

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTIQUITY

Edited by Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Christine Shepardson, Peter Gemeinhardt

Gaetano Lettieri / Maria Fallica /
Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.)

Progress in Origen and the Origenian Tradition

25



PETER LANG

Progress is a structural and systematic concept in the thought of Origen of Alexandria, which represents one of the most advanced syntheses of the Christian reading of the Old and the New Testaments' legacy and the classical paideia, as well as a rational critique towards every kind of static objectification of the religious. Origen's legacy was capable of radiating its influence through Western theology and philosophy, thus shaping its idea of theological, moral, intellectual, social and political progress. The volume follows the intellectual dynamism generated by the reception of Origen's thought through seventeen articles, which span through the centuries, from the analysis of Origen's thought to its reception history in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern Age, up until the 20th century.

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Volume 25

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Reihe sowie durch Mitglieder des
Wissenschaftlichen Beirates geprüft.

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peer review of this publication*

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of the series and by members of
the academic advisory board.

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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available online at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

The conference and the publication of this book have been supported by The European Union, Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme Marie Skłodowska-Curie program, ITN-HHFDWC-676258 and by Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origine e la Tradizione Alessandrina (GIROTA)



ISSN 1862-197X

ISBN 978-3-631-86459-3 (Print)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-89121-6 (E-PDF)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-89122-3 (E-PUB)

DOI 10.3726/b20250

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Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.), 2023

Peter Lang – Berlin · Bruxelles · Lausanne · New York · Oxford

This publication has been peer reviewed.

www.peterlang.com

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Introduction

The challenge of making a genealogy of the idea of progress – one of the most crucial driving forces of the Western culture in the modern age, brutally challenged by the twentieth century – has at its core the question about the role of Christianity. The comprehension and meta-comprehension of Western history has been intertwined with the task to define the nature of “modernity” and its (supposed) genesis as a process of “secularization” of theological-political concepts. One of the most debated theses on the genesis of the concept of progress was formulated by Karl Löwith,¹ who described the interpretations of history as belated products of biblical eschatological views. This volume intends to approach this problem from another, contested genealogy, which in some sense can be seen as a heresiology: namely, Origenism.

The history of the reception of Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–c. 253), the exegete and philosopher who shaped the history of Christian hermeneutics from the third century onwards, is characterised by the continuous debate surrounding the legitimacy of his doctrine inside the Church, the boundaries of which were only then in the making. At the same time, the almost inevitable confrontation with his theological model took place. By invoking the name of the master of Alexandria, this journey through the Christian traditions over the centuries, from Late Antiquity to contemporary times, offers the possibility of appreciating a more nuanced understanding of the “history of the Christian idea of progress”. This is done through the lens of a perspective which is at the same time marginal and hegemonic as well as both heretical and at the heart of orthodoxy.

The volume builds on the results of the international conference on *Origen and the Origenian Tradition on Progress*, held in Rome from the 14th to the 16th of May 2018. The conference was organised in collaboration between the Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN Project *The History of Human Freedom and Dignity in Western Civilization* and the Sapienza University of Rome, with its funded project *La Wirkungsgeschichte di gnosi e origenismo in età moderna*.

We, as organisers, shared the idea that the notion of *progress* (attested especially in the terms προκοπή, προκόπτω, πορεύω, προσάγω / *profectus*,

1 K. Löwith, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, Chicago 1949.

proficio, procedo) is a structural concept in the thought of Origen, who deploys it systematically.² The strategy of following the *Nachleben* of the idea of progress rests on the presupposition of the systematicity of Origen's thought and the complex symmetry between the beginning, found in the pre-existence of the intellects, and the end, found in the apocatastasis. This symmetry is studied in the first papers of the volume (i.e. by Gaetano Lettieri and Anders-Christian Jacobsen), which offer respectively a broad panorama of the theme and a detailed reference to one aspect of this theology of progress. As a result of the need of persistently being vigilant of the risk of "overexposing the continuity between discrete phenomena," as Francesco Berno puts it in his paper, the contributions attempt to describe a history of the concept of progress as found in the Origenian inheritance marked by a thorough philological, historic-critical analysis of key texts and authors. Therefore, we use the marker of "Origenism", further specified by the key concept of "progress", as a historical concept,³ fully convinced of the potential of these categories to disclose new meaning of the history of progress and the history of Western thought, leaving the field open to new investigations. As one of the most refined critics of the idea of progress, Theodor Adorno, once wrote, it is necessary to continue to interrogate history – and the concept of progress itself – knowing that "discontinuity and universal history have to be thought together"; if not so, the risk would be to elevate "mere facticity" to the rank of "the only thing to be recognized and accepted",⁴ thereby risking a theodicy of the present.

After the Origenian beginnings with the two already mentioned contributions (Lettieri, Jacobsen), Berno shows a disambiguation of the mystical semantic field in Greek Valentinianism. Berno retraces the thesis of a Gnostic origin, albeit reinvented and radically modified, of the later Christian mystics. The Catholic Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen "selected and

2 See F. Cocchini, *Il progresso spirituale in Origene*, in: M. Sheridan / J. Driscoll (eds.), *Spiritual Progress: Studies in the Spirituality of Late Antiquity and Early Monasticism*, Rome 1994, 29–45; G. Lettieri, *Progresso*, in: A. Monaci Castagno (ed.), *Origene. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Rome 2000, 379–392.

3 The bibliography on the theme is very broad: here we can mention C.L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, New Haven 1932; E.L. Tuveson, *Millenium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*, Berkeley 1949; J. Baillie, *The Belief in Progress*, London 1951; T. Mommsen, *St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of The City of God*, in: JHI 12 (1951), 346–374; J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry Into Its Origin and Growth*, New York 1955; R. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New Brunswick 1994.

4 Th.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, New York 1973, 319 (or. ed. Berlin 1958).

enriched, with extraneous themes” the Gnostic reflection, thus presenting it in a modality that the latter intended to transcend, the mystical one, seen by the Gnostics as psychic and imperfect. Thus, while Berno’s contribution tends to distinguish and separate, Patricia Ciner’s essay recovers the Platonic common ground between Plotinus’ and Origen’s mystical anthropologies. Ciner proposes an actualisation of the models of Plotinus and Origen in the light of some currents of contemporary neuroscience. Ryan Haecker’s reflection closes this first section on Origen and his context, building the case for the full inclusion of Origen in the history of logic. Haecker links Origen’s first principles of theology with his understanding of logic as a formalisation of the divine Logos into logoi, which is refracted images of the Eternal speech.

Vito Limone’s contribution focuses on one of the most decisive heirs of the Origenian tradition, namely Gregory of Nyssa. Limone examines Gregory’s notion of “intensified agape” – which, as Limone shows, is a reformulation from Origen. Furthermore, Gregory identifies a force which drives the human soul in a movement that can now be truly progress without end. The conciliation between opposite principles in the soul – namely its passionate desire and its goal, impassibility – happens in the endless intensification of this desire. In Gregory, therefore, the contradiction of one of the major tenets of Origen’s system, i.e. the finite nature of God, is the paradoxical possibility of perfecting the system without postulating an end to its driving force, i.e. the ascensional movement of progress.

With Tobias Georges’ essay we enter the Middle Ages. Hans Urs von Balthasar famously compared his system to a “jar breaking into a thousand pieces,” so that, while “the name of the master was being overwhelmed and stoned”, “the fragrance of the ointment” poured all over the house. Von Balthasar told the fate of Origen’s inheritance which was under attack from the very beginning.⁵ In the Middle Ages, the heterodox parts were removed and Origen’s inheritance was made “completely harmless”.⁶ Origen’s powerful image, originating in the Song of Songs, expresses the dissemination and the simplification of Origenian ideas in the mediaeval cloisters and

5 For the events that preceded and caused Origen’s departure from Cesarea see M. Simonetti, *La controversia origeniana: caratteri e significato*, in: Aug 26 (1986), 7–31; R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, London 2001, 117–174; E. Junod, *L’Apologie pour Origène de Pamphile et la naissance de l’origénisme*, in: StPatr 26 (1993), 267–286; E. Prinzivalli, *Magister Ecclesiae, Il dibattito su Origene fra III e IV secolo*, Rome 2002, 9–15.

6 H. U. von Balthasar, *Origenes. Geist und Feuer. Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften*, Salzburg 1938; Eng. tr. *Origen. Spirit and Fire. A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, Washington 1984, 2.

universities. Georges' portrait of Abelard is an example of this cautious and "tactical" approach to Origen, mediated by the now overwhelming authority of Augustine. The critique of Origen, dependent on an Augustinian stance, is the subject of Massimiliano Lenzi's contribution. Lenzi analyses Thomas Aquinas' theology of predestined grace as an anti-Origenian device. Lenzi, furthermore, shows us a coherent Augustinian perspective in Aquinas' soteriology, albeit expressed in the language of medieval Aristotelianism. The advantage of following Aquinas' perspective consists in seeing the systematic nature of Origen's system clearly evaluated (and rejected) by another famously systematic thinker, namely Aquinas, who judged inadequately and thus condemned both Origen's ontology and soteriology.

Pasquale Terracciano illustrates in his contribution one of the ways Origen entered the Modern Age, namely through the quest for an original, ancient, and unitary wisdom, which for many scholars and theologians took the form of the study of the Kabbalah. Terracciano reads Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's famous defense of Origen through this innovative key. He then proceeds to complete the portrait of Origen, "Cabalae studiosus," in a very comprehensive picture with the works of Francesco Zorzi, Cornelius Agrippa, and Jean Bodin at its center. The last link of the chain, evoked in the final pages of Terracciano's essay, brings us to one of the most audacious evocations of Origen's authority, made by Giordano Bruno, which underscores the radical potentiality of Origen's thought in the hands of one of the most innovative, meta-dogmatic thinkers of the Early Modern Age.

While the sixteenth century signified the rediscovery of Origen as a master of esotericism, it was also the age of one of the most integral attempts to recover Origen's authority – and superiority over Augustine – in terms of biblical exegesis, anthropology, and soteriology, namely that of Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus' Origenism, as pointed out in Maria Fallica's essay, is an integral recovery of the category of progress, which leaves out Origen's most audacious doctrines revived by the "kabbalist" vein and instead leads in the direction of a metaphorisation and spiritualisation of the revelation.

Erasmus' reception of Origen mediated other fertile receptions of humanists and theologians across Europe, especially in figures who remained at the borders of the new confessional identities. Stefania Salvadori's contribution analyses the case of Sebastian Castellio, one of the fathers of the modern idea of tolerance, who takes up and radicalises Erasmus' position. He thereby uses Origen in the construction of "a new dynamic, progressive and universal model of salvation, a complex soteriological device whose direction is entrusted to human reason."

The seventeenth century sees the development and the interplay of the various modes of reception of Origen already experimented with between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: Origen the defender of free will,

Origen the rationalist, Origen the Kabbalist are all possible and compoundable models. Elisa Bellucci's contribution confronts the eschatological paradigms of Philipp Jacob Spener, the Petersen spouses, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz on the crucial theme of the *Nachleben* of one of the most disconcerting and yet fully coherent doctrines of Origen: the expectation of the apokatastasis, the recapitulation of all things in God, which is now, as Bellucci explains, a widely diffused tenet in the Kabbalistic tradition. Following the Petersens' exegesis, the faith in the progressive action of a merciful God, manifesting Himself through the apparent contradictions of history, makes possible the conciliation between Luther and Origen, weighted in the latter's favor: the action of the Spirit in history is directed toward a progressive, total revelation of the kingdom of love.

Joshua Roe's contribution follows from a very peculiar viewpoint the history of the idea of progress in its most fortunate era, the Enlightenment, adopting the critical stance of Johann George Hamann. In his attempt to revisit and complicate current discourses on progress by showing their dark spots, the Prussian philosopher paradoxically uses the "progressive" Origen as a proof of the impossibility of eliminating the historical, sensitive, and irrational parts of human existence from the glorious account of its progressive destiny.

Andrea Annese's essay brings us to the post-Enlightenment Italian Church of the XIX century. Annese examines the difficult confrontation with modernity in the figure of Antonio Rosmini, the creator of a new "Christian apologetics" with the retrieval of the Church Fathers and Origen at its core. As John Henry Newman states, Rosmini's way to conjugate tradition and free theological discussion rested on the principle of the development of dogma: the history of the Christian doctrine as a seed, which needs the development intrinsic to a living entity to fully disclose its profoundest meaning. Rosmini's perspective shows the *reformist* aspect of theological progress, rejected by the Catholic Church of its time and reevaluated in the twentieth century; an Origenian fate, one might say.

The last three essays of our volume reflect on three of the most important figures of the twentieth century who critically retrieved Origen's role in the history of Christian theology: Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Hans Blumenberg. Enrico Cerasi returns to a subject frequently discussed in the volume: the possible convergence between Origenism – here in the form of the doctrine of apokatastasis – and the Reformed tradition, heavily influenced by Augustine's theology. Cerasi interprets this convergence in Barth as only apparent, founded as it is in a very different theological focus, and indeed diverging in the idea of progress, which proves to be a litmus test for discerning ideological trajectories. Spirit and progress make their appearance again with Elisa Zocchi's study on von Balthasar's complex parallel

between Origen and Hegel, in which the long shadow of another, powerful theology of history emerges: that of Joachim of Fiore. Progress is *Aufhebung*, dialectical synthesis, and this progress is moved into God. Notwithstanding the disturbing similarities, Balthasar redeems Origen's theology from what he considers the sin of Hegelianism, i.e. the reduction of divine freedom to a logical necessity and of human freedom to titanic effort. Ludovico Battista's essay, lastly, bring us to the theme with which we have started this brief introduction, namely the reconstruction of Western secularisation. Battista does this with the help of one of the most radical opponents to Christian genealogies of modern thought: Hans Blumenberg. Given Blumenberg's intense confrontation with Augustinism and its theological absolutism, Battista shows his cursory and "strained re-interpretation" of the Origenian tradition, considered anti-Christian in its results. Blumenberg's firm refusal of any kind of Christian origins of the rationalist, enlightened, and liberal modernity is perhaps the best way to close a volume devoted to tracing a genealogy of a theology of progress.

The philosophical gesture of Blumenberg, so charged with its Nietzschean accents, brings us back again to the ambiguities of a history of progress and history itself. Indeed, as many of the essays gathered in this volume will show, another name for *progress* can be *accommodation*, the classical rhetorical and legal principle which was incorporated into Christian theology and rabbinic thought. As Amos Funkenstein's masterpiece, which corrected and resumed Löwith's analysis, has shown that "grand historical speculations, which saw in the whole of history an articulation of the adjustment of divine manifestations to the process of intellectual, moral, and even political advancement of mankind" grew from the shared Jewish and Christian hermeneutical presupposition that "God adjusted his acts" to the capacity of the human recipient to understand them.⁷ In the shift from apocalyptic thought (with the idea of the irruption of novelty, crucial to the birth of the concept of history) to eschatology, revolutionary thought became "evolutionary", and thus progressive.

Progress and apocalypse will continue to be alternatives, mediated in the neo-apocalyptic thought of Augustine;⁸ but it will be the Origenian tradition

7 A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, Princeton 1986, 213.

8 The crucial role of Augustine in the concept of progress and in its ambiguity is well described within the complex problematisation of the idea of progress proposed by Theodor Adorno, which saw "in the Augustinian theologumenon of an immanent movement of the species toward the blessed state" the presence of the "motive of irresistible secularization": "in Augustine one can recognize the inner constellation of the ideas of progress, redemption, and the immanent course of history, which should not dissolve into one another, lest they reciprocally destroy each other. If

that will enhance this model. The heirs of Origen's theological quest – e.g. Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus, the Florentine humanists, Erasmus, Bruno, the Cambridge Platonists, Leibniz, Lessing, Kant, Fichte, the German Liberalität, Newman, Jaspers, Pareyson, Ricoeur, and Marion as well as the constant fidelity to Origen in the Jesuits from the sixteenth to the twentieth century –⁹ will build a theological alternative to the emerging hegemony of the absolute voluntarism of Augustine, based on the confession of the elective omnipotence of God, on the mono-energetic interpretation of the gift of grace, and on the tragically negative anthropology which forms its counterpoint. In building an “open”, speculative, rationalistic mysticism, Origenism will open the borders of religion while insinuating a progressive,

progress is equated with redemption as transcendental intervention per se, then it forfeits, along with the temporal dimension, its intelligible meaning and evaporates into ahistorical theology. But if progress is mediatized into history, then the idolization of history threatens and with it, both in the reflection of the concept as in the reality, the absurdity that it is progress itself that inhibits progress. [...] The greatness of the Augustinian doctrine was its for-the-first-time. It contains all the abysses of the idea of progress and strives to master them theoretically. The structure of his doctrine unabatedly expresses the antinomian character of progress. Already in Augustine, as then again at the height of secular philosophy of history since Kant, there is an antagonism at the center of this historical movement that would be progress since it is directed toward the kingdom of heaven; the movement is the struggle between the earthly and the heavenly. All thought about progress since then has received its draft from the weight of the historically mounting disaster. While redemption in Augustine forms the telos of history, the latter neither leads directly into the former, nor is the former completely unmediated by the latter. Redemption is embedded in history by the divine world plan but is opposed to it after the Fall. Augustine realized that redemption and history can exist neither without each other nor within each other but only in tension, the accumulated energy of which finally desires nothing less than the sublation of the historical world itself.” (Th.W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, tr. H.W. Pickford, New York 1988 (or. ed. Frankfurt 1969)).

- 9 See G. Lettieri, *Origenismo in Occidente: secc. VII-XVIII*, in: Monaci Castagno (ed.), 2000, 307–322; G. Lettieri, *Σκιαγραφεῖν / Scrivere ombra. La teologia congetturale di Gregorio di Nissa e la sua eredità*, in: M. Raveri / L.V. Tarca (eds.), *I linguaggi dell'assoluto*, Mimesis, Milan / Udine 2017, 143–172, then in G. Lettieri, *Il differire della metafora. Il transfert del desiderio da Gregorio di Nissa e Agostino a Ricoeur e Derrida*, Rome 2021, 167–126; G. Lettieri, *Eriugena e il transitus di Agostino nei Padri greci. Apocatastasi ed epektasis nel Periphyseon*, in *Adamantius* 22 (2016), 349–397; G. Lettieri, *Newman alexandrino, Postfazione a J.H. Newman, Lo sviluppo della dottrina cristiana*, Milan 2003, 421–452; G. Lettieri, *Il differire della metafora. II. Ricoeur e Derrida interpreti divergenti di Agostino*, in: *Filosofia e teologia* 28 (2014), 127–171, then in Lettieri, 2021, 91–166.

tendentally meta-dogmatic stance, characterised by its liberal and “humanistic” traits and optimistic with regard to human freedom, reason, and the inalienable dignity of the human being. The pages that follow will tell some of this story.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Teresa Piscitelli (University of Napoli Federico II), Luca Arcari, and Marco Rizzi – respectively, the former president, the treasurer, and the new president of GIROTA (Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina) – for the support to the conference and this publication. The support of one of the most important groups of research on Origen and the Alexandrian tradition was truly important and significant for our endeavour. Further, we express our gratitude to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN Project *The History of Human Freedom and Dignity in Western Civilization* for supporting the conference as well as the publication of the volume. Finally, we owe Margrethe Birkler a debt of thanks for her huge effort in correcting and aligning the footnotes and the bibliography as well as creating the index for this contribution.

Gaetano Lettieri

Progress: A Key Idea for Origen and Its Inheritance

Abstract: The essay presents the theme of progress in a systematic way in Origen's production, as a key word to understand all his works and his *Nachleben*. Origenism is here intended as an interpretation of Christian religion as universal religion of enlightened reason, which is rationalised and interiorised.

