 225.

209 Roth considered Le Clerc as the first to draw conclusions from his remarks on the non-literal inspiration of Scripture, different for example from Cappel, who, although made it apparent through his critical work, had still preserved the doctrine of the literal inspiration of Scripture. On this, Laplanche and Roth disagree: ROTH, *Le Traité de l'inspiration* 59; LAPLANCHE, *Débats et combats* 128. See also ELLIOTT, *Jean Leclerc* 473.

210 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 256 f.

211 Ibid. 280–282.

212 Ibid. 284 f.

213 Grotius believed in verbal inspiration, for example in those passages where Scripture said explicitly "thus saith the Lord". For the historical part however, only a good memory/a spirit of piety by the testimony was sufficient (and Le Clerc had argued similarly – and we find again in Spinoza a similar "spirit of piety"): VON REVENTLOW, *L'exégèse humaniste de Hugo Grotius* 146 f. See also ROTH, *Le Traité de l'inspiration* 59.

text was to believe it had not been verbally inspired. This problem was at the very core of Protestantism.²¹⁴ Thus, by restabilising the authority of the biblical text on different foundations, Le Clerc aimed at a philologically informed defence of Protestantism.

The doctrine of verbal inspiration was also detrimental for Le Clerc because it had hermeneutical implications that distorted the core message of the Gospel. He saw it as an open contradiction to consider the Bible as fully verbally inspired and then consequently have to consider at the same level Jesus' message of love for enemies and King David's apparent hatred for his enemies and desire for vengeance as expressed in Ps. 69 and Ps. 109. In other words, Le Clerc seemed to believe that the verbal inspiration implied a strict purely literal interpretation of Scripture. Another reason for this was that Le Clerc also believed that this argument of verbal inspiration originated from the Jewish tradition, thus was not part of a Christian tradition.²¹⁵ His argument for the non-verbal inspiration of Scripture was also meant to further support inter-confessional peace, because the focus would be on the core teachings of Scripture rather than theological subtleties born out of a study of single words or letters, and in this way morality would be promoted. Finally, Le Clerc's argument would solve the rational objections of the Libertines, who had received the Bible critically due to philological-critical discoveries.²¹⁶

We now return to Le Clerc's reference to Origen in this regard, with the awareness of the particular position of the Arminian in this matter and at the same time of the consequences that such a position seemed to guarantee for Le Clerc. The Arminian saw the origin of his doubts on the verbal inspiration of Scripture in ancient sources, in particular Jerome and, before him, Origen, who had believed, according to Le Clerc, that the apostle Paul had dissimulated his position on this

214 MIRRI, Richard Simon 32.

215 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 228 f.

216 *Ibid.* 285 f. See also VERNIÈRE, *Spinoza et la pensée Française* 78. To this list, we may also add that, as some scholars argued, the theory of verbal inspiration has serious philosophical implications for the understanding of human freedom: BASINGER/BASINGER, *Inerrancy, Dictation* 179 f. This would require further analysis. In any case, Le Clerc's overall position on the inspiration of Scripture has received a discrete audience over the centuries and has been the subject of various debates. For works dedicated to this topic or that discuss it at some length, see the already quoted article by ROTH, *Le Traité de l'inspiration* 50–60; further WOODBRIDGE, *German Responses* 65–87; PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 18 f. The latter is especially valuable because it highlights the marks of a possible Spinozist derivation in Le Clerc. On this see also LE BRUN, *Die Begründung* 2/2, 1023. For affinities with Grotius, see VON REVENTLOW, *Wurzeln der modernen Bibelkritik* 47–63, esp. 53 f. Also adding Episcopius to the picture: ELLIOTT, *Jean Leclerc* 469. See also VON REVENTLOW, *Bibelexegese als Aufklärung* 1–19, esp. 17 f. For a panoramic of the debate on Scripture in early modern Reformed theology, see the already mentioned TREUMAN, *Scripture and Exegesis* 179–194.

matter.²¹⁷ In Gal. 2:11–14, Paul would have reprehended Peter officially, but in reality did not intend to reprehend him, but to avoid that others would follow his example.²¹⁸ By stating that Paul had expressed a “prudence purement humaine,”²¹⁹ a thought that for Le Clerc Jerome had taken from Origen, these Fathers and the many others who followed Origen in later centuries in the Greek Church, had also shown their belief in the non-perpetual verbal inspiration of Scripture.²²⁰ Such human prudence had no place, he believed, in a text dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Discussing Origen's *Hexapla*, Le Clerc confirmed this thought by asserting that its comparative nature cannot but lead us to believe that, for Origen, the LXX, the canonical version of the Old Testament until Jerome's *Vulgata*, was not literally inspired and therefore needed supplementing by other translations. If otherwise, Origen would have simply trusted the LXX and not put up the great effort that he did with the *Hexapla*. However, Le Clerc was also aware that this was his particular interpretation of the facts, since he also mentioned Montfaucon's opinion on this, that is that Origen's endeavour was motivated by his assumption that the original text had simply undergone various forms of corruption (notably by copyists) and therefore had to be restored.²²¹ In any case, the multiple advantages that Le Clerc saw in the non-verbal inspiration of Scripture and that fact that it could be traced back to ancient prominent figures, such as Origen and Jerome, highlight another area where the scholarly Origen was taken as support by Le Clerc. After a recovery of various areas where Origen's scholarly and exegetical work was considered favourably, we now turn to the so called “dark side” of the scholarly Origen.

4.4 The Dark Side of the Scholarly Origen: Philology, Allegory and Biblical Languages

In the previous section, we reviewed many areas where Le Clerc esteemed Origen's scholarship. Yet, Le Clerc was not partial to Origen's erudition, and never failed to evidence what he believed to be mistakes in Origen's scholarship. One of

217 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 262. Le Clerc also mentioned prominent Arminian scholars as support for his theory of the non-verbal inspiration of Scripture. He mentioned Episcopius (*ibid.* 264 f.) and Grotius (in a letter to Bayle of 19 July 1685) where he also mentioned Erasmus for the same purpose: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario 1* (letter 94) 352. LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 265 f., had also argued that the majority of theologians contemporary to him did share this belief, although unknowingly.

218 PL 26, 338–340.

219 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 261.

220 *Ibid.* 261 f.

221 *Id.*, BC 27/2 (art. 2) 328.

the central concepts around which Le Clerc constantly reproached Origen was his allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Before we discuss Origen's allegory, a few words on how Le Clerc conceived allegory are necessary. This expands what we have reviewed in the first chapter of the present work.

In the *Sentimens*, Le Clerc did not appear to be fanatically attached to the literal sense of the biblical text, although he was keen on a philological and informed interpretation of the text. As with the narration of original sin, for example, he was obviously open to a metaphorical interpretation of the snake (Gen. 3:1–13) as in reality representing the Devil. Although this might sound obvious to the modern reader, Le Clerc's attachment to the literal interpretation meant that, at times, he adhered to the letter much more than we would expect. For example, in the paraphrases to Gen. 2:17, he interpreted the fruit of the forbidden tree as actually poisonous without what seems like a physical remedy:

*“Ex omnibus nemoris arboribus, non æquè salubrem victum peti, nam quarumdam (simul ostendebantur, & propriis vocabulis appellabantur arbores) lethiferos esse fructus, qui præsens, nisi aliunde suppeteret remedium, in stomachum demissi exitium essent allaturi, à Deo monitus est.”*²²²

Thus, this somewhat surprising interpretation of the forbidden fruit confirms that Le Clerc was, although open to some sort of symbolic meaning, much more ready to look out for a simple, literal meaning. This was so despite the fact that Le Clerc was also conscious of the fact that symbols/allegories were part of the culture of the time in which the Old Testament had been written. Allegories, like modern fables, served the purpose of hiding bigger truths.²²³ This left room for a (mild) allegorical interpretation of some passages.

For Le Clerc, generally speaking, allegory became problematic when it was detached from the scriptural text, so that it reflected purely the opinion of the interpreter and not the scriptural truth itself.²²⁴ Preferred by Augustinian hermeneutics, allegorical interpretation was claimed to be the pure result of a philosophising that was not based on an informed knowledge of Scripture:

*“On ne peut se former une autre idée du bienheureux S. Augustin, que d'un Déclamateur qui dit tout ce qui lui vient en la tête, à propos ou non, pourvû que cela s'accorde avec un certain Systeme Platonicien qu'il s'étoit formé de la Religion Chrétienne; d'un esprit qui se perd à tous momens dans les nuës & qui se laisse emporter à de froides Allegories qu'il débite comme des Oracles.”*²²⁵

222 Id., Genesis 15.

223 Id., *Sentimens* 10 f.

224 Ibid. 273.

225 Ibid. 357.

The lack of rigorous scriptural work thus favoured a type of interpretation that was void of the text's true significance. What Le Clerc proposed in *Parrhasiana*, was a scrupulous study of the holy books, which should yield: "explications régulières & méthodiques de l'Écriture Sainte, dans lesquelles on ne lui ose rien attribuer que ce que les termes signifient clairement, & selon les règles de la Grammaire."²²⁶ This is not to say that for Le Clerc the meaning of Scripture was to be found only with the aid of grammar. As also Grotius – only in part – and Spinoza before him, he was also aware of the historical dimension of the text. In line with Spinoza, Le Clerc also included in his analysis the factual circumstances of the composition of a text and the intention of the author.²²⁷ Theological and philosophical foundations also found part of the necessary background knowledge for any interpretation of the past.²²⁸

Coming back to Origen, Le Clerc criticised in him not the use of allegory *per se*, but that through it, Origen interpreted Scripture purely philosophically. Given the relatively weak epistemological value of philosophical speculations in religion for Le Clerc, this is not surprising. For Le Clerc, the role of philosophy in the interpretation of Scripture changed over time. In Le Clerc's early years, there was a total rejection of philosophy as a hermeneutical aid to Scripture:

*"Deus praeterea volebat Evangelium omnibus nunciari, intellegique etiam ab iis qui nullam literis operam dederant, ac proinde claro & familiari stylo scribere Apostolos oportebat: Et si quae obscurius dicta sunt in novo foedere, ea vel alibi clarius expressa sunt, vel exigui sunt momenti. Unum tantum Graecis obscuritatem parere poterat, Hebraismi nempe, qui toties in Apostolorum & vet. Testamenti interpretum scriptis occurrunt, sed facile era eam superare vel consulendo Fratres ex circumcissione, vel mediocri lingua Hebraica studio."*²²⁹

Philosophy and allegory in Origen were harshly criticised by the young Le Clerc, who, as we have seen in the previous section on Platonism, even accused Origen of having totally polluted the Christian religion with his allegorising philosophy.²³⁰ Several years later, however, it will be the union of Theology, *Belles Lettres*,

226 Id., *Parrhasiana* 415.

227 Id., *Sentimens* 8–18. VOELTZEL, Jean Le Clerc 51, saw this point as the principal methodological novelty in Le Clerc in comparison to Simon. In opposition to this, MIRRI, Richard Simon 87, has pointed out that such a methodological framework was already present in Spinoza's *Tractatus*. Mirri seems to presuppose Spinoza's influence on Le Clerc in this case. As LAPLANCHE, *Débats et combats* 130, has highlighted, however, the combination of grammatical and historical analysis, comprising also the intention of the author, was already there to see in Cappel.

228 LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 286–302. On Le Clerc's hermeneutics, see also PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 58 f.

229 LE CLERC, *Epistolae theologiae (praefatio)* [4 f.].

230 Ibid.

the study of ancient languages *and* philosophy: the perfect blend to reserve the most promising fruits in Scriptural interpretation:

“Pour venir présentement aux Belles Lettres, & à l'étude des Langues, il est certain que si ceux qui s'y appliquent, s'attachoient en même temps à l'étude de la Théologie & de la Philosophie, ils serviroient le Public, avec beaucoup plus d'utilité. On verrait que cette étude entre dans les choses de la plus grande importance, puisque l'intelligence de l'Ecriture Sainte & de l'Histoire Ecclesiastique en dépend, autant que de la connoissance même des choses.”²³¹

From this benevolent attitude towards philosophy did not follow an acceptance of the allegorical Origen. Le Clerc's critique continued to be harsh:

*“Fateor me ab eo [Pierre Daniel Huet's judgment on Origen as interpreter of Scripture] in ceteris dissentire, qui existimo allegoricum interpretandi genus, plenum alienis digressionibus, refertum paralogismis, ac inquinatum deliriis Philosophorum, totum abjiciendum Origeni fuisse, antequàm justas ulla laudes consequeretur; deinde aliam plane viam ei fuisse ineundam.”*²³²

To explain what seems to be an incoherence in Le Clerc, I must add that when Le Clerc referred to the philosophising allegories in Origen, the kind of philosophy he had in mind did not have anything to do with the role of philosophy envisioned in the *Parrhasiana*. This must be so, unless we want to admit an incoherence, because the two last quoted passages come from two books that were published almost in the same year and so such a rapid change of approach seems unlikely.

In *Parrhasiana*, philosophy did share some of the features of a kind of “logical thinking” and was a provider of “ordre & [...] lumière”²³³, allowed the development of the “bonne sense” so often praised by Le Clerc²³⁴ and seemed in the end almost equal with a well-functioning rationality, to be opposed to an obscurantist Scholastic philosophy:

“Comme la Philosophie Scholastique, succédant à la mauvaise Rhetorique des Siecles précédens, a achevé de perdre les esprits, & de défigurer la Religion: la bonne Philosophie rallumeroit les lumières de la Raison, que l'on n'a éteintes, que pour introduire mille mensonges, & disposerait l'esprit à voir toute la beauté de l'Evangile.”²³⁵

231 Id., *Parrhasiana* 349 f.

232 Id., *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ* 33.

233 Id., *Parrhasiana* 346.

234 Ibid. 348.

235 Ibid.

To this “good philosophy” presented in *Parrhasiana* we can contrast Origen's allegorical interpretation “inquinatum deliriis Philosophorum”,²³⁶ as we saw in the previous quote. The metaphysical speculations of philosophers were detrimental to Origen's interpretation of Scripture, not the use of philosophy as a rational activity. Le Clerc's milder attitude towards philosophy, looked at from this point of view, also seems less radical than it might have appeared, because it was more a change of accent than a fundamental shift in his thought. Philosophical speculations remained banned from his biblical hermeneutics, but not the rational aid of philosophy.

To return to Origen's allegory: that the Alexandrian often disregarded the literal reading of Scripture and applied a philosophical interpretation (where philosophy was not what Le Clerc meant) was not based for Le Clerc on the lack of critical instruments owned by the Alexandrian or his little erudition, even if these were also critiques that he had moved to the Church Fathers, as we saw. Among other factors, for Le Clerc, Origen's problem with literal exegesis was his reduced philological spirit, as was common in ancient interpreters more generally, together with his tendency to dislike the literal sense.²³⁷ This distanced the original text from the interpreters.

This reduced philological spirit was correlated with a poor knowledge of biblical languages. In the *Quaestiones Hieronimianae*, Le Clerc seemed to still point to some intrinsic value in Origen's exegesis and maintained that, if Origen was freed of his allegorical and philosophical considerations, Origen's exegetical worth might still come from his knowledge of Hebrew.²³⁸ But this was already disproved on the same page, and Le Clerc used almost all of the *Qaestio II* to prove that Origen had nearly no knowledge of Hebrew, so as to even “*quasi Hebraicos characteres legere nescivisset.*”²³⁹

As proof to Origen's poor Hebrew knowledge, besides Huet's claim that those who believed that Origen was knowledgeable of Hebrew either did not know Origen's works or did not know Hebrew themselves,²⁴⁰ and that Origen admitted it

236 Id., *Quaestiones Hieronymianae* 33.

237 Id., BAM 4 (art.) 11.

238 Id., *Quaestiones Hieronymianae* 32: “*Vix potuit exquisitiùs laudari Origenis scientia, in interpretatione Scripturae, quae nisi jungatur cum Hebraicae Linguae peritia, non magna fuit; cum cetero qui ferme tota in philosophicis ratiocinationibus, aut allegoriis sita fuerit.*”

239 Ibid. In the text, this is in the form of a question and ends with a question mark. It can, however, be considered an affirmation, since the next pages are dedicated to proving it true. Moreover, this passage openly and clearly contradicts Sina's assertion that Le Clerc esteemed Origen's knowledge of biblical languages and that this was a criterion of preference over Augustine: SINA, *Origenismo e anti-agostinismo* 300.

240 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 34: “*DICAM enim verè, subjicit Huëtius, vel Hebraismi parum scientes sunt, vel in lectione Origenianorum Operum perfunctoriè versati, qui eximium quid ipsi, vel in Sanctae Linguae, vel in earum, quae ex hoc fonte profecta sunt, dialectorum peritia tribuerunt.*”

openly in his homily to the book of Numbers,²⁴¹ Le Clerc added his own philological competence. In Origen's commentary to the Gospel of Matthew, so Le Clerc, Hebrew references were only taken from his *Hexapla*, and Origen copied them from the Hebrew character column by using the Greek transliteration of Hebrew in the parallel column, referring to Aquila's translation for an understanding of those words.²⁴² For Le Clerc, it was evident that Origen's Hebrew knowledge could be reduced to these sources only, complemented by his access to Jews for consultation: "*omnem eruditionem Hebraicam Origenis, sitam fuisse in collatione Aquilæ, cum Hebraicis verbis Græcis litteris descriptis, & in iis quæ audiverat à Judæis.*"²⁴³ And again for Le Clerc, this Origenian ignorance of Hebrew compelled him to a generalised scepticism in using Origen's *Hexapla*.²⁴⁴

An almost non-existent knowledge of the original languages of the Old Testament would not sit very well with Le Clerc, as we would expect. For the Le Clerc, knowledge of the original languages of the Bible was paramount, although not sufficient on its own, for a correct understanding of its true meaning.²⁴⁵ It is clear that without adequate linguistic competence, the whole interpretation project, according to him, was doomed to fail. Even more so, because, as we saw, he had adopted a conventionalist conception of language through Locke and had discussed in detail the various linguistic problems of any interpretation, biblical and not.

His idea of interpersonal understanding or textual interpretation required that the speaker, or the text, and the hearer, or the reader, after communicating or reading had taken place, would share exactly the same ideas.²⁴⁶ Although this was the goal, he also believed that, realistically speaking, only a moderate correspondence was possible: "*Sed cùm ad summam ἀκρίθειαν pervenire nequeamus, oportet nos modicâ intelligentiâ contentos esse.*"²⁴⁷ Le Clerc therefore pleaded for a cautious attitude towards interpretation and, especially for dead languages, the use of technical instruments such as lexica and dictionaries, in the awareness that also they would not completely solve the problem, because by nature lan-

241 This quotation is indirectly reported by Le Clerc through, once again, Huet, *ibid.* 35: "*Minime verò ipse hujus Linguae ignorantiam dissimulate Homil. XIV. in Numeros: Aiunt ergo, inquit, qui Hebraicas litteras legunt, in hoc loco, Deus, non sub signo tetragrammati esse positum; DE QUO QUI POTEST REQUIRAT.*"

242 *Ibid.* 36 f.

243 *Ibid.* 37.

244 *Id.*, BAM 24/2 (art. 4) 398.

245 Adriaan Koerbagh (1633–1669), whose work Limborch had discussed with Le Clerc in a letter of 23 January 1682, had attacked many Christian doctrines through a linguistic analysis of foreign words transferred to Dutch: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 10) 34–39. See also LAGRÉE/MOREAU, *La lecture de la Bible* 105 f.

246 LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 109 f.

247 *Ibid.* 110.

guages do not correspond exactly to each other: “LINGUAS sibi invicem satis non respondere.”²⁴⁸

Because of the diversity of languages and the limited use of technical instruments, Le Clerc saw as the best (although not complete) solution to the problem a full immersion in ancient languages so as to be able to “feel” them almost as a native speaker: “Itaque si velimus Veteres probè intelligere; oportet, ut aut longâ, & sedulâ lectione, ita eorum Linguis adsuefiamus, ut ipsi ab infantia iis erant aduefacti.”²⁴⁹ And further:

“Hinc satis liquet nos facillimè falli, dum Veteres ita legimus, ut eos non ex usu ipso Linguæ, quâ usi sunt, sed ex collatione nostrarum, usûque scribendi, & interpretandi hodierno intelligamus. Ille demum, ut diximus, plenam ac perfectam cognitionem Linguæ adsequutus est, qui cùm Libros eâ scriptos legit, non magis cogitat de verbis quibus eos interpretari nunc solemus, quàm si nondum hæ nostræ Linguæ essent natæ. Sic si dubia sit significatio vocis Gallicæ, exempli gratiâ, Gallus de ea interrogatus non quærit quî Latine exprimi possit; sed memoriam dumtaxat suam, & Linguæ hodiernum usum consulit.”²⁵⁰

Yet, Le Clerc did not believe that even such a kind of linguistic study would be sufficient for a perfect comprehension, given that meanings change over time,²⁵¹ the same word can have at times a larger or smaller meaning,²⁵² sentences can have ambiguous constructions,²⁵³ and more. These brief remarks have hopefully highlighted the gravity for Le Clerc of not knowing biblical languages while attempting Scriptural interpretation. In the particular case of Origen, we have already seen that his supposedly weak competence in Hebrew, for Le Clerc, had clearly explosive effects in any consideration of Origen's Scriptural works.

Le Clerc also included in his critique of Origen's hermeneutical efforts the latter interpretation of Hebrew names. In this case, Le Clerc both followed Huet's analysis and added his own remarks.²⁵⁴ Le Clerc's passion for a correct etymological analysis of names was evident in his injurious treatment of Origen, who in this particular matter was said to be a “*simia Philonis*” – a monkey – an imitator of Philo.²⁵⁵ Origen was said to have pedantically followed Philo methodologically, deriving the etymology of biblical names not from Scripture itself, but from other sources.²⁵⁶

248 Ibid. 111.

249 Ibid. 139.

250 Ibid. 145.

251 Ibid. 175.

252 Ibid. 193.

253 Ibid. 264.

254 Id., *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ* 39–41.

255 Ibid. 42: “POSSEMUS ingentem numerum ridicularum Etymologiarum proferre, ac præsertim castigare & Philonem, & ejus simiam Origenem.”

256 Ibid.: “[I]n Etymologiis illis, quarum ex Scriptura constat ratio, non adquiescant; sed alias absurdas & Analogiæ contrarias investigent.”

Le Clerc's upset was not only a purely erudite one, concerned about the true etymology of names, but was also about the possible consequences of such etymological work, which in the case of Philo was explicitly mentioned as leading to *putidas*, allegories, that, we can infer, would pave the way to misinterpretation of Scripture.²⁵⁷ Behind Le Clerc's reproach of Origen's etymological work, we infer, once again, a methodological concern in that Origen distanced himself from the Scriptural text even in these basic remarks. This resulted in a degrading of Origen's etymological work as well: "Quand tout cela se seroit perdu, il y auroit peu de sujet de greter cette perte."²⁵⁸

A final, minor, but still important point of criticism of the exegetical Origen was the philological criteria used in the comparative methodology he had chosen for the *Hexapla*. Notwithstanding the other relatively positive remarks expressed by Le Clerc on Origen's methodology in the *Hexapla*, as we have seen above, the Arminian was also disapproving of it at the same time. Instead of comparing the text of the LXX with other versions, as Origen did, to reconstruct the original text, Le Clerc had wished a more "modern" approach. In his own view, Origen should have reviewed the most ancient manuscripts of the LXX first and compared them to the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament so as to distinguish what had been mistakes of copyists or insertions of interpreters, correcting the first but leaving untouched the second, although pointing out the faults of the latter in *Scholia*.²⁵⁹

Le Clerc also reflected that, on the one hand, the science of *critique* at the time of the Fathers was not as developed as it was in his time, and on the other, that given Origen's poor knowledge of Hebrew, this type of operation would have been impossible.²⁶⁰ To be sure: Origen's selection of sources was here the salient point that was questioned by Le Clerc in this instance, not Origen's scholarly precision overall, which Le Clerc left untouched. In fact, following Montfaucon, he showed dissatisfaction with the Alexandrian's work in the *Hexapla* as being unnecessarily precise and pedantic. Origen had marked the LXX even in those passages where the Greek text displayed particles, necessary in Greek, but without their own significance in Hebrew. In Le Clerc's view, this was unnecessary, because it did not touch the meaning of the text: "Cette exactitude ne seroit de rien, pour l'intelligence de l'original, & faisoit un effet ridicule, aux yeux des gens eclairez."²⁶¹ We now step away from Le Clerc's strong criticism of Origen's biblical scholarship and look for parallel judgments of Origen's scholarly skills to better assess Le Clerc's position.

257 Ibid. 41.

258 Id., BC 27/2 (art. 2) 333.

259 Ibid. 338.

260 Ibid. 338 f.

261 Ibid. 357.

4.5 Resolving the Ambivalence

The last sections provided what may seem as ultimately decisive criticism by Le Clerc on Origen's exegetical and scholarly skills. If compared to other positive remarks in the early sections of this chapter, we seem to be presented with an ambivalence. I believe it legitimate to attempt a comprehension of what still stands the ground in Origen after having reviewed Le Clerc's critique, besides the fact that Le Clerc considered the Alexandrian as a "savant homme."²⁶²

Allegory and philosophy, as we have seen above, were interpreted by Le Clerc as a source of errors in Scriptural exegesis: the fact that Origen, according to Le Clerc, made ample use of these tools certainly and definitely obfuscated Origen's interpretative effort. To this Le Clerc added, as we have seen, Origen's poor Hebrew skills. The Arminian, in reality, had openly looked upon other exegetical models, such as the English Arminian Henry Hammond (1605–1660)²⁶³ and the famous Hugo Grotius,²⁶⁴ but also Erasmus.²⁶⁵ In them, and not in Origen, he claimed to be able to find the true interpretation of Scripture:

262 Ibid. 329.

263 Le Clerc had often praised Hammond's work, and this esteem for the work of the English scholar was concretely shown by the fact that Le Clerc had translated into Latin Hammond's *Novum Testamentum*. Hammond's knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, philology and history, and his closeness to the Scriptural text, rather than the posterior interpretations, were all features that made Hammond's work valuable for Le Clerc. This was expressed clearly in a letter to "a Friend in England", which acted as a preface to an additional work on Hammond: LE CLERC, A Supplement to Dr. Hammond. This "letter" was later translated into Latin and included as letter 10 in his *Epistolæ criticæ et ecclesiasticæ*. Equally important for Le Clerc seemed, however, also Hammond's agreement with Arminian theology, especially on the doctrine of predestination. See, for example, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 20 of 28 November 1682, Le Clerc to Limborch) 86, and also the letter to the General Council of the Remonstrant Church: id., Epistolario 2 (letter 257 of May 1696) 211.

264 This is what Le Clerc told to Lenfant in a letter of 30 December 1683, as we will see in a quote in the main text of this section, that Grotius' work, joined with the one of Hammond, left no obscurity in understanding the basics of the Christian message contained in Scripture: id., Epistolario 1 (letter 31) 117. Again, some years later, in a letter to Tronchin of 4 April 1685, *ibid.* (letter 79) 311, Le Clerc confirmed: "*Ego neminem novi Hammondō æquiparandum, præter unum Grotium, quem Hammondus sæpius sequitur, et spero te idem agniturum cum Hammondum leges.*" See also id., Epistolario 2, 182 n. 2.

265 Erasmus was, of course, still a general reference for the time. In Le Clerc, we find a great praise of Erasmus' hermeneutical efforts. So, in a letter to Thomas Herbert, count of Pembroke of 21 October 1695, we read, *ibid.* (letter 244) 181: "*Erasmè et Grotius [...] sont deux hommes incomparables. [...] Jamais personne ne travailla plus qu'eux à éclaircir l'Écriture Sainte, et à établir la vérité de la Religion Chrétienne, et n'eut tant de qualitez pour y réussir.*"

*“Præterea eius operis [interconfessional peace] viam supplebit Hammondus in quo integram Noui Testamenti Paraphrasin habebis et notas quibus omnia nonnihil obscura illustrabuntur, adeo ut si hunc cum H. Grotio coniunxeris nihil ullius momenti in Apostolorum scriptis superfuturum sit quod explanatum non fuerit.”*²⁶⁶

What seemed to be the highest possible praise for an exegete in the case of Grotius and Hammond, that is of favouring a full comprehension of Scripture, did not have as a consequence for Le Clerc an acritical evaluation of Hammond's and Grotius' biblical hermeneutics either. Le Clerc was sure of his own exegetical skills,²⁶⁷ through which he felt able to sometimes confute even Hammond²⁶⁸ and the same Grotius.²⁶⁹ As we have seen, this was expressed by Le Clerc also in practice by relying mostly on inter-textual references for his own hermeneutics. It seems therefore unlikely that Le Clerc would completely rely on any particular exegete or any other interpretation than his own. Any positive comment from Le Clerc's part on other exegetes must thus be read in this context and becomes only relatively important.

This is also valid in the case of Origen: even though, for Le Clerc, Origen “had read the Bible a lot, was used to writing, and had access to ancient interpreters.”²⁷⁰ In general, Le Clerc considered positively Origen's biblical erudition but did not want to embellish the picture that resulted from his analysis: “*Cetera omnia, nisi velimus verum dissimulare, ei [Origen] defuerunt.*”²⁷¹ Such an analysis was not too dissimilar from the negative one we saw in the case of Augustine. Yet the case of Origen was different, because Origen's biblical erudition and access to ancient

266 Id., Epistolario 1 (letter 31 of 30 December 1683, Le Clerc to Jacques Lenfant) 117.

267 We see multiple passages in his work where he rejected the findings of other highly esteemed scholars, like Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) or Bochart. See, for example, LE CLERC, BC 16 (art. 2) 91f. Le Clerc expressed this clearly in a letter to Locke, referring to his work on *Genesis*, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 2 (letter 199 of 26 August 1692) 79: “Je me flatte que ce livre ne vous déplaira pas, ma manière d'expliquer l'Écriture étant, comme je me l'imagine, beaucoup plus conforme aux plus severes regles de la Critique, que quoi que ce soit de cette nature, qui ait paru.”

268 HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 1 (præfatio, by Le Clerc) [2]: “*Ceterum ita viri doctissimi errata adnotavi, ut ejus existimationi propterea nihil immeritò detractum velim, quamvis cum eo errare noluerim.*”

269 So Le Clerc in a letter to Jean-Alphonse Turretini, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 4 (letter 663 of 10 May 1720) 34: “J'en suis au Comment. sur le Ch. L d'Ésaie et j'espère d'avoir bien tôt achevé ce Prophete. J'ai souvent réfuté *Grotius* et rapporté directement à Jesus-Christ, ce qu'il ne lui appliquoit qu'au travers, pour ainsi dire, d'un événement de ce tems-là. Vous verrez un grand nombre de passages expliquez littéralement, et qui n'avoient jamais été bien entendus.”

270 LE CLERC, *Quæstiones Hieronymianæ* 33 f.: “*Hæc tantum habuit Origenes, quæ ei subsidio esse potuissent, in interpretatione Scripturæ, si modò iis usus esset; quòd eam multum legisset, quòd facultatem scribendi adeptus esset, & quòd Veteres Interpretes consuleze posset.*”

271 Ibid. 34.

sources granted him a far better position. He was furthermore somehow also one of the early role models that Le Clerc could point to for his methodology of starting theological considerations from Scripture alone, for considering it coherent and self-sufficient and as a scholar who had attempted from the very beginning of Christianity to combine revelation with reason. More importantly, even if Origenian biblical interpretation as such was conceived as flawed in many cases due to his use of allegory detached from the literal meaning, this did not impede that Le Clerc still made use of Origen's exegetical work. As we will see in the third part of this work, Origen's exegesis would at times even become a useful support for his own position, and we will discuss there the possible reasons for this operation.

One of the salient positive aspects in Origen was that, through Origen's *Hexapla* or other works, a number of ancient texts and translations became accessible. For example, looking at the column of the *Hexapla* where the Hebrew text had been transliterated into Greek, Le Clerc pointed out that the reading of Origen's time was different from what was done in his own time, after the Masoretes had standardised written Hebrew by writing out consonants too. On such an occasion, Le Clerc exclaimed approvingly: "Plût à Dieu que les Chrétiens des premiers siècles eussent fait tant de copies des Hexaples, qu'il en fût parvenu quelques-unes jusqu'à nous! Nous en aurions fait un bien bien [sic] meilleur usage qu'eux."²⁷² Again, Le Clerc seemed to stress Origen's role of "textual and cultural bridge" with antiquity, in particular with Jewish culture, in another telling passage:

*"At quid fiet iis laudibus, si indubitatis indiciis ostenderimus Origenem ita loqui, quasi Hebraïcos characteres legere nescivisset? Dicendum erit, nimirum, bonum virum in conficiendis Hexaplis, vertendisque nominibus Hebraïcis, Judæi cujuspiam operâ usum fuisse, ejúsque gentis homines interdum consuluisse, dein edidisse quæ ab iis accepisset."*²⁷³

Still, as we have said, even beyond the *Hexapla* and beyond Origen's role in allowing other texts to be discovered, the Alexandrian still appeared as a valid reference scholar in antiquity. Thus, if we carve out Origen's profile carefully from what seems superficially the picture of an ugly-looking philosophising interpreter of Scripture and of antiquity, much is left to gain from the scholarly Origen, both at the textual-scholarly level and also somehow in the hermeneutical field.

272 Id., BAM 28/2 (art. 4) 356.

273 Id., Quæstiones Hieronymianæ 32.

5. Origen as Historical Testimony

The final chapter of this second part covers what would seem at first a less relevant side of Le Clerc's relationship with Origen, that is Le Clerc's use of Origen's historical testimony. Besides discussing Origen's philosophy/theology and biblical scholarship and hermeneutics, this change of topic finds its right place in this chapter, I believe, because Le Clerc himself referred to Origen in multiple circumstances as a source of historical information. This analysis allows us to review Le Clerc's relationship with Origen from yet another perspective. History had a central epistemological role for Le Clerc, and the history of early Christianity especially was one of the main weapons to enhance the credibility of the Christian religion and fend off the attack of libertines. If we want to enter Le Clerc's world even further, history becomes a central subject and therefore also the way in which he assessed the credibility of historical testimonies, in this case Origen.

This chapter will start with a recollection of the epistemological value given to historical testimonies in the early modern time as well as highlighting the specific case of Le Clerc. As a second point, I will present some of the criteria of testimonial credibility in Le Clerc and how these were applied to Origen's testimony. I will further highlight a number of ways in which Origen's testimony became instrumental to Le Clerc's arguments and finally conclude this section with a comparison of how Le Clerc's contemporary historians have dealt with Origen's witness as well as Le Clerc's own position on that.

5.1 Testimony, Facts and Credibility

The epistemological nature of testimonies is still debated in today's scholarship. Two opposing views are most easily recognisable: anti-reductionism, which looks at testimony as more or less epistemologically autonomous, with a fundamental trust in the veracity of testimonies, and reductionism. Reductionism, as the label says, "reduces" the epistemological value of a testimony to other, more basic, operations, such as operations of memory, inference and sensory experience. A testimony undergoes scrutiny based on these latter operations.²⁷⁴ Going back to the Renaissance and early modern time, we note a shift occurring in this regard, on

274 For an overview of the major philosophical positions in the debate, see the excellent concise article of LACKEY, Testimonial Knowledge. See also GELFERT, A Critical Introduction to Testimony.

the epistemological foundations of testimonies, and a move towards some sort of reductionism.²⁷⁵

This shift was also reflected in the relationship with the conception of “authority.” Whereas the concept of testimony and of authority, with its related epistemological assumptions, could not be clearly differentiated in the 16th century, in the following century, the concept of “testimony” acquired a different status. Testimony was no longer used to confirm a thesis, as for example in 16th century rhetoric, but to provide bare facts.²⁷⁶ This culture of “facts” went hand in hand with a renewed focus on evidence and the problem of assessing the probability (not the certainty) of that evidence. Drawing its terminology from legal language, such a shift had been sparked by the threat of historical Pyrrhonism of the early 17th century and Reformation debates that aimed at proving the rightfulness of their position.²⁷⁷

In this light must also be understood the debate on miracles and the new role of evidence in the assessment of the truth of miracles.²⁷⁸ The evidence of the facts proposed by testimonies was set at the centre of many debates, and the assessment of the credibility of those testimonies, as it had been previously done in the legal system, became a particularly important operation in various other domains as well, such as history and natural philosophy.²⁷⁹ The credibility of testimonies was an important part of the same assessment of evidence.

For Le Clerc, written historical testimonies were the main historical source.²⁸⁰ In line with the epistemological developments of his time, for the Arminian, the evidence of historical testimonies was also crucial and had to be assessed accurately. Such an assessment of testimonial credibility and of the credibility of the facts reported was an important part of the parallel, more philological-linguistic, reconstruction of the meaning of a text.²⁸¹ As we will see shortly in more detail,

275 OSSA-RICHARDSON, *The Devil's Tabernacle*.

276 SERJEANTSON, *Testimony and Proof* 197. 200–206. 226. An example of this can be found in the correspondence between François Baudouin (1520–1573) and Matthias Flacius known also as “Illyricus” (1520–1575), or one of the main contributors to the Magdeburg Centuries, a work that we will encounter in a later section of this chapter: LYON, Baudouin, Flacius 265 f.

277 DASTON, *Classical Probability* 322 f.; SHAPIRO, *A Culture of Fact* 34 f. 43 f. 47. 209. Shapiro's thesis of the influence of legal language on English and continental historiography has been disputed by MINA, *Testimonio y filosofía natural*. For a classical example of historical Pyrrhonism, see DE LA MOTHE LE VAYER, *Discours de l'histoire*.

278 HARRISON, *Miracles* 501–506; DASTON, *Marvelous Facts* 115–119.

279 SHAPIRO, *Testimony* 243–263.

280 Le Clerc also made use, from time to time, of so called “unintentional” sources, such as monuments, coins etc., but in a limited way compared to more common “classic” testimonies. For a reflection on various historical sources, see FASOLI/PRODI, *Guida allo studio* 113–119.

281 PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 90.

ancient testimonies had for him a primary role, especially eyewitnesses or those who had had a very close relationship to them, with no space allowed for hearsay; in this he was at least partially in contrast with the culture of evidence of the time.²⁸² If history had a positive epistemological value in his eyes,²⁸³ this was related to the credibility of the sources employed, although the sources by themselves were not the only criterion upon which he based his judgment.²⁸⁴

282 So testimonies that, among other things, report “des traditions, ou des *oui-dire*” were for Le Clerc not worthy of consideration: LE CLERC, BAM 5 (art. 5) 227. See also *id.*, BUH 18 (art. 7) 232 f.; *id.*, *Harmonia evangelica* 530. For the still present use of hearsay in the English legal system of the time, see SHAPIRO, *A Culture of Fact* 15 f.