Keywords: Universalism, Reason, Rationalisation, Spirit, Metaphor, Mysticism

To Manlio Simonetti

I would like to start my contribution mentioning my late mentor, Manlio Simonetti. I consider him the greatest Italian and international Origen scholar of the last fifty years. He was full professor of *Storia del cristianesimo* at Sapienza for many decades and he passed away in Rome on the 2nd of November 2017. My simple considerations here are no more than a pale reflection of his bright, free and profound teaching, to which many of us owe the passion and knowledge of Origen, the humble adherence to a thorough and accurate analysis of his texts and contexts, and finally the understanding of the relevance and complexity of the traditions of thought which depend upon him.

I will propose here only some schematic introductory notes, aimed at clarifying the subject of this volume. Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Maria Fallica and I share the idea that the notion of *progress* (attested especially in the terms προκοπή, προκόπτω, πορεύω, προσάγω / *profectus, proficio, procedo*) is a structural concept in the thought of Origen, who deploys it systematically.¹ Moreover, the concept of progress has proven its capability to radiate its influence through the whole of Western theology and philosophy, as their papers will show. This thought of theological progress has indeed generated an extraordinary intellectual dynamism; it inspired a rational critique towards whatever kind of static objectification in the religious and conceptual field; it has released an impetus towards new interpretations of God and truth.

1 See F. Cocchini, *Il progresso spirituale in Origene*, in: M. Sheridan / J. Driscoll (eds.), *Spiritual Progress: Studies in the Spirituality of Late Antiquity and Early Monasticism*, Rome 1994, 29–45; G. Lettieri, *Progresso*, in: A. Monaci Castagno (ed.), *Origene. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Roma 2000, 379–392.

As a matter of fact, Origenism presents itself as the most advanced synthesis of the Christian re-interpretation of the Old Testament's legacy and the classical *paideia*, in which the Christian religion is interpreted as a universal religion of enlightened reason and of freedom from error and violence; a religion of moral formation and of unbounded interiorisation of the religious revelation, a religion of brotherhood and peace among men. The presupposition of this history of freedom – confident of the possibility of leading humanity from the deceptions and lacerations of earthly history to the unanimous ascent to the intelligible heaven – is the affirmation of the dynamic and progressive nature of the relationship between reason and Truth, desire and Spirit. Hence the acknowledgement of the critical and dynamic nature of dogma itself, interpreted as the understanding of the transcendent, incomprehensible, and yet processual nature of God. Critically assumed, dogma does not pretend to define God: it is an adequate conjecture which confesses Him as a movement of unbounded revelation, a ubiquitous process of solicitation and gratification of human desire. Man, called to recognise himself as a created, yet divine image of the Logos, discovers his absolute dignity. This dignity requires a continuous movement of overcoming of the self, a tireless rational challenge of every kind of external worship, an affirmation of human freedom, able to escape every mundane and exterior bond. The analogy between human and divine, mediated by the revelation of Christ as the Logos incarnate, unfolds as a boundless anagogy which culminates in a speculative mysticism. The critique of every kind of religious *littera occidens* as an idolatrous stopping place of the outburst of the rational desire seeks to rise to an interior and fusional relationship with the Logos and his Spirit. The aim is to reach the logical dimension of an eternal gospel, universal because fully rational, which calls men to unveil Truth in themselves and unveil themselves in the inextinguishable transcendence of the loving relationship between Father and Son. This mystic yet processual intimacy is open to man's participation.

Let us proceed in stages, by identifying the idea of progress as the systematic principle of the Origenian system, capable of vivifying its entire articulation.

1. The Origenian idea of progress is a catholic anti-dualistic dispositive, which ontologically recants the apocalyptic perspective of the early Christian kerygma, fluidifying the sclerotic heretical theological dualism. The universal progress of all, in movement towards the perfect final reunification in God, solves the apocalyptic antithesis between old and new, the world of darkness and the world of light, *lex occidens* and *Spiritus vivificans*, nature and grace, transforming it into a process of morality and knowledge. The economical *aut-aut* of Paul and John, made more

rigid by Gnostics and Marcionites as theological dualism, is followed by the Proto-Catholic and progressive *et-et* of Origen, ontologically projected: the ascensional progress of the rational desire connects the material/historical world and the intelligible realm through analogy and anagogy, in the mediation of Christ Logos incarnate. This Proto-Catholic principle A) gives the “reformistic” missionary-universalist imperative precedence over the “revolutionary” eschatological-elective one. This idea starts the spreading of the gospel in mundane space and secular time, and then in logical transcendence, rather than in the spasmodic waiting for the disruptive judgement of this eon and the immediate entry of the elects into God’s kingdom. The apocalyptic kingdom in heaven is surrogated by the universal Church *in fieri*, which progressively rises into heaven. B) This apocalyptic principle, re-interpreted by Origen in a Platonic sense, tends to be reconfigured as the wisdomic revelation of the logical and intelligible nature of God, rather than eschatological revelation of an elective charisma, which, here and now, tears out the elects from the darkness of this world, dominated by the evil Archon. The eschatological and charismatic notion of Spirit is now ontologised and rationalised.² The eschatological historical novelty of the gift in the charismatic intimacy with God becomes rational introduction in the very tissue of being, in the ontological furtherness of Wisdom; apocalypse becomes spiritual gnosis, progressive understanding of the inner and natural participation in the gift of the image. This means the relativisation of the apocalyptic urgency of the conversion, as an ultimate, absolute decision. In Origen’s perspective, there is still time, it is never too late, there is always another possibility, there are still other lives and worlds, in which there will always be the possibility to progress.³ Compared to the fractional and strained time of the Proto-Christian apocalyptic, Origen maintains a very lengthy

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- 2 See Or., princ. 1.1,2–4: *Consuetudo est scripturae sanctae, cum aliquid contrarium corpori huic crassiori et solidiori designare vult, spiritum nominare, sicut dicit: “Littera occidit, spiritus autem vivificat”. In quo sine dubio per litteram corporalia significat, per spiritum intellectualia, quae et spiritalia dicimus (1.1,2); Sanctus Spiritus subsistentia est intellectualis et proprie subsistit et extat (1.1,3); Deus Spiritus est, et eos qui adorant eum, in Spiritu et veritate oportet adorare”. Et vide quam consequenter veritatem Spiritui sociavit, ut ad distinctionem quidem corporum Spiritum nominaret, ad distinctionem vero umbrae vel imaginis veritatem (1.1,4). See Or., Joh. 13.110. The original text is here and throughout the volume, if not otherwise mentioned: for *De principiis* from P. Koetschau (ed.), *De Principiis*, GCS 5, Berlin 1913; for the *Commentarii in euangelium Iohannis*, E. Preuschen (ed.), *Der Johanneskommentar. Origenes Werke* 4, GCS 10, Berlin 1903.*
- 3 See Or., princ. 2.1,1–3; 2.3,1–7.

time, gradually ascending to God, universally redeemed. The doctrine of universal progress through the succession of eons and worlds envisages a Catholic “purgatorial” metaphysics, which mediates between the present of sin and the final future of perfection, guaranteeing the procrastination of judgement that will be the final one only when it will not be in any case punitive. The very existence of evil is only provisional, and therefore its punishment can only be relative, intentionally progressive because of its remedial nature: the judgement of conviction is never final, but always medicinal, able to disclose the possibility of future goodness over the evil which has been condemned, a possibility already latent in the creature.⁴ If the “original” sin is a fall from protological perfection, it does not imprison in a perverted dimension from which the creatureal freedom cannot escape; sin is only a stopping place, a temporary alienation from which freedom can emerge, stimulated by the Logos. Universal progress is unstoppable acceptance, gradual conversion, and ultimate redemption of the all in the unity of the Logos.⁵ Marcionites and Gnostics tended to radicalise into a theological dualism the Pauline opposition between the economy of the Law and the economy of Grace (for the Gnostics, this opposition was also the explanation of the division of all humanity in different natures: the spiritual becomes a divine nature, ontologically elected). They contrasted the autistic, “powerful” God of the creation, of the ontological subordination, of the Law, with the relational and

4 See Or., princ. 2.10,6; Or., Cels. 4.72–73; 6.46. The original text for *Contra Celsum*, here and throughout the volume, is from P. Koetschau (ed.), *Contra Celsum I-IV. Origenes Werke I*, GCS 2, Berlin 1899, and P. Koetschau (ed.), *Contra Celsum V-VIII, De oratione Origenes Werke II*, GCS 3, Berlin 1899. For the translation, here and throughout the volume, see H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, Cambridge 1980.

5 Or., princ. 1.6,3–4: *Interim tamen tam in his quae videntur et temporalibus saeculis quam in illis quae non videntur et aeterna sunt omnes isti pro ordine, pro ratione, pro modo et meritorum dignitatibus dispensantur: ut in primis alii, alii in secundis, nonnulli etiam in ultimis temporibus et per maiora ac graviora supplicia nec non et diuturna ac multis, ut ita dicam, saeculis tolerata asperioribus emendationibus reparati et restituti eruditionibus primo angelicis tum deinde etiam superiorum graduum virtutibus, ut sic per singula ad superiora profecti usque ad ea quae sunt invisibilia et aeterna perveniant, singulis videlicet quibusque caelestium virtutum officiis quadam eruditionum specie peragratis. Ex quo, ut opinor, hoc consequentia ipsa videtur ostendere, unamquamque rationabilem naturam posse ab uno in alterum ordinem transeuntem per singulos in omnes, et ab omnibus in singulos pervenire, dum accessus profectuum defectuumve varios pro motibus vel conatibus propriis unusquisque pro liberi arbitrii facultate perpetitur... Dispersio illa unius principii atque divisio ad unum et eundem finem ac similitudinem reparatur. See Or., princ. 2.3,7.*

“*patiens*” God of donation, of filiality through grace, of Spirit, whereas Origen interprets the two economies of the *littera* and of the *Spiritus* as the two subsequent historical steps and the two ontological levels of the redemptive action of the same God, who encourages the moral and intellectual progress which is open to the autonomous desire of the intellectual creature. Origen maintains, as opposed to the Gnostics, that there is only one human nature: this nature is theomorphic and only the progress of freedom determines the levels of perfection of man (sclerotised into irreducibly different natures by Gnostics), in a process of re-appropriation of their forgotten divine identity, possessed by everyone (the inner *imago Dei*). Every creature is free, fluid, able to “cross the natures” and become psychical from material and spiritual from psychical. If between God and creature there is analogy (divinising participation in the intellectual nature of the absolute difference which separates Creator and creature) and the call for intimacy, then intellectual progress is the only possible relation to the transcendent God: the adjustment of the image to the Archetype can only be approximative, hence tirelessly dynamic. In other words, the Origenian idea of progress can be sustained only starting from a Catholic postulation: more time, more space, universality of the levels, delay of the eschaton, quantitative surrogate (in terms of duration of the world and extension of his conversion to Christianity) of the qualitative crisis, tendential coincidence between salvific revelation and gift of the created being. This postulation means a relativisation of the “violent,” “destructive,” eschatologically innovative notion of apocalypse, envisaging an ontological retractation of the latter. The divine revelation always exists, is inscribed in the theomorphic nature of the first creation (the creation of the intellects), so that the salvific revelation of God is but the retrieval of the protological one. The apocalypse therefore is not judgement, exclusion, punishing annihilation, fracture and catastrophe of time, but a *calling back* and a universal inclusion, a re-affirmation of the universal donation of the participation in God, a progressive conversion of time into eternity. The Origenian apocalypse does not elect by discriminating, by separating the future realm of grace, and by destroying the old world of sin; it encompasses all things, having the ability of *reforming* and *renovating* the world and history in steps, by guiding their progressive ascension to God.

2. Origen reconstructs Christianity as *humani generis instructio*:⁶ spiritual culture, intellectual progress, and mystic-speculative interiorisation of the religious. If the Spirit is identified with the divine intellectual substance,

6 Or., princ. 4.3,12.

the fruition of the Spirit is seen as a gradual process of learning, cultural growth, rational formation. His Christianity is didactic and liberal, promoting the free intellectual progress of the subject; recanting in himself the entire classical παιδεία, he orients it toward the formation of man to absolute Truth, which is the personal truth of God, of the union with God, of the intimate equality with God, gifted to the *logoi* from the Logos. Starting from the identification of the three constitutive elements of the liberal arts (*ingenium, doctrina, studium*), the salvific revelation is reconstructed as rational culture (*doctrina spiritalis*), able to form and promote the natural intellect (interpreted as *imago Dei*) through the application and the effort of its want (the *desiderium* of the *liberum arbitrium*).⁷ Here we find the subordination of the charismatic and eventual dimension of the Hebrew and Proto-Christian notion of Spirit as compared to the ontological dimension of the Greek notion of immaterial Truth. This means that the relationship with the revelation of God is seen as a meritorious process of gradual rational formation, in a synergistic fashion. The Spirit is not a supernatural force which bursts in the mortal and sinful nature of man, in order to gift it *ex nihilo, ex abrupto* with a charismatic fullness approaching the eschatological intimacy with God. Instead, the Spirit is the divine nature *already* implicitly

7 Or., princ. 1.1,6: *Indiget sane mens magnitudine intellegibili, quia non corporaliter, sed intellegibiliter crescit. Non enim corporalibus incrementis simul cum corpore mens usque ad vicesimum vel tricesimum annum aetatis augetur, sed eruditionibus atque exercitiis adhibitis acumen quidem elimatur ingenii, quaeque sunt ei insita ad intellegentiam provocantur, et capax maioris efficitur intellectus non corporalibus incrementis aucta, sed eruditionis exercitiis elimata.* See Or., Cels. 3. 45–50, for an actual apology of the liberal culture, which allows the progression of intelligence and virtue: “And it is no hindrance to the knowledge of God, but an assistance, to have been educated, and to have studied the best opinions, and to be wise” (Καὶ οὐ κωλύει γὰρ πρὸς τὸ γινῶναι θεὸν ἀλλὰ καὶ συνεργεῖ τὸ πεπαιδεῦσθαι καὶ λόγων ἀρίστων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ φρόνιμον εἶναι). For a relativization of the Pauline contraposition between “wisdom of the cross” and “man’s wisdom” (1 Cor 1: 17–31), see Or., Cels. 3.47, where there is an apology of the wisdom of God as (Platonic!) knowledge of His intellectual and over-sensible nature, as opposed to the materialistic (Epicurean, stoical) wisdom of this world. See Or., Joh. 13.36: Καὶ ἐπίστησον, εἰ οἶόν τ’ ἔστιν ἀνθρωπίνην σοφίαν μὴ τὰ ψευδῆ καλεῖν δόγματα, ἀλλὰ τὰ στοιχειωτικὰ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἔτι ἀνθρώπους φθάνοντα· τὰ δὲ διδασκὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τάχα ἔστιν ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ ἀλλομένου ὕδατος εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον; the apocalyptic Pauline antithesis which opposes the *logoi* of human wisdom (διδασκοὶ ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοι) to the teachings of the Spirit (διδασκοὶ πνεύματος) is interpreted in an antidualistic (and Catholic) manner as distinction of elements and levels of a single process of knowledge, organised in an inchoative human component and divine refining component.

present in the inner part of every intellect, which has to progressively take himself back, thanks to the continuous solicitation of the Logos, who tries to attract the freedom by a rational, non-violent persuasion to collaborate with God.⁸ In this fully Proto-Catholic perspective, between history/natural and eschatology/supernatural there is ontological continuity, intellectual progression, and gradual and meritorious transfiguration, instead of fracture and irreducible apocalyptic crisis, catastrophic final overthrow of the natural in the supernatural due to the formidable and salvific irruption of God in history. This movement substitutes the free election of the community, separated from the perverted and damned world, with the process of the progressive and universal conversion of the world to the Logos. The necessity of rational spiritualisation of the religious favors a systematic interiorising interpretation of the historical salvific religion: the authentic *knowledge* of the evangelical revelation is the interiorisation, the *progress* from the external sign to the inner Logos, and therefore the intellectual and moral appropriation of the objective and historical sacred events. Christianity becomes a metaphor/*translatio* which produces the universal moral and intellectual progress. Origenian Christianity is hence rationalistic: the divine is the rational inside me, so that every exterior materialisation of the sacred is provisional, symbolic, *littera occidens*, if maintained as reific objectification of the sacred. The landing place of spiritual progress, hence, is the mystical overcoming of all the exterior signs which still separated Logos and *logoi*: only he who again becomes *logos in the Logos, god in God, christ in Christ*, and through Him one in the One can have a deep understanding of the gospel. The *ratio mystica* is the rational interiorisation of the Christian religious cultic system, ontologically relativised as approximate signs of the spiritual cult, namely of the inner intellectual identity between Christ and christos, His images. Ecclesial mediation is still necessary in pedagogical terms, but is provisional in ontological terms, because the peak of progress is the interiorisation of the relationship between *logos* and Logos, the only absolute mediator. If the scope of the divine revelation is to make man progress, until he is transformed in god,⁹ then the fulfillment of religion as a historical structure of subordinate mediation between God and man is its overcoming in the mystical reaching of the

8 See Or., Cels. 6.58.

9 Or., Joh. 20.268: “We have presented these comments that we may flee being men with all our strength and hasten to become “gods” (ταῦτα δὲ παρεθέμεθα ἵνα πάση δυνάμει φεύγωμεν τὸ εἶναι ἄνθρωποι καὶ σπεύδωμεν γενέσθαι θεοί). The English translation, here and throughout the volume, is from R. E. Heine, *Origen. Commentary on the Gospel according to John Books 1–10*, Washington 1989.

union with God, the intimate equality with God bestowed on the *logoi* by the Logos.¹⁰

3. The theological system of Origen maintains at the same time identity and progress between the beginning and the end of all. The progress of the end compared to the beginning depends on the novelty of creaturely freedom, which progresses up to the point of loving “actively” the identical perfection of the beginning, which was only “passively” participated in originally. It is the history of freedom which makes the Origenian system swerve from the classical idea of the eternal return of the identical.¹¹ The structural overlapping between the pre-existence of the intellects created in the image¹² and their universal eschatological apocatastasis,¹³ and therefore between the perfection of the beginning and the perfection of the end,¹⁴ should not be construed as an ontological

10 See Or., Joh. 2.19–24; 32.118; 1.91–93: “In the so-called restoration (ἐν τῇ λεγομένη ἀποκατάστασει) [...] those who have come to God because of the Word which is with him will have the contemplation of God as their only activity (μία πρᾶξις ἔσται τῶν πρὸς θεὸν διὰ τὸν πρὸς αὐτὸν λόγον φθασάντων ἢ τοῦ κατανοεῖν τὸν θεόν), that having been accurately formed in the knowledge of the Father, they may all thus become a son (ἵνα γένωνται οὕτως ἐν τῇ γνώσει τοῦ πατρὸς μορφωθέντες πάντες † ἀκριβῶς υἱός), since now the Son alone has known the Father (ὡς νῦν μόνος ὁ υἱὸς ἔγνωκε τὸν πατέρα) [...] no one has known the Father even if he be an apostle or prophet, but that it will occur whenever they become one as [the] Son and the Father are one (ἀλλ’ ὅταν γένωνται ἕν ὡς <ὁ> υἱὸς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἕν εισιν);” 1.201: “Now it is very clear even to the common crowd how our Lord is teacher and interpreter (διδάσκαλος καὶ σαφηνιστής) for those striving for piety, and lord of servants who have “the spirit of bondage in fear”. But when they progress and hasten to wisdom (προκοπτόντων <δὲ> καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν σοφίαν σπευδόντων) and are judged worthy of it (ταύτης ἀξιουμένων) – since “the servant does not know what his lord wishes” – he does not remain their lord; he becomes their friend (οὐ μένει κύριος, γινόμενος αὐτῶν φίλος).”

11 See Or., Cels. 4.67–69.

12 I find myself in complete disagreement with the nevertheless refined attempt to cast doubt on the notion of preexistence of the intellects made by M.J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, Ashgate 2002, 87–122. It seems misleading to me the revival and systematisation of this ill-founded thesis made by P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, Leiden 2006; see G. Lettieri, *Dies una. L'allegoria di “coelum et terra in Principio” ricapitolazione del sistema mistico-speculativo di Origene*, in: *Adamantius* 23 (2017) 45–84; and B.P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels. Origen's Doctrine of the Soul*, Washington 2012, 157–182.

13 See the good introduction by I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, Leiden 2013, 1–221.

14 See Or., princ. 1.6,1–4: *Semper enim similis est finis initiis; et ideo sicut unus omnium finis, ita unum omnium intellegi debet initium; et sicut multorum unus*

return of the identical, but as a free and loving *retractatio* of the divine gift of the original perfection. Even though the doctrine of the apocatastasis ends up by identifying the eschatological gift with the compelling realisation of the ontological perfection of the theomorphic derivate, still the end is *new* compared to the beginning. The end fulfills and improves the beginning, regaining it after freely loving it, mindful, moreover, of the vanity of sin and the redemptive merciful passion of Christ. The gift of the original participation in the divine is then “renewed”, “fulfilled”, and “stabilized” through the progressive conciliation between mercy and sin, grace and freedom.¹⁵ This means an eschatological reinterpretation of ontology, in which the freedom itself of man cooperates: it is the free creature that defines, in conjunction with the redemptive action of the Logos, the final perfection of the being. The doctrine of the created *noes* as pre-existing images of God seems to be opposed to the notion of progress, introducing on the contrary an exaltation of protological perfection, so that the end is seen as returning to the beginning, rather than as historical-donative progress. Is this not a loss of the evangelical and Pauline *novitas* of the eschatological advent of grace? If the creature which falls is still divine in an inalienable way, is sin only a very contingent phenomenon, a provisional growth in the divine totality which proceeds from God and returns to God, in circles? From this perspective, is progress only the ascensional movement of a circular ontological process, in which divine and human freedom end up being captured and interpreted as parts of an absolute necessity? Is the Origenian system a Hellenistic system of the circular return of the perfection of the identical, and hence a system of the divinity of the ontological, of the eternal necessity of nature (despite its being created)? Is universal freedom subtracted in the prevalence of the metaphysical necessity of the inalienable participation of the intellectual in the absolute Intellectual? Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the beginning and the end in Origen: the theomorphic perfection of the creature is “subjected” to its free appropriation, so that God’s creation reaches perfection only when it is perfectly loved by all creatures. Therefore, the gospel is the eschatological announcement of love as the final and perfect love of the freedom of the creature, able to cooperate with God in the redemption of all things. The only discrepancy between the beginning and the end is the

finis, ita ab uno initio multae differentiae ac varietates, quae rursus per bonitatem Dei, per subiunctionem Christi atque unitatem Spiritus Sancti in unum finem, qui sit initio similis, revocantur (1.6,2); *Dispersio illa unius principii atque divisio ad unum et eundem finem ac similitudinem reparatur* (1.6,4).

15 See Or., Joh. 13.236–246.

progress of love, the risk of the freedom of desire, which adheres to the Love which puts it into being and in his intimacy. The major problematical point of the Origenian system is at the same time the deepest and most original height of this thought: the paradoxical identification of the pathic love of God for His free creatures introduces contingency, instability, historicity in the Absolute, which is not omnipotent in His exposition to the freedom of His creatures. Hence Augustine's accusation, which condemned Origen's eschatology as *insecura*, always exposed to the instable arbitrariness of creatures, responsible for new falls and new conversions; this would lead to extrinsic redemptive measures of God, with the subsequent capture in the useless eternal returning of progress and regress. In reality, for Origen the extraordinary mercy of God, the memory of the fall and the redemption and the free loving choice of the participation in God are sufficient safeguards against a new fall, fixing god/God in God. This way, the system of Origen is clearly and explicitly different from the eternal return of the identical, with its circular cycle of dilation and contraction. The freedom of love saves the ontological perfection of the divine from the condemnation of the vanity of the eternal return of the identical.

4. The Origenian theology of progress is tendentially anti-hierarchical: as in the Beginning, so in the end every *diversitas* of quality stops, and there is absolute equality amongst creatures; this equality is a model to which the Christian communities start to get close to slowly but surely. The ontological becoming is the passage from the original unity of the intra-divine perfection of the "first creation" to the free differentiation of the intellects and their love, which concurs with God in the determination of the "second creation." The second creation is ordained according to *different* orders and ontological and historical hierarchies: they are determinations which arose after the original *logoi* (identified with the "man in the image"),¹⁶ and therefore they are adventitious, precarious, provisional conditions, which gradually will be absorbed in the progressive return of all in the Beginning, namely the ecstatic Son, who sinks into the unified

16 See Or., Joh. 2.144–148: "Everything made "according to the image and likeness of God" is man (πᾶν τὸ "κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν" γενόμενον θεοῦ ἄνθρωπον εἶναι) [...] In the case of the higher powers, the names are not names of the natures of living beings, but of orders (τὰ ὀνόματα οὐχὶ φύσεων ζῶων ἐστὶν ὀνόματα ἀλλὰ τάξεων) of which this or that spiritual nature has been prepared by God (ὡν ἦδε τις καὶ ἦδε λογικὴ φύσις τέτευχεν ἀπὸ θεοῦ) [...] Their substance is nothing other than man (ὡν τὸ ὑποκείμενον οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἐστὶν ἢ ἄνθρωπος), and to this substance it has chanced to be a throne, or dominion, or principality, or power (τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ συμβέβηκε τὸ θρόνον εἶναι ἢ κυριότητα ἢ ἀρχὴν ἢ ἐξουσίαν)."

contemplation of the Father. “In the Beginning,” before the creation of time and the world, the Logos creates in himself a plurality of intellects, all created *in the image of God*, and therefore identical in perfection and freedom. Hence, the diversified level of perfection of the creatures is secondary, relying on the diversified exercise of their freedom, which determines different levels of approximation of the theomorphic desire, and consequently different levels of ontological perfection. If, in the Beginning, the creatures are all created identical by the Son because they enjoy an identical deified gift of the Spirit, in the end the creatures will be identical because they all will choose to love Him freely. Any ontological and secular order (τάξις), inasmuch as it is secondary, is provisional, *tends to be overcome*, raised in an unrelenting movement of an ascensional progress, which is at the same time ontologically unified and free, and therefore articulated in *different* individual movements of *different* analogical speeds. Every ontological structure is precarious, a temporary stopping point, compared to the dynamism of intellectual desire, which takes every particular reality as a point of outburst of its allegorical quest of the One (the point of origin of the ontological becoming and the goal to which it reconverts himself and is fulfilled). Every *different* reality is, therefore, vivified from an underlying movement of auto-transcendence towards the protological/eschatological divine *identity*. This movement can be halted only apparently: the mystical apocatastasis is therefore the suppression of all the hierarchical ontological and mundane *diversitates*, always physically realised, and recapitulated in the mystical body, which is entirely rational and incorporeal, reunited in love with the Head, the Logos.

5. The intellectual creature is naturally progressive, being ontologically ecstatic (as an allegorical substance) and free (determined by his desire, which makes him lean towards the other). The *mens imago* is ecstatic, because it is a) ontologically dependent on the Father and the Son/Image which gives it existence and welcomes it in His intimacy, making it part of the divinising Spirit, in which the mind is called upon to progress up to likeness and unity with the Logos; and b) free, called upon a free love to the God who constitutes it, hence characterised by the dynamism of its “desiderium.”¹⁷ Indeed, the *mens imago* exists only going outside

17 See Or., princ. 2.11,4: *Quae a Deo facta pervidemus, ineffabili desiderio ardet animus agnoscere rationem. Quod desiderium, quem amorem sine dubio a Deo nobis insitum credimus; et sicut oculus naturaliter lucem requirit et visum, et corpus nostrum escas et potum desiderat per naturam: ita mens nostra sciendae veritatis Dei et rerum causas noscendi proprium ac naturale desiderium gerit. Accepimus autem a Deo istud desiderium non ad hoc, ut nec debeat unquam*

itself: as a real “ontological allegory”, it exists only by referring to the other, to the divine archetype which lights it up and attracts it. Hence, the *imago* is *adumbratio*, ὑποτύπωσις, impetus, sketch, symbol, and a sign which in itself refers to itself as other (in God). Man is the hypothesis of an ontological impetus towards the divine, a symbol fulfilled only by progress in God. The *mens imago*, being free, can suspend, invert, forget, or love and remember, in its conversion, the dependence relationship towards the other. Therefore, freedom, desire, and progress are inextricably linked: the created intellect, being free, has to go beyond itself, beyond every stopping point of its desire.¹⁸ The original sin is satiety of desire of God, a provisional stop of the progressive desire, a paralysis of the allegorical nature of the image, a contradictory freedom which incarcerates freedom in an autistic stasis, materialising appropriation of the desire in itself of the creature, which, as a contingent being, can only fall in the inadequacy of its accidental nature. Only the continual conversion

nec possit expleri; alioquin frustra a conditore Deo menti nostrae videbitur amor veritatis insertus, si numquam desiderii compos efficitur. Unde et in hac vita qui summo labore piis studiis ac religiosis operam dederint, quamvis parva quaeque ex multis et immensis divinae scientiae capiant thesauris, tamen hoc ipsum, quod animos suos mentemque erga haec occupant atque in hac semet ipsos cupiditate praeveniunt, multum utilitatis accipiunt ex hoc ipso, quod animos suos ad inquirendae veritatis studium amoremque convertunt et paratiores eos faciunt ad eruditionis futurae capacitatem (sicut, cum aliquis velit imaginem pingere, si ante futurae formae liniamenta tenuis stili adumbratione designet et superponendis vultibus capaces praeparet notas, sine dubio per adumbrationem iam inposita praeformatio ad suscipiendos veros illos colores paratior invenitur), si modo adumbratio ipsa ac deformatio stilo domini nostri Iesu Christi “in cordis nostri tabulis” perscribatur. Et idcirco fortasse dicitur quia “omni habenti dabitur et adicietur”. Unde constat habentibus iam deformationem quandam in hac vita veritatis et scientiae addendam esse etiam pulchritudinem perfectae imaginis in futuro. Here it should be noted that the notion of image is articulated in a double dimension: that of *adumbratio* or *deformatio* and that of *perfecta imago*, which perfectly matches the notion of *similitudo*, which is described in the subsequent note.

- 18 Or., princ. 2.11,1: *Certum est quia nullum animal omnimodis otiosum atque immobile esse potest, sed omni genere moveri et agere semper et velle aliquid gedit; et hanc inesse naturam omnibus animantibus manifestum puto. Multo ergo magis rationabile animal, id est hominis naturam necesse est semper aliquid movere vel agere.* Or., princ. 2.11,7: *Et ita crescens per singula rationabilis natura, non sicut in carne vel corpore et anima in hac vita crescebat, sed mente ac sensu aucta ad perfectam scientiam mens iam perfecta perducitur, nequaquam iam ultra istis carnalibus sensibus impedita, sed intellectualibus incrementis aucta, semper ad purum et, ut ita dixerim, “facie ad faciem” rerum causas inspiciens, potiturque perfectione, primo illa, qua in id ascendit, secundo qua permanet, cibos quibus vescatur habens theoremata et intellectus rerum rationesque causarum.*

of the desire in God, the inexhaustible progress of love can transfigure the ontological contingency of the creature, allowing to it the fulfillment of the ecstatic and divinising dimension of the *imago Dei*, its deepest identity, which is still inchoative. The divinisation is then the free progress of the image, called to attain the *likeness*, the ultimate perfection and finally the very unity with God, which can only be dynamic, in its nature of unlimited desire, inexhaustible unifying love, freely chosen.¹⁹ Therefore, even regression, the fall, sinful bewilderment, and the experience of evil are inscribed in the still *progressive* reality of desire: sin is the perversion, the suspension and paradoxical contradiction of desire. Anyway, sin becomes a “redemptive” experience of lacking and insatiability in the realm of creatures and materiality (what imprisons and weighs down, instead of releasing love’s desire towards the other); this experience inflames a very deep desire for God, the only reality which, in

19 See Or., Cels. 4.30 and Or., princ. 3.6,1: *Summum bonum, ad quod natura rationalis universa festinat, qui etiam finis omnium dicitur, a quam plurimis etiam philosophorum hoc modo terminatur, quia summum bonum sit, prout possibile est, similem fieri Deo [...] Hoc namque indicat Moyses ante omnes, cum primam conditionem hominis enarrat dicens: “Et dixit Deus: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram”. Tum deinde addit: “Et fecit Deus hominem, ad imaginem Dei fecit illum, masculum et feminam fecit eos, et benedixit eos”. Hoc ergo quod dixit “ad imaginem Dei fecit eum” et de similitudine siluit, non aliud indicat nisi quod imaginis quidem dignitatem in prima conditione percepit, similitudinis vero ei perfectio in consummatione servata est: scilicet ut ipse sibi eam propriae industriae studiis ex Dei imitatione conscisceret, quo possibilitate sibi perfectionis in initiis data per imaginis dignitatem, in fine demum per operum expletionem perfectam sibi ipse similitudinem consummaret.* Further into the text, this same likeness is called to improve, culminating in the paradoxical (and ontologically “impossible”) perfect unity with God: *In quo [=John 17:21.24] iam videtur ipsa similitudo, si dici potest, proficere et ex simili unum iam fieri, pro eo sine dubio quod in consummatione vel fine “omnia et in omnibus Deus” est (3.6,1).* The eschatological, apocatastatic unity with God can only be dynamic: hence, progressive. See Or., Cels. 4.23–30, where man’s dignity (as opposed to worms, which Celsus polemically compared to the amorphous and miserable mass of Christians) is indicated in its natural power of virtuous progress, recognising the theomorphic image which is its own. See Or., Cels. 4.25, Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, 1980, 201: “And yet, whatever is the nature of the rational being, it would not be reasonable to compare it to a worm, (Καίτοι γε ὁποῖον δὴ τὸ λογικὸν οὐκ ἂν εὐλόγως σκώληκι παραβάλλοιτο), since it possesses tendencies towards virtue (ἀφορμὰς ἔχον πρὸς ἀρετὴν). These general inclinations towards virtue prohibit us from comparing with a worm those who potentially possess virtue, and who cannot entirely destroy its seeds (Αὐταὶ γὰρ αἱ πρὸς αὐτὴν ὑποτυπώσεις οὐκ ἔωσι σκώληκι παραβάλλεσθαι τοὺς δυνάμει ἔχοντας τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὰ σπέρματα αὐτῆς πάντῃ ἀπολέσαι οὐ δυναμένους).”

His transcendence, can truly satisfy the desire. From the point of view of an anthropology of freedom, even fall and sin are ways of verifying the vanity of creatures outside of God, and hence providential trials of sorrow and frustration of the desire. These trials, contracting the desire, are experimental in projecting it with a greater impetus towards a finally liberating furtherness; in eschatological time, they fix this desire more thoroughly in God. It is clear that this progressive, meta-secular, rational, and mystical reduction of man to his deep-seated rational and theomorphic dimension runs the risk of idealistically misplacing the unique singularity and historicity, the risky contingency of his being, characterised by vain hopes, gratuitous and unredeemed sorrow, and the urgency of final and irreversible decisions. The idea of progress hence is a speculative dispositive which tends to remove existence into essence. It is not a coincidence that the “existential” and confessional theology of the mature Augustine, which is focused on the crucial value of the event, defines itself in a systematic breakup with the Origenian theological model.

6. Freedom propels being, the mind becomes what it loves: despite fall, regression, and materialisation, man returns to be god in progress, in the son and thanks to the son. The fall from the “identical” divine pleroma to the ontologically different and hierarchic world depends on a materialising regression; the conversion to the Logos starts a divinising process, which will reveal the accidental and provisional state of matter, which is only a relative function of the level of self-consciousness of the intellect. The original fall causes an almost general alienation from God, who is absolute immaterial Light, divinising Fire. Therefore, human beings are intellects which had regressed from the deifying union with God and had fallen in the ontological defect of their contingency and made obscure, materialised. Their embodiment is the effect of the cooling of the free and loving intellectual desire which united them with God by making them participants of the Spirit of the Logos. On a provisional basis, the quality of man’s desire (qualified as material, psychic and spiritual/perfect, as in the Pauline tripartition, as well as the Gnostic one) determines the ontologically progressive configurations of creatures (from the demonic to the human and angelic). Freedom determines the continuous and progressive steps of the perfection of being, which culminates in the Christic self-understanding as divinised image, united with God. In the apocatastasis, the material sensible dimension will again become pure contingency assumed in the participation of God; the body will dissolve because there will not be any point of resistance or ontological opacity in the presence of the absolute Light in which the intellect will be welcomed. The historical and corporeal dimension of the subject is not original but adventitious; on the contrary, the true and deep identity of the

subject is the protological, purely intellectual and incorporeal dimension, in which matter is recapitulated in pure rational principle ((λόγος τις, *insita ratio*).²⁰ Matter, in proportion to the progress of the singular intellect to whom it is inherent, gradually progresses from its “secondary” dimension (which is solid and completely resistant) to its “primary” dimension (purely “ideal”). At last, recapitulated in its singular formal principle, purely intellectual, matter is mere potentiality or a rational trace of contingency of the singular rational creature. A profound question arises: what kind of singularity is that of a free, purely intellectual subject, originally devoid of any type of historicity, physicality, or personal relationships with emotional and pathic values? Moreover, in the beginning, from what kind of “experience” and personal expectation does freedom, which is fully identical in every ontologically identical intellect, choose differently? Does not the Platonizing ontological idea of the *freedom, equality, and fraternity* of the protological intellects standardise in an abstract and essential way the singularity of the subject, misplacing its historical, concrete reality? Indeed, the endless diversity of history and creation is completely absorbed in the unified, essential, bright universal omnipotence of the theophanic need.

7. Christ, the embodied Logos, is God in progress, precisely because He is the merciful *Deus Patiens*: He progresses by adapting himself patiently (down to incarnation and death) to the defective conditions and the longings of salvation of every singular intellect, which he converts again to himself in an ascensional process of increasingly true, intellectual, mystical metamorphoses.²¹ The ontological progress of the creature depends

20 Or., Cels. 5.23: “A certain power is implanted in the body (λόγος τις ἔγκειται τῷ σώματι), which is not destroyed, and from which the body is raised up in incorruption (ἀφ’ οὗ μὴ φθειρομένου ἐγείρεται τὸ σῶμα ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ)”; Or., princ. 2.10.3: *Etiam nostra corpora velut granum cadere in terram putanda sunt; quibus insita ratio ea, quae substantiam continet corporalem, quamvis emortua fuerint corpora et corrupta atque dispersa, Verbo tamen Dei ratio illa ipsa, quae semper in substantia corporis salva est, erigat ea de terra et restituat ac reparet.*

21 See Or., princ. 1.2.1–4; and Or., Cels. 2.64: “Although Jesus was only a single individual (Ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἷς ὢν), He was nevertheless more things than one, according to the different standpoint from which He might be regarded (πλείονα τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ ἦν); nor was He seen in the same way by all who beheld Him (τοῖς βλέπουσιν οὐχ ὁμοίως πᾶσιν ὁρώμενος). Now, that He was more things than one, according to the varying point of view (ὅτι μὲν τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ πλείονα ἦν), is clear from this statement, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”; and from this, “I am the bread”; and this, “I am the door”, and innumerable others. And that when seen He did not appear in like fashion to all those who saw Him, but according to their several ability to receive Him (Ὅτι δὲ καὶ βλέπόμενος οὐχ ὡσαύτως τοῖς βλέπουσιν ἐφαινετο, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐχώρουν οἱ βλέποντες), will be clear to those who notice why, at the time

on the merciful revelatory and redemptive progress of the Logos, who becomes all things to all to contain and convert all the creation in Himself: the God who eternally becomes “man”, uniting Himself with the totality of the created intellectual body, is the first and the last, the creative beginning and the redeemed end, the donative act (the Son as Logos who created in Himself and unifies Himself with the perfect, then lapsed and redeemed creatures) and the mystical act (the Son as Wisdom who plunges Himself in the Father, surrendering to Him all the creatures that He has unified in Himself).²² Christ is God in progress, universal motion and *translatio*, the One who becomes multiple, the Eternal who becomes time, the absolute need who welcomes in Himself the contingency and the fall of creatural freedom, to reconvert it to Himself and in Himself. The progress of the creatures can exist only because there is the accommodation of the Logos to the imperfect and progredient desire of the creatures. In His dialectic power, the Logos assumes multiple ἐπίνοια (denominations/configurations) μορφαί (representations), μεταβολαί and μεταμορφώσεις (passages, transformations, metamorphoses) – in other words, intellectual, historical, biblical theophanies in which He manifests Himself through ascensional steps of revelation and truth – these steps allow the creatures to grow in the understanding and desire of God. The Logos, therefore, is the becoming other of the Logos in Himself with the purpose of accommodating the becoming other of creatural freedom: creatural freedom thereby mercifully advances the Son in Himself, for others. Precisely because He is identified with the catholic universal truth, the Logos is able to embrace all things in Himself, not to exclude anything, and to hold together the extremes by elevating the

when He was about to be transfigured on the high mountain, He did not admit all His apostles (to this sight), but only Peter, and James, and John, because they alone were capable of beholding”; “For there are different appearances, as it were, of the Word (Εἰσὶ γὰρ διάφοροι οἰονεὶ τοῦ λόγου μορφαί), according as He shows Himself to each one of those who come to His doctrine (καθὼς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰς ἐπιστήμην ἀγομένων φαίνεται ὁ λόγος); and this in a manner corresponding to the condition of him who is just becoming a disciple (ἀνάλογον τῆ ἕξει τοῦ εἰσαγομένου), or of him who has made a little progress (ἢ ἐπ’ ὀλίγον προκόπτοντος), or of him who has advanced further, or of him who has already nearly attained to virtue, or who has even already attained it (ἢ ἐπὶ πλείον ἢ καὶ ἐγγὺς ἤδη γινομένου τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ καὶ ἐν ἀρετῇ γεγενημένου) [...] And let these remarks be an answer to the suppositions of Celsus, who does not understand the changes or transformations of Jesus, as related in the histories (τὰς ὡς ἐν ἱστορίαις λεγομένας μεταβολὰς ἢ μεταμορφώσεις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ), nor His mortal and immortal nature.” (Or., Cels. 4.16). See also 4.15; 6.78; 6.77.