283 I have already covered this topic in part in an earlier chapter, but to stress the fact that, for Le Clerc, history provided a privileged access to truth, the following quote is telling, LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 130 f.: “Il n’y a rien de si beau, ni de si utile que l’Histoire, lors qu’elle est bien écrite [...] l’Histoire veritable & sincere se propose l’utilité du Lecteur, en lui découvrant la Verité.” History was considered a supplement to a memory which one had not had, but this positive judgment of history was valid only in cases where history had been told objectively without interference from preconceptions or personal interest (*ibid.*). In his conception of objective historiography, Le Clerc saw himself as part of a tradition which stretched back to ancient Greek and Roman historiography. He mentioned Cicero and Lucian as support for this, and Polybius was also another crucial reference. These had set the tone for later historians (*ibid.* 149 f. 156). Although in his time Le Clerc did not find many historians of the same objectivity, he considered Grotius as an excellent example of objective history writing (*ibid.* 160). In contrast to this, Josephus constituted an example of those historians not to be trusted since he had distorted history, according to Le Clerc, *Sentimens* 74, to serve his goals of coming nearer to the pagan world. For Le Clerc, some examples of biased history in Josephus cast a dark shadow on his entire historiographical production, because, Le Clerc believed, just a few partial descriptions of history sufficed to be detrimental to the author’s trustworthiness. He wrote: “Si l’on remarque que l’on a été trompé en quelque chose, on se défie de tout, & un seul mensonge découvert d’un Historien suffit pour lui faire perdre route créance” (*ibid.*). A historian had to possess a number of certain attitudes, according to Le Clerc, to be able to provide an objective analysis of the past. These were, obviously, a knowledge of the facts presented, which required that the historian knew different languages, but also expertise on socio-political-historical contexts and possessing outstanding diligence and intelligence; an objectivity beyond passions; a clear and concise style; and a “morally sound judgment”: *id.*, *Parrhasiana* 131–135. 149. 173. 182. For a study dedicated to Le Clerc’s conception of history, see GARFAGNINI, *Jean Le Clerc*.

284 Le Clerc dedicated a part of his *Harmonia Evangelica* to showing that multiple beliefs on the Gospels were well attested, for example that their authors had really been those who are commonly called “the evangelists”, presupposing their credibility as testimonies, which he had discussed elsewhere: *id.*, *Sentimens* 231. This was necessary to reject the objection that the Christian religion was purely the result of credulity, *Harmonia evangelica* 530: “*Cum rerum à Christo gestarum nulla supersit historia fide digna, præter eas qui à sanctissimis viris, qui Evangelistæ dicuntur, conscripta sunt; maximi est momenti certo scire à quibus & quo consilio scripti sint, tum etiam quo tempore in lucem sint editæ; ne fides, quam iis habemus, temeraria credulitas existimari queat, aut levibus objectiunculis posse labefactari.*”

Le Clerc's belief that testimonies had to be critically assessed may lead us to consider him a "reductionist", and I think this is also correct, as I will show in the next pages dedicated to a closer review of Le Clerc's criteria of testimonial credibility. Yet, as Joseph Shieber has shown in the case of Locke, one has to be careful in using broad categorisations on the position of these authors on testimonies. Although research has traditionally considered Locke's mistrust of testimonies in the quest for philosophical truth as a dismissal by the English philosopher of the whole epistemological value of testimony, Shieber has convincingly shown that this is not the case in Locke. Furthermore, even if Locke spelled out certain credibility criteria for trusting testimonies, and one could then easily consider him a "reductionist", he also considered important that those who provide a testimony, must themselves, as Locke wrote, "vouch" for the trust of their testimony. In this way, Locke went beyond the reductionist position and included also a justification that the provider of the testimony himself had to provide.²⁸⁵ A careful analysis of Le Clerc's criteria of testimonial credibility seems therefore even more necessary to avoid any misrepresentation of his position.

Before we move on to these criteria as promised, I would like to add a statement of relevance; this is important in order not to lose the focus of this part on the reception of Origen's testimony in Le Clerc. I think it is clear that how Le Clerc assessed a particular historical testimony (in this case Origen) carried with it an evaluation of the credibility of the provider of the testimony and of the prominence of that testimony in the wider cultural panorama. Following this, I believe that to analyse first Le Clerc's practice with testimonies in general and then also his eventual special uses of testimonies, is an appropriate way to approach Le Clerc's reception of Origen in this particular area.

5.2 Criteria of Credibility

One crucial qualitative criterion which emerges from Le Clerc's writing on which historical testimonies to prefer, as we have already briefly mentioned, was temporal. If a person had lived at the time of the reported facts, or close to it, his testimony was very likely to be trustworthy. This implied the possibility of an eyewitness style of testimony, or a testimony which was as close to that as possible. So, for ex-

285 SHIEBER, *Locke on Testimony* 21–41, also argued that Locke's positions on testimony could be better interpreted as "hybrid" in the sense given to the term by Paul Faulkner. Not only are there rational grounds, assessed by the receiver of the testimony, which are important for assessing its credibility, but also the assurance that the one giving the testimony himself provides (in this sense he "vouches" for his own knowledge of the facts, distinguished from providing merely his opinion). For Faulkner's position and more general "hybrid" theories of testimony, see GELFERT, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony* 125–143.

ample, that the four Gospels were authentic was to be based for Le Clerc, among other things, on ancient testimonies.²⁸⁶ The facts narrated in the Gospels were also confirmed by the fact that the writers, the apostles, had been eyewitnesses, or assured sources: “les ayant vûs eux-mêmes, ou les ayant tirez de bons Mémoires.”²⁸⁷ Similarly, on the falsity of many narrations from the IV and V century on facts supposed to have happened in the first centuries after Christ, Le Clerc had trusted Eusebius, because he had not included them in his work. Not only did he esteem Eusebius as a scholar, but also Eusebius' temporal closeness, and so his silence on these supposed facts was to be considered: “une assez forte preuve, contre les narrations des Auteurs plus éloignez des premiers tems.”²⁸⁸ Closely connected to this criterion was also Le Clerc's reflection on language. In the case of the etymology of an originally Egyptian word “Osiris”, the testimony of those who lived when Egyptian was still spoken was to be preferred to other testimonies.²⁸⁹

Another determining factor in the choice of a testimony was the moral character of the one who gave it, and this was also not uncommon in Le Clerc's time and even preceding centuries.²⁹⁰ Le Clerc reviewed a New Testament commentary by Limborch without disapproving of the latter's belief that the ascension of Jesus was proven by the many testimonies, the sanctity of the lives of those who gave them and the sufferings they had to support for their testimony. For Limborch, this was “sufficient proof.”²⁹¹ Setting aside for the moment the quantitative character of testimonies in this example, which we will review further below, what is clear is that, at least for Limborch, but in general we find it also in Le Clerc,²⁹² an excellent moral character, confirmed, in this case, by suffering for the cause, played a significant role in ensuring that the testimony was trustworthy.

“Morality” was particularly relevant for a testimony because it obviously assured sincerity and honesty, which was exactly what Le Clerc was looking for

286 LE CLERC, BAM 6 (art. 1) 104. In *Harmonia evangelica* 530–534, Le Clerc listed those testimonies, and we find passages from Irenaeus, Papias, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius and Jerome.

287 Id., *Sentimens* 231.

288 Id., BAM 5 (art. 5) 226 f.

289 Id., BC 7 (art. 2) 132. Of the same nature was also the choice of LE CLERC, BC 26 (art. 5) 182, to prefer the most ancient documents to newer ones, because the latter could be tainted by a variety of further problems: “Ainsi on ne peut guere ajouter de foi à des Actes beaucoup plus récents, que les tems auxquels [sic!] les choses sont arrivées, sur tout quand on ne sait point par qui ils ont été dressez, ou que l'on sait qu'on les a faits dans des tems, où l'on ne faisoit point de scrupule de débiter quantité de fables.”

290 SHAPIRO, *A Culture of Fact* 16 f. For an example from the 16th century, see OSSA-RICHARDSON, *The Devil's Tabernacle* 218 f.

291 LE CLERC, BC 23 (art. 1) 12. For the original passage, which Le Clerc nonetheless reported faithfully, see VAN LIMBORCH, *Commentarius in Acta Apostolorum* 9 f.

292 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 231.

in a testimony: “Il faut de plus être sincere, pour ne dire que ce qu’on sait & ne dissimuler rien.”²⁹³ We can see this at work in the critique that Le Clerc moved to the testimony of the Fathers when discussing the Hebrew origin of Greek philosophy, something that, as we have previously seen, was contrary to his belief. Le Clerc considered doubtful the testimony of the Fathers who supported this claim, because he saw in it a fundamentally (although possibly well-intended) dishonest attempt to argue against the philosophers.²⁹⁴ Thus, not a “moral” character in the sense of “piety” was relevant for Le Clerc, but in the sense that morality assured sincerity and impartiality. The negative judgment of the Fathers in this example did not prevent Le Clerc from re-establishing their testimony on many other occasions, when the sincerity was warranted.

A clarification of the role of the sincerity of the martyrs’ testimony is needed at this point. For Le Clerc, as this emerges from another passage dedicated to a similar topic, that is the *Acta Primorum Martyrum sincera et selecta* (1689) of Thierry Ruinart (1657–1709), an important distinction was to be made. The *Acta* was a collection of documents on the histories of the first martyrs. In the *Præfatio*, Ruinart assured the trustworthiness of what the first martyrs had said and the reliability of the accounts of what they had done, following Mark 13:11, by assuming the influence of the Holy Spirit. The only problem for Ruinart with trusting these documents was that some of them were spurious or without a probable author.²⁹⁵

In his review of Ruinart’s book, Le Clerc had corrected the reflections of the Benedictine monk by distinguishing between the first martyrs and later ones. On the first martyrs, he added that what the martyrs had said was credible because they confirmed the essential facts of Christianity and that they had witnessed or had received from others who had been witnesses, through their own blood (and he did not mention anything about the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). For example, the resurrection of Jesus, because of them, was without doubt:

“En matiere de faits, leur témoignage a beaucoup plus de force, lors qu’il s’agit de faits auxquels ils n’ont pas pu être trompez; tel que fut le témoignage des Apôtres, touchant les miracles, la résurrection, & l’ascension de Jesus-Christ dont il montre directement la verité, qui devient indubitable par leurs souffrances & leur mort.”²⁹⁶

The very meaning of the word “martyr”, so Le Clerc, was “testimony.” The idea was then to ask: what more genuine testimony could there be than for someone to

293 Id., BC 26 (art. 5) 181.

294 Id., BUH 17 (art. 6/2) 443 f.

295 RUINART, *Acta* (præfatio generalis) i–ix. Le Clerc reviewed the second edition of 1713, in which Ruinart’s book also contained a dissertation against Dodwell’s claim that there had not been many martyrs.

296 LE CLERC, BC 26 (art. 5) 180.

die to be a witness to the truthfulness of the Gospel?²⁹⁷ Yet, the credibility of the martyrs' testimony, which is proven through their virtuous dying for the cause of Christianity, extended for Le Clerc only to common Christian "facts" which they had witnessed or nearly so, not to the more "speculative" part of their beliefs. So Le Clerc: "à l'égard des sentimens spéculatifs des Martyrs, leur mort n'en prouve pas directement la verité, mais seulement qu'ils en étoient fort persuadez, puis qu'ils aimoient mieux mourir, que de s'en dédire."²⁹⁸

Other, later, "martyrs" existed according to Le Clerc, and these were those who suffered death instead of saying or doing anything contrary to what *they believed* to be against the Gospel "qu'i s [sic] croyent être contre l'Evangile."²⁹⁹ To them, the appellative "martyr" was applied only if the term "martyr" was intended in a more extended – almost improper – fashion, according to Le Clerc. These martyrs, as is apparent, were not testimonies of the facts of the Gospel, but died because of *their* convictions of the meaning of the Gospel. In the world of beliefs about what the Gospel teaches (rather than the simple facts contained in it) these latter martyrs were not infallible, and neither were they supreme models of virtue. If not simple witnesses of facts, their testimony was subject to the same strict rules of any other human testimony.³⁰⁰ This also applied to the first martyrs just mentioned above, with the only distinction that the former, the first martyrs, had at least the assurance of facts, something that the latter lacked. We see here at play, once again, the importance of the "eyewitness style" of testimony for Le Clerc, which is the distinctive difference between the first and later martyrs.

In other words, the act of dying for their own cause was praiseworthy for Le Clerc, but, in cases of witnesses of a speculative nature, lacked for Le Clerc the convincing power of more factual witnesses. Moreover, alone, martyrdom was no sufficient proof,³⁰¹ although, if other criteria were assured, it made the veridicity of testimony beyond doubt, as in the case of the apostles:

"Un Historien qui a de la probité, & qui est bien instruit de ce qu'il raconte est digne de foi; & si l'on ajoûte encore à cela qu'il a souffert la mort pour soutenir la verité de son Histoire, comme ont fait les Apôtres, qui sont morts, en soutenant qu'ils avoient vû & oui ce que les Evangiles nous disent de Jesus Christ, alors non seulement cette histoire sera digne de

297 Ibid. 179 f.

298 Ibid.

299 Ibid. 180.

300 Ibid. 181.

301 In matters of religion, LE CLERC, *ibid.* 181 f., argued here as in multiple other passages, zeal and enthusiasm infect easily the mind and bias one's own view. Human beings, both contemporary to him and the "ancients", he believed as a good Cartesian, did not differ in this and considered necessary a critical attitude towards ancient documents: "On doit agir à l'égard des anciens Actes, avec la même précaution; car enfin les hommes ont été faits alors, comme ils l'ont été depuis."

foi, mais ceux qui refuseront de la croire, ne pourront passer que pour des foûs, ou pour des opinâtres.”³⁰²

This special credibility-load of martyrdom applied thus only to factual knowledge. Notwithstanding their good will and their sincerity, even their testimony, if applied to doctrines, was not infallible.

So far, we have seen two important features in historical witnesses that determine their trustworthiness for Le Clerc: temporality/eye-witnessing and morality/sincerity. Another important criterion concerned the general intellectual faculties of the witness himself. In the just quoted passage on martyrs, Le Clerc applied this to those who had collected the reports on the martyrs’ deeds and words, arguing that they must have known the facts well (“qui-aient été bien instruits des faits”)³⁰³ before being able to provide trustworthy testimonies. In the next lines he explained this further, stating that a witness must have seen and heard carefully, otherwise error may sneak in easily.³⁰⁴

Le Clerc had discussed this point in a slightly more extended fashion years before in an article on Dodwell’s *Dissertations in Irenæum* (1689). Here, Dodwell had discussed the trustworthiness of Irenaeus and claimed that his witnesses on the apostles and their disciples must be trusted because of his “piety” (“pieté”) – once again a reference to the moral character of a testimony.³⁰⁵ In this regard, Le Clerc reported somewhat polemically that for Dodwell it did not pose any threat to the credibility of Irenaeus’ testimony the fact that he had mistakenly thought that Papias had met John the Apostle, whereas in reality Papias had met another John, called “the ancient.”³⁰⁶

Le Clerc clarified that, for Dodwell, ancient testimonies were not always to be accepted at face value, and that he distinguished between trustworthiness in facts and in speculations (and we have seen this same distinction in Le Clerc earlier). It was one thing to trust testimonies for their historical reports, and another to trust them for their own reasoning. Dodwell argued, in Le Clerc’s report, that the factual narrations of ancient testimonies could only be rejected if they contradicted each other, or if they were opposed to other testimonies more worthy of faith or if they opposed things they themselves had said elsewhere, where they were better informed.³⁰⁷ The source of the credibility of testimonies, so Dodwell, was that the senses of the one giving the testimony were “well-disposed” (“sens bien disposez”

302 Id., *Sentimens* 231.

303 Id., BC 26 (art. 5) 181.

304 Ibid.

305 Id., BUH 18 (art. 7) 237.

306 Ibid. 232–234.

307 Ibid. 238. Le Clerc’s report was very faithful to the original work he was reviewing: DODWELL, *Dissertationes* 60.

in Le Clerc – “*sensus integros*” in Dodwell’s original),³⁰⁸ that is, he had to be able to perceive in a “normal” way, and his mind had to be capable of reasoning and be honest (“*n’avoir pas perdu l’esprit, & être sincère*” in Le Clerc, “*mentis compos & verax*” in Dodwell).³⁰⁹

Dodwell had also confirmed that the rationality required for providing a worthy testimony was the more standard one, in that he did not see as necessary that a witness possessed higher intellectual capabilities: “*Nec porro ingenio Testis aut acumine nititur hæc Historica fides.*”³¹⁰ In fact, the simpler the mind, the less suspect a testimony.³¹¹ There was for him no place for higher intellectual capabilities as he seemed to believe that historical reports spoke almost for themselves.³¹²

Le Clerc, however, was critical of Dodwell’s stance and, after presenting the thoughts of the Anglo-Irish scholar, pointed back to Irenaeus’ confusion with the two Johns we have seen above and to the fact that, contrary to what Dodwell believed, this posed a problem to Dodwell’s “simple-mind-testimony” argument we have just seen. Le Clerc assured that, even if with the best intentions, there were certain things where simple people (“*les personnes simples*”)³¹³ erred every day, for example due to a lack of attention or comprehension. These people believed they had understood well what they reported, but their own version was very different from what had actually happened – they were incapable of reporting their own eyewitness.³¹⁴

Even more remarkable for Le Clerc, he added that, although some people were very able and honest (“*très-habiles & très-sincères*”),³¹⁵ it happened very often that these people read a passage but interpreted it in a sense contrary to that of the author.³¹⁶ So, and this was the lesson that Le Clerc drew from this, testimonies must be carefully examined before any trust is given to them. Also, and for what we have just seen even more importantly, a certain degree of “higher intelligence”

308 LE CLERC, *ibid.*; DODWELL, *ibid.* 61.

309 LE CLERC, *ibid.*; DODWELL, *ibid.* Here, the “*mens compos*” in Dodwell could also be understood as “having the mind available to oneself”, that is, to point to the clarity of mind that comes from the freedom from passions. However, both the way Le Clerc translates it as “avoir l’esprit” and the way Dodwell used it a few lines earlier, where not having the “*mens compos*” seemed a sign of stupidity, confirm the above understanding of the passage: “*Erant initio multæ verisimiles in speciem rationes, quæ suaderent tantos progressus ne quidem facere potuisse Christianismum, quantos fecisse constat ex Historia. Nec tamen mentis compotem existimaremus, si quis, re ex Historia explorata, propterea hodieque dubitandum esse censeret.*”

310 *Ibid.*

311 *Ibid.*: “*Quo ille simplicior est, eo illum à fraudis suspicione remotiorem judicabimus.*”

312 *Ibid.*: “*Ingenio nullus locus est, ubi nulla admiscentur rebus gestis Ratiocinia.*”

313 LE CLERC, BUH 18 (art. 7) 239.

314 *Ibid.*

315 *Ibid.*

316 *Ibid.*

was needed to be able to provide a faithful witness to facts.³¹⁷ Le Clerc spoke here of “esprit”, the same word he used for Dodwell’s general rationality, but in the passage, he opposed Dodwell’s belief explicitly, so this leads us to believe that he saw a more complex mind was needed, one that was capable of attention to facts without distraction and of correct comprehension.³¹⁸

All the criteria we have just reviewed were important but not sufficient on their own to fully ensure a testimony was worthy of faith. For Le Clerc, all of the testimonies needed to undergo an analysis, or, with a different terminology, a test of the “internal” conditions of credibility, because even under the best conditions, a witness that reported things that were absurd was still to be rejected.³¹⁹ Le Clerc required that the content of all testimonies, in order to be trusted, had to be in accord with reason and Scripture, something that does not surprise us after we have seen their central role in Le Clerc’s epistemology. In the example mentioned earlier of the authenticity of the four Gospels, Le Clerc joined this criterion to the one of temporality, so that the authenticity of the Gospels was proven because in the Gospels: “il n’y a rien [...] qui soit contraire à la Révélation de l’Ancien Testament, ou à la droite Raison.”³²⁰ In other words: this further analysis did not regard as much the person who reported the facts as the content reported.³²¹ If the analysis of the internal credibility of a testimony did not pass the rational scrutiny and the Scriptural test, it would affect it negatively and, we could presume, cast suspicion on the credibility of the author of that testimony.³²²

317 Ibid.

318 Ibid.

319 Id., BAM 5 (art. 5) 226 f.

320 Id., BAM 6 (art. 1) 104. To these various proofs of the authenticity of the Gospels, Le Clerc had also added that the Gospels were authentic because there was nothing in them that was “indigne” of the apostles. Philologically speaking, there was also no proof that the text had been written by other authors: “il n’y a rien [...] qui resente des Auteurs posterieurs à ceux, dont les noms sont à leur tête.”

321 See also PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 89.

322 We find another example where Le Clerc confuted Heinrich Muhlius (1666–1733) who, according to Le Clerc, had claimed that before the deluge, human beings had spoken only one language. Muhlius had based his belief on the testimony of Moses, on the histories of the Sybills and of Abydene. Le Clerc did not attempt to find counter-testimonies or disprove the testimonies themselves, but rather analysed the matter critically and expressed his belief that a language naturally changes over time (the timespan between creation and the deluge was for him 1600 years). In this case, his analysis (but he did not say this expressly) either proved the testimonies wrong or cast doubt on the way Muhlius had understood these testimonies. What I want to highlight is how Le Clerc used the rational examination of facts even in cases of multiple testimonies: LE CLERC, BUH 23 (art. 11) 265–267. Another example still comes from the *Ars Critica*, where Le Clerc criticised the trust attributed to the apostolic pseudepigrapha in ancient times. For Le Clerc, this trust was based on a scarce analysis of the matter itself due to too much trust in authorities (or,

The just mentioned example of the attribution of the Gospels gives us the chance to highlight a final external feature of the credibility of historical testimonies in Le Clerc, although this is only scarcely present in his work. All the criteria reviewed above were qualitative, in that they mainly considered single testimonies on their own and did not elaborate further on purely quantitative terms. Yet, Le Clerc considered it important that many who had been contemporary to the time when the Gospels had been written had considered authentic their attribution, even if they had not been direct witnesses to it:

“Il arrive assez difficilement que tous ceux qui vivent en même temps, qu'un Auteur qu'ils connoissent, ou peu de temps après lui, se trompent, en disant qu'ils ont toujourns *ouï dire* qu'un livre est de lui. Il est encore difficile que cette opinion générale soit fausse, lors qu'on n'a pas d'intérêt particulier à lui faire avoir du cours.”³²³

Thus, the quantity of the testimonies seemed to be the exception, at least in this specific case, where even indirect testimonies, or hearsay, could be accepted. For Le Clerc, the same rule could not be applied to single witnesses, because they were error prone.³²⁴ This was a further point, connected to Le Clerc's review of Dodwell's work on Irenaeus as seen above, where Le Clerc criticised Dodwell by stating that he had confused (or better, deliberately hidden – “Dodwell dissimule”)³²⁵ the two levels. Dodwell had accepted that even indirect testimonies of Irenaeus were acceptable, comparing them with the indirect testimonies on the authenticity of the attribution of the Gospel. For Le Clerc, only the latter operation was granted.³²⁶

This latter argument, valuing hearsay and the quantity of testimonies, could surely be interpreted as a deliberate bending of rules by Le Clerc, where he accepted weaker (because indirect) testimonies in favour of something that he believed had to be confirmed to safeguard the truthfulness of Christian religion (the authenticity of the Gospels, in this case). Although Le Clerc did not provide sufficient elements to render this latter interpretation impossible, the way he handled the Old Testament, in particular the Pentateuch, seems to confute a purely “instrumental” Le Clerc on this matter. As we saw in an earlier chapter,³²⁷ his philological research led him to believe and openly express in the early years of his scholarly career that the Pentateuch had not been fully authored by Moses, as

alternatively, it was based on the so-called “bad faith” or partial interest of witnesses): id., *Ars critica* 2 (1712) 364.

323 Id., BUH 18 (art. 7) 244 (my italics).

324 Ibid.: “[I] est facile qu'on ne rapporte pas fidelement des doctrines, que l'on a ouïes.”

325 Ibid. 243.

326 Ibid. 243 f.

327 See chapter 1.

was generally believed then.³²⁸ Although this assertion was later corrected, as it attracted strong criticism,³²⁹ this at least shows us the lengths that he was able to go at times to support his more technical findings. It has to remain an open question whether Le Clerc would have openly contradicted the traditional attribution of the Gospels had he had enough material for it. For the reasons that we have just reviewed, it seems at least possible that he would have. Once again, the quantity of testimonies, united with an examination of the material, added credibility to their witness in this specific case. Le Clerc's evaluation of the hearsay of the many in the case of the Gospel seems thus genuine.

These last considerations, from which emerged for Le Clerc a relatively important epistemological weight in a conception of truth shared by many, would come as a surprise for the careful reader. We would not expect to see Le Clerc pay any tribute to a quantitative element. We saw that he believed that truth was based on clear and distinct knowledge and this remained necessarily the same regardless of how many adherents it had. However, the last example was not a rehabilitation of a "quantitative" element in the process of the assurance of truth, because Le Clerc also assumed that other factors, for example the rationality and coherence of the Gospel, confirmed the testimony as well. Rather than as an inconsistency in Le Clerc, this shows us that the quest for truth for Le Clerc was certainly not based on the opinions of the many, but at the same time did not disregard further quantitative support.

This particular attitude in Le Clerc towards finding support in the "many" is consistent with the Reformed practice of the sporadic but strategic use of the Fathers as *testes veritatis*. What is also clear is that, in any case, testimonies, taken at face value, were no sure historical source for Le Clerc; one was valuable as another.³³⁰ To summarise, then, what was necessary to assess the trustworthiness of historical witnesses was an examination of the authors of testimonies according to specific conditions of credibility and an analysis of the matter they had reported. There was no need for a "vouching" of the provider of the testimony, as in the case of Locke discussed above, because the assessment remained fully, or so it seems, within the sphere of competence of the receiver of the testimony.

328 LE CLERC, *Sentimens*, see the whole letter 6, especially 114–116; PITASSI, *Entre croire et savoir* 23–25.

329 *Ibid.* 28–35; VOELTZEL, *Jean Le Clerc* 45–51.

330 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 376. Le Clerc considered unjustified Simon's rejection of his own testimony on the scholarly skills of Drusius (1550–1616), against that of Ezekiel Spanheim (1629–1710), which was based, in turn, on Scaliger's judgment on Drusius. For Le Clerc, if one considered these authors superficially and without providing further reasons (this was his critique to Simon), there was no reason to prefer the one over the other.

5.3 Origen as Testimony

Having discussed the fundamentals of Le Clerc's thoughts on historical testimonies, we now turn more specifically to Origen's witness. When I refer to Origen's witness, I intend with this to point to the historical reports that we find scattered around Origen's work, but in particular in his *Contra Celsum*, and that were used as historical material in later centuries. I do not want to imply that Origen engaged a subject to compose its history, and I am conscious that only Eusebius, with the writing of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and many others after him, will embark on such a journey. In any case, in Le Clerc's work we find many mentions of historical references in Origen, where Le Clerc offered us opportunities to be convinced that he considered Origen's testimony as credible and valuable.

A first and very clear statement on this can be found in Le Clerc's *Harmonia Evangelica*, and in particular in the dissertation he attached to it and which was dedicated to testimonies of the Gospels and the evangelists. Here, Le Clerc confirmed Origen's knowledge of the facts of sacred history "*Origenes, non modò dogmatum sui ævi sed & antiquitatum Ecclesiasticarum callentissimus.*"³³¹ In a later passage, still embedded within a discussion on the history of the Gospels, Le Clerc called Clement and Origen: "*virī longè doctissimi.*"³³²

A judgment that went in a similar direction was brought up when Le Clerc pondered on conflicting evidence of Origen and other testimonies. In a discussion on pagan oracles, Le Clerc opposed Cicero on the one side, and Origen and Eusebius on the other. Cicero was shown to suggest that ancient philosophers, among which Aristoteles, shared the belief in oracles, whereas Origen and Eusebius opposed this, stating that ancient philosophers had considered oracles as frauds.³³³ The question was, then, on who was to be trusted among these, because Le Clerc esteemed all of these authors. The choice of the authors "*dignes de foi*"³³⁴ fell on this occasion on Origen, and Eusebius, who was believed to have imitated the Alexandrian.³³⁵ Both Origen's and Eusebius' testimonies were compared to other ones that stated the contrary, but which Le Clerc considered dubious, like that of Plutarch.³³⁶ Le Clerc also showed that many other ancient philosophers rejected oracles, so Origen's testimony was not implausible.³³⁷ Moreover, the opinion of Origen and Eusebius, because of their being Christian, seemed preferable to a pagan author, even of the stature of Cicero. Finally, but most importantly,

331 Id., *Harmonia evangelica* 536.

332 Ibid. 541.

333 Id., BC 13 (art. 3) 239.

334 Id., BAM 15/2 (art. 4) 358. In this passage, Le Clerc refers to BC 13 (art. 3) 200. 239.

335 Ibid. 201.

336 Ibid. 240.

337 Ibid. 240–242.

Origen's and Eusebius' knowledge of the facts was a decisive factor, because Le Clerc considered them among the most knowledgeable on the subject: "deux plus savans hommes, en ces matieres, que le Christianisme ait eu."³³⁸

The passages we have just analysed are not only good examples of Le Clerc's judgment on Origen's testimony, but also highlight how they fitted well within the framework developed in the previous section. Although not all criteria were clearly present, some of them were, and for the rest, they could easily be inferred from the text or from other parts of Le Clerc's thought. Origen's assured knowledge was confirmed as was his capacity to judge and report faithfully. Origen's testimony, in the second example of oracles, was supported by other testimonies, and the content of the testimony itself was not implausible. The temporal element was also accounted for, although not clearly in this case.³³⁹ Some of the elements we have just reviewed could also be predicated of Cicero, whose testimony Le Clerc esteemed in other circumstances³⁴⁰ but on this occasion, the mix of factors spoke in favour of Origen. Apart from the mentioned criteria, we find here a new one, the paganism of Cicero. This was detrimental to his testimony, but Le Clerc did not elaborate on that and this criterion is not found in other passages in his work, at least to my knowledge.

To summarise: because Le Clerc had good reasons to evaluate Origen's testimony positively, and here Origen's credibility seemed already assured, it seems plausible that he did so genuinely and despite the fact that Le Clerc may have had good reasons to concede as little proof as possible that the ancients had believed in oracles.³⁴¹ An element of this last testimony on oracles, the fact that it was about opinions and not about facts, and that it was not a primary testimony, strictly speaking, prompts us, however, to review further examples.

Le Clerc referred to Origen on a number of other occasions to prove simple facts. He used Origen's testimony to show that exorcisms were not only in use among Christians in antiquity, but also among Jews and pagans. In so doing, Le Clerc corrected an interpretation of Marquard Freher (1565–1614) that saw in a passage of the roman jurist Ulpian a reference to Christians as "impostors", because the latter had mentioned the term in conjunction with exorcisms. Le Clerc contended instead that Ulpian could have meant real (Christian) impostors at the

338 Ibid. 240.

339 In order to grasp this point, we need to add a detail from Le Clerc's thought. In the back of his mind there seemed to be the belief that in some cases the ancients had access to more written material from past centuries (still a form of "eye-witnessing") than in his own time, and this made these ancient testimonies particularly relevant. This element, only inferred here, was mentioned by Le Clerc in his scholarship where he esteemed Origen because he had had access to ancient sources, lost in Le Clerc's time.

340 See for example the multiple references to Cicero in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

341 See further below.

time of the emperor Justinian, but also oriental practices, that is, other kinds of exorcists.³⁴² The testimony of Origen rendered Freher's attribution problematic. This example, where Origen was a testimony of facts, provides further elements for Le Clerc's evaluation of Origen's testimony. In the just mentioned passage, Le Clerc did not note any specific credibility criteria to believe in Origen's witness, but the maximum that he did was to suggest other sources as comparison, although Origen stands on its own as the primary and most important reference.³⁴³ More passages of this kind exist where Le Clerc drew on Origen's historical witness.³⁴⁴

The credibility of Origen as testimony was often taken for granted, as in a passage on miracles, which Origen still attested in his time. Le Clerc used this fact as source to claim that in the second century miracles were still used, among other proofs, to confirm the truth of the Christian message and he mentioned that this had also been Origen's idea.³⁴⁵ This changed later, where the Christian faith was recognised across the Roman Empire, so that miracles were not needed anymore.

In this latter case, Le Clerc quoted a passage from Augustine as testimony, but after the passage he expressed explicitly that Augustine could be trusted in

342 LE CLERC, BAM 23/2 (art. 3) 352. Le Clerc referred to the *Contra Celsum* vaguely without any specific reference but wrote there were "many passages" where this was evident. I found the following, which mentions exorcisms among Jews but not among pagans: Origen, CC IV 33 f. (p. 209 CHADWICK). See also *ibid.* I 6 f. (p. 9 f.) for a reference to Christians.

343 Still, because Le Clerc did not refer to any particular passage in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, but simply wrote that there were in there "divers endroits" where Origen had testified this, we may also believe that he could have had CC I 46 (p. 42) in mind. In this passage, although referring only to Christian exorcisms and other miraculous things, Origen stated that he had been eyewitness to the events.

344 These passages are mostly contained in Origen's *Contra Celsum* and regard, for example, the early Christian use of not enrolling into battle: LE CLERC, BAM 27 (art. 9) 179. Le Clerc quoted book VIII in general, but I believe he referred more precisely to CC VIII 73 f. (p. 509 f. CHADWICK). In another example, Le Clerc mentioned also the fact that ancient pagan prophets were fraudulent, and had Origen confirm this, in opposition to Celsus. To do this, LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 52 f., reported only Celsus' claim and mentioned that Origen had rejected it, but did not include the full passage, where Origen also drew on ancient philosophers, such as Democritus, Epicurus and Aristotle, as further support. For this last example, Le Clerc had mentioned once again book VIII in general. We find this passage in CC VIII 45 (p. 484 f.). In yet another example, Origen's *Contra Celsum* became a testimony of Origen's century and, more specifically, of the fact that at the time only a very small number of followers of Simon the Wizard were still present: LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 350 f. n. 3. The reference was to book I in general, in reality it can be found at CC I 57 (p. 52 f.). Also as testimony of Origen's time, LE CLERC, *Oratio inauguralis* 19 f., referred to Origen in his discussion of free will, as in the *Philocalia*. This will be taken more into consideration in the third part of the present work.

345 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 533 f. n. 30. For a discussion on the role of miracles in early modern philosophical and theological debates, see HARRISON, *Miracles*.

this case: “*Quo in loco, ex animi sententia & ex vero loquutum Augustinum esse existimo.*”³⁴⁶ However, the honest Augustine had to take back his claim in another one of his works because of pressures from others and ecclesiastical prudence.³⁴⁷ Clearly, the contradiction in Augustine rendered it necessary to make explicit his credibility, something that was not necessary, at least in this and the majority of other passages that I have reviewed, with Origen. The only exception I found was when Origen discussed the truth of Sibylline oracles, something which we will examine further below.

5.4 Issues in Origen’s Testimony

The evidence presented so far confirms that Le Clerc had good reasons to trust Origen’s testimony. However, as in the case of his philosophy/theology and of his exegetical-critical scholarship, reviewed in the previous chapters, Le Clerc’s reception of Origen as a historical witness was at times also a critical one. This was especially true where Origen was in no better position to report on historical facts than the modern historian was. The emblematic example, in this case, was born out of the dispute with Simon on the composition and authorship of the Old Testament.³⁴⁸ Le Clerc accused Simon of basing his assumptions on the authority of ancient figures such as Eusebius, Theodoret and others. Instead of authority, which Le Clerc believed could not prevail over truth, he invoked, as usual, a return to Scripture itself. He also expressed in these circumstances his lack of consideration for the Fathers, and among others he specifically mentioned Origen, in whom Simon had found a testimony for his theory that the present text of Old Testament Scripture was based on preceding larger narrations.³⁴⁹

In this passage regarding the authorship of the Old Testament, Le Clerc did not reject the argument with another (he will do so in a later part of his book)³⁵⁰ but posed a substantial methodological problem to Simon’s argument. For Le Clerc, Origen, the Fathers and the other “authorities” that Simon had invoked as sources and support for his claim, did not have the instruments to exert their authority, nor could they be truly considered as historical testimonies. Origen and the Fathers, more generally, lacked ancient sources on this subject, “des mémoires anciens de la manière dont les Livres Sacrez ont été écrits.”³⁵¹ The Fathers could

346 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 534 n. 30.

347 *Ibid.* 534 f. n. 30.

348 See chapter 1.

349 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 63–66. For Simon’s passage, see SIMON, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* 4.

350 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 128 f.

351 *Ibid.* 66.

also not draw their support from an assured tradition, “une tradition dont on ne pût douter”, so that their role as testimonies of a transmitted message was put into doubt.³⁵²

The Fathers, including Origen, had imposed their conjectures, so Le Clerc, on the same documents that were still possessed by historians: “leur autorité séparée de ces preuves [the documents] ne sert de rien du tout.”³⁵³ Thus, we see here at work Le Clerc’s framework for historical testimonies: the only relative importance of Origen’s testimony in this subject derived for Le Clerc from the fact that the Alexandrian lacked the evidence of an eyewitness and thus was criticisable as any other scholar. Origen was far from any sort of temporal nearness, in terms of documents or of an oral tradition, which could have made him a trustworthy testimony. This consideration makes it less plausible to imagine that Le Clerc was simply selectively choosing which testimonies from Origen to accept and which not. It is true that Origen’s statement was, after all, in disagreement with his own conception of the authorship of the Pentateuch.³⁵⁴ Still, crucial elements of credibility in Le Clerc’s framework were missing in Origen’s testimony.

Another element that became sometimes problematic in Origen’s testimony for Le Clerc was the degree of disguise of the Alexandrian. The few occasions where Origen’s sincerity as a testimony was doubted are revealing. Here we must pause a little. While discussing pagan oracles, the Arminian seemed to recognise a form of “nicodemism” in Origen, claiming that Origen had disguised his position on at least two occasions. The first was with pagan oracles in general. Origen seemed to believe in the veridicity of pagan oracles, but Le Clerc warned that Origen was in camouflage in order to build a bridge to pagans³⁵⁵ – a goal that Origen had had, according to Le Clerc, with his Platonic philosophy, as we saw earlier. He proved Origen’s disguise by reporting a text that Van Dale, whose work he was discussing as part of a review of the dispute between Fontenelle and Baltus on the veridicity of pagan oracles, had already used for the same purpose.³⁵⁶ Here, Origen was shown to argue that claims to the truthfulness of oracles could be rejected. In particular, Origen had contended that: “nous pourrions alleguer beaucoup de choses, prises d’Aristote & des Peripateticiens; pour détruire ce qu’on dit de l’Oracle de la Pythie & des autres.”³⁵⁷ Thus, although Origen had supported

352 Ibid. 65.

353 Ibid.

354 With this operation, as part of a wider argument we find in *Sentimens*, Le Clerc had tried to weaken Simon’s position in order to strengthen his own contention about the composition of the Pentateuch: *ibid.* 128 f.