²² See Or., Joh. 1.91–93; 1. 216–225.

desire of the creature from the inferior to the superior level, from the fleshly to the rational, from the external to the internal, from the temporary to the fulfilled, from the partial to the complete; in other words, from the other to the One on whom this desire depends and from whom it derives. This means that reality in the Christian-catholic perspective is a process of continuous conversion, of universal progress of the flesh/matter to the rational/intellectual, of freedom into grace, of the Law into Gospel, of the human into the divine. This process of conversion depends on the mediation of the *embodied Logos*, who is the dialectical pivot of the universal becoming of reality, interpreted as the totality of the free image progressively elevated in God by the desire of His love. For Origen, the Christian religion is catholic because it can account for the original unity of dualism, its provisional nature, and its progressive reduction to unity. The Son is God who becomes, who progresses in Himself: He-is-the-God-who-becomes-Man, the Man-who-becomes-God, the person of the paradoxical, mystical *translatio* of the two into one, of love as fusion of the absolute distance between Creator and creature, of the allegorical transfiguration of the rational created being in the created Logos.

8. The historical and biblical revelation of the embodied Logos is reconstructed as ἀναγωγή of διαφωνία: the four Gospels prospect a progressive revelation of Christ's revelation, which culminates in the gospel of John. The intelligence of the exegete is called to rise up from the historical body of the Word, which constitutes the metaphorical historical facts of Jesus' life, to the rational depth of the Son, who introduces the mystical body of the elects in an eternal movement of intra-trinitarian love. The relationship between the synoptic Gospels and the fourth Gospel theorises a progressive intelligence of the revelation, therefore an abysmal theological deepening, which arises from the historical Jesus to the eternal Logos: the διαφωνία are *defectus litterae* if carried to extremes, whilst they have to be elevated allegorically in a mystical-speculative *symplochē*. Therefore, in Or. Joh. 10.15–21, the divergencies between the gospels are reconstructed as singular and diversified stages of a unique process of knowledge, as diachronic “freeze-frames” of an organic spiritual προκοπή, common to all evangelists, which depends on Christ's manifold revelation.²³ He is therefore able to accommodate

23 Or., Joh. 10.15: “But to grasp some notion of the evangelists' intention (τοῦ βουλήματος τῶν εὐαγγελίων), we must also say the following. Assume that God, his words to the saints, and his presence, which is present with them when he reveals himself at special times in their progress (τὴν τε παρουσίαν, ἣν πάρεσιν αὐτοῖς ἐξαίρετοις καιροῖς τῆς προκοπῆς αὐτῶν ἐπιφαινόμενος), are set before certain

every individual, to reveal Himself as prepared to adapt Himself to every level of his free desire of knowledge and love,²⁴ from the inferior, still prisoner of the flesh one from which the individual starts to free himself, to the purely spiritual one. The latter culminates in the knowledge of the inexhaustable transcendence of the Logos: a transcendence which still allows an intimate union. Revelation is indeed an anagogic mediation of *translatio*, identified with the embodied Logos Himself, who through His different bodily appearance (σωματικῶς) urges the believers to progress through the ascendant reaching of “something made clear to them in a purely intellectual manner” (τὸ καθαρῶς νοητῶς αὐτοῖς τετρανωμένον) (10.18): to pass from the historical gospel to the eternal one, the pure, eternal, intelligible and universal ascensional revelation of the Logos.²⁵

people who see in the Spirit. Since there are several and they are in different places, and by no means all receive the same benefits (πλείοσιν οὖσιν τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ ἐν διαφοροῖς τόποις, οὐχ ὁμοειδεῖς τε πάντη εὐεργεσίας εὐεργετούμενοις), assume that each one individually reports what he sees in the Spirit (ἐκάστω ἰδίᾳ ἀπαγγεῖλαι ἃ βλέπει τῷ πνεύματι) about God, his words, and his manifestations to the saints.”

24 Or., Joh. 10.21: “Therefore Jesus too is many things in his aspects (Καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοίνυν πολλὰ ἔστιν ταῖς ἐπινοίαις); it is likely that the different evangelists took their thoughts from these aspects and wrote the Gospels (ὡν ἐπινοῶν εἰκὸς τοῦς εὐαγγελιστὰς διαφορὸς ἐννοίας λαμβάνοντας), sometimes also being in agreement with one another concerning certain things (ἔσθ’ ὅτε καὶ συμφερομένους ἄλλους περὶ τινῶν ἀναγεγραφένα τὰ εὐαγγέλια).”

25 On the dialectic understanding of Catholic theology, see Or., Joh. 13.98–110: very interestingly, the orthodox dogma, which worships God in spirit and truth, is presented as the virtuous midpoint between two partial, and therefore imperfect, interpretations; the historically founded faith of the Jews and the simple Catholics, represented by the Jewish collocation of the Temple in the historical material Jerusalem, and the speculative heretical knowledge, represented by the Samaritans, who located the true Temple in the Garizim, which is still materialistic because it is exclusive. An equivalent opposition is in 13.51–52: the opposition between the literalist exegetes of the Scriptures and the Gnostic ones; the latter, allegorising Scripture, deserts the “five husbands” of the historical and sensible interpretations, uniting themselves with the “false sixth husband”, the allegorical, spiritual and intellectual interpretation of the heretics. The Catholic exegesis is the mediation, the dialectic connection between two partial and exclusive interpretations; the intelligible truth can be reached only as the deep knowledge of revelation, recognized as universal: this means that the revelation is connected with the historical and sensible creation, and is not opposed to it in a dualistic way. Ἐπὶ δὲ μετὰ τὸ ὠμιληκέναι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἀνακῦψαι τις θέλων καὶ προτραπείς ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ περιτύχη λόγῳ προφάσει ἀλληγορίας καὶ πνευματικῶν οὐχ ὑγιαίνοντι, οὗτος μετὰ τοὺς πέντε ἄνδρας ἐτέρῳ προσέρχεται, δούς, ἵν’ οὕτως εἴπω, τὸ ἀποστάσιον τοῖς προτέροις πέντε καὶ κρίνων συνοικεῖν τῷ ἕκτῳ. Καὶ ἕως ἄν γε ἔλθῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς συναίσθησιν ἡμᾶς ἀγάγη τοῦ τοιοῦτου ἀνδρός, ἐκείνῳ σύνεσμεν (13.52).

Therefore, to understand Jesus in His totality means to retrieve His progressive movement of ascent and descent, and reconnect in a unique process His different “comings”, His manifold “adaptations”, the progressive steps of His becoming all things to all: “But who is so wise, and has such competence as to learn everything in regard to Jesus (πάντα τὸν Ἰησοῦν μαθεῖν) from the four evangelists, and to be capable of understanding each thing by himself (καὶ ἕκαστον ἰδίᾳ χωρῆσαι νοῆσαι), and to keep in sight all his visits and words and works in each place? (καὶ πάσας αὐτοῦ τὰς καθ’ ἕκαστον τόπον ἰδεῖν ἐπιδημίας καὶ λόγους καὶ ἔργα;)” (10.36).

9. The Proto-Christian theological reflection is reconstructed as a dogmatic process, an *in fieri* understanding of God, a *work in progress*, a communal conjectural process, which results in the Catholic dogmatic synthesis, able to harmonise dissonant interpretations. As a result, the term “heresy”²⁶ means a necessary partial interpretation, which only progressively is recomposed in a more profound meaning. I point out here the very original pluralistic and “sectarian” interpretation of Christian origins proposed in *Contra Celsum* 3.11–13, in analogy with the conjectural and pluralistic nature of the philosophical sects/schools.²⁷ The

26 See G. Lettieri, *Il νοῦς mistico. Il superamento origeniano dello gnosticismo nel “Commento a Giovanni”*, in: E. Prinzivalli (ed.), *Il Commento a Giovanni di Origene: il testo e i suoi contesti*, Villa Verucchio 2005, 177–275; G. Lettieri, *Origene interprete del Cantico dei cantici. La risoluzione mistica della metafisica valentiniana*, in L.F. Pizzolato/M. Rizzi (eds.), *Origene maestro di vita spirituale*, Milan 2001, 141–186; G. Lettieri, *Reductio ad unum. Dialettica cristologica e retractatio dello gnosticismo valentiniano nel Commento a Matteo di Origene*, in: T. Piscitelli (ed.), *Il Commento a Matteo di Origene*, Brescia 2011, 237–287; G. Lettieri, *Tolomeo e Origene: divorzio/lettera e sizigia/Spirito*, in *Auctores nostri* 15, 2015, 79–136.

27 On the systematic progress of science as a paradigm of the progress of revelation and of theology and supreme science, see Or., Joh. 13.301–305 and 13.316–321. Οἶμαι δὴ ὅτι ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς ἐκ πλειόνων θεωρημάτων τέχνης καὶ ἐπιστήμης σείρει μὲν ὁ τὰς ἀρχὰς εὐρίσκων, ἄστινας ἕτεροι παραλαμβάνοντες καὶ ἐπεξεργαζόμενοι αὐτὰς ἑτέροις τὰ ὑπὸ αὐτῶν εὐρημένα παραδιδόντες, αἴτιοι ἐξ ὧν εὐρήκασιν γίνονται τοῖς μεταγενεστέροις οὐ δυναθεῖσιν τὰς τε ἀρχὰς εὐρεῖν καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς ἐπισυνάψαι καὶ τὸ τέλος τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιθεῖναι, τοῦ συμπληρωθεισῶν τῶν τοιοῦτων τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστημῶν πλήρη τὸν καρπὸν ὡς ἐν θερισμῷ αὐτῶν ἀναλαβεῖν. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τεχνῶν ἔστιν ἀληθὲς καὶ τινῶν ἐπιστημῶν, πόσω πλέον ἐπὶ τῆς τέχνης τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμης τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἔστι συνιδεῖν. Τὰ γὰρ εὐρεθέντα ὑπὸ τῶν προτέρων ἐπεξεργασάμενοι οἱ μετ’ αὐτοὺς παραδεδώκασιν τοῖς ἐξῆς ἐξεταστικῶς προσιοῦσιν τοῖς εὐρεθεῖσιν ἀφορμὰς τοῦ τὸ ἐν σώμα τῆς ἀληθείας μετὰ σοφίας συναχθῆναι (13.302–303). Very interesting is Or., princ. 3.3,3, in which Origen leans towards the hypothesis that demons themselves inspire philosophy and heresies “in good faith”, *non laedendi hominis prospectu, sed quia haec vera esse ipsi illi “mundi*

reflections on the revelation of the original communities, always biblically founded, are described here as divergent but still needed attempts to understand revelation: therefore, as *διαφωνία*, hermeneutical dissonances, and a plurality of believing opinions which show the conjectural nature of the Christian theological investigation, interpreted historically as a real work in progress. The understanding of God's mystery, albeit revealed enigmatically as always exceeding limited human understanding, proceeds harmonically through a plural work of progressive understanding, careful listening to the *διαφωνία*, "philologically discordant" conjectures which the universal church is bound to harmonise by combating the "absolutist" pretensions of the heresies.²⁸ Therefore,

huius principes" arbitrentur, ideo etiam ceteros docere cupiant ea, quae ipsi vera esse opinantur. Sicut enim, verbi causa, Graecorum auctores vel uniuscuiusque haeresis principes cum prius ipsi errorem falsae doctrinae pro veritate susceperint et hanc esse veritatem apud semet ipsos iudicaverint, tunc demum etiam ceteris haec eadem persuadere conantur, quae apud semet ipsos vera esse censuerint: ita putandum est facere etiam principes huius mundi, in quo mundo certae quaeque spirituales virtutes certarum gentium sortitae sunt principatum et propter hoc mundi huius principes appellatae sunt. Therefore, philosophical truths and heretical errors are described as reached by a positive, albeit imperfect and misguided, need of communion in truth, rather than a malevolent will of deceit and perdition. In fact, the different liberal disciplines, poetry, and magic itself are seen as originating from the angelic powers, described, ambiguously, at the same time, as inspiring deceits but also as revealers of ancient, authentic albeit inchoative, wisdom, which was obtained from the divine providence itself: *Sunt praeterea etiam aliae praeter hos principes speciales quaedam mundi huius energiae, id est virtutes aliquae spirituales, certa quaeque inoperantes, quae ipsae sibi pro arbitrii sui libertate ut agerent elegerunt, ex quibus sunt isti spiritus, qui inoperantur 'sapientiam huius mundi': verbi causa, ut sit propria quaedam energia ac virtus, quae inspirat poeticam, alia, quae geometriam, et ita quaeque singulas quasque huiusmodi artes disciplinas que commoveant [...] Sed et hi, quos magos vel maleficos dicunt, aliquotiens daemonibus invocatis supra pueros adhuc parvae aetatis, versu eos dicere poemata admiranda omnibus et stupenda fecerunt.* See also Or., *In Iesu Naue homiliae* 23.3 (Origen, *In liber Iesu Nave homiliae*, ed. W. A. Baehrens, in *Origenes Werke* 7, Leipzig, 1921). Therefore, here an admiration for the secular wisdom and the burden of the apocalyptic condemnation of this world exist side by side: they can however be compatible if *progressively* interpreted: even in the deceit or in the mundane inspiration of the celestial powers lies dormant a will for communion with man and a yet inchoative search for truth.

- 28 "He [Celsus] says, in addition, that "all the Christians were of one mind" (ὅτι ἔν ἑρρόνουν πάντες), not observing, even in this particular, that from the beginning there were differences of opinion among believers regarding the meaning of the books held to be divine (οὐδ' ἔν τούτω ὁρῶν ὅτι ἀρχῆθεν περὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πεπιστευμένοις θείοις εἶναι βιβλίους ἐκδοχὴν γεγόνασι διαφωνία τῶν πιστευόντων) [...] from the very beginning, when, as Celsus imagines, believers were few in number,

if the heresiological activity of Origen is systematic, still he is always aware that heresy means partial opinion, *διαφωνία* of knowledge, which can even contribute to the symphony of the orthodox and catholic – which means progressive and universal – understanding of the revealed Truth. As I have tried to show in various essays, even the Valentinian Gnosticism itself is abrogated and condemned only to be understood in a deepest, allegorical and mystical level. In this way the dualistic rigidity is interpreted as *littera occidens*, which the *spiritual* understanding fluidifies and vivifies, making understanding progress in an allegorical way. This means that Origen explicitly accepts the providential need for heresies, interpreted, through a daring exegesis of 1 Cor 11:19, as progressive ciphers of the universal truth of revelation.²⁹

10. At the origin of the process of dogmatic definition of the Christian revelation, Origen maintains a dynamic and critical interpretation of dogma: the true dogma is the total one, insofar as it is progressive, able to take on in itself the *different* Judeo-Christian and even heretical interpretations (therefore also the Greek Philosophical ones) of God and of Christ as partial, fragmentary. True dogma is critical, because it denies

there were certain doctrines interpreted in different ways” (Or., Cels. 3.11). But above all: “So, then, seeing Christianity appeared an object of veneration to men, as Celsus supposes (ἐπεὶ σεμνόν τι ἐφάνη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις χριστιανισμός), not to the more servile class alone (οὐ μόνοις, ὡς ὁ Κέλσος οἶεται, τοῖς ἀνδραποδωδεστέροις), but to many among the Greeks who were devoted to literary pursuits (ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν παρ’ Ἑλλήσι φιλολόγων), there necessarily originated heresies, not at all, however, as the result of faction and strife, but through the earnest desire of many literary men to become acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity (ἀναγκαιῶς ὑπέστησαν οὐ πάντως διὰ τὰς στάσεις καὶ τὸ φιλονεικον αἱρέσεις ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ σπουδάειν συνίεναι τὰ χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ τῶν φιλολόγων πλείονας). The consequence of which was, that, taking in different acceptations those discourses which were believed by all to be divine, there arose heresies (Τούτῳ δ’ ἠκολούθησε, διαφορῶς ἐκδεξαμένων τοὺς ἅμα πᾶσι πιστευθέντας εἶναι θείου λόγου, τὸ γενέσθαι αἱρέσεις), which received their names from those individuals who admired, indeed, the origin of the logos, but who were led, in some way or other, by certain plausible reasons, to discordant views” (ἐπωνύμους τῶν θαυμασάντων μὲν τὴν τοῦ λόγου ἀρχὴν κινηθέντων δ’ ὅπως ποτ’ οὖν ὑπὸ τινων πιθανοτήτων πρὸς τὰς εἰς ἀλλήλους διαφωνίας) (Or., Cels. 3.12).

- 29 Or., Cels. 3.13: “As the great proficient in philosophy is he who, after acquainting himself experimentally with the various views, has given in his adhesion to the best (ὡς ὁ πάνυ προκόπτων ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἀπὸ τοῦ πλείονα ἐγνωκέναι ἐγγυμασάμενος αὐτοῖς καὶ τῷ κρατήσαντι προσθέμενος λόγῳ), so I would say that the wisest Christian was he who had carefully studied the heresies both of Judaism and Christianity” (οὕτως εἶπομι’ ἂν καὶ τὸν ἐπιμελῶς ἐνιδόντα ταῖς ἰουδαϊσμοῦ καὶ χριστιανισμοῦ αἱρέσεσι σοφώτατον Χριστιανὸν γενέσθαι).

all the reciprocally exclusive and static interpretations of the mystery of Christ (Christ as only God: Docetism; Christ as only man: Ebionism) and of God (polytheism, Monarchianism; theological dualism). True dogma is systematic, only insofar as it is dynamic, because it elevated the different theological *διαφωνία* in the unified Truth of the *becoming of God*, so that these *διαφωνία* are interpreted as temporary moments of the understanding of the eternal relational intra-divine Process and the eternal process of incarnation of the Logos in humanity, which is intimately created and loved. Therefore, both the Trinity and Christ's person are interpreted as *processual, progressive, dynamic, relational, dialectic*, absolute realities. Dogma is the idea which moves reason, instead of stopping it; it is the idea which fluidifies the exclusive *littera* of the ontological antitheses or of the exclusive, inadequate, and therefore idolatrous truths (idolatrous precisely because partial and static).³⁰ *Dogma is processual, metadogmatic, spiritual*, insofar as it tries to think according to a processual idea which accommodates the excess of Truth in human terms. Now, truth is always in excess, not because it is not simple, but

30 A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making, Lowell Lectures 1926*, Cambridge 1927, 133: "Idolatry is the necessary product of static dogmas. But the problem of so handling popular forms of thought as to keep their full reference to the primary sources, and yet also to keep them in touch with the best critical dogmas of their times, is no easy one. The chief figures in the history of the Christian Church who seem to have grasped explicitly its central importance were, Origen in the Church of Alexandria, in the early part of the third century, and Erasmus in the early part of the sixteenth century. Their analogous fates show the wavering attitude of the Christian Church, culminating in lapses into dogmatic idolatry. It must, however, be assigned to the great credit of the Papacy of his time, that Erasmus never in his lifetime lost the support of the court of Rome. Unfortunately, Erasmus, though a good man, was no hero, and the moral atmosphere of the Renaissance Papacy was not equal to its philosophic insight. In the phrase of Leo X, the quarrel of monks began; and yet another golden opportunity was lost, while rival pedants cut out neat little dogmatic systems to serve as the unalterable measure of the Universe". Whitehead, 1927, 117: "A dogma – in the sense of a precise statement – can never be final; it can only be adequate in its adjustment of certain abstract concepts. But the estimate of the status of these concepts remains for determination. You cannot rise above the adequacy of the terms you employ. A dogma may be true in the sense that it expresses such interrelations of the subject matter as are expressible within the set of ideas employed. But if the same dogma be used intolerantly to check the employment of other modes of analyzing the subject matter, then, for all its truth, it will be doing the work of falsehood. Progress in truth – truth of science and truth of religion – is mainly a progress in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root of reality."

because it is personal and therefore relational: this means a subversive notion of the progressive dimension of Truth, which is intimately connected with its apocalyptic (and therefore concerning revelation) value. Precisely because it is personal, the achievement of Truth depends on a donative *revelation*, therefore an apocalypse, eschatologically never fulfilled.

11. The secret of the trinitarian dogma is the absolute perfection of the loving progress of the Son. If the Origenian Trinity is interpreted as an eternal and donative processual manifestation of divine persons, in a relationship of reciprocal subordination, God in Himself is absolute progress. Only as a single will, a single desire, a single love, do the three subordinate divine hypostases reach perfect unity.³¹ God is one not ontologically, but dynamically, thanks to the eternal ascensional process of the spiritual desire of the Son, who comes together perfectly in the knowledge and love of the Father. The unity of the Trinity is processual and loving, not ontological and essential (as in the dogma which would later be defined at Nicaea and refined in Constantinople: perfect unity of the three hypostases in the identical divine οὐσία).³² If the Son, as *Sophia*, had not remained in the perennial desire and in the eternally progressive contemplation of the Abyss of the Father, he would not have subsisted hypostatically.³³
12. The secret of the Christological dogma is the human perfection of loving progress, prompted by the love of the Logos. Similarly, loving progress is the key to the Christological mystery, since it defines the

31 See Or., Joh. 13.228: Πρέπουσα βρώσις τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτε ποιητὴς γίνεται τοῦ πατρικοῦ θελήματος, τοῦτο τὸ θέλει ἐν ἑαυτῷ ποιῶν ὅπερ ἦν καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ, ὥστε εἶναι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ υἱοῦ, καὶ γενέσθαι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ υἱοῦ ἀπαράλλακτον τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ πατρός, εἰς τὸ μηκέτι εἶναι δύο θελήματα ἀλλὰ <ἐν> θέλημα· ὅπερ ἐν θέλημα αἴτιον ἦν τοῦ λέγειν τὸν υἱόν· “Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν” (John 10:30).

32 Or., Cels. 8.12: “We worship the Father of truth, and the Son, who is the truth; and these, while they are two, considered as subsistences (ὄντα δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα), are one in unity of thought, in harmony and in identity of will (ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμοιοῖα καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος).” See M. Simonetti, *Sulla teologia trinitaria di Origene*, in: VetChr 8 (1971) 273–307, then in M. Simonetti, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, Roma 1993, 109–143; and M. Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo*, Roma 1975, 11–15.

33 See Or., Joh. 2.18: “by being “with the God”, the Logos always continues to be “God” (τῷ εἶναι “πρὸς τὸν θεόν” αἰεὶ μένων “θεός”). But he would not have this if he were not with God, and he would not remain God (οὐκ ἂν μείνας θεός), if he did not continue in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father (εἰ μὴ παρέμενε τῇ ἀδιαλείπτῳ θεᾷ τοῦ πατρικοῦ βάθους).”

dialectic identity of the Son (already “embodied” in the protology in the mystical body of the totality of the *logoi*), in which the intellect of the man Jesus progresses in the love of the Logos. The unity of Christ, a fusion of divine nature and human nature, is reached dynamically, in a processual way, as the meritorious peak of the *indesinenter* progressive desire of the creature;³⁴ it is not an ontological unity (Origen does not yet know the Chalcedonian single and identical ὑπόστασις of Christ, in which human and divine nature join). However, freedom, movement of desire, and the contingency of the created intellect of Jesus are assumed as *intimate* in the very becoming of the Son in God, precisely because they are prompted by the ubiquitous love of the Son.

13. The mystical Apocatastasis maintains a progredient unity. Origenian mystical thought, albeit in its unitive nature, is still ecstatic³⁵ and hence progressive,³⁶ insofar as it is the peak of the progress of all intellects, unified identically in the Son and all having become christs,³⁷ and refers to the ulteriority of the Father, who ontologically withdraws as unattainable. The relationship of the One-All³⁸ (the Son with His mystical body) can only be *simul* perfectly unitive and progressive. The secret of the hypostasis of the Son is mystical-spiritual, hence processual in a dialectic meaning: paradoxically, the human *becomes* divine in Christ. This

34 Or., princ. 2.6,5–6: *Verum quoniam boni malique eligendi facultas omnibus praesto est, haec anima, quae Christi est, ita elegit “diligere iustitiam”, ut pro immensitate dilectionis inconvertibiliter ei atque inseparabiliter inhaereret, ita ut propositi firmitas et affectus immensitas et dilectionis inextinguibilis calor omnem sensum conversionis atque immutationis abscideret, ut quod in arbitrio erat positum, longi usus affectu iam versum sit in naturam... Illa anima, quae quasi ferrum in igne sic semper in Verbo, semper in Sapientia, semper in Deo posita est, omne quod agit, quod sentit, quod intellegit, Deus est: et ideo nec convertibilis aut mutabilis dici potest, quae inconvertibilitatem ex Verbi Dei unitate indesinenter ignita possedit.* See 2.6,1–7; 4.4,4–5; Or., Joh. 32.325–326: “τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τοῦ λόγου γεγονέναι ἔν.”

35 Or., Cant. 4.30: *Foris enim est et extra corpus posita mens eius qui longe est a corporalibus cogitationibus, longe a carnalibus desideriis, et ideo ab his omnibus foris positum visitat Deus.*

36 Or., Cant. 2.5,29: *Anima quae in profectibus quidem posita est, nondum tamen ad summam perfectionis adscendit [...] pro eo quidem quod proficit pulchra dicitur.*

37 See Or., Joh. 1.197–199.

38 See Or., Joh. 1.119: “The God, therefore, is altogether one and simple (Ὁ θεὸς μὲν οὖν πάντη ἓν ἐστὶ καὶ ἀπλοῦν). Our Savior, however, because of the many things, since God “set” him “forth as a propitiation” and firstfruits of all creation, becomes many things, or perhaps even all these things (πολλὰ γίνεται ἢ καὶ τάχα πάντα ταῦτα), as the whole creation which can be made free needs him (καθὰ χρῆζει αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι δυναμένη πᾶσα κτίσις).”

means that Christ is the hypostatical and mystical progress of the totality of the human in the divine. The human is the *body* of the *Logos*, namely the *Logos* who *becomes logoi*.³⁹ In Or., princ. 1.6.8, mystical perfection is openly reconstructed as insatiable infinite progress.⁴⁰ Therefore, in the hom. 27 in Num. there is a dynamic exegesis of the *multae mansiones* of *John* 14:2.⁴¹ The faith in the incarnation of the *Logos* is the first of the *multae mansiones* (as many as forty-two, through which Origen reconstructs the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the promised land) which the ascensional progress of the soul – *profectio* (progression)/*profectus mentis* (mind's progress)⁴² – must tirelessly undertake to

39 Or., Cels. 3.41: “And with respect to His mortal body, and the human soul which it contained, we assert that not by their communion merely with Him, but by their unity and intermixture (οὐ μόνον κοινωνία ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνώσει καὶ ἀνακράσει), they received the highest powers, and after participating in His divinity, were changed into God (τῆς ἐκείνου θεϊότητος κεκοινωνηκότα εἰς θεὸν μεταβεβληκέναι)”.

40 Or., princ. 1.6,8: “*In qua [sancta et beata vita], cum post agones multos in eam perveniri potuerit, ita perdurare debemus, ut nulla umquam nos boni illius satietas capiat, sed quanto magis de illa beatitudine percipimus, tanto magis in nobis vel dilatetur eius desiderium vel augeatur, dum semper ardentius et capacius Patrem et Filium ac Spiritum Sanctum vel capimus vel tenemus* / And when after many struggles we have been able to attain to it [the holy and blessed life], we ought so to continue that no satiety of that blessing may ever possess us; but the more we partake of its blessedness, the more may the loving desire for it deepen and increase within us, as ever our hearts grow in fervor and eagerness to receive and hold fast the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It should be noted that even the opposite process of the fall, initiated by the satiety in the fruition of God, is prospected as gradual and “progressive”: *Si autem aliquando satietas cepit aliquem ex his, qui in summo perfectoque constitierunt, gradu, non arbitror quod ad subitum quis evacuetur ac decidat, sed paulatim et per partes defluere eum necesse est (ita ut fieri possit interdum, si brevis aliquis lapsus acciderit, ut cito resipiscat atque in se revertatur), non penitus ruere, sed revocare pedem et redire ad statum suum ac rursum statuere posse id, quod per neglegentiam fuerat elapsum* / But if at any time satiety should possess the heart of one of those who have come to occupy the perfect and highest stage, I do not think that such a one will be removed and fall from his place all of a sudden. Rather must he decline by slow degrees, so that it may sometimes happen, when a slight fall has occurred, that the man quickly recovers and returns to himself. A fall does not therefore involve utter ruin, but a man may retrace his steps and return to his former state and once more set his mind on that which through negligence had slipped from his grasp” (1.6,8).

41 See Or., hom. 27 in Num. 2.3. For the original text of the *Homiliae in Numeros*, here and throughout the volume, see Origen, W.A. Baehrens (ed.), *Homiliae in Numeros*, in *Homilien zum Hexateuch. Origenes Werke VII*, GCS 30, Leipzig 1921, 1–285. For the English translation, see Th.P. Scheck, *Origen, Homilies on Numbers*, Downers Grove 2009.

42 Or., hom. 27 in Num. 13.1.

go from the world to the intelligible realities. The final stage is, at last, the knowledge of God, mediated by the celestial Logos.⁴³ Therefore, in the extraordinary hom. 27 in Num., Origen describes the supreme knowledge of God as an endless *peregrinatio*, unbounded progress of knowledge and beatitude, a provisional character of every beatific understanding of God,⁴⁴ anticipating the mystical theology of Gregory

43 Or., hom. 27 in Num. 3.2: *Post haec iam proficere et adscendere ad singulos quosque fidei et uirtutum gradus nitamur; quibusque si tam diu immoremur donec ad perfectum ueniamus, in singulis uirtutum gradibus mansionem fecisse dicemur, usque quo ad summum peruientibus nobis institutionum perfectuumque fastigium promissa compleatur hereditas* / “And let this be the first stage for us who wish to go out of Egypt. In it we abandoned the cult of idols and the worship of demons (not gods) and believed that Christ was born of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit, and that the Word made flesh came into this world. After this, let us now strive to go forward and to ascend one by one each of the steps of faith and the virtues. If we dwell in them for such a long time until we come to perfection, we will be said to have made a stage at each of the steps of the virtues until, when we reach the height of our instruction and the summit of our progress, the promised inheritance is fulfilled” (Scheck, 2009, 171). See Or., princ. 3.11,6.

44 Or., hom. 27 in Num. 4.2–3: *Eorum uero qui sapientiae et scientiae operam dant, quoniam finis nullus est – quis enim terminus Dei sapientiae erit? – ubi quanto amplius quis accesserit tanto profundiora inueniet, et quanto quis scrutatus fuerit tanto ea ineffabilia et incomprehensibilia deprehendet; incomprehensibilis enim et inaestimabilis est Dei Sapientia, idcirco eorum qui iter sapientiae Dei incedunt, non domos laudat – non enim peruenerunt ad finem –, sed tabernacula miratur in quibus semper ambulant et semper proficiunt, et quanto magis proficiunt tanto iis proficiendi uia augetur et in immensum tenditur, et ideo istos ipsos profectus eorum per spiritum contuens, tabernacula ea nominat Israel. Et uere si quis scientiae cepit aliquos profectus et experimenti aliquid in talibus sumpsit, scit profecto quod, ubi ad aliquam uentum fuerit theoriam et agnitionem mysteriorum spiritalium, ibi anima quasi in quodam tabernaculo demoratur. Cum uero ex his quae repperit, alia rursus rimatur et ad alios proficit intellectus, inde quasi eleuato tabernaculo tendit ad superiora et ibi collocat animi sedem sensuum stabilitate confixam. Et inde iterum ex ipsis alios inuenit spirituales sensus quos priorum sine dubio sensuum consequentia patefecerit, et ita semper “se ad priora extendens” (see Phil 3:13) tabernaculis quibusdam uidetur incedere. Numquam est enim quando anima scientiae igniculo succensa otiari possit et quiescere, sed semper a bonis ad meliora et iterum ad superiora a melioribus prouocatur.* / “But there is no end for those who are energetic in their pursuit of wisdom and knowledge – for what limit will there be to God’s wisdom? –. For the more one approaches it, the more he will find greater depths, and the more one has investigated, the more he will discover ineffable and incomprehensible things. Indeed, God’s wisdom is “incomprehensible and beyond reckoning” On that account, for those who undertake the journey of God’s wisdom, he does not praise their houses – for they have not reached the end – but he expresses admiration of the tabernacles in which they

of Nyssa, who, however, in his doctrine of *epektasis*, will start from an assumption which is still absent in Origen: the ontological infinity of God. The darkness of the absolute transcendence of God seems to be enlightened by the mediation of the Son and the Spirit, but only progressively.⁴⁵ Progress is the name of the dialectical paradox which reveals the perfect loving unity of the ontological difference: because of that, perhaps only in the *Commentary to the Song of Songs* does the erotic metaphor reach its greatest ontological and theological deepness, in its Christological value. The secret of ontology is progress, freedom of pathic love, persuasion of the enlightenment of knowledge, conversion of desire: *God is the trinitary passion of desire and knowledge of the other, so that the understanding of the relational freedom is the secret of being. Being is unbounded progress of the loving relationship.* Every theological unity is reached at the level of the freedom of (human and divine) desire, and not at the ontological level (because the Son is inferior to the Father and the Spirit to the Son, according to Origen's subordinationism, which also prescribes that the creatures are ontologically inferior to the Son and to the Spirit).⁴⁶

are always on the move and making progress. And the more progress they make, the more the road to be traveled is lengthened for them and extends into the measureless. And for this reason, beholding through the Spirit these stages of their progress, he names these things the "tabernacles of Israel." And truly, if someone has made some progress in knowledge and has acquired some experience in such matters, he really knows that when he has come to some idea and recognition of spiritual mysteries, his soul tarries there, as it were, in a kind of tabernacle. But when, on the basis of these things it has discovered, it again fathoms other things and advances to other understandings, it picks up its tabernacle from there, so to speak, and heads for the higher things. And there it establishes a seat for its mind, fixed in the stability of the meanings. And once again from there, on the basis of these things, it finds other spiritual meanings, which doubtless are logical inferences that have come to light by the previously apprehended meanings. And in this way, always "striving for what is ahead," the soul seems to advance by means of tabernacles, as it were. For there is never a time when the soul that has been set on fire by the spark of knowledge can sink into leisure and take a rest, but it is always summoned from the good to the better, and again from the better to the superior." (Scheck, 2009, 105–106).

45 See Or., Joh. 2.174.

46 See Or., Joh. 13.151: πάντων μὲν τῶν γεννητῶν ὑπερέχειν οὐ συγκρίσει ἀλλ' ὑπερβαλλούση ὑπεροχῆ φαιμέν τὸν σωτήρα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὑπερεχόμενον τοσοῦτον ἢ καὶ πλέον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρός, ὅσω ὑπερέχει αὐτὸς καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα τῶν λοιπῶν, οὐ τῶν τυχόντων ὄντων (151). On the progressive waning of the absolute divine glory, which decreases from the Father to the Son, who is His perfect reflection (ἀπαύγασμα), and even more from the Son to the Holy Spirit, so that to the

14. The historical diffusion of the Christian churches creates providential religious, cultural, and political progress, which is realised universally. The eschatological experience of freedom, equality, and fraternity of the Proto-Christian community, animated by the Spirit of Christ, is projected back to the nature of man, created in the image of God: every creature lives, therefore, as part of the inner, albeit forgotten, participation in Christ. History becomes the field of the progressive affirmation of a spiritual “democracy”, witnessed by the church, which declares every hierarchy (τάξις), mundane as well as celestial, as provisional: every rational creature is absolutely free, intellectually superior to every kind of provisional alienation or mundane subordination, hence inscribed in an unstoppable process of reciprocal recognition of equality, brotherhood and a common sharing of the divine filiality. In a long and very important excursus of *Contra Celsum* (5.25–50), Origen proposes “a mystical and secret view”⁴⁷ on the division of global civilisations and their dependence upon the government of angels, and then on the universal progress of civilisations and political ideals that Christianity is spreading universally by asserting the only rational religion. What emerges is an extraordinary sketch of a theology of Christian history, able to recant and exalt “the law of nature (ὁ τῆς φύσεως νόμος)”⁴⁸ of

created logoi arrive only partial reflections (μερικά ἀπαυγάσματα) of that glory, see Or., Joh. 13.350–353.