355 *Id.*, BC 13 (art. 3) 200–202.

356 VAN DALE, *De oraculis* 21 f.

357 LE CLERC, BC 13 (art. 3) 200. This is Le Clerc’s own translation, as it seems, because he referred to Spencer’s Latin-Greek edition of *Contra Celsum*, whose text Van Dale had also

the belief in pagan oracles, he had been careful to also make his position clear elsewhere. Both Van Dale and Le Clerc used this last passage of Origen as a testimony against Origen himself to support their position and counter any objections of the kind. This example poses no serious threat to the credibility of Origen but provides an awareness that for Le Clerc, as for Van Dale, single testimonies were compared with the overall thought and work of an author in order to ascertain the “true” intention of that testimony. So, here again we find the famous criteria by Le Clerc, through which he ascertained the veridicity of a testimony. More importantly, the care that both scholars took to rectify Origen’s position was not only a reaction to a parallel use of Origen by the opponents but also shows that, from both sides, the testimony of the Alexandrian was considered somehow as one of the authoritative ones.

The second occasion where Le Clerc recognised a degree of disguise in Origen’s testimony was on the accountability of Sibylline oracles. Origen reported that Celsus had believed that the oracles had been Christian interpolations. Origen had confuted this without, however, adding much more reason than to pose many somewhat ironic questions to that statement.³⁵⁸ Le Clerc believed that on this occasion Origen was in disguise, and as a reason he thought that Origen did not want to be in disagreement with others: “*rem dissimulat, quòd fortè Sibyllinis libris fidem ipse non haberet, quamvis alios aliter sentire sciret, neque eos confutare sustineret.*”³⁵⁹ With “alios” Origen had most probably meant many other Church Fathers, like Clement, who made use of them.³⁶⁰ In this case, Le Clerc did not report any particular passage from Origen which would prove his claim, although he explained this by pointing to Origen’s attitude against Celsus: the Alexandrian did not want to concede anything to the pagan that could have become a support to his claims.³⁶¹

On this occasion, Origen had also been instrumental in Le Clerc rejecting the claim of the unbrokenness of the Roman Catholic tradition of the Jesuit Baltus, who had used the Fathers as testimonies to show that the belief in supernatural oracles (and the Sibylline were included in these) had been held since the early years of the Church.³⁶² Origen was also important as a support against Isaac Vos’

directly quoted in the original Greek and Latin. The precise passage is Origen, CC VII 3 (p. 396 CHADWICK).

358 Ibid. See also the whole of *ibid.* VII 53–57 (p. 439–443).

359 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 600.

360 See CHADWICK, *Contra Celsum* 312 n. 3.

361 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 600 n. 10: “*Origenes verò nihil, quod adversario favere posse putabat, concedere voluit.*” CHADWICK, *ibid.*, argued like Le Clerc that Origen did not think much of Sibylline oracles, but for a different reason, that is, from the fact that Origen never quoted them.

362 LE CLERC, BC 13 (art. 3) 200.

belief in the veridicity of Sibylline oracles.³⁶³ Thus, to return to the question of Origen's sincerity as testimony, although normally Le Clerc did not seem to doubt it, on this occasion he carefully dissociated Origen from Origen's own statements. Le Clerc made a similar move as in the previous example, comparing Origen's testimony to Origen's style in debates and, again as before, this example too shows the prominence of Origen's testimonies in his milieu. The difference to the previous example, however, is that here Le Clerc was on a much narrower evidence base to turn Origen to his side. Together with this, he had also added various reasons to negate the veridicity of the Sibylline oracles that went beyond Origen and had quoted Lactantius too as testimony of their falsity.³⁶⁴ To prove his point, Origen's statement was not the only possible proof he could draw upon and, in this way, Le Clerc had exposed himself so that some opponent could have easily turned Origen against him. Still, Le Clerc did rectify what he considered to be Origen's position. It therefore seems sound to say that this second example restates the remarks of the first example in an even stronger fashion: Origen's voice was, at least as historical testimony and for particular topics, one of the important ones. At the same time, this highlights that Le Clerc's relationship with Origen as historical testimony was in line with the use of his time. His approach presented no peculiarity besides the fact that the examples where he revealed Origen's "true" position also reinforced his own argument and that other historians, as we will see, acted in a similar way but with different examples.

A final short contextualisation within Le Clerc's own production seems the most suitable path to enrich the present analysis a little more and strengthen the argument I have just made. A review of Le Clerc's *Historia ecclesiastica* shows that Origen was no key historical testimony for Le Clerc. The major references in that book, among the ancients, were Josephus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Eusebius and, among the Fathers, mainly Justin and Irenaeus. Many other ancient authors were mentioned, some more often than Origen, some less. As for Origen, we find nonetheless a significant number of mentions, although by far not as many as for the other major historians quoted above. This is not a surprise, because Origen's offer in terms of testimonies was limited compared to other authors, such as Josephus. Another constraint on Le Clerc's *Historia ecclesiastica* was that it was chronologically limited to the first two centuries of Christianity, thus excluding most of Origen's time, a period in which Origen's testimonies could have also proven

363 Le Clerc considered a clear Jewish revelation before the Gospel revelation as problematic because it seemed to diminish the importance of the Gospels. This applied also to pagan philosophy, which by others had been considered, together with the Old Testament, to be a precursor of the Gospel revelation. This stance confirms Le Clerc's position on the primacy of Christian revelation that we reviewed in an earlier chapter on the "Hebraism" of Plato. On Le Clerc's rejection of Isaac Vos' position, see id., BC 4 (art. 6) 215 f.

364 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 599–601.

valuable.³⁶⁵ In any case, Origen's presence as testimony was more than casual, and this reinforces the view presented so far of Le Clerc's trust in the historical reports of the Alexandrian, notwithstanding, as we saw, that Le Clerc examined them critically too. We will see in the next section that this was also a general pattern in early modern historiography.

One must be very careful not to draw too much from Origen's simple presence as historical testimony. We saw, by comparison, that Le Clerc considered the work of Josephus negatively and that he was openly suspicious of the Jew's sincerity in his historical writing. Yet, Le Clerc still included many references to his work in his own history.³⁶⁶ Le Clerc was selective in what he used from Josephus, following the credibility criteria that we saw in the first part of this chapter. Such an attitude did not prevent any use of Josephus' work, when it seemed plausible, although Le Clerc's distrust in the author of the *Antiquitates ecclesiasticæ* required extra care in that operation. When we consider this, it seems more plausible that the bare fact that Origen appeared often among the testimonies of history was not a proof on its own of an *overall* judgment on Origen's testimony. Origen's work was considered credible in many circumstances, but so was that of Josephus every time Le Clerc added it to his own *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This is not to say, however, that Le Clerc considered Origen and Josephus as equally credible. After all, one was a Jew and the other a Christian, one had not given abundant proofs that he fulfilled the "credibility criteria" for historical testimonies, the other had.³⁶⁷ We now turn to other ecclesiastical histories to find additional evidence that Origen's testimony was generally considered authoritative in early modern historiography and thus that Le Clerc's reception of Origen, in this case, was rather in line with his own time.

5.5 Origen as Testimony in Early Modern Ecclesiastical Histories

A review of various ecclesiastical histories of Le Clerc's time highlights that there too, Origen's testimonies, as with Le Clerc, were considered generally trustworthy. This was often combined with a desire to recover Origen's reputation.³⁶⁸ To start

365 Le Clerc's project was to continue with the next centuries, but this did not happen.

366 For example: LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 13, 32, 184 and *passim*.

367 Although the majority of references from Josephus in the *Historia ecclesiastica* were used as support, there is at least one occasion where Josephus' testimony was considered as purely fraudulent. This is when Josephus discussed specific techniques of exorcism among Jews, involving herbs and more. Le Clerc suspected that Josephus intended, in this way, to discredit the miracles of Jesus and the apostles, *ibid.* 258 f. n. 9: "*nec absurdè suspicatur à Josepho ficta, ut elevaret Christi & Apostolorum miracula.*"

368 An examination of the reasons behind the use of Origen by many historians of the time would require a specialised study, but this would lead us away from the topic discussed and would be impossible at present for reasons of space and time. I limit my analysis to

with the famous Claude Fleury (1640–1723),³⁶⁹ this French historian used Origen's testimony as source, and in some cases his and Le Clerc's examples overlap. This was the case, for example, with Origen's testimony that in his time there were still miracles, that Simon the Wizard did not have any more followers in that time or that Christians did not go to war.³⁷⁰ Fleury also reported other passages from Origen that we do not find in Le Clerc. One obvious example, which went against Le Clerc's belief on the subject, regarded the composition of the Old Testament. Here, Fleury referred to Origen as a testimony that Christians had recovered the Old Testament from other ancient, larger and more complete texts than the Jews had had; Jews had cut things out from the text.³⁷¹ On another occasion, Fleury quoted Origen's testimony to narrate the morals of Christians in Origen's time³⁷² or that in early Christianity even women and children were instructed in the Christian religion.³⁷³ A degree of confidence in Origen's testimonies seems evident in Fleury's history, and in his case this sits well with his overall recognition of Origen as "authority."³⁷⁴ He also justified Origen's errors as having been put forward by him as pure opinions or being due to interpolations.³⁷⁵

Also in Louis-Sébastien de Tillemont (1637–1698) we find Origen as a testimony of the little number of followers of Simon the Wizard in Origen's time.³⁷⁶ In his case, we also find many more references to Origen's testimonies from the very first years of Christianity, and even covering Jesus' life.³⁷⁷ Fleury had mostly, although not exclusively, relied on Origen's *CC*, which he had considered Origen's best work, not only for its apologetic content, but also because it confirmed the Christian religion with some constant facts, such as the prophecies before the

face-value considerations from the different authors that, even if in general do not have any explanatory power on their own, they provide in this case useful comparisons to better grasp Le Clerc's thought.

369 For an introduction to Fleury, see WANNER, Claude Fleury. For a study dedicated to the reception in Fleury not of Origen, but of Tertullian, see CUCHE, Tertullian.

370 FLEURY, *Histoire ecclésiastique* 2, 282 f. 285 f.

371 *Ibid.* 136.

372 *Ibid.* 289.

373 *Id.*, *Les mœurs des chrétiens* 80.

374 *Id.*, *Histoire ecclésiastique* 2, 115 f.: "[D]es opinions hardies & singulieres; qui n'estant point tirées de la tradition de l'Eglise, ont esté universellement rejettées, nonobstant la grande autorité d'Origene."

375 *Ibid.* 118.

376 TILLEMONT, *Memoires* 2, 42. For an introduction to Tillemont, including his historiography, see NEVEU, *Un historien*. The more recent article by QUANTIN, *Reason and Reasonableness*, also provides important remarks on Gallican historiography more generally and Tillemont in particular.

377 TILLEMONT, *ibid.* 1, 65–82. 216 and *passim*. See also many other examples in the first three volumes.

coming of Jesus, the miracles of the early Church and more.³⁷⁸ Also Tillemont relied heavily on the *CC*, but at the same time he included multiple references to other works (and predominantly in the first volumes), like Origen's biblical commentaries (for example the *CMT* and *CEz*), something we do not really see in Le Clerc. We can thus believe that Tillemont also seemed rather confident in Origen's testimonies.³⁷⁹

The centrality of Origen's testimony for Tillemont comes beautifully to the foreground when he discusses the antiquity of the Marcionites, a Christian sect, and where he debated against John Pearson (1613–1686) and Pétau by interpreting a testimony of Origen differently.³⁸⁰ On some other occasions, for example on the presence of exorcisms in the early Church, Tillemont chose different testimonies from Le Clerc and quoted John Chrysostom as source, instead of Origen.³⁸¹ On the other hand, Tillemont made a larger and more varied use of Origen's works as source compared to Le Clerc. Tillemont also discussed Origen's errors at greater length compared to Fleury. He acknowledged Origen's "authority" and attributed his errors not to Origen's pride or any moral vice, but saw Origen's desire to know too much, his curiosity and his philosophy as possible causes of them.³⁸² However, although he invoked a certain caution with reading Origen,³⁸³ we see how his critique of Origen's errors was perfectly compatible with his positive evaluation of Origen as testimony, and not only as that.³⁸⁴

Other Roman Catholic historians shared Tillemont's and Fleury's confidence in Origen's testimonies. Louis Ellies Dupin (1657–1719)³⁸⁵ referred to Origen as a testimony of Church usages of his time by looking at the *Contra Celsum*, but pointed also to Origen (among many others) as proof of the attribution of ancient texts, such as the famous case of the *Epistle of Barnabas*.³⁸⁶ Besides the *Contra Celsum*, Dupin also made use of the *Commentary on Matthew* and of the *Letter to*

378 FLEURY, *Histoire ecclésiastique* 2, 279 f.

379 The fact that, among others, Origen did not speak about a certain fact, an eclipse in the specific passage, was significant for him: TILLEMONT, *Memoires* 1, 248.

380 *Ibid.* 2, 513.

381 *Ibid.* 1/2, 602.

382 *Ibid.*, 3/3, 268. 281 f.

383 *Ibid.* 284.

384 LE CLERC, *BAM* 5 (art. 5) 226 f., was critical of how Tillemont selected his sources and accused him of having included unreliable testimonies from the early centuries (he referred specifically to the fourth and fifth centuries).

385 LE CLERC, *BUH* 6 (art. 3) 127 f., did not review the *Nouvelle Bibliothèque* of Dupin but had spoken about Dupin's *De Antiqua Ecclesia Disciplina* favourably. This work might have been convenient for his beliefs because Dupin, at least in the way Le Clerc reported it, had argued for the right of councils to overcome papal authority, the limits of papal power etc. For an introduction to Dupin, including his historiography, see GRES-GAYER, *Un théologien gallican*.

386 DUPIN, *Nouvelle bibliothèque* 1/6, 140.

Africanus. Origen's errors were treated similarly as in Tillemont, as caused by Origen's excessive curiosity and his philosophy, or bluntly minimised.³⁸⁷ We also find a similar pattern in Antoine Pagi (1624–1699), from which Le Clerc had drawn plenty of information for his own *Historia Ecclesiastica*.³⁸⁸ For Pagi, the *CC* also represented a good testimony of the usages of the early Church,³⁸⁹ but similarly to the previous historians, found different supporting “facts” in Origen's testimony from those reported by Le Clerc.³⁹⁰ As a difference from the previous historians, Pagi admired Origen but seemed to cast more doubt on his genuine Christian faith. He sided with Pétau, against Baronius, for the veridicity of Epiphanius' narration, who had accused Origen of apostasy.³⁹¹

On the Protestant side, in Jacques Basnage de Beauval (1653–1723) we find again further similarities with the previous historians.³⁹² Origen was conceived as a testimony of uses of the early Church, but Basnage used Origen's *HRe* and *HNm*.³⁹³ Origen's *CC* was, instead, used to support the authorship of a particular book by St. Luke.³⁹⁴ Basnage also spent many pages in rectifying Origen's errors: he justified Origen by assuming the conjectural, rather than doctrinal, nature of these errors.³⁹⁵ One of the errors of Origen was, however, inexcusable: his Pelagianism, but Basnage's accusation was softened by taking into account the possibility of interpolations by Rufinus in his work, who had distorted the original meaning.³⁹⁶ On this latter occasion, Origen was used as testimony against himself, because he was used as witness that, already in the early Church, there were some who disputed the freedom of the will.³⁹⁷ Yet another important Protestant work where we find the same approach to Origen's testimonies was the famous “Magdeburg Centuries”, written through a collaboration of different Protestants. Le Clerc

387 Ibid. 135–141.

388 He had also reviewed very favourably and in detail Pagi's *Critica historico-chronologica* and shared with Pagi his interest not only in the “facts” of history, but also in the chronology: LE CLERC, *BUH* 15 (art. 9) 287–318, id., *BC* 8 (art. 6) 258–327.

389 PAGI, *Critica historico-chronologica* 1, 42.

390 For Pagi, Origen was, for example, a witness of the “disciplina arcani” of the early Church, because in Celsus' time, not many dogmas were openly preached (ibid. 120). Origen's (and Clement's) testimony was also used for the dating of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (ibid. 42). Similarly, Origen – this time *De principiis* – and Clement were Pagi's sources to establish the duration of the predication of Jesus (ibid. 18).

391 Ibid. 239.

392 For an introduction to Basnage and his milieu, see CERNY, *Theology, Politics and Letters*. See also the review of this book by WHELAN, *Huguenot Conceptions*, who, however, focuses on Basnage's historiography.

393 BASNAGE, *Histoire de l'église* 1, 450.

394 Ibid. 425.

395 Ibid. 595 f.; see also ibid. 518.

396 Ibid. 596. 605 f.

397 Ibid. 605.

had criticised the work as biased towards Protestantism.³⁹⁸ Besides the, by now usual, reference to Origen for the uses of the ancient Church³⁹⁹ or many other facts, Origen's testimony was not always considered as sufficient. An example of this was where Origen assured the antiquity of certain traditions, like the baptism of infants (together with Cyprian),⁴⁰⁰ but where testimonies were discordant.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, not as much space and prominence as in the other authors reviewed was given to the discussion of Origen's errors.⁴⁰² Finally, in Le Clerc's own *Bibliothèques*, we find a range of many other examples where other learned men of the time had used Origen's testimony productively.⁴⁰³ We now return to a focus on Le Clerc in order to compare the evidence of the background provided by this review of ecclesiastical historians of his time with the previous findings of this chapter.

5.6 Final Remarks

This last panoramic view on some of the most relevant histories in Le Clerc's time confirms what we saw in the previous sections. Origen's credibility as testimony was taken for granted, and in some cases the example testimonies of Origen that were used overlapped among historians. This is not dissimilar to the way Le Clerc handled Origen's testimonies as well. Historians often justified Origen's presumed errors in many ways, and we have this too in Le Clerc, as we saw earlier with the discussion of Cave's *Apostolici*.⁴⁰⁴ Both elements point to the fact that Origen was

398 LE CLERC, BUH 15 (art. 9) 288; id., Parrhasiana 168. For an introduction to the Magdeburg Centuries, see HARTMANN, *Die Magdeburger Centurien* 1, 35–80.

399 FLACIUS et al., *Ecclesiastica historia* 1, Cent. I, Lib. 2, Cap. 6, Col. 494; Cent. III, Cap. 5, Col. 136.

400 Ibid. Cent. I, Lib. 1, Cap. 4, Col. 155; Cent. II, Cap. 4, Col. 48. See also, for example, Cent. I, Lib. 1, Cap. 9, Col. 380, where Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* (and Eusebius) were used as testimony that pagans also saw an eclipse at the time of Jesus' passion.

401 Ibid. Cent. I, Lib. 2, Cap. 10, Col. 561.

402 Ibid. Cent. II, Cap. 4, Col. 57 seems to justify Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis by saying that a possible redemption of devils had already been conceived by Clement.

403 Stillingfleet used Origen and Tertullian as testimonies of the presence of Christians in England in their time: LE CLERC, BUH 6 (art. 6) 142; Dodwell, as reported by LE CLERC, BUH 18 (art. 7) 264, used Origen's testimony (together with others) to attest the gradual disappearance of miracles from the time of Marc Aurelius. In an article on a dissertation of van der Waeyen who had rejected Spencer's belief that Jews had borrowed ceremonial uses from the Egyptians, Waeyen used Origen as testimony against Spencer to support his claim. Origen was one of other witnesses that Waeyen brought, but the first mentioned: id., BUH 24/2 (art. 1) 298. As reported in id., BAM 27/2 (art. 5) 363, Friedrich Adolf Lampe (1683–1729) quoted a passage in Origen's *Contra Celsum* to show that the Gospel had not been falsified by Christians. RUINART, *Acta (præfatio generalis)* xxvi, used Origen against Dodwell to prove martyrs were many.

404 See chapter 3.

generally considered a prominent figure of the early Church, a respectable and trustworthy figure. This is true, as in the above examples, with historical testimonies specifically, although more general considerations from future research on the reception of Origen by ecclesiastical historians could provide further insights.

After the analysis presented in this chapter, it is clear on the one hand that Origen's presence as historical testimony does not seem to add any major particularities of Le Clerc's reception of Origen, because his stance was commonplace among historians. On the other hand, the specific (and somehow strict) requirements that Le Clerc had on historical testimonies and the fact that Origen was part of it provides further support to the idea that Le Clerc had a high esteem for Origen's intellectual capabilities as well as moral and objective character. Moreover, the way Le Clerc "turned" Origen towards his own goals was not uncommon in his time, but this again confirms that for him, and in this case also for many of his contemporaries, Origen's status was very valued.

PART 3: ORIGEN, FREEDOM AND THEOLOGY

The third part of the present work engages the specific question of Le Clerc's strategies of orthodoxy construction and the role of his reception of Origen therein. It builds necessarily on the foundations of the previous parts, and it is clear that, from what we learned in the last chapters, there was no clear-cut reception of Origen in Le Clerc. The way in which Le Clerc related to Origen's work and thought was inextricably linked to a number of other issues, and yet at times a pattern became clear. Despite those parts of Origen's work which attracted much criticism, for Le Clerc, in certain areas, Origen was much more than an only superficially known figure of the Christian past who had become popular through his heresies. The previous pages testified of Le Clerc's engagement with Origen and of his esteem and trust for important parts of Origen's thought and work.

With this background in mind, the following chapters of this third part will provide further insights into Le Clerc's engagement with Origen in what was for him surely a very sensitive topic and a battleground: theology, especially when it related directly to human (and divine) free will. I will not only review theological doctrines, like original sin and grace/predestination, but also extend the analysis to what was later termed "theodicy." In this way, I hope to uncover Le Clerc's intentions with Origen and also his practices with Origen's work in the less defined field of philosophical theology, further away from confessional boundaries.

6. Doctrinal Debates: Original Sin

We start this part with a chapter dedicated to a traditional Christian doctrine: original sin. The fact that this doctrine was commonly accepted among Christian confessions, although with different accents and views, makes it an ideal place to start the third part of the present work. This is so because Le Clerc had his own particular view on the subject, and the orthodoxy of his position was far from assured if compared to more commonly shared views. Due to the fact that original sin was a relatively commonly accepted doctrine, but that at the same time Le Clerc had a peculiar view on it, this doctrine seems an excellent starting term of comparison to uncover Le Clerc's practices and views. Original sin was much less present in the main confessional battleground than was, for example, the discussion on predestination and divine grace, which we will review in the next chapter.

As the reader might be unfamiliar with Le Clerc's position, I will start this chapter with an outline of Le Clerc's thoughts on the subject and provide contextual information around the contemporary Reformed debates, paying special attention to his references to Origen's thought.

6.1 Le Clerc's Rejection of Original Sin as Corruption

The idea that human beings have been created in the "image of God", a traditional Christian doctrine, was present in Le Clerc's early writings, for example the *Epistolæ theologicæ*. However, Le Clerc had a specific view on what constituted the essence of the image of God in human beings. At least according to the *Epistolæ theologicæ*, the image of God in human beings consisted in rationality, *sanctitas*, that is, innocence, (moral) probity and being in dominion over the rest of creation.¹ The stress on *sanctitas* especially differed from what major Arminian theologians, such as Episcopius and de Courcelles, but also Limborch, had contended.²

Among the just mentioned three components of the image of God in human beings, for Le Clerc, the most prominent component was rationality and the least was the power it allowed over the rest of creation. The reason behind this was that, if one were to take into consideration human beings' rationality and innocence – Le Clerc no longer discussed the "dominion" part of the image of God – their rational part was fully in the image of God, whereas their *sanctitas*, their innocence, was mutable. So Le Clerc: "*certè mens humana semper ac necessariò spiritualis est quemadmodum Deus; sed sanctitas Adami ita erat mutabilis ut valde leviter Dei sanctitatem adumbraret.*"³ Le Clerc also added that sin did not wash away completely the image of God from human beings, but only their innocence. Thus, for Le Clerc, the image of God in human beings was preserved through their rationality: "*etiam post peccatum homines ad imaginem Dei formati dicuntur, quia etsi carent sanctitate [sic], mentem habent spiritualitate Deo similem.*"⁴ In this last quot-

1 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 112. 121 f.

2 EPISCOPIUS, *Institutiones theologicæ* 1, 359 f., for example, had stressed human rationality and freedom, DE COURCELLES, *Institutio religionis christianæ* 108 f., and LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 135–138, had highlighted the human dominion over all creatures through the use of rationality, but had rejected that an originary innocence was part of that image.

3 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 122 f.

4 *Ibid.* 123. This was in agreement with what, a few years later, Le Cène had maintained in the part of the *Entretiens* that he authored. Although he did not take a clear stance on what constituted the essence of the "image of God" in human beings, he confirmed nonetheless that, whatever it was, it was not lost with the sin of Adam: LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 137.

ed passage, the reference to the *post peccatum* might be interpreted as a reference to the sin of Adam and Eve in the traditional Augustinian way, as an ontological break in the human condition. It will emerge clearly from the next paragraphs that this was far from Le Clerc's intention, but for the moment it is important to note that in his early writing, Le Clerc already seemed to reject the doctrine of original sin, or at least the consequences of original sin, as traditionally conceived in the Augustinian tradition.

In later years, Le Clerc's rejection of the traditional conception of the doctrine of original sin emerged clearly. He wrote explicitly that this (and other) doctrines were not scriptural, but the result of an over-interpretation of a few biblical passages, something Le Clerc termed "*ἐμφάσεις*," and that a more literal interpretation, *diluto sensu*, without those doctrines, was preferable.⁵ He did not discuss the matter further, this was the *Ars Critica* after all, which was primarily concerned with hermeneutical questions, but we find explicit rejections of the traditional doctrine of original sin scattered around his exegetical commentaries.

Two examples: Mark 7:23, "all these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" and John 2:24–25, "Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man." These verses could point to an inherent condition of corruption in human beings, something that was traditionally attributed to original sin. Le Clerc did not write much on the verse of Mark, but interpreted the word "defile" not so strongly as a "corruption", but more as a minor stain, as a "vice."⁶ On the verses in John, his interpretation was that Jesus knew that the people believed he was sent by God only up to a point,⁷ and not that Jesus knew "what was in man" in the sense of man's "(inherited) corruption."

Even more strongly in Rom 3:10–12: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Here, Paul quoted Ps. 14:1–3, and Le Clerc commented on Paul's passage and applied the fallen condition of humanity described in Scripture not to general humanity but to the Jews whose actions in a specific historical time God had witnessed.⁸ This was in line with the interpretation of Hammond,⁹ and Le Clerc, later in his life, although he altered slightly his exegesis of the psalm, he never applied this passage to a sort of gener-

5 LE CLERC, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 173.

6 Id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 1, 140 n. 23.

7 Ibid. 269 n. 24.

8 Id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 92 n. 10–12.

9 HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1699) n. 10–12. 18.

alised fallen condition of humanity.¹⁰ Once again, for Le Clerc there seemed to be no trace of original sin in passages that could be easily interpreted in favour of it.

It is also revealing, in this regard, to reflect briefly on how Le Clerc considered the state of sinlessness of children.¹¹ Already in the *Epistolæ theologicæ* he had contended that the rational part of human beings was not affected by the sin of Adam and Eve because, being of spiritual nature, it was not part of the material transmission from the first parents, but created from God each time *justam ac sanctam*. Otherwise, God would have been the author of sin.¹² Le Clerc maintained that to believe in the original corruption of children was contrary both to Scripture and to rational reasoning.¹³

Le Clerc's interpretation of Ps. 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me", followed a similar pattern. In his paraphrase, Le Clerc interpreted עָרַבְתִּי that is, "conceive", as *fovīt*, which bears more the meaning of "nourish." Le Clerc also added in this verse *me peccantem*, which was not in the original biblical passage.¹⁴ Le Clerc explained this interpretation more fully in the commentary of the verse, adding that David, the psalmist, had meant his own young age in the passage, not his time in the womb of his mother. He also supported his interpretation with a comparison of other passages from the Bible with similar expressions and even with pagan references, for example

- 10 In his commentary dedicated to the book of Psalms, one of the last ones that he composed, he applied this verse that states "no one does good, not even one" to Babylonians or rather Chaldeans, not to Jews. Le Clerc also added that the fact that the psalm says that God had to look down was only an anthropomorphism, because in reality God was always all-knowing: LE CLERC, *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi* 215 f. n. 1–3.
- 11 In the *Epistolæ theologicæ*, Le Clerc had dedicated a large part of the sixth epistle, titled "*Propagatio peccati nova methodo explicatur*", to an explanation of some of those biblical passages that were used by contenders of the doctrine of original sin to scripturally substantiate their claim that children were born already in a state of corruption. We find there Gn. 6:5; Job 14:4; Ps. 51:7[4]; Rm. 5:12; Jn. 3:6; Eph. 2:3. As counter examples, Le Clerc brought Dtn. 1:39; Jonah 4:2[10 f.]; Mt. 18:13[3]; 19:14; Rm. 9:2[11]; 1 Cor. 14:20; 1 Pet. 2:2[1f.]; LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 150–168. We will review in later sections some of these passages as discussed in Le Clerc's biblical commentaries.
- 12 Ibid. 170. This "creationist" conception of the generation of the soul, of which rationality was a part, was common in orthodox Reformed thought, and supported for example by F. Turretini and others. This does not mean, however, that also the opposite theory, "traducianism", in which the soul was considered as transmitted from parents to a new-born together with the material body, did not have other supporters. In any case, the difference between the orthodox Reformed and Le Clerc's position on this point consisted in that Reformed theologians, like Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), held that, although God created the soul freshly with each human being, due to original sin he withheld original righteousness. See MACLEOD, *Original Sin* 144 f.
- 13 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 173: "[S]ed dogma illud infantium corruptionis & scripturæ & rationi, ut ostendimus, est contrarium."
- 14 *Id.*, *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi*, paraphrase of verse 5 (in reality 7) 315.

from Cicero, to show that the expression was normally used metaphorically.¹⁵ In the end, the argument of the Arminian was that a child could not sin in the womb of his mother, because in order to sin, he had to have known divine law first, and this was impossible for a still unborn or a newly born child.¹⁶ The examples of this section thus evidence clearly Le Clerc's rejection of the traditional conception of original sin, especially if considered as a sort of primordial corruption with which every human being is born, an original depravity. This was, of course, in stark contrast with Reformed orthodoxy.¹⁷

6.2 Original Sin as Imitation

A practical consequence of the rejection of the traditional doctrine of original sin in Le Clerc was that the Arminian regarded the sin of Adam and Eve as without any ontological consequence for the rest of human beings in their capacity for goodness. Human beings were still capable of wanting and doing good. This idea was the fundament of much of Le Clerc's moral speculations. One place where this was shown clearly was in Le Clerc's commentary of Gen. 6:5: "[...] every intention of the thoughts of his heart [of human beings] was only evil continually." Le Clerc contended that the interpretation of this passage could only be mistakenly interpreted as a reference to a general corruption of humanity. The biblical writer had not intended to say that every thought of human beings before the deluge was infected with sin. In reality, so Le Clerc, this passage intended to describe a situation of great (historical) corruption, not a generalised condition. He remarked that it was not possible to regard human beings as fully corrupted, not even in that situation of greater corruption, on the one hand because human beings faced morally neutral things, but also more importantly because even just the remorse of conscience that they feel was considered by him as already a good thought. Sin had thus not completely taken over the human condition.¹⁸ In the context of this passage, it is also interesting to note that Le Clerc dedicated a significant portion of the note to showing that his own understanding of the passage was both sound compared to related biblical passages (he quoted the already mentioned Ps. 14:3 and Ps. 53:4) but more importantly to pagan antiquity. He quoted passages from

15 Ibid. comm. on verse 5 (in reality 7) 314 f.

16 Ibid. 314: "[...] [I]n utero matris, quo tempore peccare nequibat; omne enim peccatum cum sit violatio legis Divinae, notam eam necessario statuit; aut certe nosci potuisse à delinquente, nec nisi ejus culpá ignotum; postuletque ut is rationis compos sit, hoc est, norit quid agat, ab eoque etiam absteineat, si velit; sine quibus rebus, nemo reus haberi queat."

17 See MACLEOD, Original Sin 139; HAMPTON, Sin, Grace, and Free Choice 232 f.

18 LE CLERC, Genesis 50 n. 5: "Cum innumera sint ἀδιάρρορα, & pessimi etiam hominum quandoque bonas cogitationes animo versent, ut quando conscientiae sentiunt morsus."

Sophocles, Seneca, Euripides and Ovid.¹⁹ In any case, this attitude on the situation of human beings after the sin of Adam was not solely particular to Le Clerc, but part of his Arminian heritage even if, according to the pillars of Arminianism, as we have seen, the original innocence of human beings was not a constitutive part of the image of God in them.²⁰

Having practically dismissed both the essence of original sin and its ontological consequences on the will, we might easily consider Le Clerc's position fully Pelagian. Such a judgment would not be unreasonable, and in fact in later years Le Clerc was clearly accused of Pelagianism. Yet, for Le Clerc the fact that Adam and Eve did sin, *de facto*, was not fully without consequences, although these consequences were not of the kind typical of the Augustinian heritage. Hence Le Clerc in his youth writing: "*Quid ergo? an nulla erit peccati propagatio. Absit ut id putemus; est certè ut scripturâ & nimis tristi experientiâ constat.*"²¹

Key concepts, in this regard, were, early on in his writing, "habit" and later more clearly, "imitation." In his early writing, Le Clerc contended that children cannot be sinful, at least as long as their rationality is not developed enough to be able to sin with a rational choice. For him, the mind of a child before the onset of rationality was as in a state of dreaming, *veluti somno*, where bodily impulses could not be resisted. They were thus amoral: "*Itaque peccati necessariò immunes esse debent.*"²² The explanation that he proposed for the propagation of original sin was that children got used to following the impulses of their bodies and their passions and that they carried over this habit even after they became fully rational beings, thus adults.²³ The role of Adam in this was not spelled out clearly by Le Clerc in this passage; he only confirmed the common biblical teaching that "*Scriptura docet Adamum peccatum in mundum intulisse*";²⁴ and we can only conjecture it. It seems plausible to say that Adam's sin was like a model of irrationality that somehow became entrenched in human nature without, however, leaving any clear ontological trace in adulthood.

Le Clerc did not discuss this point in detail in his many other subsequent works, but it is clear from a number of passages that he slightly altered his conception of the propagation of original sin. Adam and Eve still remained "mod-

19 Ibid.

20 For Arminians, the impact of the sin of Adam on the rest of the human genre had been limited and the will had not been fundamentally corrupted: GOUDRIAAN, *The Synod of Dort* 98–101.

21 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicae* 174.

22 Ibid. 169.

23 Ibid. 175: "*Tamen quia ante rationis usum sese affectibus suis permittebant, eum habitum contraxerunt, ut quamvis non ignorent, aut saltem scire possint, id semper licitum non esse, se se ab iis extra rationis ac æquitatis metas rapi patiantur, quod vitium usu in dies confirmatur.*"

24 Ibid. 174.

els” of subsequent sin, but their influence on human nature as such was further weakened. The infant irrationality, which seemed in Le Clerc’s early writing to still be an ontological effect of original sin, although of little weight and lost in adulthood, was no longer explained as the cause of sin. This influence became purely a matter of imitation of the sin of the first progenitors, who were culpable of having been the first.²⁵ So Rom. 5:19, “by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners”, was interpreted by Le Clerc as: “il est certain que la multitude de ceux, qui imitent Adam sont sujets à la même condamnation que lui.”²⁶

The explanation of sin as imitation was not in contrast to the earlier view that the effect of original sin was a “habit”, but the accent was more on the active imitation, although even in the earlier discussion of habit Le Clerc had contended that such an attitude would not lead any human being necessarily to sin.²⁷ Furthermore, what would influence human beings so that they choose to imitate the sin of Adam and Eve was no longer traced back by Le Clerc to a habit of following their own passions while in the a-rational state of infancy, but as the product of bad examples of adults, which have detrimental effects while in that infant state.²⁸

25 Adam and Eve were conceived by Le Clerc as initiators of human sinning, not in an ontological sense but rather simply in a chronological one. This thought was present years later in his exegetical works. In his commentary on Gen. 3:1, Le Clerc confirmed this: “*primos, scilicet, humani generis Parentes initium fecisse peccandi*”, and admitted his ignorance on the exact circumstances of that first sin, without supporting any of the other Reformed positions on that particular point: “*At quomodo peccatum in orbem ingressum sit, adeo ut primi peccati circumstantias perspicue, & sine ulla dubitandi ratione, intelligere possimus, indicare eorum esset, qui rei interfuerunt, si reviviscerent.*” A similar, non-ontological understanding of the sin of Adam and Eve was present in another exegetical passage some years later, this time in conjunction with a commentary on Rom. 5:15 and specifically the passage “si par le peché d’un seul plusieurs sont morts”. Here, Le Clerc commented that “Adam seul a tant fait de mal à sa posterité, en introduisant le peche [sic] au monde”: Le Nouveau Testament 2, 98 n. 15; see also id., Genesis comm. 25 n. 1. This first sin was considered by the other Reformed theologians as originating in an abuse of freedom, or a disobedience by the first progenitors, that was consequent to demonic persuasion. See, for example, HEIDEGGER, *Medulla medullæ theologiæ* 75 f.; MACLEOD, *Original Sin* 135. Heidegger was, together with F. Turretini, the author of the *Consensus Helveticus* and therefore one of the most authoritative figures of 17th-century Reformation thought. The *Synopsis purioris theologiæ*, a standard textbook of Reformed orthodoxy, composed in the beginning of the 17th century, contended that the very origin of the primordial sin had been that Adam and Eve had doubted God’s threat and that the rest followed from this: RIVET et al., *Synopsis purioris theologiæ* 144. This is also later in TURRETINI, *Institutio theologiæ elencticæ* 1, 653. For an introduction to the purpose and structure of the *Synopsis*, see TE VELDE/FERWERDA, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiæ* 1, 1–16.

26 LE CLERC, *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 99 n. 19.

27 Id., *Epistolæ theologiæ* 176.

28 Id., *BAM* 28/2 (art. 4) 412: “Peu à peu, ils deviennent pires, parce que les Adultes, qui les élevent, leur donnent de mauvais exemples, & tiennent aussi de mauvais discours devant eux, & même les excitent à faire du Mal, avant qu’ils sachent distinguer le Mal du Bien.”

The shift in perspective in Le Clerc might have been influenced by the work of his fellow Arminian Le Cène, who in their common book had argued that the effect of the sin of Adam was of being a model of imitation.²⁹ However, this idea preceded even Le Cène.³⁰

One strong objection to the idea that original sin was only a model for sinning, without any significant ontological effect, was the experience of human death. This could be considered the clearest consequence of original sin. Over the course of the years, Le Clerc's thought on this point changed slightly. In the *Epistolæ theologicæ*, he argued that the biology of Adam and Eve made them mortal by design, but that through the eating of the fruit of the tree of life in the garden of Eden, they would have been practically immortal.³¹ Within this conception of the sin of Adam and Eve, their sin had had a detrimental role for the whole of humanity because it caused the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and so the impossibility to reach the fruit of the tree of life. Yet again, this was not really an ontological consequence (and posterity could not be said to be culpable of that sin, at least for the reasons we have seen so far). We find a similar idea later in his commentary on Gn. 3:19, but there is no longer any reference to the capacity of the fruit to restore Adam and Eve's bodily strength, but only to an undetermined action of preservation performed by God, which was negated to the disobedient Adam.³² Here, the importance of the first sin compared to subsequent sins of Adam and Eve was left undetermined.

Years later, this last distinction, between the first and later sins, became obsolete and the death of Adam and Eve and their posterity became the consequence of not only the first sin, but of subsequent sins too (both their sins and those of their posterity). In this way, the whole of humanity was individually responsible for their own deaths as caused by their own sins, rather than simply as a consequence of the sin of Adam. The passage in Rm. 5:12, which was sometimes translated to

29 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 154. 163: "Dieu ne visite l'iniquité des Peres sur les enfants que quand ces derniers imitent les premiers; au lieu que nos Imputateurs veulent que le peché d'Adam soit imputé des le ventre de la mere, & avant qu'on soit en état d'imiter où de fuir l'injustice" and also "[...]Adam par son mauvais exemple a montré à sa posterité le chemin de transgresser les loix de Dieu, & que les hommes l'ont imité, ce qui les a rendus pecheurs, & les a assujettis à la mort."

30 According to SANLON, *Original Sin* 96, in Pelagianism sin was considered substantially the result of imitation.

31 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 131: "[E]rat enim ad manum fructus arboris vitæ, qui, ut patet ex Gen. III. 22. à Deo destinatus fuerat in eum usum, ut vires repararet, & quæ ad vitam necessaria sunt conservaret. Mortalis ergo erat Adamus, hoc est, eo corpore præditus quod per se & viribus propriis senio resistere non poterat, sed nunquam moriturus quia aderant auxilia quibus corpus sustentaretur, & cura peculiaris Dei"

32 Id., *Genesis* 33 n. 19: "Ex pulvere diluto constabat, adeoque, nisi Deus aliquâ obstaret, dissolvi potuit."

imply that death came into the world through Adam, “*in which* all sinned”, was translated differently by Le Clerc. The *éφ’ ᾧ*, the contested part, did not refer to Adam, Le Clerc claimed, because the position of the name of Adam was far from the rest of the sentence. The *éφ’ ᾧ* had therefore to be translated as “because”, so that the passage meant that death came into the world through Adam *because* all sinned.³³ Death became thus a punishment for sin even if someone could object that human beings died even before divine law was given to Moses, and that without law there could not be a punishment. To this possible objection, Le Clerc replied with the argument from natural law. Even before Moses, he contended, there was a valid natural law and this was attested by the fact that human beings were punished with death even before Moses.³⁴ In any case, death as punishment was still understood by Le Clerc as a deprivation of divine support caused by individual sins. Far from him was the concept that death was the result of God’s imputation of the sin of Adam and Eve upon the whole of humanity.³⁵

Another crucial point that Le Clerc had to clarify to coherently argue against the traditional doctrine of original sin was the common human experience of the tendency to sin. He had been always clear on this point, that the tendency to the sensible and the pleasurable, so often associated with sin, was not the result of a sort of Augustinian concupiscence derived from original sin, the position of the orthodox Reformed.³⁶ A passage from Le Clerc would seem to contradict this. He argued that: “*In hoc situm est peccatum originis, quod proinde nihil est aliud præter nimium rerum sensibilibium amorem, quo mens ita occæcatur & malè cogitando as-*

33 Id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 97 n. 12.

34 Ibid. 98 n. 13 f.

35 See, for example Le Clerc’s commentary on 1 Cor. 15:21 f.: *ibid.* 163 n. 21 f. In this, Le Clerc differed for example from HAMMOND, *A Paraphrase* 560, who in the same passage argued that death was the result of the imputation of the sin of Adam on human nature. The propagation of that imputation and the consequent death was carried out through biology, but the origin of that was traced back to God’s active imputation. In this case, Hammond was more in line with orthodox Reformed thought. In canon XII of the *Consensus Helveticus*, the idea of “immediate” imputation was made clear, in opposition to Josué de la Place (1596?–1655), who had argued in favour of a “mediated” imputation, according to which it was fundamental that human beings give their consent to the heritage of Adam’s sin. Le Clerc was well aware of the position of de la Place and had quoted him in *Epistolæ theologicae* 152. He was in agreement with Le Cène, who was contrary to the imputation of original sin because he considered it unjust that the sin of the forefathers was simply passed on to their posterity without the need for their consent (but the orthodox Reformed would have replied that consent was “concomitant” with the transmission of life). Le Cène supported also the idea that Adam was mortal even before sinning and that death was a natural component of his nature. See also MACLEOD, *Original Sin* 137 f.; HAMPTON, *Sin, Grace, and Free Choice* 232–235.

36 RIVET et al., *Synopsis purioris theologiae* 157 f. See also HAMPTON, *ibid.* 232 f.

*suescit, ut nonnisi Dei Omnipotentis ope sanari possit.*³⁷ This has been interpreted as Le Clerc's own thought,³⁸ but this interpretation does not take into account the context of the sentence. Here, Le Clerc provided a summary of adversary positions,³⁹ and in fact his early thought on this was that the tendency to sin was simply the result of a habit of following one's own impulses. These impulses were, however, not sinful in themselves, because a child, without rational awareness of divine law, could not be blamed for them.⁴⁰

In later years, Le Clerc's thought on this point remained unchanged, and we find a similar explanation of the tendency to sin considered as a habit, as was the case in the *Epistolæ theologicæ*. This was so despite the fact that Limborch had openly expressed his disagreement, commenting the *Epistolæ theologicæ*, on what he considered an excessively optimistic consideration of human nature in Le Clerc: "*Vellem te paulo expressius ostendisse, esse aliquod in natura nostra vitium, physicum nempe, non morale, quo fit, ut proniores simus in ejusmodi objecta, quæ nos ad peccandum proritare solent.*"⁴¹ Limborch's concern was that Le Clerc, in this way, could have fuelled accusations of Pelagianism moved to Arminians.⁴² Le Clerc persisted in his "optimism" and argued that it was God himself that created human beings with the tendency to the sensible and the pleasurable: "*Ita enim à Deo facti sumus, ut abhorreamus à dolore, voluptatèmq̃ue amemus; nec ullum est, ea in re, vitium.*"⁴³ Common to Le Clerc, Limborch and also to Le Cène was the idea that the tendency to the pleasurable and the sensible, or the tendency to

37 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 171.

38 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1, 71 n. 15, claimed that "[i]l peccato originale, comunicato dai genitori ai figli, era visto dal Le Clerc essere 'nihil aliud praeter nimium rerum sensibilibium amorem, quo mens ita occaecatur et male cogitando assuescit, ut nonnisi Dei Omnipotentis ope sanari possit'."

39 LE CLERC, *Epistolæ theologicæ* 170: "*Hic eos qui mentem propagari volunt non moror tam absurda est ea opinio ut vix mentione digna sit, videndum duntaxat quid ab iis qui mentem à Deo creatam in corpore corrumpi, afferatur memoratu dignum.*" Le Clerc, *ibid.* 173, then presented different arguments which were openly contrary to his own positions, even within the *Epistolæ theologicæ* themselves, and the related difficulties, showing the weakness of these arguments. He then concluded this argument by adding: "*Hosce nodos cum solvere nequeant sententiæ hujus patroni, desinant facilitatem explicationis suæ jactare, & tandem agnoscant rem quæ neque scripturâ probari potest neque ratione explicari, esse saltem valde dubiam, ac proinde pro fidei capite haberi non debere.*"

40 *Ibid.* 175.

41 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 17 of 6 October 1682) 64.

42 *Ibid.*

43 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 103 f. Limborch's stance on this had considered the material world in a more negative way, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 17 of 6 October 1682) 64: "*Temperamentum quippe minus purum in nobis est, majoremque cum objectis, ex quibus carni voluptas oritur, habet convenientiam: inde fit, ut ab ejusmodi objectis facilius excitentur spiritus nostri animales, qui dum aliquos in corpore nostro motus efficiunt, fit etiam ut aliquæ inde oriantur menti cogitationes.*"

sin, was not sinful in itself, but became sinful only in practice, that is, if it was left unconstrained by the power of reason.⁴⁴

6.3 Debates, Orthodoxy and Strategic Use of Sources

Le Clerc's peculiar position on the doctrine of original sin, as is clear from the previous pages, was also far from traditional Arminian views, if we compare it to the original remonstrance of 1610. Here, the first article had described the human condition after the sin of Adam and Eve as "*genere humano in peccatum prolapse*."⁴⁵ Le Clerc's position was, however, at least partially in line with later developments in Arminianism, which tended towards the full rejection of this doctrine,⁴⁶ and obviously also diametrically opposite to the belief of the orthodox Reformed (and of the Jansenists). In this sense, Le Clerc had to take part in the development of Arminian theology and shield it from accusations of heterodoxy coming from multiple sides. In order to do this, Le Clerc employed substantially two strategies, which we will now review. The first involved an at times selective return to and the correction of allegedly wrong interpretations of the pillars of Arminianism, the work of Arminius, Episcopius and Limborch mainly; the second looked back at the early Church, and here we find Origen again.

Strategy 1: Return to the pillars of Arminianism

A paradigmatic example of the first strategy was Le Clerc's epistolary exchange with the English divine William Nicholls (1664–1712) during the years 1707–1708. It was Nicholls who started the correspondence with Le Clerc with a letter on 1 August 1707. Together with this letter, Nicholls also sent Le Clerc his own *Defen-*

44 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 104: "*Ex fuga doloris, & inquisitione voluptatis, nascuntur omnes hominum affectus, qui per se quidem mali non sunt; si intra modum à Ratione contineantur; sed mali fiunt, quando vehementiâ suâ obstant ne divinis Legibus, ob præsentem voluptatem, vel instantis doloris metum, pareamus.*" For Limborch and Le Cène, see VAN LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 130 f.; LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 171 f. This confirms the primary role of the intellect within the Arminian theology of sin as maintained by GOUDRIAAN, *The Synod of Dort* 88 f. 102, who also referred to Norman S. Fiering on that matter. Although Goudriaan pointed out that such a "rationalist" approach was also shared by orthodox Reformed theologians, he stressed the fact that, contrary to the latter, the Arminian will was "not drastically affected by sin."

45 BERTIUS, *Scripta adversaria* 62. This was also reflected in Le Clerc's report on the five articles of remonstrance, where he translated this passage as "masse corrompue du genre humain": LE CLERC, *BUH* 4 (art. 8) 327.

46 See GOUDRIAAN, *The Synod of Dort* 84; STANGLIN, *Arminian, Remonstrant, and Early Methodist Theologies* 393.

sio ecclesiae Anglicanae, which had been published in the same year.⁴⁷ In this letter, Nicholls asked Le Clerc for an opinion on his work, which discussed, among other things, fundamental doctrines of Arminianism and how they sometimes differed from those held by the Anglican Church.⁴⁸ Nicholls did not have to wait long for Le Clerc's reply, because Le Clerc sent him a response between September and October of the same year. Moreover, the importance of the matter for Le Clerc appears from the fact that he did not write any other letter in the meantime. His reply was a point-by-point discussion of the subjects where he believed, or so he stated, that Nicholls had been misinformed.⁴⁹ Nicholls replied promptly with a precise discussion of each of the points raised by Le Clerc, mostly defending his earlier interpretation of Arminianism, although admitting his at times second-hand knowledge of it.⁵⁰ To this letter, Le Clerc came back the following January 1708 criticising Nicholls' sources.⁵¹ Nicholls closed the conversation in March 1708, seemingly accepting Le Clerc's argument, although he also mentioned ambiguities in the writings of some of the Remonstrants as an added element that contributed to the misunderstanding of the Arminian thought.⁵²

Most of the points raised by Le Clerc in his first reply to Nicholls were related to the doctrine of original sin. Nicholls had contended, for example, that Arminians do not share the belief in the propagation of the sin of Adam and Eve: "[Arminians contend that] *infelix Adami peccatum sibi solum nocuisse*."⁵³ Le Clerc replied by pointing back to Episcopius and Limborch, and quoted the former, who had contended that the effect of the first sin was not reserved to Adam and Eve only, but also to the whole of their posterity.⁵⁴ Le Clerc's reply was faithful to what Episcopius had written, at least formally, where this had contended that the original sin of Adam and Eve had had as consequence the loss of the original justice of humanity, misery and death. However, Le Clerc, of course, neglected to

47 NICHOLLS, *Defensio ecclesiae Anglicanae*. Nicholls later translated this work into English, and this was published posthumously in 1715 as *A Defence of the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England*.

48 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 444 of 1 August 1707) 82f. So NICHOLLS, *ibid.* 147: "*Nos non omnia cum Contraremonstrantibus sentire; neque in rebus Theologicis opinari, Belgicorum Conciliorum autoritate adductos; sed rerum ipsarum pondere evictos, & quòd à sacra Scriptura aut antiquis Patribus, aut magnis nostris in hac Ecclesia Antecessoribus eadem dicta fuerint, pro certo habere.*"

49 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 85–96.

50 *Ibid.* (letter 447 of 6 November 1707) 96–110.

51 *Ibid.* (letter 454 of 31 January 1708) 125–131.

52 *Ibid.* (letter 457 of 31 March 1708) 139–142.

53 NICHOLLS, *Defensio ecclesiae Anglicanae* 184. Le Clerc quoted Nicholls in his letter in the following way, SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 87: "*Postea Remonstrantes contendere ais infelix Adami peccatum ei solum nocuisse.*"

54 *Ibid.* The quoted passage in Episcopius is from EPISCOPIUS, *Confessio* 81.

mention that Episcopius had also contended in the same passage that, through Jesus, the imputation of that original sin had been cancelled, so that the sin of Adam and Eve had no soteriological consequences for the rest of humanity.⁵⁵ The same applies to the passage he referred to from Limborch, where Le Clerc only referred to par. 1, where Limborch initially seemed to point to the detrimental effects of the original sin of Adam for the whole of humanity. Le Clerc failed to mention that Limborch in par. 3 and 4 explicitly rejected the idea of an imputation of that sin to the human genre and concluded that: “[v]ox peccati originis nusquam in Scriptura legitur.”⁵⁶

The strategy employed by Le Clerc in this specific case was to defend Arminianism from the implicit (but not too implicit) accusation of Pelagianism in Nichol’s work by resorting selectively, as we have seen, to Episcopius and Limborch. This was not at all different from the style of Nicholls,⁵⁷ but Le Clerc pretended to focus on what he considered as the most representative passages in Arminianism for this occasion, which Nicholls had misunderstood, and interpret them correctly. When Nicholls commented on the answer given to him by Le Clerc in the just seen example, he employed the same strategy and also quoted from Episcopius and Arminius.⁵⁸ Le Clerc’s further reply reaffirmed that what he had contended was the correct interpretation of the “classics” of Arminianism and accused Nicholls of bad faith.⁵⁹

Another passage, where we see Le Clerc’s strategy even more clearly in place, was on the subject of concupiscence. Nicholls has contended that the Armin-

55 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.*

56 VAN LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 182.

57 Nicholls had also quoted from Arminius and Episcopius in his *Defensio ecclesiae Anglicanae* (see for example p. 185) and did the same in his epistolary reply, where he however also quoted from works that Le Clerc later condemned as composed by enemies of Arminianism. In any case, Nicholls himself later admitted that his knowledge of Arminian theology was based on quotations he had collected many years before or only indirectly. SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 447 of 6 November 1707) 98: “*Huic infortunio accessit, quod ipse, dum ista pars Libri prælo succumberet, febri fuerim correptus, qua sex septimanas lecto domive detentus sum, nec notulis, quas huic parti destinabam, par fui adijciendis. Raptim tantum dabam nudas Citationes, partim quas ipse collegeram aliquot retro annis, cum in domo Convocationis Designatus fui, ad examinandum, utrum cum Articulis nostræ Ecclesiae congruerent Limborchij Institutiones, nuperrime tum conversæ in Linguam Anglicanam; partim ex celeberrimis alijs Authoribus, qui, cum vestræ Controversiæ maxime flagrarent, scripserunt.*” Moreover, as Sina, *ibid.* 107 n. 18, noted, Nicholls’ quotes were not precise and thus, in part, justify Le Clerc’s attempt to show him the “correct” theology of Arminianism.

58 *Ibid.* 99–100.

59 *Ibid.* (letter 454 of 31 January 1708) 126: “*Mirror inter alias citationes Theologorum Remonstrantium, quibus probare conaris eos dogmata, quæ pernegant, fovere, memorari a te loca nonnulla indicata in Limburgii nostri Theologia, quæ, si legantur paullo adtentius contraria omnia arguunt. Cum ea non aliorum fidem sequutus, sed ex tua lectione indicaveris, vereor ne hoc candoris tui famæ nonnihil detrahat.*”

ians reduced the tendency to sin inherent to original sin to a simple habit: “[the Arminians] *propensam peccandi libidinem, [...] aut omninò pernegantes, aut non alia ferè causæ ascribentes, quam malæ hominum consuetudini, aut habitui cuidam constituto animi peccatis assueti.*”⁶⁰ Le Clerc rightly argued that one of the two references by Nicholls on Episcopus did not contain anything on that,⁶¹ and that his interpretation of the second was misunderstood. This second reference, in the version contained in Le Clerc’s letter, reads:

“*Præter hoc peccatum (Originale, scilicet) sunt et alia propria, seu actualia uniuscujusque hominis peccata, quæ et reatum nostrum coram Deo reverà multiplicant et mentem in rebus spiritualibus obscurant, imo paulatim excæcant, denique voluntatem nostram magis ac magis adsuetudine ipsâ peccandi depravant.*”⁶²

In this passage, Episcopus seemed to contend that actual sins, in addition to the original one, lead human beings into a habit of sinning, in which the human intellect and will deteriorate. Thus, Augustinian concupiscence becomes not only the result of original sin, but also of subsequent sins, although that first sin is not at all deprived of its own weight. This expression in Episcopus justifies the fact that Le Clerc stressed the “*præter hoc peccatum*” in that passage, in order to reject Nicholls’ claim that Arminians reject the concept of concupiscence from original sin altogether.⁶³

The only problem with Le Clerc’s interpretation of Episcopus’ passage is that he de-contextualised it. Before the mentioned passage, Episcopus had discussed the effects of original sin, both soteriological and material, but at the same time, as mentioned earlier, he had discounted any negative soteriological effect of that due to the sacrifice of Jesus:

“*Atque hoc vulgo, peccatum originis dici solet. De quo tamen tenendum est, Deum illum benignissimum, isti generali malo, quod ad nos ab Adamo derivatum est, gratuitum in Filio suo dilecto Jesu Christo velut altero & novo Adamo, remedium omnibus præparasse. Ut vel hinc*

60 NICHOLLS, *Defensio ecclesiæ Anglicanæ* 185. Le Clerc reported it as “*insimulas postea Remonstrantes, quod propensam peccandi libidinem non alii fere causæ, quam malæ hominum consuetudini adscribant*”: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 87.

61 *Ibid.* The questioned passage was, in this case, EPISCOPIUS, *Confessio* 80.

62 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 87 f. The original passage (very similar to the one reported by Le Clerc) reads, EPISCOPIUS, *ibid.* 81: “*Præter hoc peccatum [original sin] sunt & alia propria, seu actualia uniuscujusque hominis peccata; quæ & reatum nostrum coram Deo revera multiplicant & mentem in rebus spiritualibus obscurant, imo paulatim excæcant, denique voluntatem nostram magis ac magis adsuetudine ipsa peccandi depravant.*”

63 *Ibid.* 88.

*noxius illorum error satis appareat, qui decretum absolutæ reprobationis, ab ipsis confictum, in isto peccato fundare solent.*⁶⁴

When Episcopius started the next paragraph with the “*præter hoc peccatum*”, it was surely pointing to original sin, but at the same time to his own understanding of it, where he had already strongly diminished the real effect of that first sin on the human condition, at least at the soteriological level. For this reason, Le Clerc’s operation was, again, formally correct as a rejection of Nicholls’ claim, but did not fully represent Episcopius’ thought either. Nicholls’ reply quoted only secondary sources of information on Arminian thought, but here the English divine seemed to have grasped the scarce weight given by Episcopius to human concupiscence caused by original sin: “*Propter hoc allego Confessionem Remonstrantium, quae eam rem [tendency to sin] duabus causis ascribit, sed præcipue secundæ [human habit].*”⁶⁵ Thus, Le Clerc’s reply must have been not too convincing for him either. We could provide further examples of this strategy in Le Clerc’s correspondence with Nicholls, where the latter even seemed to have discovered Le Clerc’s strategy,⁶⁶ even though sometimes Le Clerc’s defence of Arminianism was also fully genuine but at the same time also failed to really address Nicholls’ concerns.⁶⁷

64 Ibid. 81.

65 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 3 (letter 447 of 6 November 1707) 100.

66 A further example regards the discussion on baptism, where Nicholls was able to discover Le Clerc’s strategy. NICHOLLS, *Defensio Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ* 193, had contended that “*Non cum illis [Arminians] credimus Baptismum tantum esse perantiquam Ceremoniam, ex depravata quadam Apostolorum imitatione sumptam, per quem, ex Majorum more, Christianis Mysteriis Novitii initiuntur.*” Le Clerc had reported this as “*hanc sententiam tribuis Remonstrantibus, Baptismum esse tantum perantiquam Ceremoniam, ex depravata quadam Apostolorum imitatione sumtam [sic]*”: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 90. He quoted a significant number of Arminian passages to reject this claim, mainly from Episcopius and Limborch. The crucial passage was from Episcopius’ *Disputationes*, especially the corollary 1, EPISCOPIUS, *Disputationes* 458: “*An Baptismum Ceremoniam & ritum fuisse tantum temporarium, & nullo præcepto Jesu Christi ab Apostolis tantum usurpatum atque exercitum, ulla solida ratione demonstrari possit? Neg. [Negatur].*” This passage Le Clerc quoted fully in his letter to Nicholls as confutation: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* Although this passage was somehow ambiguous, and Episcopius seemed not really to affirm the sacramentality of baptism, but rather that such sacramentality could not be rationally disproven, Le Clerc seemed to put particular explanatory power on it. Nicholls, however, discovered Le Clerc’s strategy, especially the fact that he had taken Episcopius’ assertion out of its original context. *Ibid.* (letter 447 of 6 November 1707) 102, he pointed to “*thesis 8*”, which was contained in the same page as the corollary and which affirmed: “*Effectus sive finis Baptismi, non est realis aliqua gratiæ collatio, sed sola tantum divinæ gratiæ & professionis nostræ significatio.*” In this way, Nicholls reaffirmed his original point.

67 This was the case, for example, with the qualification of the natural appetite for sensible things of human beings. For Nicholls, such an appetite was to be considered negatively because it was the result of the corruption of the human condition generated by original sin.

Strategy 2: Recourse to the Early Church

We will now consider Le Clerc's references to the Early Church, and in particular to Origen, the second strategy employed by Le Clerc in discussions on original sin. These references were surely part of the continuous development of Arminian theology, to which Le Clerc contributed, consciously or not, and of his defence from accusations of heterodoxy, as in the examples from the previous section, but in their background we also sense a continuous polemic with Reformed orthodoxy.

Although the patristic interests of the Arminian were already present from his youth, we need to wait for the last quarter of his life to find an explicit and genuine recourse to Origen in theological debates. His argumentative strategy in the use of the Fathers and of Origen in particular changed dramatically from the "disavowed theodicy" of Origen that he presented to Bayle in earlier years – we will come back to this debate. This only late appearance of Origen as legitimate theological interlocutor could be explained, at least in part, by the fact that Le Clerc did not have to argue as cautiously as in earlier years, because his wishes and efforts for a better post in England had vanished at that point.⁶⁸

To start with the first references to Origen that we find in the discussion of the doctrine of original sin, these were from the years 1715–1716. In these references, Le Clerc did not yet state clearly his belief that the early Church was

His accusation to Arminians was that their judgment on that natural appetite was morally indifferent, NICHOLLS, *Defensio ecclesiae Anglicanae* 185f.: "*turbatos eos animi motus, & rerum illicitarum appetitiones, minimè à Deo improbari, sed uti insignioris virtutis Semina, si non in vitiosos actus erumpunt, ei potius placere.*" Le Clerc addressed this point by claiming that no Arminians had argued in that manner, and quoted Episcopus and Limborch: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *ibid.* (letter 446 of September/October 1707) 88. If we compare Le Clerc's references to Nicholls' claim, we find that the evidence that supported Le Clerc was blurrier in Episcopus but seemed somehow to support his view of the Arminian position. However, Le Clerc's reference to Limborch seemed to fully reinforce Nicholls' claim, thus work against him, because Limborch had expressed clearly his belief that the inclination to sin or to the sensible was not sinful in itself. Le Clerc, *ibid.*, explained that "*Non agit [meaning Limborch] de quavis appetitione, sed de actibus illis, qui primo primi a Schola dicuntur et quibus voluntas resistit, de quibus copiosius egit Lib. V, c. IV, 8, 9.*" This explanation seemed to rather reinforce Nicholls' claim that Arminians do not believe in an inherent corruption in man due to original sin and which is expressed in everyday concupiscent impulses. That Le Clerc missed the point, on this occasion, is evident also from Nicholls' reply, where on this point he stressed that, in the sources that Le Clerc had quoted, the concept of the inherent corruption in man was not there, *ibid.* (letter 447 of 6 November 1707) 101: "*Putavi de hisce rebus melius loqui Articulos nostros. Manet etiam in renatis haec naturae Depravatio etc. et quanquam ijs qui credunt et baptizantur, nulla est condemnatio, tamen in se rationem peccati habere concupiscentiam fatetur Apostolus.*" See EPISCOPIUS, *Disputationes* 452, 454, and VAN LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 182, 407–409, for the original references in Le Clerc.

68 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (introduzione) x.

fundamentally Pelagian. The first mention of 1715 was tentative and subtle. The occasion was a review of Montfaucon's *Collectio nova*, where the French monk, discussing Eusebius' alleged rejection of the doctrine of original sin, mentioned the possibility that Eusebius could have followed Origen on that. Montfaucon reassured, however, that such opinion was false and that, according to him, there were some passages in Origen's work that attested his doctrinal orthodoxy on the matter. Le Clerc reported faithfully Montfaucon's opinion, but at the same time included a very small addition and a reflection that seemed to weaken Montfaucon's argument. The Arminian added to his review, shortly after including the discussion of the Origenian paternity of Eusebius' position, that Origen's doctrine of "pre-existence" was in contradiction with the doctrine of original sin.⁶⁹ This reference was not in Montfaucon's original text.⁷⁰ Moreover, Le Clerc reported Montfaucon's claim that Origen had been condemned officially by the Church for his rejection of original sin but also Montfaucon's explanation on that, that the Church had condemned Origen because his works had been interpolated. However, Le Clerc added, and this was his own reflection not found in Montfaucon's text, that the council had condemned Origen's doctrine of pre-existence, but not explicitly his stance on original sin.⁷¹ He thus once again weakened Montfaucon's claim and gave the impression that Origen really did not believe in original sin.

A reference from 1716, this time from Le Clerc's main work of those years, the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, went one decisive step in the direction already sketched. The mention of Origen was set within a larger discussion on *Prolegomena*, where the Arminian discussed the fundamentals of Jewish religion first, then pagan philosophy and religion and ultimately Christian religion. Within this last section, after general considerations on God and angels, it was the time of a "*Sententia Christianorum de Homine & Legibus à Deo ei latis*" or anthropology and morality, where the first topic we encounter was the creation of Adam and Eve and related subjects. The point where the reference to Origen took place was a long note to the sentence: "*Ita enim à Deo facti sumus, ut abhorreamus à dolore, voluptatémque amemus; nec ullum est, ea in re, vitium.*"⁷² The subject was the constitutive goodness of human beings, even in reference to those aspects, like the love for pleasurable things, that with an Augustinian-Reformed outlook would have been considered the result of original sin and part of "concupiscence."

Le Clerc started his note with a long reference to Calcidius' commentary to Plato's *Timæus*, where the philosopher contended that our sense of suffering and of pleasure was born of our nature, but that it was applied to the wrong objects

69 LE CLERC, BAM 4 (art. 1) 21.

70 DE MONTFAUCON, *Collectio nova* xxx.

71 LE CLERC, BAM 4 (part 1, art. 1) 22.

72 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 103 f.

when we grow up and that this error was corroborated socially and through poetry. Then it followed Le Clerc's own Latin translation of a passage from Origen's *Contra Celsum*, where Origen was shown to be of a similar opinion on that, that is that our nature was created without vice but that it was later corrupted by external influences:

*“Unam esse naturam omnis animæ rationalis, & dicere nullam malam à rerum omnium Creatore esse factam, multos verè malos evasisse per educationem, aut depravationem (aliorum) aut sermones qui circa eos insonuerunt, ita ut in quibusdam malitia in naturam versa sit.”*⁷³

This quote from Origen was introduced and followed by two statements that seemed to warn that, although in the note, the Alexandrian could be understood as professing his Pelagianism, in reality he could not be easily accused of Pelagianism. The warning Le Clerc wrote before the quote was: “[referring to Origen] *quamvis non diffiteatur homines priùs vitio infici, quàm virtutem sequantur*”;⁷⁴ which seems generally formulated to allow for some room for the possibility of a sort of non-Pelagian orthodoxy in Origen. This was, however, not decisively so, because the mere fact that Origen did not negate (the *diffiteatur*) a vicious corruption in human beings, did not seem a strong enough way to state that this was Origen's belief. This was further confirmed by the indication that Le Clerc included after the quote (in which original sin was practically negated), where the Arminian stated that Origen's later condemnation by the Church did not touch on his belief or rejection of original sin. In fact, Le Clerc added, the essential goodness of human beings was the continuous belief of the Greek Church, something he showed by also briefly mentioning a passage from John Chrysostom and even Isidore of Pelusium.⁷⁵

Around ten years later, and at the dawn of his scholarly life, Le Clerc expressed even more openly his understanding of the relationship of the early Church with the doctrine of original sin. The occasion was a review of an edition by Jacques Basnage of Henricus Canisius' (1562–1610) *Thesaurus monumentorum*. Here, Le Clerc analysed thoroughly Basnage's long *præfatio*, where Basnage had claimed that the Fathers, he quoted Origen and Titus of Bostra, had explained the essential freedom of man in a Pelagian way and that they remained silent on the doctrine of original sin.⁷⁶ The friction between the two authors, Le Clerc and Basnage,

73 Ibid. 102 f. n. 1. Le Clerc referred to the 1658 edition of Spencer, page 155 [153] for the Greek text, but translated it into Latin in a slightly different way compared to Spencer CC III 69 (p. 174 Chadwick).

74 LE CLERC, *Historia ecclesiastica* 102–104 n. 1.

75 Ibid.

76 Id., BAM 23/2 (art. 1) 248 f. The review of Le Clerc followed faithfully the original text of Basnage, at least in what concerns the topics reviewed here. See CANISIUS, *Thesaurus monumentorum* (præfatio) 3–10.

evident from Le Clerc's review, did not concern the content of the Father's belief, but its orthodoxy. Le Clerc tried to prevent the position of the Fathers on original sin identified by Basnage being interpreted as a "novelty", an invention of Origen and his followers. For this reason, Le Clerc added a personal reflection within the text in which he stated that the practical absence of the doctrine of original sin was not contrary to the thought of the very first Fathers and that Origen's thought might have even preceded him. He stated: "Je ne sai néanmoins si l'on ne peut pas dire, que ce sentiment étoit reçu avant *Origene*. Au moins il ne paroît pas que les Peres les plus Anciens ayent rien dit, qui fût incompatible avec cela."⁷⁷ Le Clerc also (and very importantly) contended that Origen's thought was ultimately a true interpretation of the revealed message and contrasted Basnage's claim that argued in the opposite direction.⁷⁸ In the end, so Le Clerc, because it discharged God from the accusation of being the author of sin and of evil, one should prefer the thought of Origen and the Greek Church: "le sentiment contraire [contrary to the one of Augustine, meant here is the thought of Origen], qui est celui de toute l'Eglise Grecque, doit être préféré."⁷⁹

This reflection was further enriched by Le Clerc towards the end of this long review of Basnage's work. Le Clerc cleared Faustus of Riez (died c. 490) of Basnage's accusation of heterodoxy because of his semi-Pelagianism. Le Clerc contended that semi-Pelagianism was the common belief of the Greek Church and that it had never been condemned, neither by the oriental, nor by the occidental Church, "au moins en tous ses Articles."⁸⁰ Semi-Pelagianism, at least in the way conceived by Le Clerc, was a middle way between a strict predestinarian and a fully Pelagian conception of soteriology. God's predestination was based on the foreseen merits or faults of a person and his or her acceptance or rejection of God's grace, which was the only true beginning of that saving journey.⁸¹

77 LE CLERC, BAM 23/2 (art. 1) 251. It is interesting to note that there is still an open debate on this point, but which regards the "opposite side" of the camp, that is Augustine's doctrine. Some claim that reflections on original sin before Augustine had been nowhere near the formation of a real "doctrine", although some elements of it had existed before. Augustine, it has also been claimed, in reality made explicit a still older ecclesiastical tradition and practice, with Cyprian and Irenaeus among the precursors, and supported his formulation with Scriptural evidence. The "discontinuity" thesis, in turn, argues that Augustine's formulation of the doctrine was a novelty that could not be found in earlier centuries. See MCFARLAND, In Adam's Fall 30–32; SANLON, Original Sin 85–95; COVA, Peccato Originale 59–63.

78 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 251 f.: "Mais on sait que quantité de Théologiens ont cru & croient encore que S. Paul ne dit rien, qui soit contraire à la doctrine des Peres, qui ont vécu avant les controverses Pélagiennes."

79 *Ibid.* 252.

80 *Ibid.* 293 f.

81 *Ibid.* For a concise definition of "semi-Pelagianism", see also *id.*, BUH 2 (art. 13) 197 f.

Throughout the three preceding examples, we could notice a progression in the way Le Clerc expressed his understanding of the belief of the early Church and of Origen in particular. As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, in part, the reason for this decline in argumentative caution in Le Clerc could be explained by reasons in connection with his personal biography, where formal orthodoxy seemed less important. This is not to say, however, that the accusation of heterodoxy was not still very present, as it appears, for example, from a letter by a certain “Dumonstier”, dated by Sina to the year 1726. As was to be expected, Le Clerc’s position was branded as Pelagian in the way it criticised Augustine’s position on freedom.⁸²

Yet, with the decline of Le Clerc’s preoccupation for formal orthodoxy, we notice his increased effort to redefine orthodoxy and to prove the real orthodoxy of his position, even if this meant diverging from the accepted formal Reformed orthodoxy and even early Arminian theology. In this light, the preceding three examples, taking aside their specificity, have in common the attempt, made by Le Clerc, to render Origen as orthodox as possible on the doctrine of original sin (or better, the rejection of that doctrine), at least in what he believed should have been the real orthodoxy. Le Clerc wanted to show that the early Church agreed with the Alexandrian, and that his thought was in accordance with Scripture.

Origen was not the only representative of the early Church to be mentioned in the discussion on original sin and, early on in his career, Le Clerc had tentatively argued that Cyprian’s belief in this doctrine, even if not totally absent, could be interpreted in a very weak way. Cyprian’s view would let the sense of an original corruption almost disappear.⁸³ At the same time, Le Clerc did not shy away from finding further support in fellow contemporaries, like in the case of the latitudinarian Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), whose work he had reviewed in the same year as the article of Basnage we have just analysed.⁸⁴ Notwithstanding these other references, it seems, however, that Origen had a particular prominence in the mentioned examples, especially in the one from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. When Origen was rendered orthodox by Le Clerc, that is, as a representative of the early Church and the interpreter of Scriptural truth, he became a very strong support for Le Clerc’s own rejection of original sin. In this way, the Alexandrian seemed the cornerstone of a sort of “true orthodoxy.” This “true orthodoxy” resembled closely Le Clerc’s own interpretation of the doctrine of original sin, his conception of sin as imitation and the non-existence of a concupiscent driving force inside human beings that we saw earlier in this chapter.

82 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 4 (letter 807) 347: “[Q]uand vous reprochez á Saint Augustin son manicheisme, vous n’etes que l’echo des Pelagiens, qui de son temps lui ont fait le même reproche.”

83 LE CLERC, *BUH* 12 (art. 6) 329.

84 *Id.*, *BAM* 24 (art. 7) 181.

7. Doctrinal Debates: Predestination and Grace

In this second chapter dedicated to a discussion of the place of Origen within theological debates, we will review what was without doubt one of the hottest topics of contention in inter- and also intra-confessional debates contemporary to Le Clerc. This was the relationship between human and divine action, better known as the debate on grace, predestination and free will. In contrast to the previous chapter on original sin, Le Clerc's thought on the doctrine of grace did not differ radically from the generally accepted Arminian consensus, at least formally, which held that human beings have an active responsibility for their own salvation, to be reached through faith, good works and repentance.⁸⁵ For this reason, I will not provide a separate exposition of the general tenets of Le Clerc's thought on these doctrines but highlight eventual peculiarities as the analysis progresses. The *fil rouge* of this chapter will be the review of the various references to Origen within Le Clerc's discussion of the doctrine of grace. After a first section on Le Clerc's early writing and correspondence on this subject, I will present the three different facets of Origen that emerge from the reviewed material: Origen as representative of the old Church, as founder of an "Origenist tradition" and as rational theologian.