- 47 Or., Cels. 5.28: “Let us venture to lay down some considerations of a profounder kind (ὀλίγα τῶν βαθυτέρων), conveying a mystical and secret view (ἔχοντά τινα μυστικὴν καὶ ἀπόρητον θεωρίαν) respecting the original distribution of the various quarters of the earth among different superintending spirits.”
- 48 “As there are, then, generally two laws presented to us, the one being the law of nature, of which God would be the legislator, and the other being the written law of cities, it is a proper thing, when the written law is not opposed to that of God, for the citizens not to abandon it under pretext of foreign customs; but when the law of nature, that is, the law of God (ὁ τῆς φύσεως τουτέστι τοῦ θεοῦ), commands what is opposed to the written law (τὰ ἐναντία τῷ γραπτῷ νόμῳ προστάσει), observe whether reason will not tell us to bid a long farewell to the written code, and to the desire of its legislators (ὄρα εἰ μὴ ὁ λόγος αἰρεῖ μακρὰν μὲν χαίρειν εἰπεῖν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις καὶ τῷ βουλήματι τῶν νομοθετῶν), and to give ourselves up to the legislator God, and to choose a life agreeable to His Word (ἐπιδιδόναι δὲ ἑαυτὸν τῷ θεῷ νομοθέτῃ καὶ κατὰ τὸν τοῦτου λόγον αἰρεῖσθαι βιοῦν), although in doing so it may be necessary to encounter dangers, and countless labours, and even death and dishonour (Or., Cels. 5.37).” “We Christians, then, who have come to the knowledge of the law which is by nature “king of all things” (Ἡμεῖς οὖν οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τὸν τῆ φύσει πάντων βασιλεῖα ἐπιγνόντες νόμον) and which is the same with the law of God (τὸν αὐτὸν ὄντα τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ), endeavour to regulate our lives by its prescriptions, having bidden a long farewell to those of an unholy kind (μακρὰν

Greek philosophy, in open polemic with the conventionalist relativism of Celsus, who was strongly conditioned by an Epicurean perspective. Celsus declares that religions, cults, systems of government, and moral rules are basically fortuitous, changing from one nation to another. On the contrary, Origen claims that every pagan nation, submitted to lapsed angelical intellects, participates at an ethical-religious level proportionate to the level of alienation from the original divine perfection from which humanity lapsed. The only nation which remained faithful to God was Israel, in which men with less guilty and more advanced intellects are gathered in their homeward path to the Logos. Starting from Israel, Christianity spreads as a universal religion, converting the heathen, putting every nation in motion, spreading ideals of freedom, universal peace, rational conversion to the only true God and to the “home” of the Church, which introduces humanity to the transcendent heavenly Jerusalem, namely the eschatological, universal, identical participation in the Logos of the “children of peace”, freed at last by the Logos/Teacher from the error of idolatry, reciprocal violence, and indifference towards the notions of what is true and just.⁴⁹ Against philosophers, who restrict the relationship with Truth to a few intellectuals, unduly reserving the common good to the exclusive fruition of the few,⁵⁰

χαίρειν φράσαντες τοῖς οὐ νόμοις νόμοις) (Or., Cels. 5.40).” “For we see that it is a religious act to do away with the customs originally established in the various places (Ὁρῶμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὅσιον μὲν τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τόπους νενομισμένα λυεῖν ἐστὶ) by means of laws of a better and more divine character, which were enacted by Jesus, as one possessed of the greatest power (νόμοις κρείττοσι καὶ θειοτέροις, οἷς ὡς δυνατώτατος ἔθετο Ἰησοῦς), who has rescued us “from the present evil world” and “from the princes of the world that come to nought” (Or., Cels. 5.32).”

49 Or., Cels. 5.33: “All the nations come to the house of God, and the many nations go forth, and say to one another, turning to the religion which in the last days has shone forth through Jesus Christ [...] For we no longer take up “sword against nation”, nor do we “learn war any more” (Οὐκέτι γὰρ λαμβάνομεν “ἐπ’ ἔθνος μάχαιραν” οὐδὲ μανθάνομεν “ἔτι πολεμεῖν”), having become children of peace (υἱοὶ τῆς εἰρήνης), for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader, instead of those whom our fathers followed, among whom we were “strangers to the covenant” and having received a law, for which we give thanks to Him that rescued us from the error (λαμβάνοντες νόμον, ἐφ’ ᾧ χάριτας ὁμολογοῦντες τῷ ἡμᾶς ῥυσαμένῳ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης λέγομεν) [...] Our Superintendent, then, and Teacher, having come forth from the Jews, regulates the whole world by the word of His teaching (Ὁ χοροστάτης οὖν ἡμῶν καὶ διδάσκαλος ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἐξελθὼν ὄλην νέμεται τῷ λόγῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἑαυτοῦ τὴν οἰκουμένην).” See Or., Cels. 7.59–60.

50 Or., Cels. 6.1: “Those, on the other hand, who turn away from the ignorant as being mere slaves (Ὅσοι δέ, πολλὰ χαίρειν φράσαντες ὡς ἀνδραπόδοις τοῖς ιδιώταις) and unable to understand the flowing periods of a polished and logical

Origen proclaims the universal significance of the Christian gospel, able to adapt the revelation of the Truth to every step of intellectual and moral progress, to reach and save every man.⁵¹ Precisely because it is universal and accessible through a necessary duty of rational intelligence, the Truth has to be communicated to all, but can be enjoyed only progressively. The Christian Catholic economy is therefore universalistic and “democratic” because it is aimed at converting the whole rational creature, an image of God; consequently, if “democratic”, it can only be a progressive and forward-thinking culture, directed at gradually and persuasively attracting every single creature, without violence. In *Or., Cels.* 4.31, after comparing the original Hebrew nation to “a whole nation devoted to philosophy (ἔθνος ὅλον φιλοσοφούν)”, for which the deepest truths were mediated through rites which contained “innumerable symbols (μυρία σύμβολα)” of the celestial truths, Origen declares that, after the progressive corruption of the religion of Israel, “Providence, having remodelled their venerable system where it needed to be changed, so as to adapt it to men of all countries, gave to believers of all nations, in place of the Jews, the venerable religion of Jesus” (4.32), with which God reveals his power. And if the spreading of Christianity from the beginning was strongly hindered by evil powers and the political forces of the heathen, “yet, notwithstanding, the word of God, which is more powerful than all other things, even when meeting with opposition, deriving from the opposition, as it were, a means of increase, advanced onwards, and won many souls, such

discourse (καὶ μὴ οἷοις τε κατακούειν τῆς ἐν φράσει λόγων καὶ τάξει ἀπαγγελλομένην ἀκολουθίας), and so devote their attention solely to such as have been brought up amongst literary pursuits (μόνων ἐφρόντισαν τῶν ἀνατραφέντων ἐν λόγοις καὶ μαθήμασιν), confine their views of the public good within very strait and narrow limits (οὗτοι τὸ κοινωρικὸν εἰς κομιδῆ στενὸν καὶ βραχὺ συνήγαγον).”

- 51 *Or., Cels.* 6.1: “Now we maintain, that if it is the object of the ambassadors of the truth to confer benefits upon the greatest possible number (Φαμὲν οὖν ὅτι, εἴπερ τὸ προκειμένον ἐστὶ τοῖς πρεσβέουσιν τὰ τῆς ἀληθείας πλείους ὅση δύναμις ὠφελεῖν), and, so far as they can, to win over to its side, through their love to men, every one without exception, intelligent as well as simple (καὶ προσάγειν, ὡς οἷόν τε ἐστίν, αὐτῇ διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν πάνθ’ ὄντιν’ οὖν οὐ μόνον ἐντρεχῆ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνόητον), not Greeks only, but also Barbarians (πάλιν δ’ αὐ οὐχὶ Ἑλληνας μὲν οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ βαρβάρους) – and great, indeed, is the humanity which should succeed in converting the rustic and the ignorant (πολὺ δὲ τὸ εὐήμερον ἔαν καὶ τοὺς ἀγροικοτάτους καὶ ἰδιώτας οἷός τε τις γένηται ἐπιστρέφειν) –, it is manifest that they must adopt a style of address fitted to do good to all, and to gain over to them men of every sort (δῆλόν ἐστιν ὅτι καὶ χαρακτήρος ἐν τῷ λέγειν φροντιστέον αὐτῷ κοινωφελούς καὶ δυναμένου πᾶσαν ἐπαγαγέσθαι ἀκοήν).”

being the will of God (ἀλλ' ὁ πάντων δυνατώτερος τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος, καὶ κωλυόμενος ὡσπερὶ τροφήν πρὸς τὸ αὔξειν τὸ κωλύεσθαι λαμβάνων, προβαίνων πλείονας ἐνέμετο ψυχάς· θεὸς γὰρ τοῦτ' ἐβούλετο).⁵² In a dialectical way, the violent obstacle to the redemptive power of the religion of Jesus multiplies its force, making it progress universally. In short, God promotes the universal progress of all and of every singular part,⁵³ so that the entire universe is the living all which progresses gradually (because freely) but in harmony, overcoming the provisional resistances of the temporary evil creatures⁵⁴ in the universal participation in God.

15. The Origenian justification is a synergistic, dialogical, gradual process; it is not a free, irresistible, and immediate, mono-energistic event: the relationship between grace and freedom is, hence, understood as concurrent progress of the free human will and the persuasive divine provocation, leading to the divinisation of the creature. The freedom of man has to fulfil and perfect the divine gift of the created *imago Dei*, which the merciful revelation of God exhorts humanity to rediscover in itself, and perfect, through a free, fully conscious and loving desire.⁵⁵ The event/advent of God is progressive, never absolute and unconditioned; salvation is not a gift created *ex nihilo* (as for the mature Augustine), but is an *admonition* and a *suasio* which asks an autonomous answer,

52 Or., Cels. 4.32; see 7.26.

53 Or., Cels. 4.99: “God takes care (Μέλει δὲ τῷ θεῷ), not, as Celsus supposes, merely of the whole (οὐχ, ὡς Κέλσος οἶεται, μόνου τοῦ ὅλου), but beyond the whole, in a special degree of every rational being (ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ ὅλον ἐξαιρέτως παντός λογικοῦ). Nor will Providence ever abandon the whole (οὐδέ ποτε ἀπολείψει πρόνοια τὸ ὅλον); for although it should become more wicked, owing to the sin of the rational being, which is a portion of the whole, He makes arrangements to purify it, and after a time to bring back the whole to Himself (οἰκονομεῖ γάρ, κἂν κάκιον γίνηται διὰ τὸ λογικὸν ἁμαρτάνον μέρος τι τοῦ ὅλου, καθάρσιον αὐτοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ διὰ χρόνου ἐπιστρέφειν τὸ ὅλον πρὸς ἑαυτόν).”

54 See Or., Joh. 13.245: “ἕτερα δέ, ἀπειθήσαντα τῷ λόγῳ, χρῆζει πόνων, ἵνα μετὰ τοὺς πόνους λόγοις προσαχθέντα ὑστερόν ποτε τούτοις τελειωθῆ.”

55 Or., princ. 2.9,7: *Per gratiam vero misericordiae suae omnibus providet atque omnes quibuscumque curari possunt remediis hortatur et provocat ad salutem.* See the pre-Pelagian sentences in Or., prin, 3.1.1–6; and 3.1,19–24; in particular, see 3.1,20, where, referring to Phil 2:13 (which attributed to God the impetus to will and act good) Origen is making only the gift of the unspecified *velle* (*quod volumus ex Deo habemus*) dependent on God; then this *velle* is determined by the human free will autonomously: *Ita ergo est et quod dicit Apostolus quia virtutem quidem voluntatis a Deo accipimus, nos autem abutimur voluntate vel in bonis vel in malis desideriiis.* So, *nostri operis est recte vel minus recte vivere, et non vel ex his, quae extrinsecus incidunt, vel, ut quidam putant, fatis urgentibus cogimur* (3.1,6).

calls for a progressive adequation of freedom to its profound identity of image, hence to the *becoming god in God, logos into the Logos*. The Logos, therefore, intimately radiates an attractive grace in every created *logos*.⁵⁶ The Logos is an ever-working attractive Light, but which never forces the free will of the creature: it is only the freedom of the creature which makes effective and persuasive the call of the logos, the calling/admonition of God.⁵⁷ The progress of freedom is therefore the dynamic creatural adequation to the transcendent perfection of God, who providentially attracts all in Himself with His Logos.⁵⁸ Instead, a “determinant” grace of God can be seen at an ontological level: if in the apocatastasis *all* creatures come back to the Principle (in the Logos, which is Wisdom which immerses in the Father, contemplating Him and loving Him), it is the theomorphic nature inscribed in the *mens imago* which “determines” the free desire of the creature. Universal progress is universally guaranteed, because the freedom of the intellectual creatures

56 Or., princ. 1.3,6: *In corde omnium esse significat Christum secundum id, quod verbum vel ratio est, cuius participio rationabiles sunt.*

57 “God conveys His admonitions throughout the whole of Scripture, and by means of those persons who, through God’s gracious appointment, are the instructors of His hearers (νουθετεῖ γὰρ διὰ πάσης γραφῆς καὶ διὰ τῶν χάριτι διδασκόντων θεοῦ τοὺς ἀκούοντας) [...] And therefore it must not be said that it is because God is incapable of persuading men that they are not persuaded (Διὰ τοῦτο οὐ παρὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι τὸν θεὸν πείθειν λεκτέον τοὺς μὴ πειθομένους μὴ πείθεσθαι), but because they will not accept the faithful words of God (ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ ἐκείνους μὴ δέχεσθαι τοὺς πειστικούς λόγους τοῦ θεοῦ) [...] For that one may (really) desire what is addressed to him by one who admonishes, and may become deserving of those promises of God which he hears (ἵνα γὰρ τις θέλῃ ἄπερ λέγει ὁ νοουθετῶν καὶ εἰσακούσας αὐτῶν ἄξιος γένηται τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπαγγελιῶν), it is necessary to secure the will of the hearer, and his inclination to what is addressed to him (τῆς προαιρέσεως τοῦ ἀκούοντος δεῖ καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὰ λεγόμενα ἐπινεύσεως)” (Or., Cels. 6.57); so, “persuasion does not come from God, although persuasive words may be uttered by him (κἂν τὸ πειστικούς λέγεσθαι λόγους ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἔρχηται, τὸ γε πείθεσθαι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπὸ θεοῦ).” See Or., Cels. 3.1,1–6.

58 Or., Cels. 5.21: “We maintain that all things are administered by God in proportion to the relation of the free-will of each individual, and are ever being brought into a better condition, so far as they admit of being so (ἡμεῖς δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς σχέσεως τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐκάστου οἰκονομεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ λέγοντες τὸ πᾶν καὶ αἰεὶ ἄγεσθαι κατὰ τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον) and know that the nature of our free-will admits of the occurrence of contingent events (καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν φύσιν γινώσκοντες ἐνδεχομένους ἃ ἐνδέχεται), for it is incapable of receiving the wholly unchangeable character of God (οὐ γὰρ δύναται χωρῆσαι τὸ πάντῃ ἄτρεπτον τοῦ θεοῦ).”

- is, as a matter of fact, the one which *in the end* restores them to their profound autonomy, identity, property (albeit ontologically donated).
16. The allegorical method reveals the idea of intellectual progress as the hermeneutical key of the Bible, which musters an unbounded Christological *translatio* from history to the eternal Being, from sensible and accidental differences to the rational and mystical Truth; the latter is in itself articulated in progressive steps of deepening understanding. The allegorical hermeneutic is a progressive deciphering of the Truth, which hides and reveals itself in the Bible to put intelligence into motion, which is prompted by the gift and the disappearance of the Logos, who, with His coming and goings, addresses Himself towards the unattainable transcendence of the Father to Whom at last He introduces all things.⁵⁹ However, the intimate secret of allegory is the desire's

59 See Or., princ. 4.3,14: *Quantumcumque enim quis in scrutando promoveat et studio intentiore proficiat, gratia quoque Dei adiutus sensumque inluminatus, ad perfectum finem eorum, quae requiruntur, pervenire non poterit. Nec omnis mens, quae creata est, possibile habet ullo genere conpraehendere, sed ut invenerit aliquantum ex his, quae quaeruntur, iterum videt alia, quae quaerenda sunt; quodsi et ad ipsa pervenerit, multo iterum plura ex illis, quae requiri debeant, pervidebit [...] Unde et optabile est ut pro viribus se unusquisque semper "extendat ad ea quae priora sunt, ea quae retrorsum sunt obliviscens"* (Phil 3:13), *tam ad opera meliora quam etiam ad sensum intellectumque puriorem per Iesum Christum, salvatorem nostrum, cui est gloria in saecula* / "For however far one may advance in the search and make progress through an increasingly earnest study, even when aided and enlightened in mind by God's grace, he will never be able to reach the final goal of his inquiries. For no created mind can by any means possess the capacity to understand all; but as soon as it has discovered a small fragment of what it is seeking, it again sees other things that must be sought for; and if in turn it comes to know these, it will again see arising out of them many more things that demand investigation [...] It is therefore to be desired that each one according to his capacity will ever "reach out to the things which are before, forgetting those things which are behind", that is, will reach out both to better works and also to a clearer understanding and knowledge, through Jesus Christ our Savior, to whom is the glory forever." (The English translation here is from G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles*, Oregon 2012, 311–312). On the continuous progress of the intelligence, prompted and guided by the revelation of the entire Trinity, see Or., princ. 1.3,8: *Unde et inoperatio Patris, quae esse praestat omnibus, clarior ac magnificentior invenitur, cum unusquisque per participationem Christi secundum id, quod "sapientia" est, et secundum id, quod scientia est et "sanctificatio" est, proficit et in altiores profectuum gradus venit; et per hoc quod participatione Spiritus Sancti sanctificatus est quis, purior ac sincerior effectus, dignius recipit sapientiae ac scientiae gratiam, ut depulsis omnibus expurgatisque pollutionis atque ignorantiae maculis, tantum profectum sinceritatis ac puritatis accipiat, ut hoc quod accepit a Deo ut esset tale sit, quale Deo dignum est [eo], qui ut esset*

desire of the person: spiritual truths/meanings of the revealed event/cult/word/sign are not a concept or an idea, except as *littera*, which refers to the personal Logos. The Logos is a Person/a Face (πρόσωπον), a relational hypostasis, Logos of logoi, a divine desire of human desire, so that the latter could become the desire of God, a reflexive knowledge of His desire for relationship. Consequently, the inexhaustibility of the Origenian hermeneutic depends on the recognition of the inexhaustibility of the other's desire, who talks, calls, reveals Himself through signs, at last communicating Himself in a boundless loving relationship. The same dynamic relation between the Logos' cataphatic theology (progressive through His manifold ἐπίνοια) and the Father's apophatic theology⁶⁰ is characterised by an allegorical processuality: the Son is the unbounded metaphor of the Father, the progress of the universal logos

pure utique praestitit ac perfecte; ut tam dignum sit id quod est, quam est ille qui id esse fecit. Ita namque et virtutem semper esse atque in aeternum manere percipiet a Deo is, qui talis est, qualem eum voluit esse ille qui fecit. Quod ut accidat et ut indesinenter atque inseparabiliter adsint ei, qui est, ea, quae ab ipso facta sunt, sapientiae id opus est instruere atque erudire ea et ad perfectionem perducere et Spiritus Sancti confirmatione atque indesinenti sanctificatione, per quam solam Deum capere possunt. Ita ergo indesinenti erga nos opere Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti per singulos quosque profectuum gradus instaurato, vix si forte aliquando intueri possumus sanctam et beatam vitam / “Thus the working of the Father, which endows all with existence, is found to be more glorious and splendid, when each one, through participation in Christ in his character of wisdom and knowledge and sanctification, advances and comes to higher degrees of perfection; and when a man, by being sanctified through participation in the Holy Spirit, is made purer and holier, he becomes more worthy to receive the grace of wisdom and knowledge, in order that all stains of pollution and ignorance may be purged and removed and that he may make so great an advance in holiness and purity that the life which he received from God shall be such as is worthy of God, who gave it to be pure and perfect, and that which exists shall be as worthy as he who caused it to exist. Thus, too, the man who is such as God who made him wished him to be shall receive from God the power to exist forever and to endure for eternity. That this may come to pass, and that those who were made by God may be unceasingly and inseparably present with him who really exists, it is the work of wisdom to instruct and train them, and lead them on to perfection, by the strengthening and unceasing sanctification of the Holy Spirit, through which alone they can receive God. In this way, then, through the ceaseless work on our behalf of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, renewed at every stage of our progress, we may perchance just succeed at last in beholding the holy and blessed life.” (Buttherworth, 2012, 39). See also Or., princ. 2.11,6; 3.6,6; 3.6,9; 4.4,10; Or., Joh. 20.308.