7.1 Early Appearances

Many years after the Synod of Dort, the dispute on the doctrine of grace was as alive as it had been earlier in the century. A letter from Heidelberg from Jacques Lenfant to Le Clerc of 26 April 1684 shows how this topic was still much critically debated. Lenfant mentioned and criticised as part of the debate the positions of Pierre Allix, Claude Pajon (1626–1685) and Jean Claude (1619–1687).⁸⁶ In turn, the echo of not fully orthodox positions on the doctrine of grace from earlier on in the century, the one of Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664) and John Cameron (1579–1625), apart from the thought of Arminius, was still very much felt. We also know that Le Clerc himself had studied theology under Tronchin, who in his younger age had lived at the place of Amyraut and had followed his courses at Saumur.⁸⁷ It is thus unsurprising that Le Clerc's position on the doctrine of grace was not

85 See, for example, LIMBORCH, *Theologia Christiana* 746–749.

86 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 46 of 26 April 1684) 169.

87 FATIO, Louis Tronchin 64–69.

in line with the Reformed orthodox one, even though Le Clerc had signed the *Consensus Helveticus*.⁸⁸

Le Clerc's attachment to a position close to the Arminian on the doctrine of grace emerges clearly from his first letters to Limborch even before moving to Amsterdam. In one of these letters, Le Clerc informed Limborch of his translation work of Hammond's commentary to the New Testament and justified his effort by adding, referring to Hammond: "*est enim plane in nostra sententiâ circa Prædestinationem.*"⁸⁹ In a letter from Amsterdam two years after that, in 1684, to his correspondent Antoine Vattemare, Le Clerc expressed clearly his preference for Arminianism rather than "Calvinism", as he mentioned it, and pointed to a work⁹⁰ by Le Cène as an assured way of considering the matter of grace.⁹¹

Absolute predestination, a doctrine which Le Clerc rejected as part of his Arminian background with strong influences from Saumur, was considered by him as a modern form of Stoic fatalism.⁹² Le Clerc's worry was, at least in general, not different from his Arminian peers. Limborch, for example, had communicated a concern to Le Clerc that absolute predestination would destroy Christian compassion and ultimately lead to immorality.⁹³ This was also one of the main preoccupations of Le Clerc in those years and beyond, together with the fact that, for him, the doctrine of absolute predestination would cast doubt on God's mercy and sincerity and thus on Christian religion as a whole.⁹⁴ Le Clerc's rejection of

88 Ibid. 52.

89 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 20 of 28 November 1682) 86.

90 LE CÈNE, De l'état de l'homme.

91 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 65 of 10 November 1684) 263.

92 LE CLERC, Histoire des Provinces-Unies 1, 261 f. Here, Le Clerc's intention was to show that the Dutch dispute on predestination which resulted in the Synod of Dort had been preceded by a long tradition of philosophical and theological thought. The earliest appearance of the argument that resembled what he later called "absolute predestination" was the Stoic one, which believed that everything was ruled by destiny. Le Clerc clarified that Stoics believed that the human soul was exempt from such destiny and that it was free but were sceptical about the possibility that an all-encompassing destiny and human freedom were compatible at all. More importantly, Le Clerc contended that Stoics based their belief in a destiny, among other things, on the fact that oracles had predicted future events. If we consider the dispute between Fontenelle and Baltus we touched upon earlier (see n. 87), we can see that Le Clerc's belief in oracles was almost non-existent, although he did not deny the existence of oracles in general. A future prediction was not an impossible event, but surely a rare happening. What is more, Le Clerc did take it as a proof of destiny but resorted to the argument that we do not know how such prevision and human freedom would work in practice, but nonetheless he contended that the two were compatible: id., BC 3 (art. 2).

93 SINA/SINA ZACCONE, Epistolario 1 (letter 21 of 2 February 1683) 88.

94 LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, Entretiens 270 f. Some modern scholars have criticised what is commonly believed to have been the doctrine of absolute predestination in orthodox Reformed thought. They have contended that early modern theologians, like for example F. Turretini

absolute predestination thus had reasons which went beyond purely polemical/confessional interests and seemed to encompass his own moral outlook and also keep the rising threat of atheism in sight. Le Clerc's dealing with the early Church in conjunction with the doctrine of grace was primarily directed at intra-confessional disputes but was also informed by the message that a possible formulation of that doctrine as absolute predestination would send to the learned world of the time.

Around the same time in which Le Clerc had had the just mentioned epistolary exchange with Vattemare, 1684, we find Le Clerc's earliest reference to the early Church while discussing the doctrine of grace. This was set in the context of, yet again, another epistolary discussion, this time with Alexandre Vigne. One of the subjects was inter-confessional tolerance. Le Clerc argued that, among other reasons, mutual tolerance among Christian confessions should be granted because of the various views on theological doctrines. In reality, so Le Clerc, what Reformed orthodoxy believed as assured was in fact much more doubtful than what Arminians considered as doctrinally sound. This claim was supported with a look at Church history. Not only the modern Church, but a vast majority of the early Church believed differently from what Reformed orthodox theologians considered as the truth:

*“Possem quidem pro iis sententiis quæ à Reformatis in Remonstrantibus damnantur cæteros omnes Christianos fauentes in scenam adducere, omnes Patres Latinos ante Augustinum, et post eum Galliæ nostræ Antistites, omnes Græcos ab Apostolorum æuo ad J. Damascenum usque, et universam pæne Ecclesiam Anglicanam hodiernam, præter Lutheranos et Pontificios quorum iudicium non est semper spernendum, quicquid dicitent eorum aduersarii.”*⁹⁵

In this last quote, Le Clerc mentioned the Latin Church *before* Augustine and the Greek Church, without a particular mention of Origen or of other Fathers, as support for the Arminian position, which held for him the true legacy of the Church of the origins.

The year after, Le Clerc discussed this point in more depth in the *Sentimens*. His intention in the specific passage was to confute Simon's argument that the understanding of Scripture also needed the support of Church tradition. In order to do this, he discussed two examples; the first was the doctrine of the Trinity,

among others, believed that necessity (this was the problematic point in the doctrine of absolute predestination, for Arminians) was compatible with human freedom. The key concept was “synchronic contingency”. These scholars claim that Arminians oversimplified the debate with orthodox Reformed. See, for example, VAN ASSELT/BAC/TE VELDE, *Reformed Thought on Freedom* 15–49.

95 SINA/SINA ZACCONI, *Epistolario* 1 (letter 41 of 15 March 1684) 150. Some years later, LE CLERC, *BUH* 3 (art. 18) 363 f., would include also the Lutherans within this consensus.

which we amply discussed in an earlier chapter and does not need further explanation here, and the second was the doctrine of grace. In this second example, he mentioned several passages from Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), where this had contended that the Church before Augustine, in particular the Greek Church and Origen, had held “semi-Pelagian” beliefs and that Augustine had been the first to really understand the doctrine of grace.⁹⁶ For Le Clerc, this was a clear statement, made, besides other things, by a Roman Catholic thinker, that showed the weakness of Church tradition and of Simon’s argument. Tradition was problematic and inconsistent:

“On croiroit que l’homme a encore son Franc-Arbitre, & que par les seules forces de la nature, il peut obéir à Dieu, si l’on en croyoit l’Eglise Gréque, & les Peres mêmes Latins, qui ont vécu avant Saint Augustin: mais on croiroit tout le contraire, si on s’attachoit à une partie de ceux qui ont vécu après ce Pere.”⁹⁷

It could seem incoherent that Le Clerc appealed to the Church tradition against Reformed orthodoxy in the letter we reviewed earlier and that he seemed to deprive it of any argumentative power against the Roman Catholic Simon only some months after because of its inconsistency. In reality, Le Clerc’s critique of Church tradition was not wholly destructive of any possible use of Church tradition, but was firstly concerned in particular with the tradition related to the doctrine of grace stemming from Augustine that had moved the doctrine away from what Le Clerc considered the previously held Church consensus.

This latter point, that Church tradition related to the doctrine of grace had to be handled carefully but that tradition as such was not to be disregarded completely, was expressed more clearly by Le Clerc in another passage. For Le Clerc, the “sentimens communs de tout le Christianisme”⁹⁸ were an important theological baggage of Christianity, but the Augustinian tradition was considered as problematic. The stringency of this passage, where Le Clerc also mentioned John Chrysostom (and not Origen) as representative of the Greek Church, shows again the attention and importance of Church tradition for Le Clerc. It is worth quoting this passage in full:

“Ne sait-on pas que c’est lui qui a formé le premier Systeme la Grâce, qu’il soutient néanmoins comme la Doctrine de l’Eglise Universelle, pendant que dans les lieux où l’on parloit Grec, on prêchoit une Doctrine toute opposée? Pourquoi voudroit-on que nous cherchassions dans les Commentaires de Saint Augustin, la Doctrine de l’Ancienne Eglise, plutôt que dans ceux de Saint Chrysostome? Duquel des deux apprendrons nous la Verité de la

96 Id., *Sentimens* 46 f.

97 Ibid. 50.

98 Ibid. 365.

Religion sur le Franc-Arbitre, & sur les autres points qui appartiennent à la Doctrine de la Grâce, puisque l'un parle comme Pelage, que l'autre condamne comme un abominable Hérétique? Comment connoîtrons nous que Saint Augustin lui-même a eu raison de nier de certaines choses contre Pelage, qu'il avoit approuvées avant qu'il s'engageât dans les Controverses qu'il a eûes avec les Pélagiens?"⁹⁹

Le Clerc practically accused Augustine of being the *novateur* in the history of the Church and considered the Greek tradition as orthodox.¹⁰⁰ A bit stronger was also Le Clerc's reference to the fact that Augustine himself changed his mind on the doctrine of grace when he was promised an episcopal chair, an allusion to Church political dynamics that he will focus on in a stronger way some years later. We will return to this.

The only passage in *Sentimens* where Le Clerc mentioned Origen explicitly in conjunction with the debate on the doctrine of grace is found only a few pages after the last quote reviewed. The chapter, "letter 16", had dealt, among other things, with a specific critique of Augustine and Jerome and the place of their doctrines in Christianity. The two Latin authors were considered "models" which had been followed by the Western Church and compared to Origen, who had had a similar role as initiator of the Greek Church. The comparison, however, was less to elevate the prominence of these three authors and more to indicate the fact that, because their thought had been received without objection and "copied" by later generations of theologians, various errors stemming from them had been introduced

99 Ibid. 365 f.

100 In the same year as the *Sentimens* appeared Le Clerc's *Entretiens*, in which, as we have seen earlier, Le Clerc and Le Cène each shared a part of the book. One of the arguments put forward by Le Cène, but Le Clerc believed in the conformity of his essays with the ones by Le Cène, as we can read from the *præfatio* [2], was, once again, that the doctrine of absolute predestination was a distortion of the original Christian message. Le Cène argued that the Reformed orthodox party could count only on limited support from Church tradition: it could go back to the Synod of Dort only or, at the very least, to Augustine, but not before him (10). Thus, we see here again Le Clerc's argument, which was surely a recurrent theme in the confessional controversies of the time, adapted in favour of the Arminian position. In the same work, but this time in an essay written by Le Clerc himself, Le Clerc put forward the argument that one of the tools of that distortion of Church tradition had been the purposeful misinterpretation of the Letter of Paul to the Romans. He subsequently proposed a correction of that interpretation (382–420). In any case, to go back to the question of the corruption of Church tradition, Le Clerc returned once again on this point in the subsequent year in a (long) preface [1–2] to his own translation of a book by Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), the *Critique*. Burnet's critique was directed to a history of reformation written by Antoine Varillas (1624–1696). Le Clerc took Burnet's work as an occasion to affirm that his time had seen an unprecedented degree of biased historical narration with the purpose of supporting recent doctrinal novelties. Indirectly, Le Clerc was almost surely continuing the polemic against Reformed orthodoxy on the doctrine of grace as an invention in the history of Christianity.

into the Christian message. We have already covered this, for example, with our discussion of Le Clerc's reception of Origen's Platonism in an earlier chapter. In contrast to Augustine and Jerome, however, Le Clerc added that in the case of Origen, although many errors were present, still some errors had already been discovered and rejected.¹⁰¹ The Le Clerc of the *Sentimens* seems thus very cautious towards Origen: he indirectly accepted his doctrine of grace as orthodox but preferred to ascribe it to the "Greek Church" in general and to Chrysostom on one particular occasion. He considered Origen explicitly as the founder of a Church tradition which he had considered earlier as orthodox but warned of other heterodox aspects in his thought.

We find again a similar pattern in the next year. Here too we can see Le Clerc's complex and cautious handling of Origen's thought on the doctrine of grace. Yet this time, various pages were dedicated to the presentation of Origen's thought. More or less in the middle of the very first volume of the *BUH*, Le Clerc dedicated one of his book reviews to the first ever edition of Origen's *De Oratione* (Oxford 1686).¹⁰² After a brief summary of the history of the edition, Le Clerc quickly mentioned the occasion of the composition of this work by Origen. He also reported from the *præfatio* of the book that the Alexandrian had been ordered to write this treatise by Ambrose, who, as everyone who had read him should know, so reported Le Clerc, "étoit une personne de qualité & un grand homme de bien", and his sister Tatiana.¹⁰³ Thus, Le Clerc started this review with a stress on the fact that Origen's reflections were within a larger consensus and not simply the product of Origen's own mind. This was not Le Clerc's own thought – it was already present in the original book he reviewed – but he still chose to bring the reader's attention to it. Possibly, Le Clerc did so for reasons of completeness, but the fact that he failed to also report the related discussion on the value of Origen's thought and of Fathers in general that was present in the *præfatio* shows that he carefully selected what he wanted to report.

The review of Origen's *Orat* continued then with the actual content of the initial part of Origen's work, which Le Clerc summed up very briefly. He rested longer on Origen's conception of the necessity of prayer. He posited that Origen's attempt was polemical, against those "heretics" who drew "fausses conséquences de la doctrine de la providence & de la prédestination."¹⁰⁴ These "wrong consequences" meant that for these heretics, prayer was useless because God foreknew and disposed everything already. Man could not contribute to his own salvation but was either elected to be saved or chosen to be punished. Instead, Origen con-

101 LE CLERC, *Sentimens* 373.

102 *ΩΡΙΓΕΝΟΥΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ* (Oxford 1686). For a brief overview of the history of this edition, see PERRONE, *Zur Edition von Peri Euchês* 269–281.

103 LE CLERC, *BUH* 1 (art. 20) 304.

104 *Ibid.* 305.

tended that God acts in accordance with the internal disposition of human beings, not superimposing his will, and that divine decrees were based on God's foreknowledge of how human beings will use their freedom.¹⁰⁵

The previous passage could seem quite easily a clear attempt by Le Clerc to confirm the orthodoxy of his Arminian stance on the doctrine of grace with a reference to Origen's thought as part of his continued polemic against Reformed orthodoxy. I believe that such a "use" of Origen's thought surely formed part of the plan of Le Clerc's writing. Le Clerc was, however, again very cautious in handling Origen's thought. Right after the above mentioned passage on Origen's anti-predestinarian argument, he included a brief warning notice: "Il n'y a pas dequoi [sic] s'étonner qu'Origene donne le Franc-Arbitre à l'homme, il en fait bien part au Soleil, à la Lune & aux étoiles."¹⁰⁶ In this short statement, it is striking to note that Le Clerc showed that Origen's conception of free will contained erroneous notions even if he had presented it favourably against "heretics" – or the predestinarian party of his time, just before that. The way he introduced the thought, "Il n'y a pas dequoi [sic] s'étonner ..." seemed also to want to create a certain distance from the just presented argument. Again, he started the next paragraph with the words: "[c]ette derniere erreur";¹⁰⁷ which obviously pointed to the fact that Origen ascribed free will to celestial bodies, but Le Clerc's expression was not so unambiguous as not to be usable in a different way in a future defence. This *derniere erreur* could also refer to the full argument just presented, that is, Origen's conception of free will as a whole.

In any case, it is clear from Le Clerc's excerpt that the Arminian did not want to turn his back on Origen either, because he spoke of the errors *attributed* (*attribuées*) to Origen and provided justification for some of them.¹⁰⁸ He also added that: "Si l'on veut voir Origene justifié des autres erreurs qu'on lui impute, on n'a qu'à lire le R. P. Halloix dans son *Origenes defensus*."¹⁰⁹ Thus, compared to the previous example from the *Sentimens*, Le Clerc's reference to Origen and his conception of human–divine interaction was much more direct in this small article

105 Ibid. Le Clerc's summary of the argument, even if partial, was faithful to the gist of Origen's argument Le Clerc referred to, that is, ch. 19, 25[20] and 22 of the 1686 edition (21–27 of the Latin version in the second part of the book).

106 LE CLERC, BUH 1 (art. 20) 306.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid. 306–308. One of the "errors" of Origen was to have stated that prayers should be directed only to the Father and not to Jesus. Le Clerc reported the opinion of "the bishop of Oxford", who contended that, in other works, Origen had specified what prayers should be addressed only to the Father. Another "error" of Origen was to have considered God as having an actual body, and here Le Clerc added his own explanation, that this was a wrong interpretation that Origen himself had rejected in the *De principiis* and in the *Contra Celsum*.

109 LE CLERC, BUH 1 (art. 20) 308.

from the *BUH*. It was, however, still stated with very much caution so as to allow for a lot of manoeuvre in a defence against possible future accusers.

Two more occasions from the time in which Le Clerc mentioned Origen are worth noting. The first is from the same year as the article in *BUH* related to Origen's *Orat* we have just presented, but from the third tome of *BUH*. It is a very short passage on the errors of Origen, which Le Clerc discussed, and although it did not touch explicitly on Origen's doctrine of grace, it shows Le Clerc's balancing effort with Origen. The occasion of this passage is of interest for us on its own: it was Le Clerc's paraphrase and translation of a summary from *Il giornale de' Letterati* from Parma, which regarded the critique, made by Serafino Piccinardi (1634–1695), of a book of unclear authorship edited earlier in the century by the Jesuit Jacques Sirmond (1559–1651) and titled *Prædestinatus*.¹¹⁰ To this summary, Le Clerc also added his own very brief summary of another critique of the *Prædestinatus*, written by a certain "Auvray" (in reality Martin de Barcos, 1600–1678) who had reached diametrically different conclusions from those of Piccinardi.¹¹¹ The Jansenist de Barcos conceived the doctrine of absolute predestination commonly held (and its soteriological consequences) not as a distortion of the thought of Augustine (this was Piccinardi's opinion) but as truly representing the thought of Augustine.¹¹²

One of the ways used by de Barcos to prove wrong the original author of the *Prædestinatus*, who had contended that the predestinarian thought was a heresy created by the followers of Augustine, was to show the lacking knowledge and truthfulness of this author. Among many other examples, de Barcos referred to the, in his opinion, wrong claim by the author of the *Prædestinatus*, that Origen's errors were interpolations. This was the only passage that Le Clerc reported in his summary of de Barcos' treatment of the errors which were to be found, or so it was supposed, in the *Prædestinatus*. De Barcos' argument was that, if so much Church tradition had recognised no falsifications in Origen's errors, and even councils, to say that Origen's errors were falsifications was "une folie & une insolence si grande, qu'elle n'a peu tomber que dans un esprit entièrement esgaré."¹¹³ It would also mean that Church tradition was both ignorant and false. Le Clerc's report was somehow faithful and pretended to be so because it included the text in quotation marks.

We note, however, two subtle differences. Whereas in the original work, de Barcos explicitly rejected the thought that Origen's errors were interpolations, not so Le Clerc, who simply contended that, if the errors of Origen were considered

110 Id., *BUH* 3 (art. 12) 258; BACCHINI, *Il Giornale de' letterati* 35–42 p. 3; PICCINARDI, *De novitio opere*; SIRMOND (ed.), *Prædestinatus*.

111 AUVRAY [DE BARCOS], *Censure*.

112 Ibid. 34–50; BACCHINI, *Il Giornale de' letterati* 37 p. 3; PICCINARDI, *De novitio opere* 8–17.

113 AUVRAY [DE BARCOS], *Censure* 32.

interpolations, then Church tradition was ignorant or false. Le Clerc would not have had as much of a problem with this kind of conclusion as the Roman Catholic de Barcos. Le Clerc had also introduced the quote of de Barcos' text by stating that the errors or lies of the *Prædestinatus* were only claimed to be errors by de Barcos, without further comments on his own part. Another striking difference between the original work of de Barcos and Le Clerc's summary was that, whereas de Barcos had concluded the passage on Origen's errors by adding that the 5th ecumenical council had "Anathematizé non seulement ses escrits, mais aussi sa personne";¹¹⁴ Le Clerc had paraphrased it in the following way: "puisqu'ils ont attribué ces erreurs à Origene, & les ont anathematizées."¹¹⁵ The strong condemnation of the whole of Origen in de Barcos was thus softened by Le Clerc and, most importantly, limited to Origen's errors only.

A last interesting appearance of Origen's name during that time was again from *BUH*, and from an article we have already mentioned in an earlier chapter, the one dedicated to Cave's *Apostolici*. It is already striking that Le Clerc, out of the multitude of biographies of the early Christians presented by Cave in his book, 23 in total, picked out only three of them, and in particular Stephen protomartyr, Justin and Origen.¹¹⁶ However, the interesting appearance of Origen's name in conjunction with the topic of this chapter, the doctrine of grace, is not found in the part of the article dedicated to Origen, but early on within the final discussion of some of Justin's doctrinal (or allegedly thus considered) errors. Le Clerc reported faithfully Cave's statement that, although in Justin there was a stress on the power of the human will, still this power was accompanied by the awareness of the necessity of divine grace, thus there was no Pelagianism.¹¹⁷ Cave then proved this point by adding some explanatory comments, in particular on how some of the early Christian writers had understood this point. Instead, Le Clerc summarised this part very briefly in the following way: "nôtre Auteur [Cave] le fait voir [the Father's need for divine grace] par divers passages de S. Justin, de S. Irenée, de Clement d'Alexandrie, de Tertullien & même d'Origene."¹¹⁸ What is interesting in Le Clerc's own statement is the final *même* (not found in the original), which seems to have the meaning of "even Origen." This possibly points to the fact that, for Le Clerc but not for Cave, at least not on this occasion, Origen's stress on free will made him suspicious of Pelagianism, so that it almost came as a surprise

114 Ibid.

115 LE CLERC, *BUH* 3 (art. 12) 270.

116 Id., *BUH* 6 (art. 1) 2f. In general, in Le Clerc's excerpt, some traits of these three figures of early Christianity were useful for a discussion (already prompted by Cave) on miracles, on Platonism in Christianity and on exegesis. This and other reasons could be behind Le Clerc's choice.

117 Ibid. 28 f. Compare it with CAVE, *Apostolici* 157 f.

118 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 29; CAVE, *ibid.* 158.

to Le Clerc that *even the Alexandrian* allowed some room for the necessity of divine grace on certain occasions, at least if one were to follow Cave.

Through this last example and the previous ones reviewed in this section, the contours of Le Clerc's reception of Origen's conception of divine and human cooperation have started to emerge. In particular, the early appearance of Origen in Le Clerc's work in conjunction with the debates on grace has been cautious and balanced by enough statements that still pointed to his heterodoxy. Le Clerc did not (yet) specifically appeal to Origen's conception of grace to strengthen his Arminian position on that matter. We will now review later references to Origen that, as I believe, can be divided in two main categories: Origen considered as authority from the early Church and Origen considered as rational theologian.

7.2 The Authority of the Origenist Tradition

Our analysis of the way Le Clerc conceived of Origen as an authority in confessional debates must start with a brief remark on the way he conceived Church tradition, as we have reviewed this topic in an earlier chapter.¹¹⁹ It seems already clear that Le Clerc had a cautious relationship with Church tradition, but the previous sections have shown some examples in which Le Clerc often supported his soteriological conception through a reference to Church tradition without explicitly mentioning that he was referring to it almost as a sort of authority.

Earlier we looked at Le Clerc's *Compendium historiae universalis*, in which Le Clerc had dedicated much space to Origen's *Hexapla*. After the presentation of this monumental work, Le Clerc added that, "*Ab hoc Origene, cujus plurima inter-ciderunt, plurima adhuc exstant, tamquam ex fonte perenni, Ecclesiae Graecae Patres, omnia fermè sua hauserunt.*"¹²⁰ In this way, Le Clerc contended that, although much was lost of the production of Origen (and the *Hexapla* was one prestigious example), still much had also been preserved, so that Origen could become a continuous source of inspiration for the Greek Fathers. This was a strong and explicit attribution to Origen as the progenitor of the Greek Church, and in general of the Early Church, which was confirmed by mentioning that Jerome and Rufinus had also taken much from him and by a last sentence in the paragraph which reads: "*Eo tempore, floruerunt Gregorius Thaumaturgus, & Julius Africanus, qui summopere Origenem coluerunt.*"¹²¹ This may seem nothing new when compared to the passage we reviewed earlier from the *Sentimens*, where Origen was a "model" for the later Church tradition, but a change of tone is noticeable during this

119 See chapter 2.

120 LE CLERC, *Compendium historiae universalis* 121.

121 *Ibid.*

time, in that the negative outlook of the earlier quotes was here substituted by a more positive evaluation of Origen as *fons perennis*.

This understanding is further supported by the fact that Le Clerc continued stating that Origen “*insimulatus est postmodum variorum errorum*”, in which case the “*insimulatus est*” could be translated as simply “was accused” but also to mean that it was just a matter of calumny and thus in this way consider positively the orthodoxy of the Alexandrian. This was an important point, because in this paragraph the matters over which Origen was considered heterodox as mentioned by Le Clerc were, of course, Origen’s conception of the Trinity and “other doctrines”, but for us most relevant, his doctrine of grace, in which Origen “*valdè diversa sensit ab iis opinionibus, quæ postea invaluerunt, in Ecclesia præsertim Latina*.”¹²² If calumny was influential in the general negative judgment on some of these doctrines, as Le Clerc seemed to believe, then this implied that Le Clerc might have considered these doctrines not simply as errors. Again, even if Origen *diversa sensit* from what was later established (and the term “*invaluerunt*” – which means, besides other things, “to prevail” – seems to have a particular political undertone) in the Latin Church, Le Clerc seemed to say that the fact that these were considered errors was ultimately only an accusation or the result of ecclesiastical politics. With a neutral tone and the style of the pure historiographer, Le Clerc of the *Compendium* had subtly conveyed his idea that Origen might have been a more orthodox representative of the reception of the Christian message than later Christian authors (notably Augustine) and that he was accompanied by an original *consensum ecclesiæ*.¹²³ Yet, Le Clerc stated his point somehow clearly but also very cautiously and ambiguously.

A similar example to support this interpretation can be found in the short passage of an article written around ten years earlier in *BUH*. Here, Le Clerc had referred to the work of the Roman Catholic bishop Isaac Habert (1598–1668), which, according to Le Clerc, had been used by the Cardinal Richelieu to reject the *Augustinus* of Jansen and which had been debated by Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694).¹²⁴ Le Clerc himself had mentioned that Habert had, among other things, published a work titled *De gratia ex Patribus Græcis* [*Theologiæ Græcor*] in 1647 without adding anything in particular from this work but his own reflection, which went against the spirit of Habert’s book itself.¹²⁵ Le Clerc maintained that: “Il est certain au moins que les plus estimez des Peres Grecs, qui ont été la plûpart admirateurs d’Origene ont été très-éloignez des sentimens de S. Augustin; & qu’il seroit aussi

122 Ibid.

123 In a later passage, upon briefly presenting the appearance of Manicheism, Le Clerc had argued that Manichean and, in general, Stoic fatalism, was opposed in general by Irenæus, Athenagoras, Origen and *aliique Patres*: *ibid.* 127.

124 *Id.*, *BUH* 14 (art. 5) 261.

125 HABERT, *Theologiæ Græcor* 1–7.

difficile d'expliquer leurs paroles conformément aux pensées du dernier."¹²⁶ Thus Le Clerc argued that the consistency of the Church tradition, and the topic of dispute was the doctrine of grace, had been initially heavily influenced by Origen and was later interrupted by Augustine with the doctrine of predestination.

Here again, but more clearly than in the previous example, Origen was thus considered the progenitor of the early Church tradition. Some pages later, Le Clerc subtly added that this particular form of Origenian soteriology, which Augustine encountered at the beginning of his career, was the mainstream Church consensus of the time.¹²⁷ If we couple this statement with a little remark from the next page, it seems again that the fact that Origen and the Greek Church had appeared some time before Augustine was also a mark of their increased authenticity and thus orthodoxy and of the authority of their soteriological conception. Le Clerc wrote, after having presented Jansen's critique of Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623): "s'il falloit examiner cette doctrine [the doctrine of grace] par l' Antiquité, il faudroit voir si l'autorité de l'Eglise Latine, depuis son temps [the time of Augustine], doit prévaloir à celle des Peres des siecles précédens & de toute l'Eglise Greque."¹²⁸ It was clear that this statement was meant as a provocation and supported the view according to which Le Clerc saw in Origen and the early Church a more robust interpretation of the Christian message than in later thinkers, especially Augustine. The early Church seemed thus to have an authoritative character to which it was convenient for him to refer in order to support his Arminian orthodoxy and confessional position more generally.

A very short remark is necessary at this point on Le Clerc's conception of the antiquity of a particular doctrine. In one of his last works, Le Clerc urged Protestants to stop accusing each other of "novelty", because the holiest truth – the Gospel, he maintained – had been a novelty for a time. He added that the fact that something was ancient was not on its own proof of its truth, as was the case with pagan and ancient philosophy (and we saw an example of that within the discussion of Origen's Platonism).¹²⁹ We must therefore be very considerate of the weight we believe Le Clerc attributed to the fact that Origen and the Greek Church came before Augustine, because it seems that for him this factor was important, but not of fundamental importance. As we will see in the remainder of this section, the thought of the early Church had to be based for Le Clerc in what he considered the correct interpretation of Scripture, and the added factor was also that it was shared by more than Origen alone and that it was "rational." The antiquity of a certain doctrine was thus of only secondary importance.

126 LE CLERC, BUH 14 (art. 5) 263.

127 Ibid. 287.

128 Ibid. 265.

129 See chapter 3.

All of the passages we have reviewed in this section were obviously very short passages to be fully decisive on their own. To make better sense of them, we pause a little and consider a parallel reference to Augustine written by Le Clerc towards the end of the century. If Le Clerc's references to Origen on grace and free will were still limited and cautious during that time, his anti-Augustinianism was not. In the year after the *Compendium*, in the preface of his *Supplement to Hammond*, Le Clerc expressed his anti-Augustinianism in an even clearer way compared to earlier versions. Thus, for Le Clerc:

“[Augustine] was one of the very first that promoted some two Doctrines, which take away all Goodness and Justice, both from God and Men. For by the one God is represented as creating the greatest part of Mankind to damn them, and sentence them to eternal Torments, for Sins committed by another, or which they themselves could not avoid; and by the other, Magistrates, and all that have the Administration of publick Affairs, are stirred up to persecute those that differ from them in matters of religion.”¹³⁰

Le Clerc's anti-Augustinianism was thus linked to Augustine's approval of religious persecution, and this was the point Le Clerc criticised harshly in the remainder of the page. However, Augustine was also the innovator in matters of grace and predestination. Le Clerc's critique to Augustine became even more nuanced in the first volume of his *Ars Critica*, where the concept of an inappropriate “ἐμφάσει” of Scripture, which we have considered in the previous chapter as referred to the doctrine of original sin, was applied to Augustine too. In this specific case, because in Scripture God seems at times to be the author of evil, interpreters, *à temporibus Augustini*, have understood those passages in that sense, that God was the actual author of the specific evil. Instead, Le Clerc clarified, this was simply a Jewish tradition of attributing everything to God.¹³¹

This small digression of Le Clerc's anti-Augustinianism of the time evidences that, if the Arminian was still cautious with Origen, he did not disguise his harsh rejection of Augustine. It seemed not so problematic for Le Clerc to reject the authority of Augustine, because such a stance toward the Bishop of Carthage had also been present at times in early Arminianism.¹³² Origen was still relatively too controversial as an author to be approached openly and extensively without appropriate precaution.

In order to find a more explicit passage in Le Clerc where he actively supported his Arminian consideration of the doctrine of predestination through a ref-

130 Id., *A Supplement to Dr. Hammond* (preface) xviii.

131 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 160 f.

132 On Le Clerc's anti-Augustinianism, see the already mentioned FLASCH, Jean Leclerc über Augustinus. For a reference to early Arminianism, see GOUDRIAAN, *Seventeenth-Century Arminians* 377; id., *Augustine Asleep or Augustine Awake?* 62–64.

erence to Origen, we must wait until Le Clerc had fully established his scholarly reputation and also when his hopes for a post in England had vanished. After his appointment to the chair of ecclesiastical history, Le Clerc gave a speech to the Remonstrant brotherhood in Amsterdam in 1712, where he presented the usefulness of both history in general and ecclesiastical history in particular. Roughly in the middle of the speech, Le Clerc discussed the mutual intra-confessional accusations of being the group who “innovated” and thus distorted the true Christian message. To exemplify this point, Le Clerc presented the controversy on human free will and predestination and showed that the position shared by the Arminians, which negated that God’s decree determined human beings to salvation or perdition without taking into account their actual behaviour, was the truest one, because it respected the belief of the early Church. Le Clerc not only advanced that, in general: “*antiquissimique Christiani contra Manichæos & alios Fati defensores, acriter contenderunt, omnibus hominibus inesse Liberum Arbitrium*”,¹³³ he also supported this claim with a reference to Justin’s *Apologia* and Origen’s *Phil.*¹³⁴ Of the two, Origen’s work “*majoris est ponderis*”, because “[the Philocalia] *doctissimorum, sine controversia, Ecclesiae Græcæ Theologorum judicio comprobata est.*”¹³⁵

Le Clerc believed thus to be able to prove with Origen’s *Phil* that the Arminian position was the most ancient Christian position on the subject and, therefore, that subsequent doctrines, like the doctrine of absolute predestination, were simply superimpositions on that original truth. He strengthened his proof with a reference to the early Greek Church, which had approved of Origen’s work. Le Clerc pointed in the same passage to Origen’s official condemnation but added that: “*sed & serò post ejus mortem factum est, nec propter ea dogmata umquam est damnatus.*”¹³⁶ For Le Clerc, Origen was never officially condemned by the Church because of his belief on human free will. At the same time, the fact that Origen was condemned only after his death, in the way I interpret Le Clerc’s passage, gave the Alexandrian no opportunity to clarify and eventually correct his own belief.

After this passage, Le Clerc pointed out again that Origen’s doctrine of free will was not simply his own belief but was shared by the whole Church, and Augustine was put again in bad light as the one who had perverted the true doctrine with the power of persuasion. The whole Church before Augustine had disregarded Origen’s condemnation in the matter of free will: “*Ita [like Origen] semper senserunt Græci, etiam post Origenem proscriptum, & Latini quoque, antequàm Augustinus Hipponensis contraria dogmata pro veris vendicaret & Afris suis persuaderet.*”¹³⁷ Le Clerc thus concluded this passage with a provocative question and

133 LE CLERC, Oratio inauguralis 20.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

an affirmation, which most clearly shows how he believed the Arminian position as solidly grounded in the early Church: “*Ubi sunt nunc, qui novitatem ei doctrinae [the one free will of Origen] objiciunt? Taceant, aut fateantur se primævos Christianos numquam legisse, qui eorum sententiam novitatis notâ inurere conantur.*”¹³⁸ Le Clerc was not alone in this, and pointed out that Vos, in his *Historia Pelagiana* (1618), had similarly contended that the position of Arminius on grace had been the same as that of the Church of the first four centuries and of the Greek Church in particular.¹³⁹

We might also be surprised that Le Clerc referred to Church tradition in a similar way as a Roman Catholic thinker would. Le Clerc negated that he was using Church tradition as the source of doctrinal authority and confirmed that he was still faithful to the *sola scriptura*, because his reference to Origen was apologetic, that is, to defend his confessional position from the accusations of being *novatores*. However, it seems that, in practice, the doctrines shared by Origen and the early Church were considered by Le Clerc at least as a correct interpretation of Scripture, which provided the basis for them. The Fathers had to be used selectively, this is what Le Clerc seemed to argue, because they had erred too and their thought had to be brought back to scriptural truth, as in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴⁰ Yet, the Fathers could also be used as support for the way they interpreted the Christian message, and this is what Le Clerc seemed to do with Origen and his idea of human freedom.

Le Clerc’s reference to Origen as the first who had elaborated the doctrine of free will in the most accurate way in the early Church and that had inspired the whole Church before the Augustinian turn was thus one way to solidly prove his own orthodoxy on the specific doctrine. We have seen traces of such an appraisal in earlier examples, but it seems that in 1712 the time had come to be fully explicit on the matter. This development may be explained by pointing to multiple reasons, among which a lowered stigmatisation of Origen that was probably the result of a much augmented knowledge of his works as part of a re-appropriation of the heritage of the early Church that the 17th century witnessed and to which it greatly contributed. In Le Clerc’s case, apart from the intent to redefine the

138 Ibid. See also on this id., *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 1, 316 f.

139 Ibid. 263.

140 Id., *Oratio inauguralis* 21: “*Ceterum, ut id quod comperi paullò audaciùs proloquar, mihi constat, nullam Christianam Societatem, ex iis quæ hodie supersunt, consentire per omnia cum Patribus, sive seorsim, sive in Concilia coacti consulantur. Nulla est hodie Ecclesia Christiana, quidquid à nonnullis de suo cum iis consensu jactari soleat, quæ Patribus, si ex vero exponi audiat eorum dogmata, adsentire sustineat; nec id in levioribus tantum capitibus, sed in quibusdam, quæ gravissima videntur. De S. Trinitate aliter hodie sentiunt omnes Christiani, quàm sæculi quarti Ecclesiæ sensere. Veteres Philosophicis argutiis in errorem delapsi erant, sed posteros Apostolicorum Scriptorum divina simplicitas ad veritatem, licèt inscios, reduxit.*”

boundaries of confessional orthodoxy and heterodoxy I just mentioned, we could also add what seemed his growing feeling that an adequate amount of Church consensus existed on the matter.