60 On the treatment of the apophatic nature of the supreme theological knowledge, see Or., Cels. 6, especially 6.15 e 6.20.

towards the transcendent One, to whose bosom He relentlessly returns, without exhausting His exceeding perfection.⁶¹ To interpret means to progress from the immediate scriptural letter (and its narrative) to the ulterior meaning: the understanding of the text is the progress of the intellectual desire,⁶² the immersion in an abysmal metaphor, the ability to grasp the immense wealth of meaning hidden in the revealed trace, in the parable, in the enigma or in the Scriptural fragment.⁶³ However,

61 See Or., Joh. 32. 344–353.

62 See Or., princ. 4.1,1: “If Celsus had read the Scriptures in an impartial spirit, he would not have said that “our writings are incapable of admitting an allegorical meaning” (Εἰ δ’ ἀδεκάτως ἀνεγνώκει τὴν γραφὴν ὁ Κέλσος, οὐκ ἂν εἶπεν οὐχ οἷα ἀλληγορίαν ἐπιδέχσθαι εἶναι τὰ γράμματα ἡμῶν) [...] the historical portions also were written with an allegorical purpose (καὶ ταῖς ἱστορίας ὡς σκοπῶ τροπολογίας γεγραμμένας) (Or., Cels. 4.49).” “For we must not suppose that historical things are types of historical things, and corporeal of corporeal. Quite the contrary: corporeal things are types of spiritual things, and historical of intellectual (Οὐ γὰρ νομιστέον τὰ ἱστορικὰ ἱστορικῶν εἶναι τύπους καὶ τὰ σωματικὰ σωματικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ σωματικὰ πνευματικῶν καὶ τὰ ἱστορικὰ νοητῶν) (Or., Joh. 10.110).” On the still progressive eschatological education as the continuation of Scriptural exegesis, progressive reintroduction to the intimacy with the Logos of God, at last with the unity with God Himself, see P.W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture. The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford 2012, 234–242; on the progressive character of the Origenian hermeneutic, see also K.J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis*, Berlin 1986: “The progress of the soul toward perfection, participation in the Logos – in his universal pedagogy – is made possible through exegesis of the sacred text” (147); see 121–124.

63 Or., Cels. 3.45: “Solomon, too, because he asked for wisdom, received it (Καὶ Σολομῶν δέ, ἐπεὶ σοφίαν ἤτησεν, ἀπεδέχθη) [...] and the evidences of his wisdom may be seen in his treatises (καὶ τῆς σοφίας αὐτοῦ τὰ ἴχνη ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι θεωρηῆσαι), which contain a great amount of wisdom expressed in few words (μεγάλην ἔχοντα ἐν βραχυλογίᾳ περίοιον), and in which you will find many laudations of wisdom, and encouragements towards obtaining it (ἐν οἷς ἂν εὗροις πολλὰ ἐγκώμια τῆς σοφίας καὶ προτρεπτικά περὶ τοῦ σοφίαν δεῖν ἀναλαβεῖν) [...] And to such a degree does the Logos (ὁ λόγος) desire that should be wise men among believers, that for the sake of exercising the understanding of its hearers (ὑπὲρ τοῦ γυμνάσαι τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν ἀκουόντων), it has spoken certain truths in enigmas, others in what are called dark sayings, others in parables, and others in problems (τὰ μὲν ἐν αἰνίγμασι τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς καλουμένοις σκοτεινοῖς λόγοις λελαληκέναι τὰ δὲ διὰ παραβολῶν καὶ ἄλλα διὰ προβλημάτων).” See 7.10: “The prophets have therefore, as God commanded them, declared with all plainness those things which it was desirable that the hearers should understand at once for the regulation of their conduct (χρήσιμα καὶ συμβαλλόμενα τῇ τῶν ἡθῶν ἐπανορθώσει); while in regard to deeper and more mysterious subjects, which lay beyond the reach of the common understanding (ὅσα δὲ μυστικώτερα ἦν καὶ ἐποπτικώτερα καὶ ἐχόμενα θεωρίας τῆς ὑπὲρ τὴν πάνδημον ἀκοήν), they set them forth in the form of enigmas and allegories, or

a real understanding of the Origenian allegory (deeply indebted to the unrestrained Valentinian allegory) means the comprehension of its Christological – hence ontological – structure: the Bible for Origen is Christic, based on the unbounded progress from the *littera* to the *Spiritus*, *ontologically*, then *gnoseologically* interpreted as sensible reality and immaterial reality, *flesh* and *Logos*. But the Scriptures are only an introductory dimension, mediated by senses,⁶⁴ to the knowledge of the divine Truth, progressively known by the intellect which advances into it. The same *logos* of the Logos, grasped beyond Scripture through the “flesh” of Scripture, is at the same time articulated in different intellectually deepening steps: so that every “cataphatic” understanding of the revelation is *littera*, as opposed to the ulterior *spiritual* understanding, which Christ Himself discloses to the interpreter. Inasmuch as it is projected to the recognition of a personal relationship with the Father, who is ontologically at once simple and overflowing, the peak of the allegorical progress can only be apophatic, hence rationally unbounded and only mystically and lovingly available “in ecstasy.”

17. The ontology of the Origenian revelation is a speculative mysticism: the gospel of the theophanic progression maintains a Platonizing ontologisation and a Catholic “secularization” of the eschatological Spirit. The apocalyptic revelation becomes an ontological theophanic flux, of which Christ’s historical revelation is a religious sign. The progressive interpretation of the being, crossed by amorous desire and by creatural freedom, has an additional and coherent horizon of development in Gregory of Nyssa and the consequent tradition of thought. The fracture between old and new aeon is mediated and reconstructed as the dialectical difference of progressive ontological levels, which the freedom of the creature must tread to come back to the Beginning, immersing itself in the absolute mystical interiority of God. Hence history becomes the provisional sign of a rational furtherness, which has to be conquered in interiority. Christianity, which embraces in itself the totality of the human attempts to convert to an ulterior Truth, reveals the peak of a universal

of what are called dark sayings, parables, or similitudes (ταῦτα δι’ αἰνιγμάτων καὶ ἀλληγοριῶν καὶ τῶν καλουμένων σκοτεινῶν λόγων καὶ τῶν ὀνομαζομένων παραβολῶν ἢ παροιμιῶν ἀπεφήναντο). And this plan they have followed, that those who are ready to shun no labour and spare no pains in their endeavours after truth and virtue might search into their meaning, and having found it, might apply it as reason requires (ἵν’ οἱ μὴ φυγοπονούντες ἀλλὰ πάντα πόνον ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς καὶ ἀληθείας ἀναδεχόμενοι ἐξετάσαντες εὕρωσι καὶ εὐρόντες, ὡς λόγος αἰρεῖ, οἰκονομήσωσιν).”

64 See Or., Joh. 13.27–30; 37. “Οἶμαι δὲ τῆς ὅλης γνώσεως στοιχειά τινα ἐλάχιστα καὶ βραχυτάτας εἶναι εἰσαγωγὰς ὄλας γραφάς, κἂν πάνυ νοηθῶσιν ἀκριβῶς (13.30).”

cataphasis, which culminates in an exceeding mystical apophasis. The eschatological end is not the final event which invades all by destroying perverted nature and granting an unprecedented intimacy with God, but is the peak of a very slow ascensive progress of the intelligence which becomes God. However, the becoming God, precisely because it is ontologically ecstatic, can also only be progressive. Therefore, the reform of Gregory of Nyssa is latent in Origen's theology and represents its most coherent and originally innovative landing: Gregory introduces: (a) the idea of the infinity of God (which is absent in Origen, who connects the infinite and the unlimited with evil, which is limited, defined, converted by God),⁶⁵ fully transcendent and irreducible to the finity of creatures; (b) the Nicaean – Constantinopolitan idea of the perfect ontological equality of the persons of the Trinity, participants in the singular divine οὐσία; (c) the idea of theological knowledge as conjectural and infinitively progressive (so that every cataphasis is *littera* of a subsequent apophasis, *in infinitum*); (d) the mystical doctrine of the ἐπέκτασις as infinite progress of desire, beatitude, and unbounded knowledge of the divine infinity. Here the ontological, gnoseological, psychological retraction of the apocalyptic eschatology, in a progressive, Catholic way is clear: *ad infinitum*, all of human knowledge becomes the theophanic event, the *final coming of God in the finite mind of man*, so that history progressively enters into the eternal, without ever grasping it. An end without end...

65 See Or., Cels. 4.63 and 4.69.

Anders-Christian Jacobsen

Transgression, Regress, and Progress in the Theology of Origen of Alexandria

Abstract: The basic structure of “movement” in Origen’s theology is progress. However, progress in Origen’s theology can only be understood at the background of transgression and regress. Progress is salvation from sinful transgression and regress. Thus, the terms transgression, regress and progress define the coherent structure underlying Origen’s theology. This article explores how Origen understand transgression and regress and which terminology he uses to express transgression and regress.

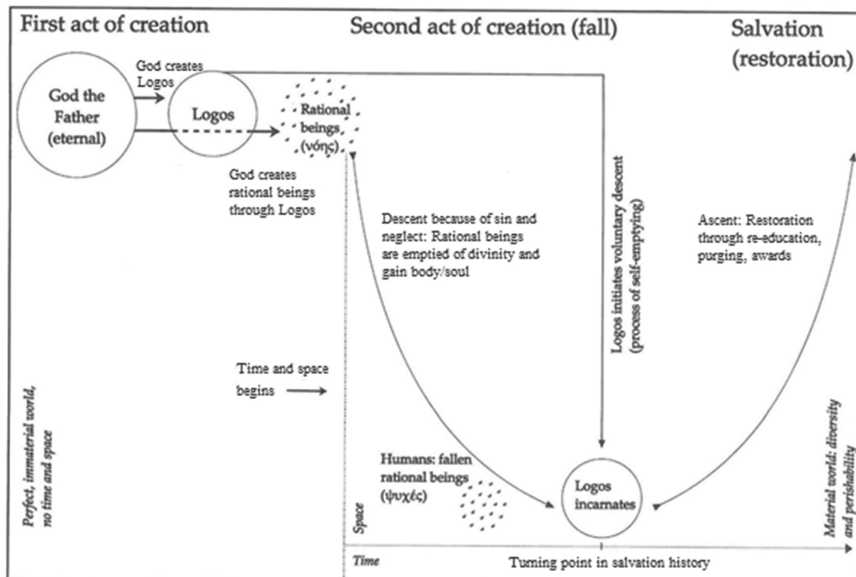
Keywords: Transgression, Regress, Progress, Sin, Salvation

Progress in Origen of Alexandria was the well-chosen theme of the conference, of which this article is a product. The title is well-chosen because the term “progress” captures the essence of Origen’s theology: How do the fallen rational beings – the noes (νόες) – find their way back to their divine source? I will try to answer this question briefly, but the focus of my contribution will be on rational beings’ transgression and regress which cause the need for progress: How and why did these rational beings end up in a situation which they need to progress from? I use some figures to explain this. Using figures is always risky since the nature of figures is to simplify reality in order to be able to grasp reality. Thus, the readers should be aware that the figures that I present in the following will not capture all aspects of Origen’s theology.¹

1 This approach to Origen’s theology participates in the long-standing discussion about whether Origen was a systematic or non-systematic thinker. This discussion has divided modern Origen research since the first decades of the twentieth century, cf. U. Berner, *Origenes*, EdF 147, Darmstadt 1981. Among the main representatives of a systematic interpretation of Origen’s theology is Harnack (see e.g. A. v. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Bd. 1–3, Tübingen 1931–32⁵), Kettler (see e.g. F. H. Kettler, *Der ursprüngliche Sinn der Dogmatik des Origenes*, Berlin 1966), and Koch (see e.g. H. Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis. Studien über Origenes und sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus*, Berlin / Leipzig 1932). The main figure in the non-systematic interpretation of Origen is H. Crouzel (see e.g. H. Crouzel, *Origène est-il un systématique?*, in: BLE 60 (1959), 81–116. Reprint in: H. Crouzel, *Origène et la philosophie* (Theol [P] 52), Paris 1962, 179–215). The majority of contemporary Origen scholarship follows Crouzel’s approach. This approach is supported by a general postmodern critique of systematic thinking.

1. The Structure of Origen's Theological Thinking

The first figure that I will present aims at giving an overall idea of the structure in Origen's theology.



I hope that the figure is more or less self-explanatory; however, I will still provide a few comments. It is important to notice that according to Origen there is movement and motion (progress and regress) in all parts of reality outside of God. No standstill is possible except in God. We should also notice that the history of creation and salvation in Origen's mind has three main phases, which I call the first and the second act of creation and the salvation / restoration. This process of creation and salvation is circumscribed by God, who is eternal and without motion. The Logos and the Wisdom were eternally in God and the *vóę* were in the Logos as plans to be realised. This is similar, says Origen, to the plans of a ship or a building, which are in the mind of the architect before they are realised and materialised in the concrete building of the ship.² The first act of creation is the externalisation of first the Logos and the Wisdom and then the *vóę* from God. This condition

As will be clear from the following I argue for a more systematic interpretation of Origen's theology.

- 2 Or., Com. in Joh. 1.113–115; Or., princ. 1.2,2. A.-C. Jacobsen, *Christ the Teacher of Salvation*, Münster 2015, 124–125.

is often called the “pre-existence” in Origen research, meaning that this is the condition of existence “before” the materialisation of the rational beings. It is important to be aware of the use of concepts of time such as “pre-” or “before” being problematic when describing the first element of creation in Origen’s theology, because this element is placed outside time. However, we cannot avoid using categories of time.³ The second act of creation is, according to Origen, a fall from the pre-existence into the physical world characterised by difference and embodiment.⁴ This fallen state is, according to Origen, a fall away from the divine origin, which necessitates the progress back to God. This is the process of salvation, in which the major event and turning point is the incarnation of Logos. Logos leads the νόες back to God. The process of progress towards God is disturbed by elements of regress. In the following I will elaborate on these elements in Origen’s understanding of the creation and salvation history, but first a few remarks concerning the terminology.

2. Transgression and Regress – the Terminology

The following short list of terms which Origen uses to describe the rational beings’ transgression and regress is in no way comprehensive,⁵ but a first attempt to identify the terminology used by Origen to express how rational beings become separated from God. It is my impression that this theme is understudied in Origen research. A systematic, digitally supported study of Origen’s use of ἀμαρτία and related terms could shine new light on Origen’s understanding of rational beings’ existence. Origen uses the following terms:

- Παράβασις = transgression, digression, deviation. 18 times in Origen’s works. 15 from fragments of his commentary to the Romans quoting Rom. 4:15. 3 in dubious Psalm fragments.
- Παρέκβασις = transgression, deviation from. 2 times in Origen: Com. Joh. 1.94; Com Math 16.8.
- *Neglegentia* (ἀπροσεξία) = neglect. 10 times in Origen, for example princ. 2.9,2; 2.9,6.

3 See concerning the idea of pre-existence in Origen’s theology, P. Martens, *Origen’s Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis*, in: ZAC 16 (2013), 516–549.

4 Or., princ. 2.8,3. Jacobsen, 2015, 267–268.

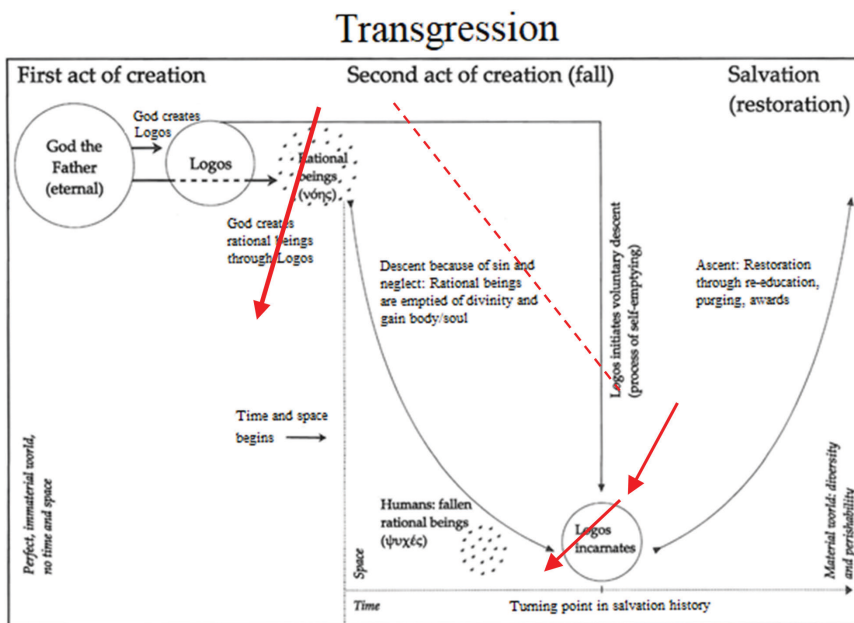
5 The occurrences of these terms were counted using *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG). When studying Origen’s terminology one of the major problems is that a huge part of his works only survived in Latin. Deep studies of Origen’s terminology must compare the rare parts of his corpus that have been transmitted both in Greek and Latin.

- *Desidia* = idleness, laziness or apathy. 2 times in Origen, for example princ. 2.9,2.
- Ἀμαρτία = sin. 1531 times in Origen.

This terminology will guide the following description of how the νόες transgressed the original order of being, how they progressed from the fallen state resulting from their transgression, and finally how regression is an integrated element in the νόες' progress.

3. Transgression and Regress

This figure indicates where the rational beings' transgression is located in the structure of Origen's theology. The first and foundational act of transgression happens when the rational beings turn away from God and Logos. That is the second act of creation – or the fall – where difference and materiality come into being. However, this foundational act of transgression is repeated continuously during the process of progress. That is what I label "regress". I will return to that.



The νόεσ' transgression is sin and neglect, and results in regress and falling out of the divine state of existence into embodiment and diversity.⁶ Why do all human beings, according to Origen, experience this transgression and regress as an existential condition? Origen's answer seems to be clear: freedom! God created all rational beings with freedom. Rational beings are created in the image of God, who is unconditioned freedom. Therefore, rational beings are also free – until they use their freedom to transgress. This does not mean that they lose their freedom, but that it becomes limited, resulting in the rational beings needing help in order to progress back to total freedom. Origen expresses it this way:

For the creator granted to the minds created by him the power of free and voluntary movement, in order that the good that was in them might become their own, since it was preserved by their own free will; but sloth and weariness of taking trouble to preserve the good, coupled with disregard and neglect of better things, began the process of withdrawal from the good.⁷

The rational beings should integrate freedom in their own existence, but the opposite happened: they misused freedom to neglect and transgress.

As shown above, Origen uses different terms for this transgression. One of these terms is παράβασις, which means transgression, digression, deviation. Fifteen of these occurrences are found in fragments of his commentary to the Romans, quoting Rom. 4:15, and three in dubious Psalm fragments. Rom 4:15 says: “For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression” (ὁ γὰρ νόμος ὀργὴν κατεργάζεται· οὐ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος οὐδὲ παράβασις). In the cases where the term is used in the interpretation of Rom. 4:15 Origen mainly discusses whether there was any transgression before the Law of Moses, and he concludes that there were transgressions before Moses. In Rufinus' translation of Origen's commentary to the Romans, we find the same discussion of Rom 4:15, but in Rufinus' translation this

6 Jacobsen, 2015, 265–268.

7 Or., princ. 2.9,2: *Voluntarios enim et liberos motus a se conditis mentibus creator indulisit, quo scilicet bonum in eis proprium fieret, cum id voluntate propria servaretur; sed desidia et laboris taedium in servando bono, et aversio ac negligentia meliorum, initium dedit recedendi a bono.* The English translation of princ. in the article is from G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles*, Oregon 2012.

Concerning Origen's understanding of human freedom, see further Or., princ. 1.5,3; 2.9; 3.1; Or., orat. 6.1–5, and further C. Hengstermann, *Origenes und der Ursprung der Freiheitsmetaphysik*, Adamantiana 8, Münster 2016; H. S. Benjamins, *Eingeordnete Freiheit. Freiheit und Vorsehung Bei Origenes*, Leiden 1994, 58–70; A.-C. Jacobsen, *Body and Freedom in Origen*, in: A. Fürst (ed.), *Perspectives on Origen and the History of his Reception*, Münster 2021, 31–47. G. Lekkás, *Liberté et progrès chez Origène*, Turnhout 2001.

also leads to considerations about whether Paul was thinking of the Law of Moses or on the natural law (*Com. in Rom.* 4.4). Thus, the occurrences of παράβασις do not shed any light over Origen's understanding of the transgressions that lead to the need for progress.