If we move our focus from the beginning of the so called Origenist tradition to Le Clerc's time, we find that the Church consensus he saw around a non-predestinarian soteriology was not only the one from his Arminian party, was also found by him in the Lutheran Church. Additionally, this consensus included not only his Arminian Church and the Lutheran Church but also at least *les plus sages Théologiens*, among which he counted Archbishop of Dublin William King (1650–1729) and Hammond,¹⁴¹ or part of the wing of the Anglican Church which was close to the Arminian position. His claim was not simply that these churchmen shared some theological points, but that he also saw them as being in agreement with those of an “Origenist”:

“Les Origenistes [...] soutiennent 1. que les hommes ne tombent pas nécessairement dans le mal & qu'ils peuvent l'éviter: 2. que si Dieu ne l'empêche pas, par sa Toute-puissance, c'est qu'il a voulu faire des créatures libres, pour donner lieu à la Vertu & au Vice, au blâme & à l'ouïange, aux récompenses & aux peines.”¹⁴²

The background of this passage will become clearer in the chapter dedicated to the discussion of theodicy. The concept of “Origenism” had been used by Le Clerc in the debate with Bayle we saw in the introduction of this work. Yet, for the moment it is important to note that Le Clerc saw that a wider Church consensus was present on these points he mentioned, which explicitly rejected a predestinarian soteriology. His reference to the thought of Origen on grace and predestination during this time, as we have just seen, was for him unproblematic because it considered it as never officially condemned by the Church and, rather, widespread in the early Church. Some pages after the last passage, Le Clerc mentioned that this consensus included again *les Origenistes* or, what I may call an “Origenist tradition”, and even *la plupart des Chrétiens*, both of which believed that “l'homme a été créé libre.”¹⁴³ This consensus also included many Scholastic theologians after Augustine¹⁴⁴ and, in any case, it also admitted explicitly at least some Roman Catholics of his time too, for example Sirmond, but also Erasmus and Pighius and the Jesuits in general because of their (alleged) semi-Pelagianism.¹⁴⁵

141 Id., BC 9 (art. 3) 119.

142 Ibid. 118 f.

143 Ibid. 132.

144 Id., Histoire des Provinces-Unies 1, 263.

145 Id., BAM 28/2 (art. 1) 260; id., BUH 14 (art. 5) 157–161. 222. In another article, in which Le Clerc commented on the work of the Lutheran Johann Albert Fabricius (1668–1736), the *Delectus argumentorum*, esp. 751 f., Le Clerc added Justin, Clement and Origen, apart from

Le Clerc's reference to the Origenist tradition or to other theologians contemporary to him must not lead us to conclude that these were considered by him as "authorities" in the common understanding, or the fundament of his own conception of the subject matter. He had clarified that "[some points of the Origenist tradition, among which the soteriological responsibility of human beings] ne sont-ce pas des suppositions arbitraires, puisque ce sont ou des faits indubitables, ou des veritez certaines, par l'Escriture Sainte";¹⁴⁶ so that Scripture was actually his fundamental point of reference. Still, the wider Church consensus was considered, in practice, like a further authoritative support to his and the Arminian stress on human responsibility as they were interpreted from Scripture.

The passage we have just reviewed was not an isolated case, and another example supports this vision of Le Clerc that part of the modern Church and parts of the early Church were united in one consensus around humans' responsibility for their own salvation. After an article in which Le Clerc presented the theological digressions of Daniel Whitby (1638–1726) on concepts such as grace, election and predestination,¹⁴⁷ Le Clerc went on to review Whitby's reply to Edwards on the same topic. Le Clerc connected Whitby's anti-predestinationist stance to the *grands hommes* of the Anglican Church, among which he counted, this time, "les Hammonds, les Tillotsons, les Cudworth, les Sherlocks, les Burnets, & grand nombre d'autres morts, ou vivans."¹⁴⁸ He then brought together these English theologians and the early Church, contending that, if one were to despise these theologians, as Le Clerc claimed that Edwards had done, one would despise the early Church as well.¹⁴⁹ Surely, Le Clerc did not mention Origen or the "Origenist tradition" in this stance, but it seems evident from the argument developed in this section that on the matter of grace and predestination the early Church had been fundamentally influenced by the thought of Origen. For Le Clerc, a strong link between Origen and these theologians and obviously his fellow Arminians, seemed to be present.

That Le Clerc saw a link between the "Origenist tradition" and non-predestinarian Church consensus contemporary to him was also clear from a later article dedicated to the *Spicilegium* of the Arminian Adriaan van Cattenburgh (1664–

Erasmus, to soften Fabricius' thought and so to argue that even Socrates, for example, and *les autres hommes de sa sorte*, could have been saved, even if they did not know the Gospel. In this passage, Le Clerc built an early Church consensus on a generous conception of soteriology based on human merit: id., BAM 27 (art. 2/1) 82.

146 Id., BC 9 (art. 3) 119.

147 Id., BAM 9 (art. 4/1) 120–171.

148 Ibid. (art. 4/2) 172.

149 Ibid. 173.

1743).¹⁵⁰ In this article, Le Clerc added his own reflection that Christian thinkers had fought the fatalism of the Manicheans starting from the third century and that they “suivirent en cela les idées d’*Origene* & les ont suivies depuis, dans tout l’Orient.”¹⁵¹ He added that Augustine, too, before becoming a bishop, had fought the Manicheans “avec les mêmes armes, que l’avoit fait *Origene*; c’est à dire, en soutenant ouvertement la Liberté, contre la Fatalité Stoïque”;¹⁵² in which case the modern equivalent of the “stoic fatalism” was for Le Clerc the doctrine of absolute predestination. According to Le Clerc, due to his pre-conversion Manichean background and his poor knowledge of original biblical languages, Augustine was led astray by a wrong interpretation of St. Paul. This was something which had general consequences for Christianity because Augustine had had the power to influence both councils and the emperor Honorius.¹⁵³ In this light we could therefore say, once again, that Le Clerc saw his own and related Church traditions, such as the Anglican one on this occasion, as substantially a continuum of an older and truer Origenist tradition on grace.

A final, minor, but still interesting example because it strengthens our understanding of how much Le Clerc was really interested in Church consensus, can be found in a later article from the *BAM*, which reviewed a book composed by Mosheim on the controversial John Hales (1584–1656). This book had focused, among other things, on the Synod of Dort and contained, besides Mosheim’s own additions, his translation of Hales’ letters from the time he was at the Synod. Le Clerc, however, was much more interested in showing commonalities between the

150 VAN CATTENBURGH, *Spicilegium theologiae Christianae*. This work proposed again the work *Theologia Christiana* of Limborch with additions by the author.

151 LE CLERC, *BAM* 26/2 (art. 1) 249.

152 *Ibid.* 249 f.

153 *Ibid.* 250 f. This whole reflection, as I mentioned, was not present in VAN CATTENBURGH, *Spicilegium theologiae Christianae* 82 f. It provoked the outraged epistolary response of a certain “Dumonstier”, “*disciple de St. Augustin*”, who attacked Le Clerc’s passage and accused Le Clerc of Pelagianism and, subtly, of Origenism: “Quand vous reprochez à Saint Augustin de n’avoir pas perseueré dans l’origenisme; je ne scai si vous ne faites pas son eloge sans le vouloir.” Interestingly, Dumonstier argued that Augustine had believed in human freedom against stoic fate as much as Origen and the whole Church did, but that he had been careful to avoid Origen’s errors. He also defended Augustine from the accusation of Manicheism. Sina, who edited this letter, expressed the fact that we have no proof that such letter reached Le Clerc, but he conjectured, however, that an implicit response to this letter might have appeared in the subsequent volume of the *BAM*: SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 4 (letter 807 of 1726) 347, 361 f. n. 2. In *BAM* 27 (art. 2) 55, Le Clerc had reaffirmed that, for him, the soteriology of Augustine and of the Manicheans was very similar and advised those who did not agree with this to: “consulter l’Index des Bénédictins sur les mots *Arbitrium, Liberum arbitrium, Gratia, Electi* &c. On trouvera, par les lieux indiquez dans cet Index, que *S. Augustin* differe des Manichéens, pour le fonds des dogmes controversez, bien plus en paroles qu’en effet.”

thought of this Anglican divine, Hales, and his Arminian belief on the doctrine of grace (and not only that).¹⁵⁴ He did that operation through an extra, careful and long, analysis of a work by Hales that the original book he was reviewing did not mention among Hales' works. That analysis, in the end, occupied the majority of the article itself.¹⁵⁵

In conclusion, from the evidence brought in this section, it appears that, on the doctrine of grace, Le Clerc saw himself as part of a Church tradition that went back to Origen and to Scriptural truth that was shared by many in his time and was considered by him as authoritative. Because another predominant tradition existed on the doctrine of grace, the Augustinian, it is left to clarify why, according to Le Clerc, the Church in general and much of the Protestant world in particular had chosen to follow the latter and not the former. This will be the subject of the next section.

7.3 Roman Catholic and Protestant Debates on Predestination

Le Clerc considered his understanding of the doctrine of grace as part of a larger Church consensus and this again as part of an orthodox Church tradition that went back to Scripture passing through Origen. Yet, much Church consensus existed in his time that opposed such an understanding of the doctrine of grace and that equally claimed to trace its understanding back to the early Church, and even arguably a more orthodox form of it, in Augustine. Le Clerc considered the obscurity of these doctrines, where revelation could help only up to a certain point, as part of the reasons that explained such division in ecclesiastical understanding.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, he also pointed to a good number of other reasons.

I have already mentioned a brief passage on the ecclesio-political influence of Augustine on Christianity. Le Clerc argued, on another occasion, that the terminological ambiguity and the obscurity of the thought of Augustine joined to its misuse in later centuries, because of his authority, were the origin of ecclesiastical disputes on the doctrine of grace and predestination.¹⁵⁷ This was also a recurring

154 *Id.*, BAM 23 (art. 4) 134–138.

155 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 120 f., reviewed the *Ioannis Halesii historia concilii Dordraceni* (1724), collated, edited and translated by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, but much of Le Clerc's article was spent on a work that Mosheim had not included in his list of Hales' works. Le Clerc explained that that particular treatise was part of a collection of rare works titled "The Phenix." See [DUNTON], *The Phenix* 2, 315–347. Compare it to the original work: VON MOSHEIM, *Ioannis Halesii historia* 187–196.

156 LE CLERC, BUH 14 (art. 5) 144–147.

157 *Ibid.* 147–155. Cf. *ibid.* 154 f.: "C'est là ce qui a fait naître tant de disputes, dans nôtre Occident, sur la doctrine de la Prédestination & de la Grace, considérée en elle même, & sur la manière dont & Augustin l'explique."

theme in Le Clerc. Yet, from the way Le Clerc presented the Roman Catholic debate on grace and predestination between Franciscans and Dominicans at first and between Jansenists and Jesuits later, we can infer that the misuse of Augustine and the obscurity of the doctrine of grace were only part of the explanation for the debates of his time on this doctrine. If we look at the way he discussed the confessional debate in a lengthy exposition which covered from 1524 (the year of publication of the *De libero arbitrio* of Erasmus) to 1689 (the year of publication of the article), we find many more detailed indications on what Le Clerc considered as the causes of doctrinal disputes in Roman Catholicism. In parallel, and we will see this shortly, most of these reasons also applied to the intra-Reformed debate.

One of the biggest problems in Roman Catholic disputes which we find mentioned often in Le Clerc's account was the confusion and ambiguity in Church documents. With the intention of condemning the thought of Luther or Jansen, Le Clerc maintained that the Roman Catholic Church had condemned in reality Thomas Aquinas and even Augustine.¹⁵⁸ The importance of Church tradition for Roman Catholicism forced that more weight was given to the authorities of the Roman Catholic tradition than to the matter itself, and that when those authorities seemed challenged in practice (for example by the Jesuits), censorship (the case of the University of Leuven) was applied.¹⁵⁹ However, because of the ensuing confusion and, at times, conscious ambiguous formulation of Church authorities covered by rhetoric, the Roman Catholic Church had been able to satisfy in appearance the various factions. Le Clerc could say that neither the thought of Franciscans on the doctrine of grace (closer to semi-Pelagianism) nor that of Dominicans (closer to Thomism) were thus ever condemned officially.¹⁶⁰

Politics and an authoritarian leadership style on the part of the Roman Catholic Church equally played a very important role in doctrinal debates on the doctrine of grace. Le Clerc was keen on showing various examples of that: political pressures from the Republic of Venice, the silencing of disputants by Roman authorities, the inquisition opposing the Jesuits and at the same time the political compromises of Jesuits with Dominicans against Jansenists and more.¹⁶¹ Human passions, like jealousy, together with ignorance, completed the picture.¹⁶² Thus, Le Clerc could claim that: "la Cour de Rome [...] n'est presque autre chose qu'un amas de gens qui ne pensent qu'à leur avancement, & parmi lesquels l'intrigue & l'adresse font tout."¹⁶³

158 Ibid. 163–166. 175. 180–183. 197 f. 203. 319 f. 323.

159 Ibid. 214–216. 231.

160 Ibid. 165 f. 171–173. 241. 243.

161 Ibid. 193 f. 219. 234. 240. 243. 267. 306. 336 f.

162 Ibid. 225 f. 248. 290.

163 Ibid. 345.

The fact that the Jesuits themselves apologetically equated at times the thought of Augustine and of Jansen to that of Calvin¹⁶⁴ (but also Franciscus Gomarus, 1563–1641, equally accused Arminius of being close to the Jesuits, besides Pelagians and Arians)¹⁶⁵ provides the bridge to the Protestant or more specifically intra-Reformed debate. As we know, this culminated in the Synod of Dort. Le Clerc covered the story of the Synod but especially the story preceding the Synod in much detail. Here, we find an evaluation by Le Clerc of the handling of these disputes by the mainstream Dutch Reformed Church that had much in common with what we already reviewed in the previous passage on the Roman Catholic debate.

One accusation moved by Le Clerc to the Dutch Reformed Church was that its provincial synods imposed dogma and a particular interpretation of Scripture even if theirs was a particularised opinion and not the overall consensus.¹⁶⁶ Le Clerc was also very critical of the request by some of the representatives of these regional synods who, in the preparation for a national synod, had required that the parties submit themselves to the judgment of the synod or of the majority of the votes. So Le Clerc: “le *Compromis* n’a assurément point de lieu ici, & on ne sauroit convenir d’aucun *Arbitrage*, quand il s’agit de Religion; ce seroit la faire dépendre des hommes, & non de Dieu.”¹⁶⁷ With this accusation of being authoritarian in matters of religion, Le Clerc compared the Dutch Reformed Church to the Roman Catholic Church, and the synod which it aimed to organise he compared to the council of Trent.¹⁶⁸

The claim that politics interfered much in matters of religion was again also made against the Dutch Reformed Church, which could count on the support of Prince Maurice of Nassau, of King James I and of other external parties.¹⁶⁹ As with the story of the Roman Catholic debates on the doctrine of grace, Le Clerc also added that the widespread ignorance among Reformed ministers and their biased attitude towards Arminius and the Remonstrants had played a major role in the dispute.¹⁷⁰ Similar complaints, the fear of political retaliation, the widespread ignorance among the Swiss clergy and the possible power struggle with Saumur were for Le Clerc also the reason why some of the Swiss churches had signed the *Consensus Helveticus*.¹⁷¹

164 Ibid. 209. 238. 282–284. 309.

165 Id., *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 1, 272. 299.

166 Ibid. 266 f.

167 Ibid. 268.

168 Ibid. 269. 275; id., *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 2, 47. We can find a similar argument already in id., *Parrhasiana* 205–207.

169 Id., *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 1, 288. 290. 297. 302. 318 f.

170 Ibid. 267. 271. 284. 329; id., *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 2, 24.

171 Id., *BAM* 25 (art. 6) 160 f.; id., *Sentimens* 442.

From the previous pages it becomes clear that, although Le Clerc considered the Origenist tradition as orthodox, Scriptural, and as representative of the early Church consensus and of much consensus in his time, different processes had had an important influence. Church tradition had been spoiled by confusion, terminological ambiguities as well as political interests, human passions, ignorance and the fact that decisions in religious matters were often imposed through authority rather than through reasons. Le Clerc's effort to redefine theological orthodoxy, also in the case of the doctrine of grace, seems thus motivated, besides confessional interests, by a desire to restore the message of Christianity without the various factors that contributed to its pollution.

7.4 Origen as Rational Theologian

So far in this chapter, but also in the previous one on the doctrine of original sin, we have seen that Le Clerc attempted on multiple occasions and in multiple ways to render Origen's thought orthodox in those cases where his own orthodoxy had been disputed. Yet, the doctrine of grace, if it was conceived as allowing for a sort of absolute predestination, presented not only a challenge from the point of view of inter-confessional disputes, but, according to Le Clerc, posed the whole of the Christian religion on a very weak basis. Quite surprisingly, we find one occasion where Le Clerc went beyond confessional differences on what he believed were the effects of personal morality, and in the *De l'incrédulité* his argument presented the whole of Christianity as a united front on that matter. He contended that: "tous les Chrétiens, malgré leurs divisions, conviennent de certains articles, par l'examen desquels il faut nécessairement que les Incrédules & les Infidèles commentent."¹⁷² Among these shared articles, he mentioned the "[c]ommandemens de Morale, & des recompenses & des peines qui y sont attachées."¹⁷³ Outwardly, in this passage Le Clerc wanted to provide an impression of unity by neglecting the importance of the doctrine of absolute predestination, but if we look at other passages in his vast production, we find that in reality he accused orthodox Reformed theologians of "incoherence" and, as we saw earlier, compared them to ancient stoics. On the one hand they maintained the need for everyday morality, but on the other they predicated absolute predestination.¹⁷⁴

Le Clerc's attempt to show a united front in matters of morality and salvation before atheists and libertines rested on his assumption that there was a fundamental conceptual problem with the doctrine of absolute predestination. We find

172 Id., *De l'incrédulité* 195.

173 Ibid. 195 f.

174 Id., BAM 6 (art. 2) 113 f.

part of this problem summed up by Le Clerc in a review of Cornelis Bontekoe's (1645–1687) *Metaphysica* (1688). According to Le Clerc, Bontekoe had argued that even our thoughts are completely dependent on God and that they are actually his own work, so that human beings were not only deprived of physical freedom (Bontekoe was using Cartesian physics) but also of the freedom of their mind.¹⁷⁵ This meant for Le Clerc that: “En seignant d'élever l'excellence de la nature divine, & d'humilier l'homme, on fait de Dieu un homme, & de l'homme une machine incapable de mal comme de bien; de punition, comme de recompense.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, Le Clerc saw the problem with the doctrine of absolute predestination as a deprivation of human beings of their moral responsibility and of the possibility of determining their destination in the afterlife at the expense of an affirmation of God's excellence. Le Clerc was firmly convinced of the capability of human beings to contribute to their own salvation with their behaviour and their penitence for past sins, as in the Arminian tradition.

Le Clerc's way of conceiving of both human freedom and responsibility, but at the same time of preserving God's excellence, was to posit that God was actually responsible for significantly helping human beings on the good path both through external instruments (for example Revelation) but also through internal inspiration. He expressed his consent to this thought and added his own reflection in a review of the work of Whitby, who had put forward a similar argument. Following this idea, God was thus ultimately to be glorified for every good action, because he was the only and necessary source of it, even though human beings were responsible for it too – but Le Clerc expressed his ignorance on how that actually happened:

“Il se peut faire encore que Dieu éloigne de nôtre esprit de mauvaises pensées, qui autrement l'occuperoyent, & éteigne en partie les passions, qui nous empêchent de faire l'attention que nous devons aux veritez célestes & de nous y rendre, parce qu'elles leur sont opposées; & que Dieu agisse, en cela, non seulement au dehors, mais encore au dedans, quoi que nous n'en sâchions pas la maniere, ou que nous n'en ayons qu'une idée imparfaite. Ceux, qui sont en état de faire des réflexions sur leur disposition interieure & sur leur conduite passée, ne douteront même pas de ce que je viens de dire. Ainsi il faut rendre graces à Dieu de tout, & lui donner toute la gloire de nôtre salut. On ne pourroit se vanter de se l'être procuré sans extravagance, seulement parce qu'on s'est rendu à tant de graces célestes; qui ne nous ont été données, que pour nous empêcher de nous perdre, & que nous n'avons méritées, par aucune action anterieure. Dieu a tout sujet de blâmer & de punir ceux, qui ne s'y rendent pas, puis qu'il y a eu cela de la fureur & une malice indomtable; mais plus cette fureur & cette malice sont grandes, moins il y a de sujet de se glorifier de ne s'y être pas laissé entrainer; après tous les soins, que Dieu a pris de nous en empêcher. On auroit

175 Id., BUH 12 (art. 3/3) 117 f.

176 Ibid. 119.

grand tort, après tout cela, d'accuser ceux, qui soutiennent que Dieu nous laisse la liberté de résister à ses grâces, ou de nous y rendre, de ce qu'ils donnent à la Créature la gloire, qui n'appartient qu'à Dieu."¹⁷⁷

The theological problem of human freedom, which could have seemed a threat to God's excellence, was thus easily solved by Le Clerc with a reference to the unmerited divine "grace" which in the quote seemed like an essential, even if not sufficient, support for good human actions. It was wrong, therefore, to praise human beings for their own good actions, because they had received divine support, but it was equally inconsiderate to state that human beings were pure puppets in the hand of God, because it was in their power to reject such divine grace.

The concept of "grace" used by Le Clerc needs clarification, because it is obvious from the just mentioned argument and from his Arminian background, that, for Le Clerc, divine grace was of a different kind than what was normally believed in Reformed orthodoxy. Le Clerc had already contended in the first edition of his *Ars Critica* that the commonly shared understanding of divine grace in his time was the result of a confused use of terms in the early Church, from the time of Augustine. Grace had been understood as "*de hominis ad saniolem mentem reditu, & vi cui is reditus debetur*";¹⁷⁸ a sort of regenerative force for the human mind, but the problem was that it was not at all clear for him what was actually meant by that: "*voce quid significetur, cum ab iis quaeritur, qui ea utuntur, nihil responsi perspicui ferre licet.*"¹⁷⁹ The only clear statement we can draw from Augustine on grace, Le Clerc wrote, was that it is a kind of divine force that overcomes human freedom:

*"Nulla definitio vocis Gratia, quae quadret in notionem Augustini, dari potest, praeter hanc: Est nescio quid, quo Deus, ex Augustini sententia, animos nostros ad pietatem ineluctabiliter flectit, idque ab omnibus cum nostris ratiocinationibus, tum iis quae extrinsecus nobis objiciuntur distinctum. Si nitaris clariorem notionem adnectere voci Gratia, ea tua erit notio, non Augustiniana."*¹⁸⁰

Le Clerc's point was to highlight that some commonly used concepts were obscure. He subtly admonished those of his contemporaries who were composing lexica and dictionaries (but in the background of his mind there could well also have been the theologians from the opposing party) that to try to define clearly these concepts, such as that of grace, would be a worthless effort, because that

177 Id., BAM 9 (art. 4) 141–143.

178 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1697) 323.

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid. 324f. Le Clerc changed the wording slightly at least from the fourth edition of 1712 (I have not been able to read the third edition). Here, *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 224, we read "*paucorum animos ad pietatem*" instead of "*animos nostros ad pietatem.*"

result was not reachable.¹⁸¹ They should be aware of the fact that, so Le Clerc, they might also be confusing their own thoughts with those of the ancients, without noticing that they were different.¹⁸²

As a response to a polemic with a certain van der Waeyen, Le Clerc reinstated this point a couple of years later in the *Parrhasiana*, and concluded: “je n’ai aucune idée d’une action qui fasse vouloir irrésistiblement, & qui laisse la liberté de ne vouloir point.”¹⁸³ The problematic nature of the concept of “grace” seemed thus to reside more in its interpretation by Augustine and the Augustinian tradition. Le Clerc’s intention was not to affirm the impossibility of a clear definition of the concept of divine grace, even though it might have seemed so from the previous passage, but to show that the particular conception of grace held by Augustine could not be clarified further and therefore remained obscure (and unusable).

Le Clerc opposed clearly the concept of irresistible grace and the same controversy with Van der Waeyen provides an example of it. The disputed passage was from Acts 16:14, in which, referring to “a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia”, it was written that “the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” Le Clerc rejected the interpretation of Van der Waeyen that the “opening of the heart” was an irresistible act of God that had such an effect on her will so that she converted, and he contended that it did not represent what was actually written in the given passage. In reality, God did only so that Lydia could hear Paul’s words carefully.¹⁸⁴ He then referred to his own *Ars Critica*, in which he reinstated the same point and considered any interpretation that saw this opening of the heart as an act of irresistible grace as an unnecessary “ἐμφάσεις” of the biblical passage.¹⁸⁵ Le Clerc seemed to claim that although God’s support allowed to hear, to see, to be attentive, it did not have a major effect on the will itself and left human beings free to act in the way they wanted. This was confirmed from, among others, an earlier explanation of the passage in Jer. 31:33, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts”, in which Le Clerc believed that God had not done this so that human beings would necessarily follow his law, but instead had inscribed his law in their memory.¹⁸⁶

181 Ibid. 1 (1697) 325: “*Ne frustra laborarent quærendo claram significationem vocis.*”

182 Ibid.

183 Id., *Parrhasiana* 427.

184 Ibid. 427f. Some years later, in his French translation and commentary to the New Testament, LE CLERC, *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 51, argued that this passage had to be interpreted metaphorically. The “opening of the heart” meant the spiritual preparation of Lydia carried out by God. Le Clerc stressed that one has to open the heart to let God in (he supported this with the reference to Rev. 3:20) and wrote that Lydia must have not resisted the divine vocation.

185 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1697) 244f.

186 Ibid. 239 f.

A more precise definition of divine grace drawn from Scripture itself was already present in the *Ars Critica*. Here, divine grace was defined as God's "misericordiam, aut beneficium quodpiam."¹⁸⁷ In a later edition, Le Clerc added as proof 1 Cor. 3:10; 15:10 and clarified that he did not reject altogether the idea that God would act inside human beings in an unknown way ("*occultæ Dei in animum actiones*"), but that he did not agree that such a grace was given to only the few. Grace was considered ("*cùm putetur*") necessary for salvation and had therefore to be given to all to be just.¹⁸⁸ That understanding of divine grace as divine mercy was confirmed in other works, especially in Le Clerc's French translation of the New Testament¹⁸⁹ but, together with this it also meant God's imputed justification and forgiveness of sins,¹⁹⁰ his favours more generally¹⁹¹ and also the Gospel itself.¹⁹² In the end, Le Clerc's conception of divine grace seemed coherent with his aversion to its absolute efficacy for human conversion and his belief in the possibility for human beings to either make use of or reject such grace. It seemed thus unproblematic for him to state that the primacy of God's grace but also the possibility for human response would preserve both divine excellence and human responsibility. This was, for him, also philosophically sound, because where only God had given human beings the power to act, he could withhold it, but until he did, human beings were responsible for what they did with that power. They could not create new substances, but new accidents.¹⁹³

To go back to the conceptual problems of the doctrine of grace, the fact that Le Clerc could find a relatively simple answer to those who claimed that his version

187 Ibid. 324.

188 Id., *Ars Critica* 1 (1712) 223 f.

189 As, again, in 1 Cor. 15:10, but also in Rm. 5:17: id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 98. 162.

190 See Tit. 3:7; LE CLERC, *ibid.* 2, 269. This meaning is also present in a note, written by Le Clerc, to Rm. 11:5 that appeared in the second edition of Le Clerc's translation of Hammond's work (in the previous version from 1699, the note was a simple paraphrase, see p. 56 – the content remained substantially unchanged). Here, the "grace of God" meant that God disregarded the lacking observance of the law by Jews and pagans and called them to be part of his family. The "chosen by grace" "*κατ' ἐκλογήν χάριτος*" meant that God had forgiven the Jews and the pagans, but also that these had believed in Christ and obeyed him. The election was not God's action but the result of the human response, which was, however, based on the previous forgiving by God: HAMMOND, *Novum Testamentum* 1, 85.

191 In Acts 7:8; 18:27. LE CLERC, *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 21. 59.

192 So, for example, in Jn. 1:17; Acts 13:43; 21:32. LE CLERC, *ibid.* 1, 264; 2, 44. 65.

193 This philosophical argument, already developed by Le Clerc in the first edition of his *Pneumatologia*, shows again the centrality of an argument that would safeguard God's excellence without sacrificing the active participations of human beings. LE CLERC, *Opera philosophica* 2, 146–151, referred to a certain *Durandus* as the source of his argument, which seems to be identifiable with the Dominican Durandus of Saint-Pourçain (c. 1275–1332/1334).

of the doctrine of grace did not preserve God's excellence, the argument we have just reviewed, did not mean that he had neglected other aspects of the question too. In fact, the threat that, according to him, the doctrine of absolute predestination posed to divine justice was even greater and, as we shall see, it is in this place that references to Origen resurfaced.¹⁹⁴

Before we discuss these references, however, it is important to note why Le Clerc had to recur to them in the first place. The traditional Arminian position on the doctrine of grace was, at least in Le Clerc's understanding, at least formally, the one called "conditional predestination." The idea was that God's decree of election and reprobation was not based on his sole sovereign will – it was considered an incredible injustice that a large part of human beings were lost without having had the chance to redeem themselves – but on the faith in Jesus Christ that he foresaw in human beings.¹⁹⁵ This came close to – if it was not a full adherence – the Molinist doctrine of the *scientia media* and solved the problem of God's justice in his judgment in the afterlife, because human beings alone were responsible for their own destiny: God had given all the sufficient means to be part of the elected.¹⁹⁶

Le Clerc, however, did not develop further this theological argument in his own deposit of rational theology and went a different path. He affirmed that, philosophically speaking, both God's prevision was assured but also the contingency of future events. He discussed various positions on this subject, like the idea of those who reject God's foreknowledge of future contingency because they believe that certain kinds of contingencies cannot be known by him ("*repugnet eos à Deo prænosci*") and at the same time still remain contingencies. He quoted Cicero on this occasion.¹⁹⁷ Le Clerc left out on purpose from this discussion those who did not admit any contingency at all and he did not fail to mention the argument of those who contended that God must know in advance future contingencies necessarily, because not to know them would be unworthy of him, since he would then become wiser every passing day.¹⁹⁸ Le Clerc, however, assured that these different kinds of reasoning, rejecting God's foreknowledge altogether or making it necessary: "*objectiones meræ sunt; quibus nullo modo solvitur argumentum adversariorum* [that negated God's foreknowledge]."¹⁹⁹

194 See, for example, id., BUH 14 (art. 5) 152.

195 Id., BUH 3 (art. 18) 364; id., BUH 4 (art. 8) 346.

196 STANGLIN, Arminius and Arminianism 10–13, provided a brief summary of recent scholarship on this subject.

197 LE CLERC, Opera philosophica 2, 131. Cicero's argument (quoted from his *De divinatione*) was that, if contingencies were foreseen, they would happen necessarily, and so there would not exist any chance or luck.

198 Ibid. 131 f.

199 Ibid. 132.

Le Clerc's own position on this discussion was that God knows future contingencies because this is a fact confirmed in Scripture, even if we have to admit that we do not know how this happens in practice.²⁰⁰ The option offered by the *scientia media* was too philosophical to be coherent to his epistemology. He mentioned that the *Scholastici* distinguish between absolute, conditional and simple knowledge and vision (*scientia absoluta*, *scientia conditionata* – identifiable with the *scientia media* – *scientia simplicis intelligentiæ* and *scientia visionis*)²⁰¹ but this remark appeared more as a final statement to provide information that is as complete as possible, rather than as something he subscribed to personally. This distinction was given very little space within the chapter and seems in contrast to Le Clerc's sceptical note and his rejection of philosophical speculations in religion.

Again, in a later chapter of the same work, the *Pneumatologia*, where Le Clerc discussed the "moral properties of God", among which was also God's justice, he did not discuss it in conjunction with the possible objections to it derived from the just mentioned concepts of prevision and contingency. He argued that the *justitia vindicatrix* is in God "*quippe qui summus hominum Judex naturâ suâ est.*"²⁰² This simple postulate was followed by a very brief discussion of God's just punishment of those who commit injustice in this life and a reference to the discussion of their possible eternal punishment, but no further philosophical reasoning was provided in support of his attribution to the divinity of the "moral property" of justice.²⁰³ As a comparison, the attribute of clemency (*beneficentia*) was believed to be in God "*ipsâ experientiâ, sine multis ratiocinationibus.*"²⁰⁴

We have to take into account that what we have just read on divine justice and clemency was part of a manual of philosophy, the *Pneumatologia* – and the gist of the argument remained the same at least up to the fifth edition of 1722. The way in which Le Clerc presented these arguments, however, seems to confirm that his solution to what he considered problems posed by the doctrine of absolute predestination to God's justice (how can God be just if he condemns human beings without demerit) was not to try to subscribe to the Arminian doctrine of conditional predestination. Instead, he considered divine justice as a given and admitted that human beings are ignorant on its relationship to prevision and contingency.

200 Ibid.: "At ii omnium modestissimè ac prudentissimè se gerere nobis videntur, qui postquàm eventus esse contingentes, atque ex Scriptura Deum ejusmodi eventus prædixisse ostenderunt; ideò, licèt contingentiam rerum cum præcognitione certa conciliare nequeamus, tamen hanc esse admittendam contendunt, quia modum quo Deus res cognoscit ignoramus."

201 Ibid. 133.

202 Ibid. 179 f.

203 Ibid. 180.

204 Ibid. 181.

To admit that the relationship between human and divine freedom, at the purely speculative level, was unclear was an acceptable statement for Le Clerc, especially given his epistemological ground beliefs. This did not mean that he was not uncomfortable with this problem at the confessional level,²⁰⁵ especially

205 We have a sense of how much Le Clerc was keen on strengthening a non-predestinarian conception of soteriology at the theological level if we examine his comments on the New Testament, in which Scripture was repeatedly used as support, even if not formally, for his theological position. A few examples will illustrate this point. In Mt. 19:25 f., Jesus replied to the apostles, frightened for their own salvation after his teaching on the difficulty for rich people to enter the kingdom of God: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Le Clerc argued that the "impossible" in this passage was to be interpreted hyperbolically, that is that it is very difficult with human reasoning to convince someone of abandoning wealth, but that it is very easy for Jesus with reasons and promises of the Gospel. Again in Jn. 17:24 Jesus prayed to the Father with the following words: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am." Le Clerc explained that although the verb "you gave Me" is in the past, Jesus in reality meant the future, because it was usual in Jewish culture to speak in that way out of certainty of execution. That God intended to extend his invitation to all and that everyone could respond with faith was clear from, for example, Jn 1:12 f. and 17:9. Furthermore, in Acts 13:48, Le Clerc interpreted the "appointed to eternal life" not in the sense that some human beings had been elected for salvation, but as a natural inclination towards God in certain people, due to the grace of God. He clarified, however, that even without such a natural inclination, everybody has enough natural light to obey God and can acquire more of that divine grace if he uses properly what he has already. If somebody is not disposed to eternal life, so Le Clerc, it is due to one's own fault, not to God's. Again, and here Le Clerc's intent was particularly evident, in Rm. 8:28 we read: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Thus, the calling, in this passage, is God's action. Le Clerc instead translated this passage as "selon leur disposition", in which the reason for the calling was the human disposition. However, if we look at the original Greek, we find only *κατὰ πρόθεσιν*, which could be translated, at least formally, in both ways. Le Clerc noted that there is no "their" in the original Greek, but he contended that he referred to what he believed was the sense of the passage. Furthermore, Le Clerc believed that *πρόθεσις* had to be understood not as a plan in the sense of decree, but as a person's own plan of life and thus as a "disposition". He supported that with a reference to the parable of the sower in Lk. 8:15. He concluded, somehow enigmatically, that this disposition originates from God, who is the author of everything but sin, so that he is the only one that needs to be thanked. Finally, in the lines after the passage we have just discussed, the famous Rm. 8:29 f., "for whom He foreknew, He also predestined [...] whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Le Clerc turned this passage completely around in comparison to what other confessional circles had done with it. God's foreknowledge of some he interpreted as "ceux dont Dieu a approuvé la foi", God's active predestination he transferred into the present "il les destine", because he contended that, in this case, a habitual action was expressed with the aorist but should be translated in the present. God has destined and continues to destine. God's calling, in this passage, he understood to apply not in general to those who received the Gospel, but especially to those who receive the Gospel properly. This leads to their justification, in which case, for Le Clerc, God looks upon them as just due to their answer to the divine vocation and they

because the doctrine of predestination was, as is known, one of the hottest battlegrounds in confessional controversies. It was within this framework that Le Clerc went back to Origen's work, the first time as part of his commentary on the book of Exodus in 1696, in particular on the famous passage of the hardening of the pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21). In his paraphrase of the passage, Le Clerc restored the meaning to what he believed was intended, that is, that it was the result of the pharaoh's action and not of God, as could have appeared from a superficial reading, if the pharaoh stubbornly insisted on not letting the people of Israel leave Egypt.²⁰⁶

In the commentary section of this passage, Le Clerc mentioned firstly the problem of the text. This seemed to clash, in its literal sense, with divine justice. One solution that he mentioned as being contended by "some" was to suppose an "*arcanam quamdam Dei actionem*", that was of a kind that through it but at the same time from within the soul of the pharaoh himself it made his heart harder. For Le Clerc this reading could be reconciled with divine justice only *vix ac ne vix*.²⁰⁷ The even harder reading, that God was directly responsible for the hardening of the pharaoh, and even that God in a way had decreed that the pharaoh would not obey his commands and thus be lost, even though God remained his judge, was plainly irreconcilable for him with divine justice.²⁰⁸ In this harder reading resurfaced what Le Clerc considered to be the problem with the doctrine of predestination in relation to divine justice, even if he did not explicitly refer to this doctrine in the comment of this biblical passage (after all, his formal aim was to do exegesis and not theology). He therefore had every reason to counter such a reading and referred to the *Phil* of Origen in a provocative way: "*Respondeant [those who support the harder reading of the passage] huic Origenis, in Philocaliæ Cap. XXVII. quæstioni.*"²⁰⁹

become part of his glory due to their faith. Thus, even this passage, which would prove strongly a predestinarian reading of Paul's epistle, was interpreted by Le Clerc in the opposite sense. More and more examples from Scripture, especially the Epistles, would show Le Clerc's intent and theological thinking: id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 1, 79. 264. 321 f.; 2, 44. 107 f. Other passages worthy of mention, which I am unable to consider here due to space and time limitations, would be, for example, Rm. 9:11–13; Eph. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:10. However, it is surprising that Le Clerc did not comment at all other "hot" passages, such as Eph. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 2 Thess. 2:13 f.: *ibid.* 2, 110. 206 f. 221. 246. 318.

206 Id., *Mosis prophetæ libri quatuor* 20: "*Scio autem hominem [the pharaoh] usque adeò pertinacis esse ingenii, ut vel hac ipsâ oratione, editisque prodigii, ad negandum quod rogabis obstinatio sit futurus.*"

207 *Ibid.* 21.

208 *Ibid.*

209 *Ibid.*

In the passage that Le Clerc quoted in full both in Greek and in Latin,²¹⁰ Origen showed the logical inconsistency of a reading that would consider the hardening of the pharaoh as the result not of his free will, but of his predetermined fate and so, ultimately, of God's choice. Origen asked what would be the reason for God's hardening, was one to admit it, if the pharaoh was "*conditus est ad interitum*", born to be lost, because such hardening would not be required. He also asked what the pharaoh would have done if he had not been hardened by God (supposing that it was God who had hardened him). If the pharaoh had released the people of Israel, then he could not be said to be "*conditus ad interitum*", but if, instead, he would have not released them anyway, then God's eventual hardening was, once again, superfluous.²¹¹ Although Le Clerc used this passage polemically against a conception of the pharaoh's actions which mirrored the doctrine of absolute predestination, he commented this passage with a word of caution, stressing the fact that, even if Origen's reasoning was stringent, it could not be said to escape every difficulty due to the intrinsic ambiguity of an ancient language.²¹²

Following the *pars destruens* of his argument, Le Clerc went on to explain that in Jewish culture as well as in the Gospels, the causality of a result was often attributed to what had provided the occasion for it to happen, not to the efficient cause in itself. He referred on this occasion to Grotius' reading of Matt. 10:34 and Luke 12:49;51, in which the latter had attributed "the sword" or "fire" or "division" not directly to God's plan but only secondarily so, because he foresaw that this would have been the human response to his message of peace.²¹³ This meant for

210 The Greek text and the Latin translation were taken, in a slightly altered way, from the Spencer edition of 1658.

211 LE CLERC, *Mosis prophetæ libri quatuor* 24 n. 21: "*Qui conditus est ad interitum, numquam quidquam ex melioribus facere potest, cum ei ad honesta natura ipsa quæ inest repugnet. Quid ergo opus erat Pharaonem, filium, ut dicitis, interitiûs indurari à Deo, ne dimitteret populum? nisi enim fuisset induratus, dimisisset. [...] Respondeant, & de hoc quid videatur dicant. Quid fecisset Pharaos, nisi induratus esset? Si enim dimisisset non induratus, non erat perditæ naturæ. Si non dimisisset, supervacuum erat cor ejus indurari, neque enim non induratus dimisisset.*"

212 *Ibid.*: "*Sed non opus est usque adeò urgeri phrases, quasi essent Geometræ cujusdam, & sine ambiguitate, & ut nos solemus, loquentis.*"

213 GROTIUS, *Annotationes in libros Evangeliorum* 209. 736. Le Clerc explained other biblical passages following this thought pattern, for example Is. 63:17, in which case he referred to the philological-grammatical considerations of Salomo Glassius (1593–1656) and his *Philologia Sacra* (1623–1636). He also discussed Mt. 10:34 and argued that there are two ways of doing evil, intentional or unintentional, and only the latter is not to blame, even if what would happen was foreseen (but not desired). Le Clerc added that it was still worth doing the action that would cause an effect (in this specific case the preaching of the Gospel) even if that would bring division unintentionally, because it was useful at least to save some. He referred to this clarification also in his comments on Rm. 9:18: LE CLERC, *Veteris Testamenti prophetæ* 291; *id.*, *Le Nouveau Testament* 1, 43 f.; 2, 111.

Le Clerc necessarily that: “*Deus pertinaciæ ejus [of the Pharaoh] occasio fuit, non causa.*”²¹⁴ Yet, Le Clerc felt the need to strengthen his point, going back again to Origen’s text, and quoted two passages from the same chapter of the *Phil.* The first passage showed that Le Clerc’s understanding of the passage was in agreement with what Origen had claimed, that is: “*Tot signis & prodigiis factis non obtemperat Pharaos, sed & post hæc resistit, ut durities & incredulitas ex prodigiis oriri potuisse videantur.*”²¹⁵ The second passage illustrated this point even further, since Origen argued that it was a general language use that a master would say to his wrong-doing servant, “I have ruined you”, yet through his patience and goodness, the master was only the occasion of that.²¹⁶

Le Clerc added even more support on this point from the ancients and also included a passage from Faustus of Riez which Le Clerc contended was “*forte ex Origene desumpto.*” In this passage, Faustus of Riez repeated essentially in a more elaborated way Origen’s reflection on the common language use between master and servant.²¹⁷ At the end of it, Le Clerc extended this understanding of the passage to the major part of the early Church since he argued that: “*Similia habent plerique Patres Græci, qui de hoc loco egerunt.*”²¹⁸ His conclusion was that such understanding should also be applied to similar sentences found in the Bible²¹⁹ and that, in any case, the hardening of the pharaoh was to be ascribed properly to the pharaoh himself and only *ἐσχηματισμένως*, figuratively, to God.²²⁰ On this last point, we find again Le Clerc’s ambiguity with Origen’s biblical scholarship as discussed earlier, to Le Clerc’s advantage. Le Clerc very interestingly referred once again back to Origen’s *Phil.*, this time to chapter 9, and to his own commentary of Gen. 3:6 as proof of the possibility of interpreting Scripture correctly in that figurative manner.²²¹ Origen was here a resource not just as an ancient rational

214 Id., *Mosis prophetæ libri 22 n. 21.*

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.: “*Sæpe boni heri patientia usi in delinquentes servos, dicere solent, Ego te perdidisti, & Ego te malum feci, ostendentes cum affectu bonitatem suam & patientiam causam videri fuisse increscentis nequitiae.*”

217 Ibid.

218 Ibid.

219 So, for example, Acts 4:28, in which Jesus’ death, following one interpretation, could be said to be ultimately the result of God’s will. LE CLERC, *Le Nouveau Testament* 2, 16, argued that God had only provided the circumstances, but not compelled anyone to do the crime. He stressed that caution was needed in the interpretation of a passage because this had to conform to divine justice, goodness and holiness.

220 Id., *Mosis prophetæ libri 22 n. 21.*

221 In chapter 9 of the *Philocalia*, Origen covered, among other things, the biblical use of the concept of “sight” and contended that there are two ways of conceiving this in Scripture, as bodily sight or, figuratively, as referring to knowledge. LE CLERC, *Genesis* 28 n. 6, followed Origen on this point (but he did not mention him, he mentioned Grotius instead) in his

theologian, but also as an authoritative interpreter of what may have seemed a difficult passage of Scripture.

More than 20 years later, we find again a reference to Origen in the *Historia ecclesiastica* within a similar discussion. The context of that was the discussion of Christian prolegomena that I already introduced in the previous chapter on the doctrine of original sin, but this time it was a different subsection, dedicated to the human relationship with God, with oneself and with each other. In comparison to what we have just reviewed on Genesis, in this case the reference to Origen was very brief and Le Clerc did not quote it in full. It was included in a note to the sentence: “*Non satis bene sentiret de Deo, qui Potentiam quidem Dei extolleret, & summum ejus Dominium in creaturas; intèreaque eum præcipientem & facientem ea induceret, quæ cum Sanctitate, Justitia, & Bonitate consistere non possunt.*”²²² In the note, Le Clerc firstly explained what was behind that stress of divine omnipotence which clashed with divine attributes. He argued that those who contended that human beings cannot not sin did attribute those sins ultimately to divine agency and that, because these human beings were to pay with eternal torment those sins that they did not commit out of their own responsibility, this could not be reconciled with divine sanctity and justice.²²³

In the back of Le Clerc’s mind there was surely the doctrine of absolute predestination and the controversy with orthodox Reformed thought: “*Qui talia [that God is the author of sin] esse Christianæ Theologiæ dogmata contendunt, & negantibus etiam indignantur, eam repugnantia omnium maximæ imprudentes ream faciunt.*”²²⁴ Le Clerc concluded the note by pointing to Origen’s *Phil*: “*Contrarium dogma tuentem vide Origenem in Philocalia Cap. XXI & XXVII.*”²²⁵ Origen’s work seemed to be a sort of depot of contra-arguments to which Le Clerc pointed. In chapter 21 of the *Phil*, Origen discussed the so-called difficult biblical passages which one could have interpreted in favour of a pre-determination of human actions, such as the famous passage of the pharaoh, but also Isa. 63:17, Jer. 20:7 or Mark 4:12. Here, we also find a discussion of the passage from Ex. 4:21 on the pharaoh’s hardening that we have just reviewed in the earlier example and that was present also in chapter 27. If we compare Origen’s interpretation of the “difficult passages” as in chapter 21, we note, however, that in none of them did Le Clerc quote Origen explicitly and that in many of them his interpretation differed

commentary of Gen. 3:6. He argued that Eve’s seeing of the tree of knowledge could be understood in both senses.

222 Id., *Historia ecclesiastica* 127.

223 Ibid. 126 f. n. 1.

224 Ibid. 127 n. 1.

225 Ibid.

from that of the Alexandrian.²²⁶ Yet, in the note we just reviewed, Le Clerc proved that Scripture indicated otherwise through the reasoning and demonstrations of Origen. The role of Origen was obviously also that of being an authoritative testimony of the belief of the early Church and we can consider this as an additional support of similar reflections made earlier.

How significant were the two passages we have reviewed in the previous pages, where Le Clerc referenced Origen's work and thought? I believe they testify of the way Origen could be useful to Le Clerc in his theological discussions surrounding the problem of human freedom and divine providence. This applies not only to Origen's authority as an early Church writer – still this was surely also a primary element, as we saw earlier – but also for the actual arguments that he developed. The 20 years which passed between these two passages were not uneventful on the Le Clerc–Origen side. The many examples from previous chapters provided many interesting insights. These years were also the years of the controversy with Bayle, which we will review again in more detail in the next chapter, and where Origen was still instrumental for Le Clerc, among other things, again for what concerned the doctrine of absolute predestination. Still, the two passages presented in the last pages, so temporally far apart from each other, happened to be in works that were central to the indirect debate with Reformed orthodoxy on the doctrine of grace. These two last passages enrich our perception of Le Clerc's relationship with the thought of Origen, something which will become even more clear within the discussion on theodicy that we will analyse in the next chapter.

226 It was the case with Ps. 127(126):1, for example, in which Le Clerc interpreted the passage, broadly speaking, in the same sense as Origen, but with his own specific argument. No mention was made of Origen there. In Jer. 20:7 we find no trace of Origen in the interpretation and Le Clerc also started from a different translation of the passage. Instead of translating the “*Ἠπάτησάς με*”, as it was in Origen's original text (it was the text of the LXX), translated by Spencer as “*decepisti me*”, Le Clerc preferred to translate it as “*mihi persuasisti*”. His interpretation was simpler and did not require a lot more explanation. Compared to Origen, Le Clerc interpreted very differently even Mk. 4:12, in which case he referred to Mt. 13:13. It was because of the weak perceiving capability of his hearers that Jesus spoke in parables. More passages of this kind can be found in Rm. 9:13, in which Le Clerc, unlike Origen, interpreted Paul's mention of the story of Esau and Jacob as an intention to point to two separate nations, but also Rm. 9:16 where Le Clerc, again unlike Origen, interpreted this passage as symbolising the vocation of a people to know him. A similar pattern we can find in Rm. 9:22; 1 Cor. 5:5; Phil. 2:13; LE CLERC, *Veteris Testamenti libri hagiographi* 503 n. 1, id., *Veteris Testamenti prophetæ* 407 n. 7; id., *Le Nouveau Testament* 1, 55 n. 13; 129 n. 12; 2, 110 n. 13 and n. 16; 111 n. 22; 140 n. 5; 222 n. 13. See SPENCER, *ΩΡΙΓΕΝΗΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΚΕΛΣΟΥ* 50–67.

8. Doctrinal Debates: Theodicy

In this final chapter, I review the role of Origen for Le Clerc within the debate with Bayle on what was later called theodicy, that is, the relationship of God's attributes, especially his justice and goodness, with the presence of evil. Here, we return to those passages in Le Clerc in which his possible "Origenism" was the most evident and which therefore provided the first inputs to the present research. The next pages will consequently be very fruitful, because they will not only provide further evidence on Le Clerc's reception of Origen and his role in Le Clerc's construction of orthodoxy, but also provide insights on another side of the question, that is, Le Clerc's "Origenist mask." In the first section, I will return to the first arguments proposed by Le Clerc against Bayle in their debate on theodicy, then move to subsequent parts of the debate and also take into account the parallel eschatological discussion. As one might imagine, this discussion was very much interconnected with the debate on theodicy. I will conclude this chapter with a review of Le Clerc's final and strongest answer to Bayle and compare it to Le Clerc's claim that he proposed an argument that went beyond his original Origenist mask.

8.1 The Early Stage of the Debate

According to Le Clerc's understanding, Manicheans, whose argument he rejected "clothed" as an Origenist, as we will see below, believed in *fatum Stoïcum*, they fully deprived human beings of their freedom and ascribed evil and sins not to God but to an evil principle.²²⁷ The closeness Le Clerc perceived between the doctrine of absolute predestination as held by orthodox Reformed and the Manichean position was evident.²²⁸ In 1689, ten years before the appearance of *Parrhasiana* and so of the famous dispute with Bayle's Manicheans, Le Clerc had already proposed

227 LE CLERC, *Compendium historiae universalis* 126.

228 Apart from the final point, the existence of a "second God" who is responsible for all evil, we can see here the commonality of the Manichean argument and the one of the absolute predestination of the orthodox Reformed. It will be no surprise, therefore, that Le Clerc's stress on human freedom and responsibility was also one of the weapons he employed in the controversy on Manicheans. Despite the specificity of the two positions, for Le Clerc, the Manichean and the orthodox Reformed seemed like a united front on that point that, as we saw in earlier sections, had a strong connection with Augustine. The bishop of Hippo had returned to Manicheism in his mature years and had been the initiator of the tradition of absolute predestination. Bayle will pick up this subtle line of argumentation in a later part of his debate with Le Clerc and openly express this: LE CLERC, *BAM* 26/2 (art. 1) 249 f.; id. *Histoire des Provinces-Unies* 1, 262.

a set of arguments to the readers of his *BUH*, advanced by the Christian poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348–after 405) “contre l’opinion des Manichéen.”²²⁹ This article was his review of an edition on Prudentius by the Jesuit Stephan Chamillard (1656–1730). The “arguments” (we are dealing here with poetry) proposed by Prudentius to confute the Manicheans (in reality Marcion, in Prudentius’ text) were similar to those that we will find later in the debate with Bayle.²³⁰ The Manicheans (Marcion) objected that if God was in control of the world and hated vice, it would be difficult to explain why he did not prevent evil if he could,²³¹ and Le Clerc explained that, for the Manicheans, to do evil and to permit it was the same thing. Prudentius’ claim was that God hated vice because it was evident that he later restored what had been corrupted and that God saves those who do not commit it anymore, and that ultimately his permission was not responsible for evil because human beings are endowed with free will.²³² Prudentius proved this point with a reference to the Old Testament, the story of Adam and Eve, of Lot and his wife (Gen. 19) and other passages where human freedom was evident. Prudentius also proved this with the argument that human responsibility merits human beings other-worldly rewards or punishments.²³³ If the Manicheans replied that man would have been better off without freedom, Le Clerc added, but this was his own opinion not contained in Prudentius’ text, Prudentius would have probably answered (again, this was Le Clerc’s opinion) that only a minority of human beings would suffer eternally because of their wrong use of freedom.²³⁴

With the famous chapter in *Parrhasiana* in 1699 on divine providence, we find these arguments, and more, but this time they were uttered by an “Origenist.” The particular place of this chapter within the book does not seem, this time, to be of any relevance for the argumentation Le Clerc developed in it. *Parrhasiana* was conceived as a collection of unrelated supplementary discussions of particular points.²³⁵ What occasioned Le Clerc’s writing on the “défense de la Providence”, as

229 Id., *BUH* 12 (art. 12) 181. Prudentius did not mention the Manicheans specifically; his poem, the *Hamartigenia*, was more against Gnostic dualism and Marcion in particular: CHAMILLARD, *Prudentii opera* 446 n. 282. See also: MALAMUD, *The Origin of Sin* 96 f.

230 Bayle reserved the entire Remark F of the article he dedicated to Prudentius to the discussion of Le Clerc’s points. The entire article was not present in the first edition of Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*, and Le Clerc’s attack on the Manichean position as in the mentioned article in *BUH* must have been one of the reasons for this new addition. BAYLE, *Dict* 3 (1702) rem. F ‘Prudence’ 2527 f.

231 LE CLERC, *BUH* 12 (art. 12) 182; CHAMILLARD, *Prudentii opera* v. 640 f., 446.

232 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 181–183; CHAMILLARD, *ibid.* v. 660–666. 670–685, 447–449.

233 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 183; CHAMILLARD, *ibid.* v. 685–691, 449.

234 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 184.

235 Id., *Parrhasiana* (preface) [1–3]. The chapter featuring the Origenist was preceded by a chapter on the reasons for state decay and was followed by a chapter on the power of passions on human reasoning.

he stated in the first few lines of the chapter, had been some of Bayle's articles in the first edition of his *Dictionnaire*, where the latter had shown the argumentative strength of the Manichean position.²³⁶ This was, again, part of the early modern discussion on the problem of evil to which Malebranche, Papin, Arnauld and others had contributed.²³⁷ According to Le Clerc, Bayle had wanted to show through

- 236 BAYLE, Dict 2/1 (1697) rem. D 'Manichéens' 529; 2/2 (1697) rem. E and F 'Pauliciens' 752. 759, claimed that Manicheans do not win the argument *a priori*, that is if we consider the logical advantage of one perfect God or two co-eternal principles, but *a posteriori*, or when we compare the logical possibility with the actual empirical experience. Due to the philosophical solidity of the Manichean position on the problem of evil, Bayle concluded on multiple occasions: "Il faut captiver son entendement sous l'obéissance de la foi, & ne disputer jamais sur certaines choses." He expressed his thoughts with the phrase "*Ab actu ad potentiam valet consequentia*", meaning that, because Scripture says there is only one good God and experience tells us there is evil, we must believe that the two are compatible even if we do not know how. What seemed like a fideistic conception of religion was one of the main reasons for Le Clerc to start, and continue, the dispute with Bayle which saw the appearance of the "Origenist."
- 237 LANDUCCI, La teodicea nell'età cartesiana 17–68 (see also PITASSI, L'écho des discussions métaphysiques 274), who has dealt at length with the early modern debate on theodicy, has argued that, without Malebranche, Bayle's articles on the problem of evil in the *Dictionnaire* would have been unthinkable. In his analysis, Landucci has also shown how Malebranche was indebted to Descartes. The Oratorian had developed the argument proposed by Descartes in the sixth Meditation, where Descartes discussed the problem of the so-called "errors of nature" in relation to human sensory perception. The typical example was the thirst of dropsical people. Malebranche extended Descartes' solution, that those errors were explainable through a reference to the utility of the mind-body interaction, to natural laws in general. Initially, Malebranche even tacitly accepted Descartes' argument of theodicy that justified God's work in the face of the suffering caused by those errors through a quantitative argument: those (physical) evils were quite rare. Later on, with the *Traité de la nature et de la grâce*, Malebranche abandoned this solution with the acceptance that evils (both physical and moral) were, in fact, everywhere to see. He regarded them as "disorders" and thus by-products of the simplicity of God's laws, a simplicity which was directly connected to God's wisdom and which had priority over other aspects. Thus, for Malebranche, evil was not a problem of divine goodness but of divine wisdom. In line with this and in contrast to Descartes' sixth Meditation, Malebranche also decoupled suffering and evil: evil did not mean necessarily suffering (suffering was a punishment for sin, after all), even if suffering was always evil. The latter argument was one of the points that, for Bayle, rendered Malebranche's theodicy problematic. This was so despite the fact that Bayle had initially supported Malebranche's theodicy, he had continued to follow Malebranche's rejection of metaphysical evil (evil as imperfection and "shadow", the traditional Augustinian argument which still influenced Descartes' fourth Meditation and, later, Régis, Leibniz, King, Arnaud) and that he was convinced of the solidity of Malebranche's occasionalism. For Bayle, evil meant necessarily suffering and was thus not justifiable through a reference to the worth of God's ways and thus God's wisdom at the expense of God's goodness. Bayle's critique to Malebranche was that he made God not good and not free and omnipotent (Malebranche had rejected Descartes' absolutely indifferent God). Also, the argument of freedom in Malebranche, that God gave freedom

the Manicheans that human reasoning was so limited in matters of religion that pure faith should be chosen instead, “sans se mettre en peine si ce qu'elle nous enseigne s'accommode avec les lumières de la Raison, ou non.”²³⁸ Le Clerc's stated goal in this chapter was, therefore, to show that the Manichean position could be countered rationally and so implicitly to prove that religion could be brought into agreement with reason.

Before he introduced the arguments of the “Origenist”, Le Clerc added two clarifications that tell us much about the problematic perception of the thought of Origen in that time and at the same time Le Clerc's strategy to render his use of the thought of Origen more acceptable. Le Clerc firstly separated Bayle from the Manichean position and argued that Bayle had shown the strength of the Manichean position as a learned exercise that would bring honour to the disputant. However, and here was Le Clerc's first step, he requested that the same consideration should be given to his argument as well.²³⁹ The second clarification reinforced this point even further and applied it to Le Clerc's use of Origen. Le Clerc claimed that even if he countered the Manichean position with the Origenian: “je ne veux ni approuver, ni défendre tout ce qu'il a dit, ni tout ce que je vai

to be loved as a choice, Bayle argued, but we will see more of this in the rest of this chapter, was inconsistent with the fact that God foresaw that man would not love him, so freedom was not necessary. Other prominent philosophers and theologians of the time also took a stance on Malebranche's theodicy (and his occasionalism). Pierre Jurieu's (1637–1713) position was ambivalent, because he seemed to support Malebranche's occasionalism but at the same time opposed his theodicy, and so was Isaac Jacquelot (1647–1708), but in the other direction: he opposed occasionalism but supported Malebranche's theodicy. Isaac Papin (1657–1709), who believed that it had been Spinoza who had really posed the question on the origin of evil, was similarly against a traditional Augustinian theodicy but at the same time believed that if God's intervention in the world was too close to the events, he could be easily considered the author of sin. Le Clerc had also opposed the theodicy of Malebranche early in his career and had argued that our reason is not able to ascertain the ends and the means that God uses to reach them. Even if we do not know why there are so many insects, so Le Clerc, this does not make Malebranche's explanation that they are a by-product of the simplicity of divine laws more plausible. Not even if one followed Malebranche that God could have created a better world but would have had to multiply the created worlds. For Le Clerc, more wisdom and ability were ascribed to a God who created without these side products, but multiplied the laws, than the opposite. For Le Clerc, the system of Malebranche also had detrimental soteriological effects, because it supposed that the majority of human beings were damned only because of God's general laws. This was equal, Le Clerc argued, to saying that God actively wanted most human beings to be damned, because he was able to foresee that these laws would lead them there: LE CÈNE/LE CLERC, *Entretiens* 276–278. 280; BAYLE, *Dict 2/2* (1697) rem. E ‘Pauliciens’ 756. On the theodicy of Malebranche and Bayle's handling of the problem of evil, see also MOREAU, *Malebranche* 81–100; LARIVIÈRE/LENNON, *Bayle* 101–118.

238 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 301 f.

239 *Ibid.* 302 f.

faire dire à un de ses disciples.” He continued: “je ne m’intéresse nullement dans sa réputation, ni dans ses dogmes, & je n’empêche pas qu’on n’en pense ce qu’on voudra.”²⁴⁰ Thus, Le Clerc dissociated himself from any personal commitment to the Origenian position and claimed here a purely instrumental use of the thought of Origen, a mask, only in order to “fermer la bouche aux Manichéens.”²⁴¹ His final thought on this initial part should convince us, this seemed his aim, that his use of Origen’s thought was not only instrumental but even paradoxically so; the Manichean position seemed not to deserve better opponents: “si un homme de cette sorte [the “Origenist”] peut réduire un Manichéen au silence, que ne feroient pas ceux, qui raisonneroient infiniment mieux, que les Disciples d’*Origene*?”²⁴² As we will see, those who “raisonneroient infiniment mieux” than Origen will be later identified as the Arminians. We will also witness how his attempt to dissociate from Origen and the claim that Arminians would be even better equipped against Manicheans will be far from unproblematic.

The arguments presented in the rest of the chapter followed a similar pattern as those we saw earlier with Prudentius. The Manicheans, Le Clerc reported, objected that physical as well as moral evil were incompatible with a good and benevolent God. If God was causing such evil, that would be evident, but the Manicheans claimed that even if he only permitted it, he was in no better position. In this latter case, if God was aware of those evils and was even able to prevent them (one had to sacrifice divine power otherwise, we will come back to this) but did not do it, he was indifferent or even cruel towards human beings and therefore could not be considered as good either.²⁴³ This was even more so because God

240 Ibid. 303 f.

241 Ibid. 304.

242 Ibid.

243 This was at least one of the main arguments in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*: BAYLE, Dict 2/1 (1697) rem. D ‘Manichéens’ 531; 2/2 (1697) rem. E, F and I ‘Pauliciens’ 754–759. 762–764. Philosophically speaking, a benevolent God would either impede human beings from being able to commit any evil or at least permit that they were able to commit it but then ensure they never actually commit it in practice. He supported this argument with a reference to Cicero. The “gift” of freedom that, according to Prudentius, as we have seen, but also to “the Origenist”, was one of the reasons that explained why God permitted evil, was harshly criticised by Bayle. A gift cannot be benevolently given to someone in the knowledge that he will misuse it, or, at least, it should be taken back if such misuse threatens to happen. To explain this more clearly, Bayle used the famous example of the mother who had her daughter go to a ball, knowing that, in that place, she would be seduced and lose her virginity. Bayle argued that a good mother would not only instruct her daughter on what her demands are and what she should avoid, but also make sure she impedes her daughter from actually being seduced. If necessary, a good mother, so Bayle, would even lock her daughter within four walls to preserve her virginity. Another important argument Bayle used to reject the argument that evil was permitted to allow freedom to exist was directed primarily to Malebranche’s conception of freedom as the capacity to arrest, rather than

either had decreed from all eternity the damnation of the majority of human beings, or did not prevent that they would necessarily fall and thus be punished.²⁴⁴

The reply of the Origenist, or at least Le Clerc's version of it, was primarily concerned with a stress on human freedom and presupposed that a good God did not cause evil upon man directly. God did not prevent evil (intended here was mainly "moral evil"), so the Origenist, because, even if God could prevent it (God's power was preserved) he had created human beings as free and this freedom could: "donner lieu à la Vertu & au Vice, au blâme & à la louange, à la recompense & aux peines."²⁴⁵ Freedom thus made possible the appearance of virtue and of reward and this seemed for Le Clerc's Origenist to justify the risk that human beings would choose instead vice and be punished and thus result in evil. The Origenist would agree that no necessity exists that human beings would fall and

actively generate, an action. This was something which for Bayle was not consistent with the fact that not only an active action constitutes an act, but also the activity of arresting an action. More generally, for Bayle, simple divine permission would not explain the origin of evil, because human beings, according to him, were not the origin of their own actions. In this light, he also claimed that simple permission seemed not to be able to explain how future contingency becomes actuality and seems to state that God is not in control of the future. To solve this problem, Bayle argued, some theologians argued in favour of the doctrine of absolute predestination, whereas others explained this with the doctrine of *scientia media*. For Bayle, none of these attempts was successful in philosophically preserving divine goodness, because in both cases God was ultimately responsible for human actions and thus for his evil too. Even the *scientia media* was lacking here, Bayle claimed, because it was not different, in the end, if God predestined some human beings to sin or only put them in the circumstances to sin. Finally, if one wanted to safeguard divine goodness by believing that God did not foresee the future at all, this he labelled the Socinian position, he would not solve the problem either. To return to the example of the mother, Bayle claimed that this resembled a mother who followed her daughter to the ball and looked from a window at how the daughter was being seduced and was about to fall. The mother would see the hints and the high probability that the daughter would fall, even if she did not exactly foresee the future. If she did not intervene to impede the fall, Bayle claimed, how could she be called good? All of these theological positions were thus for Bayle a form of "less rational" Manicheism, because instead of two principles, they believed that in the one God there were two opposing principles. This whole argument was another occasion to state the impossibility of reason arriving at a rational solution and the necessity of a simple faith in the Scriptural facts. Le Clerc did not discuss this second objection in his *Parrhasiana*, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, simply believed that divine foreknowledge was compatible with human freedom, even in, for us, mysterious ways. Human beings were for him, in opposition to Bayle, who had a more occasionalist outlook on this, capable of making their own choices independently from God, in a libertarian fashion. For a detailed study of the various arguments of Bayle on theodicy, see also LANDUCCI, *La teodicea nell'età cartesiana* 245–277.

244 LE CLERC, *Parrhasiana* 304 f. The debate was thus not so much on the logical incompatibility of God with evil, but on the actual existence of evils in the world, or what could be called empirical arguments. On these concepts, see DALFERTH, *Malum* 10 f.

245 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 306.

thus be damned eternally and that, even if they fell, no perfection was required of them but only repentance and as much obedience as was possible for them.²⁴⁶ God's goodness seemed thus preserved by the Origenist argument because human freedom seemed a higher good for human beings than the lack of it.

Physical evil was considered by the Origenist as a consequence of moral evil and so again ultimately as a responsibility of human beings. One could accuse God of not intervening and not stopping supernaturally the course of nature caused by the sin of man, but Le Clerc's Origenist would answer that, because physical evil was a consequence of sin, God was not obliged to intervene and human beings could not complain about it because it had happened due to their own fault.²⁴⁷ In the argument on the non-prevention of physical evil, the Origenist preferred divine justice over divine love. Finally, Le Clerc's Origenist claimed that everyone can be ultimately assured of his/her freedom (and thus of their own responsibility for evil): "par sa propre experience, ou par le sentiment interieur du pouvoir qu'il a de faire ou de ne faire pas les actions bonnes, ou mauvaises, que l'on peut louer, ou reprendre en lui."²⁴⁸ Clearly, these thoughts remind us of Le Clerc's Cartesian background.

Besides the argument of freedom, Le Clerc's Origenist strengthened his position against the Manichean objection through another argument which, once again, we encountered in a less elaborated way with the previous example of Prudentius. This was the so-called "quantitative argument." Compared to infinity, Le Clerc's Origenist argued, the physical evil we experience is almost nothing: it is like the bitterness of a medicine experienced by a child at which an adult laughs because he knows it will last very little time and that after that the child will feel better.²⁴⁹ Le Clerc clarified: "il y a infiniment plus de disproportion entre Dieu & les hommes les plus éclairés, qu'il n'y en a entre eux et les enfans les plus simples."²⁵⁰ What Le Clerc's Origenist drew from this was that human beings could not rightfully accuse God because he did not prevent even this little evil that they themselves caused.²⁵¹ Within the whole argument, this physical evil seemed thus the by-product of human freedom that God was able to accept because, as we saw, it considered human freedom a higher good, but also because, as we see here, it was very little when compared to infinity.

246 Ibid. 305–308.

247 Ibid. 307.

248 Ibid. 306.

249 Ibid. 310.

250 Ibid.

251 Ibid.: "Ainsi nous ne pouvons pas nous étonner raisonnablement que Dieu regarde les maux que nous souffrons, comme presque rien; lui qui seul a une idée complete de l'éternité, & qui regarde le commencement & la fin de nos souffrances comme infiniment plus proches, que le commencement & la fin d'une minute."

One could argue that sin, that is, moral evil, would diminish God's holiness and perfection, but the answer of Le Clerc's Origenist was to compare God to a clockmaker. If a clockmaker was to make a pendulum that, within a year, had a defect of only a couple of seconds, nobody would say that such clockmaker was not skilful and so: "si Dieu redresse un jour, pour toute l'éternité, les desordres que le mauvais usage de la Liberté aura cause parmi les hommes, pourra-t-on s'étonner qu'il ne les ait pas fait cesser, pendant le moment que nous aurons été sur cette Terre?"²⁵² Once again, God permitted evil in the name of human freedom, and the quantity of this evil, compared to the fact that he had the power to correct it at all times, was too little to diminish his perfection.

One last objection discussed by the Origenist in this passage and, we may say, this was the most typically "Origenist" of the arguments presented so far, was concerned with eternal punishment. Eternal punishment seemed a contradiction, for a Manichean interlocutor, to what the Origenist had claimed of the limited quantity of evil because it had, as it were, the character of physical suffering for eternity. Moreover, the existence of eternal torments seemed well proven through Scripture. The Origenist claimed that Scripture was rather ambiguous on the matter and accepted that Jesus had threatened the sinners with an eternal fire, but considered this, after all, only as a threat. God was obviously free to limit that fire if and when he pleased. He clarified that God's goodness and faithfulness obliges him normally to fulfil his promise, but, he added, who would claim that such a God was not good if, after a time of punishment, he would restore human beings to their happiness? Similarly, a king who takes back an absolute condemnation he had pronounced earlier would not be considered an evil king.²⁵³

Le Clerc's exposition ended with this last argument based on Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis. Le Clerc clarified that he would not provide further reasons to strengthen this last doctrine, and dissociated from it: "mon dessein n'est pas de faire trouver son sentiment plausible."²⁵⁴ His claim was that apocatastasis was simply instrumental to the debate and that, again paradoxically, if Origen was able to triumph over the Manicheans with a doctrine that "est rejeté néanmoins de tout le monde", this would prove that there was still ample space for reason in religion. However, what follows seemed to point to a slightly different direction compared to this last remark but also to his initial dissociation from the thought of Origen. Le Clerc not only stressed that Origen was essentially orthodox on *all* (*tous*) the essential articles of Christianity but also that on apocatastasis: "ce grand homme [Origen] n'a jamais été traité d'Hérétique, pour cela, pendant sa vie; & il faudroit être bien dur, pour le déclarer damné, après sa mort, à cause de ce seul

252 Ibid. 311.

253 Ibid. 311f.

254 Ibid. 312f.

sentiment.”²⁵⁵ Origen’s apocatastasis did not render him less orthodox, according to Le Clerc (as we will see in one of the next sections, it was a possible doctrine, that one could not be certain about but neither disprove). After all, Le Clerc concluded, Origen’s “method”, meaning here the apocatastasis, could be used apologetically, where other doctrines fail: “il vaudrait mieux être Origeniste, que Deïste, ou Athée, ou Manichéen.”²⁵⁶

Although Le Clerc tried to distance himself from the thought of the Origenist, the simple fact that this was his first defence against the poignant arguments of Bayle is already telling of his relationship with the thought of Origen. As we saw, Le Clerc had already found two of the three main arguments in Prudentius, but it seems that both the importance of apocatastasis and the authoritative nature of the thought of Origen, which provided further details to the argument, made him better suited for the confrontation with Bayle. Le Clerc’s choice could have simply been his best alternative of the time and this is something we will analyse in the rest of the chapter. What is sure is that his dissociation from Origen seemed more so formally than in practice. We will dedicate the next section to Bayle’s challenges on this point and Le Clerc’s subsequent replies.

8.2 The Argument of Freedom

The article from *Parrhasiana* in which Le Clerc’s “Origenist” entered the scene of the debate with Bayle represented an important beginning of that debate. If we want to temporally determine the debate, we can consider the final act of the dispute, from Bayle’s side, his posthumous publication of the *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémitte* in 1707 and the subsequent (long) reply by Le Clerc in tome 12 of his *BC* in the same year. In 1725, towards the end of his academic activity, Le Clerc summed up once more his past efforts to counter Bayle and referenced his different articles on the subject,²⁵⁷ but in 1727 he did not miss the chance of re-pro-

255 Ibid. 313. In the second edition of his *Dictionnaire*, BAYLE, Dict 3 (1702) rem. A and D ‘Origene’ 2255 f. 2258. 2261, had treated this question on the salvation or damnation of Origen probably also as an indirect response to Le Clerc. Bayle had stated clearly that Origen was *mort herétique*, and that the majority of Roman Catholics were convinced of his damnation. However, he even ironically added that God’s judgment must be really mysterious if he damned Origen, notwithstanding his moral rigour and pious life, and then saved immoral church ministers just because they were part of orthodoxy. In remark A, he presented the dispute between Daillé and Samuel Cottiby (1630–1689) on the latter’s expression “St. Origen” and, more importantly, in remark D, he reported the discussion on the salvation of Origen by the Jesuit, with references to Erasmus, Bellarmine and others.

256 LE CLERC, *ibid.* 314.

257 Id., *BAM* 23/2 (art. 1) 245 f., mentioned his articles in *BC* 7, *BC* 9, *BC* 10, *BC* 12 and *BAM* 21. We also find, however, further acts of this dispute, although minor, in other articles, for

posing his main points.²⁵⁸ As we will see in this and the next sections, the main positions from the one side and the other remained mostly constant throughout the duration of the debate. I will therefore refer organically to the different articles of the dispute, with a focus on one particular aspect of the debate at a time, rather than provide a general chronological reconstruction. This last operation would not help focus, in my opinion, on how particular points evolved during the course of the dispute. In this section I will concentrate on the argument of human freedom, one of the core arguments of Le Clerc's defence of rational theodicy, as we saw in the previous section.

The biggest counterargument by Bayle to Le Clerc's position on freedom, hints of which we already find in the first edition of his *Dictionnaire* against Basil of Caesarea,²⁵⁹ was explained more fully in his second edition. For Bayle, freedom was considered a dangerous divine gift that God, in his foreknowledge, had foreseen would be utilised badly by human beings. Instead, God should have either deprived human beings entirely of their freedom or at least, in his omnipotence, he would have united it with "his holiness" so that human beings, although capable in theory of committing evil, would never commit it in practice. Divine omnipotence was able to act such that this last option, so Bayle thought, although fully making evil deeds impossible, was still compatible with human freedom. In sum: for Bayle, the only way which guaranteed that divine goodness was preserved in God's administration of human handling was if God prevented evil in some way, not if he permitted it.

The argument that human freedom was unavoidable if virtue as well as vice were to appear, was rejected by Bayle in a similar fashion. Virtue, Bayle claimed, could exist without vice, as is the case in heaven, and an infinitely good and powerful God was able to let virtue appear in human beings without vice.²⁶⁰ The fact

example, in *BC* 6 (art. 6) and in *BAM* 28 (art. 2). Le Clerc and Bayle did not discuss only theodicy. Another important discussion they had in that time was on the theory of "plastic nature" presented by Cudworth. Most of the articles mentioned by Le Clerc as part of the dispute with Bayle on theodicy also included some references to the debate, but in order to follow the most important parts of this other debate, we must review other articles dedicated by Le Clerc specifically to that subject. This further debate, although mainly concerned with questions of natural philosophy, cannot be considered as detached from the debate on theodicy, because it claimed important consequences for the framework in which human freedom could, or could not, exist. For an overview of the debate on plastic nature between Le Clerc and Bayle, see KORS, *Naturalism and Unbelief* 256–288; ROSA, *Ralph Cudworth*; BIANCHI, *Cambridge Platonists*, esp. 158–164.

258 LE CLERC, *BAM* 28 (art. 2) esp. 365–429.

259 BAYLE, *Dict* 2/2 (1697) rem. E and F 'Pauliciens' 763. Bayle argued that Basil's argument was not valid because it built on the concept of freedom, but freedom was part of the problem, not the solution. Bayle accused Basil of *petitio principii*.

260 *Id.*, *Dict* 3 (1702) rem. A 'Origene' 2259 f. and rem. K/2 'Pauliciens' 2234. Also, in rem. F 'Prudence' 2528, Bayle rejected the same argument with a reference to the article on Pru-

that God did not expect human beings to be perfect but only to repent, as we saw earlier in Le Clerc, did not escape this fallacy, according to Bayle. Repentance was still part of human freedom, so that an impenitent human being should not have been given the possibility to be impenitent by a good God.²⁶¹ God was not obliged to intervene in human affairs to give “extra grace” to human beings so that they could not sin, Le Clerc had claimed, but Bayle retorted this with the argument that, if God was obliged only to himself, his goodness would oblige him not to tolerate evil.²⁶²

Le Clerc’s reply to these objections kept at its centre the value of human freedom. It returned to his earlier argument that, if freedom made possible the appearance of evil, it also made possible the appearance of virtue. If freedom made possible that human beings were punished for their evil, it also made possible that they will be rewarded.²⁶³ For Le Clerc, the “Origenist” in *Parrhasiana* had already solved this problem, but he clarified here that the fact that human beings were of changeable nature had as by-product that they were free not only to do good but also to do evil.²⁶⁴

Le Clerc disputed that God’s foreknowledge was incompatible with his goodness because God knew the future (evil) use of freedom by human beings. God supported human beings in all possible ways so that they would not commit evil, but he also let them be free.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, and here returns the “quantitative” argument we saw earlier in Le Clerc’s “Origenist”, the evil that human beings produced was too little: “n’est que d’une très-courte durée en lui même & dans toutes ses suites, & ne fait aucun desordre dans l’Univers.”²⁶⁶ Le Clerc also added in this case that even this little evil could be easily restored by God. The Origenian argument of apocatastasis was meant here, and we will return to this point in the next section. Finally, and again here returned the older argument of perfection versus penitence: even if God foreknew that human beings would sin, this was not problematic for his goodness because, so Le Clerc thought, he did not condemn human beings for their sin but for their eventual impenitence. A choice they were fully free to take.²⁶⁷

dentius written by Le Clerc that we reviewed in the previous section.

261 Ibid. rem. A ‘Origene’ 226o.

262 Ibid. rem. K/2 ‘Pauliciens’ 2235.

263 LE CLERC, BC 7 (art. 8) 337 f.

264 Ibid. 339 f.

265 Ibid. 338 f.

266 Ibid. 339. This point was already harshly criticised by Bayle early on in the dispute. Bayle argued that, if one was to quantitatively compare the finite with the infinite, any finite quantity would still be nothing compared to the infinite, so that even millions upon millions of years of this-worldly suffering would seem, following Le Clerc’s argument, rationally acceptable.

267 Ibid. 341.

Divine goodness, according to Le Clerc, was much more confirmed by the fact that human beings, because free, committed evil things. God could take this freedom away from them, but, in his goodness, he did not. The fact that human beings were created at all, although liable to sin, was more an effect of divine goodness for Le Clerc than a problem: “Qui peut douter qu’il ne soit infiniment plus avantageux pour eux [les Impénitens], d’avoir été créés, quoique sujets à certains inconveniens, que de n’avoir jamais été? Qui ne voit que la Bonté de Dieu éclatte en cela, d’une maniere très-digne d’elle?”²⁶⁸

The points brought forward by Le Clerc in his reply were thus based on the earlier argument of freedom and in some cases simply refined his earlier position without any alteration to its core. Bayle noticed this and replied in other articles connected to this dispute with a representation of mostly the same objections we saw earlier, with their central idea that the freedom of human beings unaided by a sort of efficient grace was not compatible with divine goodness.²⁶⁹ Le Clerc then referred to the work of William King (1650–1729), among others, for some support of his belief in the intrinsic value of human freedom and reiterated, among other things, his conviction that a sort of efficient grace of divine origin was incompatible with human freedom.²⁷⁰ For what concerns the argument of freedom, Le Clerc never abandoned as one of the fundamental ideas of his theodicy the idea that indifferent freedom had some intrinsic value and consequences for human beings and that God tolerated the quantitatively almost insignificant evil as a by-product. It was present in its full force in the summary of his position in the final reply to Bayle in 1707,²⁷¹ and again in the very last tome of the *BAM* in 1727.²⁷²

Article 3 in tome 9 of the *BC* was considered by Le Clerc as an important step in the dispute with Bayle, because he claimed that he was abandoning his Origenist “mask” to come forward with his own thought on this matter. For what concerns Le Clerc’s argument of freedom, he did not seem to differ from his previous position but rather to support it with a reference to Scripture. We will come back to this. His formal departure from Origenism did not sacrifice his stance on the importance of freedom and so his theodicy seemed still strongly dependent on his “Origenism” as in earlier articles. Bayle noticed this aspect of the debate

268 Ibid. 343.

269 BAYLE, Reponse 3, 1160 f.

270 LE CLERC, *BC* 9 (art. 3) 118 f. 132.

271 Id., *BC* 12 (art. 5) 340 f. 356 f. Le Clerc also added some other reasons on the importance of human freedom for both human beings themselves and creation as a whole. Without freedom, he claimed, there would be less variety in creation, thus less beauty. God had created man free to give him good sensible pleasures. Le Clerc also added that God did not intervene in human affairs not only in order to preserve human freedom, but also to “save human genre”.

272 Id., *BAM* 28 (art. 4/1) 422 f.

and, in so doing, accused Le Clerc of wanting to reject not only the Manichean position, but also all of the “predestinarians.” Bayle claimed that Le Clerc’s belief was that only when his “Origenism” was granted, in this case the notion of freedom of indifference, could one win against the Manicheans.²⁷³

The conversation on this aspect of the problem, whether human freedom really solved the Manichean objection and was a good argument for a theodicy, did not have a proper end, if not that both Bayle and Le Clerc reiterated the same points and accused each other of not having solved the difficulty posed by the other. Especially after the already mentioned article 3 of tome 9 of the *BC*, the conversation on freedom became less important and, from the standpoint of Le Clerc, was entirely abandoned until his “summary” of 1707. In contrast, the fate of the other main argument employed by Le Clerc’s “Origenist”, apocatastasis, was thus that it was strongly discussed throughout the debate and beyond. We now turn our attention to this other element of Le Clerc’s Origenist theodicy.

8.3 Apocatastasis, Tolerable and Eternal Punishment

The doctrine of apocatastasis as portrayed in *Parrhasiana* was an attempt to rationally justify the nature of other-worldly punishment while holding fast on God’s traditional attributes, especially justice and goodness. Whereas this-worldly evil was reduced to almost nothing by Le Clerc, as we have just seen, the idea of an eternal punishment which included eternal physical evil threatened Le Clerc’s overall theodicy. The first counterargument that Bayle proposed on this matter, among other things, targeted exactly this aspect of the question. Bayle maintained that apocatastasis was not able to preserve the goodness of God, because it still allowed for some form of punishment in the period between death and the final restoration of all. There was a problem of measure: was this period long, would God still be good? Was it too short, was God really just?²⁷⁴ The question was also if that punishment, which seemed like a necessary passage before the final salvation, was reconcilable with a good and omnipotent God. If God was omnipotent and good, this was the way Bayle reasoned, an argument which we encountered in a similar form in the previous section, why would God not prevent human beings from experiencing any punishment at all in the next life and save them once and for all? Famous is Bayle’s example of a king who is able to govern his kingdom so that his subjects never suffer, but that allows them to cause all sorts of disorders

273 BAYLE, Reponse 4, 22 f.

274 Id., Dict 3 (1702) rem. E ‘Origene’ 2261 f.

and only later fully restores the order of his kingdom. Such a king would not be called good.²⁷⁵

Le Clerc's reply, however, did not discuss these points directly, because, as we saw earlier, the idea that human beings are responsible for their own suffering due to their freedom and their changing nature seemed enough to him to counter Bayle's objections. The idea that God is just would ensure that punishment is tailored to the evil committed. In his subsequent reply, in *Reponse aux questions d'un provincial*, Bayle went back to his earlier objection that a good God would not permit that any punishment at all should happen or be necessary. He also added that apocatastasis would be adverse to social order, because it seemed to promote immoral and unsocial behaviour.²⁷⁶

Up to this point, we notice a hardening of positions in both authors that resembles the one we experienced in the previous section. At the same time, in the just mentioned reply, Bayle admitted that apocatastasis did have some argumentative strength that solved one of the most important problems of Christian theodicy, the eternity of punishment, but he clarified that all the Manichean objections he had proposed were still valid nonetheless.²⁷⁷ This was something that Le Clerc later tried to retort against Bayle himself. The Arminian argued that Bayle considered apocatastasis as a reasonable solution.²⁷⁸

In the already mentioned article 3 of tome 9 of the *BC*, a new element was introduced that attempted to render apocatastasis more acceptable. After he claimed to abandon Origenism to come forward with his own solution to Bayle's objections, Le Clerc argued that, rather than a full apocatastasis, a number of intermediate possibilities were available. Eternal punishment could be considered eternal only by a limited human mind but, in the eyes of God, this punishment had a set end. Another possibility was to conceive of the eventuality that, whereas those worthy of salvation will be eternally happy from the outset, those who were worthy of punishment will be punished until needed and then restored to a "tolerable state." In this last state, the impenitent will not be as happy as the saved, but neither will he suffer as deeply as it was believed by those who believed in the doctrine of the eternity of hell.²⁷⁹

275 Ibid.

276 Id., *Reponse* 3, 1153; id., *Dict* 3 (1702) rem. C 'Origene' 2257 f.

277 Id., *Reponse* 3, 1154.

278 LE CLERC, *BC* 10 (art. 8) 412 f.

279 Id., *BC* 9 (art. 3) 143 f. Another possibility for the afterlife which we sometimes find in Le Clerc but for which he showed relatively limited support was to state that the nature of eternal torments was comminatory, and that it was in the full power of God to execute his threats or not. LE CLERC, *BC* 7 (art. 8) 297–299, described at length, on this occasion, the thought of the Anglican archbishop Tillotson on this matter. In the same article dedicated to Tillotson, Le Clerc had answered many of Bayle's objections, some of these answers I refer to in various parts of this chapter.

Bayle's response to this argument by Le Clerc was that his theory of a "tolerable state" for the condemned was still a form of "mitigated Origenism."²⁸⁰ The same he would say of the other option offered by Le Clerc, which did not change the nature of Origen's apocatastasis. Thus, Bayle's objections to Origen's apocatastasis were easily transferable to Le Clerc's "mitigated Origenism." Even after Le Clerc had "abandoned" Origenism, so Bayle, his position was still weak.²⁸¹ From his first reply to Le Clerc's arguments, Bayle had not only proposed the difficulties we have just reviewed, but had also tried to show that Le Clerc's attempt to argue in favour of apocatastasis was not capable of addressing his concerns. According to Bayle, Origen had conceived apocatastasis only as a middle step between Platonic aeons, in line with the idea of a cyclical time.²⁸²

Bayle did not discuss in other articles this Platonic aspect of the Origenian conception of apocatastasis but attempted to show on multiple occasions that it was a heterodox doctrine, rejected by the whole of Christianity, and that even the Arminian Church did not subscribe to it. In reality, Bayle claimed, most Christians believe in the eternity of hell punishments.²⁸³ Apocatastasis was fundamentally an error.²⁸⁴ Furthermore, Bayle argued that, even if apocatastasis was true, his many objections were too strong to be countered. And again, so Bayle, even if apocatastasis won the dispute against Manicheans, only Origen won, but not Christianity, because apocatastasis was generally considered as heterodox. Bayle could therefore ultimately claim that Le Clerc had rendered the whole of Christianity weaker by showing that only Origenian apocatastasis, a "false doctrine", was able *somehow* to stand the Manichean objections.²⁸⁵

As we might expect, Le Clerc's primary counterargument was that Origen had not been the only one to conceive the doctrine of apocatastasis.²⁸⁶ In his last article directly concerned with this dispute, Le Clerc also claimed that the possibility that other-worldly punishment might be limited was also shared by some theologians, among which he mentioned Episcopius and John Tillotson (1630–1694).²⁸⁷ In another passage, Le Clerc had even claimed that the whole of Christianity should applaud Origen because of his apocatastasis.²⁸⁸ On the other difficulties raised by Bayle on apocatastasis, he claimed that apocatastasis, if true, did indeed save Christianity from the attack of Bayle and that all the rest of Bayle's objections he

280 BAYLE, Reponse 4, 62 f.

281 Id., Entretiens de Maxime 60.

282 Id., Dict 3 (1702) rem. K 'Origene' 2263.

283 Id., Reponse 3, 1190 f.; 4, 83 f.

284 Id., Entretiens de Maxime 205.

285 Id., Reponse 4, 98; id., Entretiens de Maxime 20.

286 LE CLERC, BC 7 (art. 8) 345.

287 Id., BC 6 (art. 6) 422; id., BC 7 (art. 8) 297–299.

288 Id., BC 10 (art. 8) 423–425.

had discussed in other articles.²⁸⁹ This was a reference to the discussion on freedom of the previous section. Le Clerc's argument wanted to show the solidity of his supposedly mild-Origenian position. Le Clerc also argued that he had not said that other Christian groups would not be able to confront Bayle's Manichean objections, but that he himself was not able to take the defence of these other groups, especially because one had to believe in a Christian sect in order to defend it. It thus seems that, for Le Clerc, the Origenian position was for him the most reasonable and conformed to Scripture and, therefore, in his opinion, was the most apt to be utilised in the dispute. This did not mean for Le Clerc that no other possible defence against Bayle existed, but his goal had been to show that there existed a solid way to silence Bayle's objections.²⁹⁰

One of Le Clerc's strongest arguments against the doctrine of eternal punishment was that it was not proven in Scripture and that apocatastasis was therefore impossible to reject, even if it remained only a conjecture.²⁹¹ However, this conjectural Origenism was problematic for him as well. Despite his main arguments in *Parrhasiana*, Le Clerc had insisted that Origenism was for him only a mask, that it was "tactical", because Origen was too Platonic and assured what he could not assure.²⁹² We will come back to this last aspect in the next section. Le Clerc admitted that his Origenism (his lack of belief in eternal torments, in this instance) was only a "maybe", but the same could be said of the eternity of punishment, so that Bayle's argument could not win.²⁹³ His conviction was that Bayle's Manichean argument was based on the eternity of hell, a claim that Bayle rejected.²⁹⁴

The conjectural character of Le Clerc's Origenism offered Bayle the opportunity to claim that Le Clerc's position was invalid, because it attempted to propose a counterargument without fully considering it valid.²⁹⁵ In reality, Bayle argued on more than one occasion, Le Clerc was an Origenist (and this Origenism included not only apocatastasis but also Origen's conception of freedom as indifference, among other aspects of it),²⁹⁶ but was a "deserter", or a "semi-Origenist", who

289 Id., BC 12 (art. 5) 289 f.

290 Ibid. 302–304.

291 Id., BC 9 (art. 3) 139, 143; id., BC 10 (art. 8) 418 f.

292 Id., BC 9 (art. 3) 148.

293 Id., BC 10 (art. 8) 412 f.

294 Ibid. Cf. BAYLE, *Entretiens de Maxime* 187 f.

295 Ibid. 59.

296 Much could be said on Origen's conception of freedom, and one of the most relevant sides of that conception as perceived by early modern thinkers was surely its character of being an indifferent rather than a spontaneous kind of freedom. To complement this conception with modern studies, it can be added that, for Origen, freedom was located in the will and characterised by autonomy of will over heteronomy. This kind of freedom, in Origen (but also in Le Clerc), was not simply a freedom of indifference (although this was a prerequisite) but implied a choice between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly.

distanced himself from Origenism despite the fact that it was his only weapon against the objections of the Manicheans.²⁹⁷ Bayle had agreed that Origenism was far better than, say, Socinianism in this particular dispute, because Socinianism believed in the final annihilation of the wicked and was therefore more problematic.²⁹⁸ He believed that the reasons behind Le Clerc's disavowal of Origen were political.²⁹⁹ Bayle used the conjectural character of Le Clerc's conception of other-worldly life to argue that it was not himself who disputed divine goodness, as Le Clerc had cried out multiple times, but that it was Le Clerc who was not sure of it. He proposed a syllogism and stated that, because Le Clerc considered divine goodness incompatible with eternal punishment and the end of that punishment for Le Clerc was only a conjecture, it could be concluded that divine goodness was also a conjecture, dependent upon the conjectural nature of apocatastasis.³⁰⁰

Le Clerc's answer to this last objection was meant not as a typically Origenian answer, and this was true at least formally, but not in the substance, because Le Clerc conceived an end to other-worldly punishment as more than a mere possibility. He claimed that, despite all conjectures, there was a certainty in how God will treat sinners in the next life. He will treat them in the way they have deserved and, on God's part, if any of his actions was not worthy of his justice and love, God will not do it.³⁰¹ This was not the first time Le Clerc had made this claim, but the first appearance of that statement was in the already mentioned article 3 of tome 9 of the *BC*, in which Le Clerc had "gone beyond Origenism" to come forward with his own position.³⁰² In Le Clerc's later reference to this argument as an answer to Bayle, he considered this position a suitable answer to Bayle's syllogism and left it open to the individual to believe in the eternity of punishments or not. He stated that, if one considered the eternity of hell as unacceptable for divine goodness,

True freedom was fulfilled for Origen, but also for Le Clerc, by adhering to God's law, and for Origen this law was the inner *logos* to be found in the soul of man, in which God has inscribed his law. For Origen, the aspect of responsibility implied in this conception of freedom was proven through the many Scriptural passages, in which God exhorts man to moral behaviour. As in Le Clerc, for Origen, God's moral exhortation and future reward or punishment of man would also make him unjust if it was not in the power of man to follow God's law. See KOBUSCH, *Die Idee der Freiheit* 67 f.; FÜRST, *Autonomie und Menschenwürde* 10; HENGSTERMANN, *Origenes* 16–18. 35 f. For Le Clerc, see LE CLERC, *Opera Philosophica* 2 *Pneumatologia* (1704) 17–20; id., *De l'incrédulité* 68; id., *BAM* 25 (art. 4/1) 110; SINA/SINA ZACCONE, *Epistolario* 3 (letter 413 of 28 March 1706, Le Clerc to Dodwell) 10.

297 BAYLE, *Reponse* 4, 22 f.

298 *Ibid.* 3, 1153.

299 *Id.*, *Entretiens de Maxime* 194.

300 *Ibid.* 192 f.

301 LE CLERC, *BC* 12 (art. 5) 295 f.

302 *Id.*, *BC* 9 (art. 3) 148 f.

there was no problem in abandoning it and holding fast to the belief that, nonetheless, God will act justly in the next life.³⁰³

Le Clerc's departure from Origenism, on this last occasion, was more a statement than a reality and this is evident from the fact that even in the last tome of the *BAM* when he discussed once again his debate with Bayle, Le Clerc claimed that apocatastasis was both understandable and justifiable as a doctrine.³⁰⁴ His moderate position, however, was also evident, because he also expressed his scepticism on a full apocatastasis which would contemplate the final salvation of demons. This latter idea, Le Clerc argued, is uncertain: Origen had gone too far.³⁰⁵ The interlinked discussion surrounding faith, certainty, evidence and rationality will be presented in the next section.

8.4 Reason, Evidence and Faith

The main purpose of Bayle's articles on the Manicheans, already in the first edition of his *Dictionnaire*, and so even before the start of the dispute with Le Clerc, was to show that different arguments of theodicy failed to be successful when confronted with the stringency of the Manichean solution. His goal was not that one should therefore profess Manicheism and abandon Christianity, at least this was what Bayle claimed throughout his articles on the subject, but that a Christian should be aware of the weakness of his reason and so his only option was to abandon himself to faith. As we will see in this section, Bayle never abandoned this approach in the dispute with Le Clerc and attempted to defend his position from the attacks of the Arminian.

In the early part of his debate with Bayle, Le Clerc did not discuss this claim, the rationality of religion, directly, but attempted to show that Bayle was wrong in practice. The arguments we reviewed in the previous sections of this chapter had for Le Clerc exactly the function of a corrective to Bayle's "fideism." Such a fideism, Le Clerc would later claim, was closely related to fanaticism and so to atheism and Pyrrhonism.³⁰⁶ This attitude was, therefore, for Le Clerc, a danger to Christianity as a whole. Bayle was convinced that, with his reply in the second edition of his *Dictionnaire*, he had shown that the one of Le Clerc had been yet another one of the many failed attempts to rational religion, in particular rational theodicy. He reiterated his claim that reason is not capable of solving the difficul-

303 *Id.*, BC 12 (art. 5) 325.

304 *Id.*, BAM 28/2 (art. 4/1) 406–408.

305 *Ibid.* 408.

306 *Id.*, BC 12 (art. 5) 231f. This was something that BAYLE, Reponse 4, 29, obviously, harshly rejected.

ties posed by the Manicheans.³⁰⁷ Once again, in his other reply, Le Clerc discussed Bayle's individual objections to show that reason was, indeed, able to overcome the obstacles posed by the Manicheans.³⁰⁸ To this further attempt, Bayle replied once more with generally the same key arguments, although in refined form. He claimed that human reason is not able to reach to the depths of divine handling and that even the Origen whose position Le Clerc had utilised to retort his argument, this Origen had been fideistic too!³⁰⁹

At this point, and here we go back once again to the key article 3 of tome 9 of the *BC*, Le Clerc chose to address Bayle's claim and discussed the question of the use of rationality in religion. This was the article, as I suggested earlier, where for the first time Le Clerc proposed a theodicy which claimed to depart from Origenism and which stated that Bayle's objections could be solved by simply going back to Scriptural truth and adopting a tolerant attitude towards those who believe differently on non-Scriptural points.³¹⁰ We have seen, however, that this was only a formal departure from Origenism, but that in practice Le Clerc relied heavily on the various "Origenian" arguments we have encountered in this chapter.

In his discussion of the rationality of religion, Le Clerc's argument was that reason was indeed necessary for faith and that the doctrines contained in the New Testament were fully rational. Le Clerc admitted that God is just and good above all reasoning and added that Bayle's argument, on this point, was correct. He claimed however, a somewhat puzzling remark, that the origin of Bayle's reasoning was wrong,³¹¹ something which seems to point to the fact that Bayle's reasoning was philosophical rather than "Scriptural." Reason was for Le Clerc the principal instrument of conversion of unbelievers and its centrality for him derived from the fact that without reason – meant here are common rational notions – Scriptural interpretation was impossible and so, ultimately, was religion. Reason was also a corrective to a fanatic interpretation of Scripture.³¹² At the same time, Le Clerc clarified that it was wrong to overvalue reason because, on some topics, like the resurrection, it is in need of revelation and is therefore humbled by it.³¹³ Rather than destroying reason altogether, as Bayle, for Le Clerc, aimed to do, a "different kind of reason" was required connected to revelation.³¹⁴ One should start with a well-conducted exegesis, and Le Clerc repeated in this article some of

307 *Id.*, Dict 3 (1702) main art. 'Origene' 2258.

308 *LE CLERC*, *BC* 7 (art. 8) 333–343.

309 *BAYLE*, *Reponse* 4, 1155.

310 *LE CLERC*, *BC* 9 (art. 3) 139 f.

311 *Ibid.* 150.

312 *Ibid.* 154, 166.

313 *Ibid.* 156–158.

314 *Ibid.* 164.

the main points he had covered in his *Ars Critica* and elsewhere on how best to do it, and then review it with the aid of reason.³¹⁵

In his following replies to Le Clerc, Bayle presented again his belief that his conception of the relationship between faith and reason was correct, as it was shared, according to him, by Protestants in general.³¹⁶ He also claimed that, if one followed Le Clerc's reasoning on the subject, he would soon realise that Le Clerc had adopted a position on the subject that was not dissimilar from his own: Le Clerc had ultimately adopted a fideistic attitude, or so claimed Bayle.³¹⁷ Moreover, Bayle also argued that he did not intend to claim that divine goodness is not rational at all, but that it is not rational according to human reason. It was, and in this he seemed to agree with Le Clerc, not the case of an "against reason", but of an "above reason."³¹⁸ Finally, Bayle rejected Le Clerc's claim that Origen's system was to be preferred because it was the result of a "less difficult" exegesis and accused Le Clerc of biased exegesis.³¹⁹ Even a less daring form of Origenism, a "purified Origenism", as Bayle stated, that is, a less radical form of final salvation of the impenitent as Le Clerc had proposed, was for Bayle not really stronger in the debate.³²⁰ It was rather the more difficult interpretation of some Scriptural passages, so Bayle, that had to be preferred.³²¹

In order to distinguish his position from the one Bayle had attributed to him, Le Clerc declared Bayle's fideism as untenable because, in his opinion, it completely renounced common rational notions.³²² Without common notions, he explained, Scripture was incomprehensible, because the words contained therein would have no meaning at all for us.³²³ In line with his belief in Scriptural accommodation, Le Clerc believed that God had spoken to human beings through Scripture, and that the concepts he had used were thus comprehensible by a human mind. For Le Clerc, this could also be applied to the common notion of goodness, which therefore could and had to be in human-rational agreement with God.³²⁴ This did not mean for Le Clerc that our reason is able to comprehend the full depths of the nature of God, but that it can approximate our understanding of some of his attributes.³²⁵ His Origenian mask, Le Clerc claimed, had been exactly part of that rational response to Bayle's Manichean positions that sought to impede any pos-

315 Ibid. 164 f.

316 BAYLE, Reponse 4, 19.

317 Ibid. 27 f.

318 Ibid. 29.

319 Ibid. 98.

320 Ibid. 62 f.

321 Ibid. 26.

322 LE CLERC, BC 10 (art. 8) 403 f.

323 Ibid. 411 f.

324 Ibid. 397–399.

325 Id., BC 12 (art. 5) 328 f.

sible rational theodicy.³²⁶ He was “just defending Scripture”, and although Bayle accused him of distorting Scripture to suit his own goals, he claimed that the New Testament could not be manipulated by an honest exegesis.³²⁷

A further point that Le Clerc made was that, besides renouncing common notions in order to understand divine goodness, Bayle had collected all possible reasons against it. Bayle was culpable, in the eyes of Le Clerc, because he demonstrated rationally, or so Bayle thought, that God was not good. In the face of rational evidence, Le Clerc argued, it was meaningless to claim that faith reveals divine goodness. Once evidence is provided, it has to be accepted as truth and it cannot be contradicted by other evidence.³²⁸ Bayle rejected this understanding of his position and claimed that the Manichean position he had defended so many times was not a mathematical demonstration and did not, therefore, provide the necessary conceptual strength to be accepted without further doubt.³²⁹ He stated that it would be wrong to consider false a doctrine, divine goodness for instance, only because it presented substantial rational problems.³³⁰ That a rational theodicy had major problems, he added, was without doubt the reason that had Le Clerc resort to early Christian arguments for help against his objections.³³¹

The final word in the dispute, due to external reasons, as we know, belonged to Le Clerc. He repeated that the Manichean positions had been conceived as a demonstration and that it claimed therefore the power of evidence. Le Clerc agreed with Bayle, that the substantial problems of a doctrine do not render it wrong, but he clarified that, in this instance, Bayle had attempted to object not to rational problems of divine goodness in general, but to show evidently that a rational theodicy was impossible. An evident demonstration would render a theory false and this was the reason why Bayle’s position, for Le Clerc, was particularly dangerous.³³² Le Clerc’s Origenist was thus a corrective to Bayle’s claim of evidence because it showed that his “evidence” was not solid – and in this light Le Clerc considered himself successful in the task he had chosen for himself at the beginning: silencing Bayle by showing that there was at least a (solid) alternative to his reasons.³³³

326 *Ibid.* 289.

327 *Ibid.* 307 f.

328 *Ibid.* 364 f. 382.

329 BAYLE, *Entretiens de Maxime* 14–19.

330 *Ibid.*

331 *Ibid.* 191.

332 LE CLERC, BC 12 (art. 5) 223–225.

333 *Ibid.* 288.

8.5 Political or Tactical Origenism?

The general character of Le Clerc's relationship with the thought of Origen within the debate with Bayle on theodicy remained constant until the final years of his scholarly life. If we return to the final tome of his *BAM*, we find that, once again, Origen was considered both a crucial resource and at the same time a figure of Christianity from which a much-needed intellectual distance had to be professed. Even 20 years after his final article on the controversy, Le Clerc had claimed that Origen had provided weapons to the whole of Christian antiquity in the battle against Manicheism.³³⁴ He clarified that the position of Origen was a lot more reasonable than that of the Manicheans while repeating what for him were the strengths of the position, that is, mainly, the heavy value placed on freedom and the doctrine of apocatastasis.³³⁵ Yet again, as was the case with his article in *Par-rhasiana* and the articles that followed, his appreciation of Origen's thought and his heavy use of it within his argument was balanced by a statement of distance from Origen.

After the review of the most salient arguments of the dispute with Bayle on theodicy, it seems adequate, at this point, to try to briefly reconsider the reasons behind Le Clerc's attempts to create a distance with Origen. This is even more important given the fact that this attitude was constant until the later part of his life. The question is whether Le Clerc's attitude towards the thought of Origen was a "political" device, and this was Bayle's accusation, whether Le Clerc had evoked the figure of the Origenist just as a rhetorical device to prove Bayle wrong, his own claim, or whether any other explanation exists.

The previous sections, as we saw, evidenced the fact that, despite his effort to go beyond Origenism, Le Clerc was mostly representing the same initial arguments in refined form, with the addition of a certain moderate attitude. This seems evident despite the fact that in his autobiography of 1711, Le Clerc briefly argued that, at some point, he had abandoned Origen's position to present the view he "really believed in."³³⁶ Even Le Clerc's reference to the New Testament as the sole rule of faith was too general to be usable as a theodicy, and this is clear from the fact that Le Clerc returned to the same Origenian points again and again, also in his final "summary" of 1707. It may well be that Le Clerc understood these points as a correct interpretation of Scripture, especially in the moderate form, but it is also clear that he branded them as "Origenian" until the end of the debate.

334 Id., *BAM* 28/2 (art. 4/1) 389.

335 Ibid. 393–406. Other factors, not specifically Origenian, were also mentioned, like the idea that it was not that difficult to do good if reason and revelation were followed and that God did not ask of human beings that they be perfect, but only that they strived to be in constant obedience: *ibid.* 406.

336 Id., *Joannis Clerici vita et opera* 131–133.

These later remarks disprove Le Clerc's claim that his Origenian position in the debate with Bayle was simply a rhetorical provocation and also that he kept Origen's thought at a distance. At the same time, it would be unfair to Le Clerc to believe he had simply adopted a political stance in order to "cover up" his full adhesion to Origenism or to call him an "Origenian deserter", as Bayle had done. If we consider only the elements of this chapter – I refer to the general conclusion for an overview that takes into consideration further elements – it seems clear that, as much as Le Clerc was dependent on Origen, he still appropriated parts of his thought without fully and passionately embracing Origenism. Once again, Le Clerc was carefully selective with Origen and was quite upset at the beginning of the dispute with Bayle, when the latter had simply rejected Origen's thought by pointing to his condemnation by the Church. Le Clerc insisted that this way of argumentation was not valid and that the single points of Origen's thought had to be discussed instead.³³⁷

337 Id., BC 9 (art. 3) 133; BAYLE, Dict 3 (1702) rem. D 'Origene' 2258.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

At the end of this analysis it will be hopefully more evident why this chapter of European intellectual history was worth telling. The first and clearest result of the present work has been an awareness of the complex and very differentiated reception of Origen's thought in Le Clerc. There could surely still be discussion on the way I have interpreted Le Clerc's various statements in relation to Origen, but one thing stands out in all of these and seems beyond doubt. It would be wrong to oversimplify and think of Le Clerc as a simple "Origenist" and at the same time to consider his relation to Origen solely the result of other factors, rational analysis, confessional interests and more, regardless of whether support had to be found in Origen, Jerome, Augustine or any other author. This analysis has shown that Le Clerc's relationship with the thought of Origen, as is even more clear with a focus on Origen's conception of freedom, resists any black-and-white definition of who Origen was for Le Clerc. The primary conclusion of the present work is thus a rather negative one, in the sense of what the relationship between Le Clerc and Origen was not. This is in disagreement with at least part of the limited scholarship on the subject but is based on material which has never been examined in a similar breadth and depth, and which offers here a fresh new perspective on this subject.

The primary "positive" consideration that can be made from the results of the single chapters of this analysis is that the encounter with the thought of Origen was at times of the highest relevance for Le Clerc's own thought. In theological debates on freedom-related doctrines, such as original sin, the doctrine of grace and theodicy, Origen's thought was considered instrumental in intra-confessional debates. It was referred to by Le Clerc as support for his own position, as an illustration of the beliefs and uses of the Ancient Church and so as a claim to orthodoxy, and as a treasure-chest of rational theological arguments. This shows that Le Clerc openly went against his own conviction, the one he had adopted from Daillé and which he professed many times, that the Ancient Church could not be used instrumentally in theological debates. It also proves that he went against his intended use of keeping the Fathers at the same (or even further) distance as modern authors: Le Clerc considered Origen at times a *testis veritatis* in the more common Protestant framework.

The evidence I have brought forth on this occasion has been built not only upon direct and explicit references made by Le Clerc to Origen and his thought

on a relevant subject, such an element alone would have been highly precarious, but also and more importantly on a survey of the role of Origen in Le Clerc's argumentative practices. As in the case of theodicy, for example, I have shown that Origen's thoughts in defence of divine goodness and justice were in the end the only firm basis on which Le Clerc could build his argument against Bayle. A rational-apologetic function of Origen was also evident in the argumentative practices surrounding the discussion of grace and predestination. Origen and his exegetical insights were indicated as a resource of rational theology on the subject. Part of these argumentative practices also included that Le Clerc looked at Origen's theological convictions, or rather interpreted these in the most profitable way for himself and his beliefs and considered them as if they had been the core theology of the early Church. This was the classic idea that what the early Church believed, in this case represented by Origen, could be considered somehow authoritative and, paradoxically in the case of Origen, orthodox. Despite his aversion to intellectual authorities, with Origen, Le Clerc at times resorted to a form of rationally approved authority in religious debates.

Le Clerc's reception of Origen, if we look at Le Clerc's practices, could be taken to be nothing else than another example of the general trend of the time in Reformed Protestantism, which adopted a polemical strategy in the use of Early Church authors. Le Clerc switched interpretative framework, historical and ahistorical, depending on the subject matter and whether it was connected with a religious debate, among other reasons. However, such a consideration is hardly reconcilable with the fact that Origen was no common early Christian writer, but that a lot had been already written and said on him during the 16th and 17th centuries and earlier still.

That Origen was generally considered a heretic in Church circles is not sufficient as a reason to exclude the purely religious-polemical use of his thought in Le Clerc. After all, Le Clerc himself had been part of the minority Church group of the Arminians and had been accused of Socinianism. Le Clerc himself was no champion of orthodoxy, at least no orthodoxy as it was conceived in mainstream orthodox Reformed circles of the time. His theological outlook allowed for much room in the definition of orthodoxy through his *modica theologia* based on a technically accurate interpretation of Scripture, focused only on the meaning expressed in the original language. Yet, the heterodox nature of the thought of Origen, at least in the way it was generally considered in that time, provides a strong indication that the Alexandrian was no easy thinker to relate to and to invoke as support in religious debates. Moreover, Le Clerc's fellow Arminians and other theologians of the time whose outlook was not fully in agreement with Reformed Orthodoxy were not even close to allowing Origen the space, voice and, at times, the authority, Le Clerc had.

Religious-intellectual polemics were surely part of the reasons which motivated Le Clerc to search further and at times resort to Origen, and Origen became instrumental on those occasions despite the fact that he was a controversial thinker, but the present analysis has highlighted that this motivation had to be considered together with Le Clerc's epistemological-critical outlook. Origen was, in other words, not just chosen because it was an expression of Le Clerc's own thought, was useful in polemics or simply convenient as an ancient form of support, but also because Origen and his thought had successfully passed the test of rationality and were rich in rational arguments.

In a time where the philosophies of Descartes and Locke, and their successors, had contributed to the maturation of the modern spirit of enquiry, Le Clerc applied the criteria of his critical mind to Origen's thought together to ancient authors more generally. As a result, Origen was highly praised for his attachment to the letter of Scripture and the considerations that followed from it and blamed for his allegory and all that brought far from the literal text. He was appreciated for his application of rationality in religion, but criticised for his excessive Platonism, a philosophy which did not respect the canons of the new philosophy. He was praised as historical testimony and regarded with trust because of his objective spirit and disinterested attitude.

This selective appreciation and critique of Origen allowed Le Clerc to successfully resort to the thought of the Alexandrian when in need but at the same time to avoid and disavow any sort of "excessive" Origenism, a discipleship in which he would seem entangled if only a narrow consideration of some of Le Clerc's debates was to be considered. It is clear that Le Clerc looked for those elements which favoured his own thought, especially in the mentioned discussions on freedom and related theological doctrines. Still, Le Clerc did not hold back his critique on Origen when he considered it appropriate and at the same time kept his general appreciation of Origen and his thought as a constant throughout his career.

A similar pattern of selective appreciation and critique was applied by Le Clerc to the very concept of "authority" and particularly to other early Christian authors and Church Fathers as well as to pagan antiquity in general. For Le Clerc, again, such rational framework was also a guide to judge modern authors. This wide application of the principles of reason is also witness to the authenticity of Le Clerc's rational examinations in the case of Origen, even if a certain degree of dissimulation and selective remodelling of evidence for the purpose of building a stronger position and a sort of new orthodoxy cannot be excluded. Le Clerc's relationship with early Christian authors and with Origen in particular, albeit not a total break with contemporary and preceding approaches, presents a clear step in the development of a – pre enlightenment – new relationship with the past more generally and Church authorities in particular.

List of Abbreviations

Origen

CC *Contra Celsum*

Clo *Commentarius in Iohannem*

Orat *De oratione*

Phil *Philocalia*

Prin *De principiis*

Jean Le Clerc

BUH *Bibliothèque universelle et historique*

BC *Bibliothèque choisie pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle*

BAM *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne pour servir de suite aux Bibliothèques
Universelle et Choisie*

Pierre Bayle

Dict *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*

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