Origen also uses παρέκβασις twice. This word has the same denotation as παράβασις: transgression, deviation from. However, in *Com. Joh.* 1.94 as well as in *Com. Math.* 16.8, the term bears no theological meaning; instead Origen uses the word speaking about digressions from the theme he is discussing.

In princ. 2.9,2 and 2.9,6 we find *neglegentia*, which probably is a translation of ἀπροσεξία, a word that occurs 10 times in Origen. In both cases *neglegentia* is used to describe the negligence or carelessness that the νόες showed towards the good from which and in which they originally existed. They used their free will to turn away from their origin. However, the use of *neglegentia* indicates that the νόες did not make a clear and judicious decision to turn away from God, but did so because of sloppiness and carelessness (cf. the quotation above).

In princ. 2.9,2 we also find the term *desidia*, which means idleness, laziness or apathy. *Desidia* is used in the same passage in princ. 2.9,2 as *neglegentia* and thus underpins that the νόες' neglect of the good was a result of inactivity towards the good and not of an active decision to move away from God. This suggests that that the connection between the rational beings' free will and their fall is not as straightforward as often believed. The combination of *neglegentia* and *desidia* in princ. 2.9,2 might reflect a common combination of terms in Origen when he writes about human fall and transgression. Thus, we find ἀπροσεξία (*neglegentia*) combined with ἀμελεία (*desidia*) in *Fragmenta in Lamentations* (fragment 20, line 25) where Origen also writes about the fall of the soul.

In *On Prayer* 29.13 Origen uses ἀπροσεξία to describe the carelessness and neglect which causes rational souls to descend into evil. All rational souls, Origen says, have the free choice to choose the better and ascend to the summit of all good, or to choose the opposite and descend to a great depth of evil. As in princ. 2.9,2, this decision or choice is not made deliberately but is a result of ἀπροσεξία – carelessness and neglect. The passage from *On Prayer* deserves to be quoted:

I believe that God in dealing with every rational soul has regard always to its eternal life. It always is in possession of freedom of choice, and it is by its own responsibility that it either finds itself in a better state on ascending to the summit of all good, or, on the contrary, descends through carelessness to such or such great depth of evil. And as a quick and accelerated recovery induces some to make little of the illnesses into which they have fallen as being readily curable, so that in fact they suffer a relapse after having recovered, so God will be acting reasonably in such cases

if He bears with their wickedness however it grows, and even overlooks its aggravation to where it becomes incurable. For through long continuance in evil and by having their fill of the sin they lust after, they by their satiety are to perceive the harm they have suffered and to hate what formerly they cherished. In this way they can be healed and enjoy with greater security the health of soul restored to them.⁸

These examples of how Origen uses ἀπροσεξία as an explanation of how rational souls transgress and descend are important, because they show that transgression and fall caused by carelessness and neglect is not only nor mainly considered by Origen to be an event at the beginning of the world, but a constant existential condition for all rational souls in this world. There is a constant struggle in rational human beings between progress and regress. God will interfere in this struggle in the right moment when the rational beings have suffered enough from the consequences of their transgression and therefore are mature enough to receive God's intervention in their lives.

Furthermore, and as importantly, Origen's use of ἀπροσεξία in these examples shows how Origen understands rational beings' free choice. Rational beings' free choice is not first and foremost a rational choice, but decisions characterised by neglect and carelessness or by the experience of God's mercy, when the suffering caused by neglect and transgression has made the rational beings mature enough for God's help. I find that these precisions of Origen's understanding of rational beings' free choice are important in order to understand that for Origen, rational beings' choices are always to a certain degree conditioned by neglect of or openness towards God's mercy.

In addition to the already mentioned terms Origen uses ἀμαρτία (sin) 1531 times. Thus it is clear that ἀμαρτία is Origen's main term for the νόεζ' transgression, the neglect of and turning away from God. One example is enough to show that Origen uses ἀμαρτία in a rather traditional way to describe human beings' transgression:

8 Or., orat. 29.13: ἡγούμαι δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐκάστην λογικὴν οἰκονομεῖν ψυχὴν, ἀφορῶντα εἰς τὴν αἰδίων αὐτῆς ζωὴν, αἰεὶ ἔχουσαν τὸ αὐτεξούσιον καὶ παρὰ τὴν ἰδίαν αἰτίαν ἦτοι ἐν τοῖς κρείττοσι κατ' ἐπανάβασιν ἕως τῆς ἀκρότητος τῶν ἀγαθῶν γινομένην <η> καταβαίνουσαν διαφόρως ἐξ ἀπροσεξίας ἐπὶ τὴν τοσὴνδε ἢ τοσὴνδε τῆς κακίας χύσιν. ἐπεὶ οὖν ἡ ταχεῖα θεραπεία καὶ συντομωτέρα καταφρόνησιν τισιν ἐμποιεῖ τῶν, εἰς ἃ ἐμπεπτώκασι, νοσημάτων ὡς εὐθεραπεύτων, ὥστε καὶ δευτέρον ἂν μετὰ τὸ ὑγιαῖσθαι τοῖς αὐτοῖς περιπεσεῖν, εὐλόγως ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων περιόψεται τὴν ἐπὶ τι κακίαν αὐξουσαν, καὶ ἐπὶ πλείστον χεομένην ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀνίατον ὑπερορῶν, ἵνα τῷ προσδιατρίψαι τῷ κακῷ καὶ ἐμφορηθῆναι ἢς ἐπιθυμοῦσιν ἀμαρτίας κορεσθέντες αἰσθηθῶσι τῆς βλάβης, καὶ μισήσαντες ὅπερ πρότερον ἀπεδέξαντο δυνηθῶσι θεραπευθέντες βεβαιότερον ὄνασθαι τῆς ἐν τῷ θεραπευθῆναι ὑπαρχούσης ὑγείας τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτοῖς. The English translation is from J. J. O' Meara, *Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Ancient Christian Writers, New York 1954, 120–121.

Further, in regard to the kingdom of God we must also consider this, that just as *justice has no participation with injustice*, and *light has no fellowship with darkness*, and *Christ has no concord with Beliar*, so the kingdom of sin cannot be reconciled with the kingdom of God. If, therefore, we wish to be under the kingship of God, *let not sin reign in our mortal body*, nor let us obey sin's injunctions when she invites our soul to *the works of the flesh*, and acts in which God has no part. But rather let us *mortify our members which are upon the earth*, and *bring forth the fruit of the Spirit*, so that the Lord may walk in us as in a spiritual paradise, ruling alone as king over us with His Christ, who *sits in us on the right of the spiritual power*, which we pray to receive, and who will continue to sit there *until all His enemies* within us *become His footstool*, and *all principality and power and virtue be brought to naught* in us.⁹

Ἀμαρτία is to choose to be under the wrong domain: the domain of injustice rather than justice, the domain of darkness rather than light, the domain of Beliar rather than the domain of Christ. As the biblical quotations in the passage show, this is Pauline theology. As we have seen in the examples above, where Origen employs the term ἀπροσεξία he manages to translate this Pauline understanding of sin into his own theological thinking.

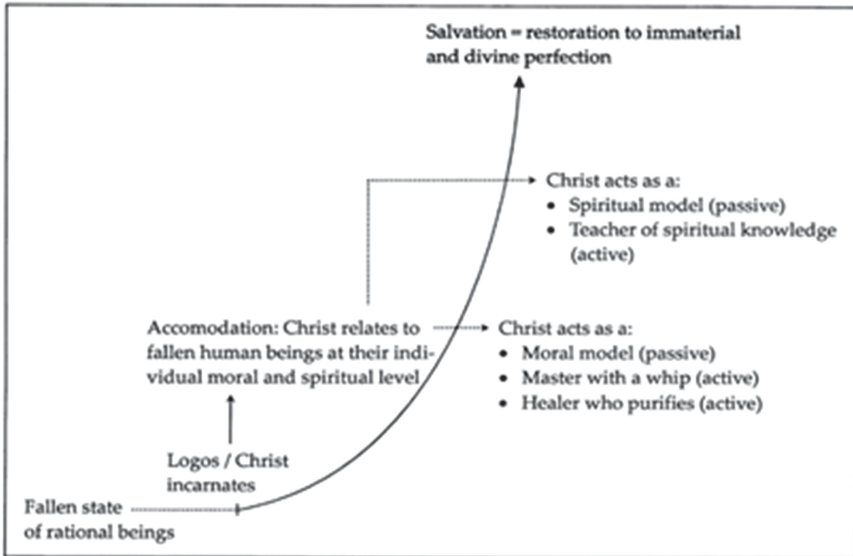
To sum up, transgression understood as neglect and laziness toward keeping the good is the reason for the “second creation” or the fall of the νόες, as well as for the constant regress which according to Origen is a universal existential condition for human beings.

4. Progress and Salvation

Even though I decided to focus my contribution on transgression and regress, it is necessary at this point to add some words about progress, because transgression, regress, and progress belong closely together. According to Origen, progress is an expression of rational beings' correct use of their free will to choose God's help to be under his domain. As the rational being decided

9 Or., orat. 25.3: ἔτι δὲ περὶ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ βασιλείας καὶ τοῦτο διαληπτέον, ὅτι, ὡσπερ οὐκ ἔστι „μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἀνομία“ οὐδὲ „κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος“ οὐδὲ „συμφώνησις Χριστῷ πρὸς Βελίαρ“, οὕτως ἀσυνύπαρκτόν ἐστι τῆ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ βασιλεία τῆς ἀμαρτίας. εἰ τοίνυν θέλομεν ὑπὸ θεοῦ βασιλεύεσθαι, μηδαμῶς „βασιλεύετω ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ἡμῶν σώματι“, μηδὲ ὑπακούωμεν τοῖς προστάγμασιν αὐτῆς, ἐπὶ „τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκὸς“ καὶ τὰ ἀλλότρια τοῦ θεοῦ προκαλουμένης ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν· ἀλλὰ νεκρώσαντες „τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς“ καρποφορῶμεν τοὺς καρποὺς „τοῦ πνεύματος“, ἴνα ὡς „ἐν“ „παραδείσῳ“ πνευματικῶ κύριος ἡμῖν ἐμπεριπατῆ, βασιλεύων ἡμῶν μόνος σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ αὐτοῦ, ἐν ἡμῖν „ἐκ δεξιῶν“ καθημένῳ ἡμῶν μόνος σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ αὐτοῦ, ἐν ἡμῖν „ἐκ δεξιῶν“ καθημένῳ ἢς εὐχόμεθα λαβεῖν „δυνάμει“ πνευματικῆς καὶ καθεζομένῳ, „ἕως“ πάντες οἱ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐχθροὶ αὐτοῦ γένωνται „ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν“ αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργηθῆ ἄφ' ἡμῶν πᾶσα ἀρχὴ καὶ ἐξουσία καὶ δύναμις. Cf. O' Meara, 1954, 86.

to turn away from the divine, they should also decide to turn back to God. However, according to Origen this is not possible right away, because the *vóες* will is paralysed and confused because of their transgression. The will has to be redirected towards God. This is the salvific work of Christ. I have tried to describe this salvific process in the following figure:



As can be seen from the figure, the process of progress back to God has several phases in which the Logos acts in different ways: passively as a model to follow and actively as a master who commands and demands. As the model to be followed Logos presents himself as a moral and spiritual model. As the master who acts and orders, he uses the whip to punish, and bitter medicine and sharp tools to heal, or he acts as the teacher who teaches moral and spiritual doctrines to the rational beings. Origen says that Logos accommodates to the needs of the fallen rational beings at different levels. Logos becomes everything that rational beings need:

God, therefore, is altogether one and simple. Our savior, however, because of the many things, since God 'set' him 'forth as a propitiation' (Rom 3,25) and first fruits of all creation becomes many things, or perhaps even all these things, as the whole creation which can be made free needs him. And for this reason he becomes the light of men when men, darkened by evil, need the light which shines in the darkness and

is not grasped by darkness. He would not have become the light of men if men had not been in darkness.¹⁰

There are different stages in this process of progress. The first stage is moral purification, healing, and education. The next stage consists of spiritual training and education. As mentioned earlier Origen is convinced that this salvific process will lead to the final restoration and salvation of all, but it is not a linear process of progress. There will be experiences of regress. Rational beings must choose to enter into this process, but this free decision is inspired and supported by Logos. Without the help of Logos progress would be impossible.¹¹

5. Conclusion

In the short paragraphs above, I have tried to argue that there is a clear structure in Origen's theological thinking, and that the terms "progress", "transgression" and "regress" can be used to describe this structure. Seen from one perspective, this does not say a lot, because almost every early Christian theology can fit into this structure. Seen from another perspective, it does say a lot, because it indicates that Origen's theology participates in a very basic common way of understanding Christian theology. At this level, Origen is not anything special. However, when it comes to the unfolding of the different elements in this structure, his theology differs in many respects from most other early Christian theologies. What makes Origen outstanding is that he manages to stick to a common theological structure, but at the same time he develops most of the elements of this structure in a unique manner.

10 Or., Joh. 1.119–120: Ὁ θεὸς μὲν οὖν πάντα ἐν ἑστὶ καὶ ἀπλοῦν· ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν διὰ τὰ πολλά, ἐπεὶ «προέθετο» αὐτὸν «ὁ θεὸς ἰλαστήριον» καὶ ἀπαρχὴν πάσης τῆς κτίσεως, πολλὰ γίνεται ἢ καὶ τάχα πάντα ταῦτα, καθὰ χρῆζει αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι δυναμένη πᾶσα κτίσις. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο γίνεται φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅτε ἄνθρωποι ὑπὸ τῆς κακίας σκοτισθέντες δέονται φωτὸς τοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνοντος καὶ ὑπὸ σκοτίας μὴ καταλαμβανομένου, οὐκ ἂν, εἰ μὴ γεγόνεισαν ἐν τῷ σκότῳ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, γενόμενος ἀνθρώπων φῶς. The English translation is from R. E. Heine, *Origen. Commentary on the Gospel according to John Books 1–10*, Washington 1989.

11 See concerning Origen's understanding of salvation Jacobsen, 2015, where this theme is developed in detail.

Francesco Berno

Gnosticismo e mistica: una relazione complessa. Sull'anima gnostica e la genesi dell'antropologia cristiana

Abstract: The present contribution aims at providing an in-depth analysis of the Gnostic use of the “mystical” semantic field, by scrutinising and investigating the occurrences of “μυστικ-” and “μυστηρι-” in the Greek Valentinian production and in the related heresiological production. Such a survey leads to recognise a recursive connection between the “mystical experience” and the Valentinian anthropological class of the psychics.

Keywords: Mysticism, Gnosticism, Soul, Spirit, Allegory

1. Introduzione, tesi e alcune considerazioni di metodo

In un contributo fondamentale per la comprensione non solamente del *Vangelo di Filippo* – a cui è precipuamente dedicato – ma anche del fenomeno gnostico tutto, Jacques Ménéard introduce la propria riflessione affermando che quella gnostica è una “mistica di identificazione”, grazie a cui l'anima si libera dalle pastoie della materia per penetrare la sfera della Verità.¹

La dichiarazione è di quelle che necessitano di poche specificazioni, ed, in effetti, la corposa nota acclusa dallo studioso testimonia del vasto ed immediato consenso che essa dovette raccogliere negli studi precedenti. Spicca in particolare, tra questi, il nome di Henri-Charles Puech, raffinato conoscitore ed interprete della logica del pensiero gnostico e delle prime manifestazioni della mistica cristiana, impegnato lungamente in una valutazione delle relazioni tra i due fenomeni.² Di “mystic composition” *tout court* aveva del resto parlato Søren Giversen in riferimento all'*Apocrifo di Giovanni*.³

1 J.E. Ménéard, *L'Évangile selon Philippe. Introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire*, Paris 1967, 10–11.

2 Si vedano le osservazioni in H.-Ch Puech, *La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et dans la tradition pratistique*, in: *Études carmélitaines* 23 (1938), 33–53, perfezionate poi nel primo volume del celebre H.-Ch Puech, *Enquête de la gnose*, Paris 1978.

3 S. Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis: The Coptic Text of the Apocryphon of Johannis in the Nag Hammadi Codex II with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, Copenhagen 1963, 12.

Siamo, con Ménard, alla fine degli anni '60; la scoperta del fondo di Nag Hammadi aveva già infiammato la critica e rivoluzionato i nascenti *Gnostic Studies*, ma i testi copti giacevano, almeno in larga parte, ancora inediti nei rispettivi manoscritti. I primi studi critici su di essi concordarono nel riconoscere un marcato retroterra mistico, tanto nelle modalità d'espressione, quanto nella dottrina. Basti ricordare qui i rappresentativi nomi di Frederik Wisse⁴ e Birger Pearson,⁵ ma la rassegna potrebbe allungarsi senza difficoltà.

Una maggior cautela lessicale e metodologica, unita ad una sempre più percepibile settorializzazione della ricerca, ha reso più difficile il rinvenimento di asserzioni tanto radicali e nette nei contributi seriori, sebbene tale minor ricorrenza non paia certo da interpretare come una mutata convinzione della critica.

La copiosa produzione di April DeConick,⁶ volta ad evidenziare la continuità tra le speculazioni gnostiche e certe manifestazioni di un *early Jewish mysticism*, ne è testimonianza autorevole e feconda. La studiosa americana – che certo non opera in un *vacuum*, ponendosi a sua volta nel solco d'una fortunata linea di ricerca –,⁷ intende infatti sostenere la saldatura tra esperienze profetico-sapientziali del mondo giudaico e la pretesa di un contatto diretto, *via* Cristo, con il Padre: la *visio Dei* veterotestamentaria viene sostituita dalla *visio Christi* neotestamentaria, e questa, a sua volta, in una sorta di “superamento” rivelativo, dalla possibilità di attingimento sacramentale, ritualmente mediato, al mistero del Salvatore («the “democratization” of the mystical»⁸).⁸ Ciò permetterebbe d'attingere ad una *definizione non-monastica* del fenomeno mistico, ovvero svincolata dalla definizione storica più prossima ch'esso ha assunto nel corso del pensiero cristiano.

In una serie di illuminanti contributi,⁹ Guy Stroumsa ha argomentato in favore di una tesi opposta, nel suo complesso, a quanto abbiamo fin qui

4 Cfr. F. Wisse, *The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists*, in: VigChr 25 (1971), 205–223.

5 Cfr. B.A. Pearson, *Anti-Heretical Warnings in Codex IX from Nag Hammadi*, in: M. Krause (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts*, Leiden 1973, 145–154.

6 Cfr. almeno A.D. DeConick, *What Is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?* in: A.D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, Atlanta 2006, 1–24 e A.D. DeConick, *Early Christian Mysticism*, in: G.A. Magee (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, New York 2016, 69–79.

7 Si vedano le osservazioni in C. Gianotto, *Tendenze mistiche in alcuni scritti di Nag Hammadi*, in: C. Giuffré Scibona / A. Mastrocinque (eds.), *Ex pluribus unum. Studi in onore di Giulia Sfameni Gasparro*, Roma 2015, 367–368.

8 A.D. DeConick, *Early Christian Mysticism*, 2016, 75.

9 Si vedano, in particolare, le osservazioni sul tema in G.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Leiden 1984, 2–4; G.G. Stroumsa, *Caro Salutis Cardo: Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought*, in: History of

osservato. Lo studioso sostiene infatti che la mistica cristiana inizi proprio là dove finisce la stagione dello gnosticismo ed in diretta ed esplicita polemica con esso. La gnosi cristiana sarebbe erede di preesistenti tradizioni di sapere esoterico,¹⁰ la cui forzata *soluzione* da parte della nascente ortodossia avrebbe fornito il vocabolario e l'armamentario concettuale per la nascita dell'antropologia "cattolica" e del suo misticismo. Del tutto analogamente alla celebre proposta sulla genesi del fenomeno gnostico elaborata da Robert Grant,¹¹ secondo cui questo originerebbe dalla deluse aspettative apocalittiche, allo stesso modo la genesi del fenomeno mistico è identificata nelle deluse aspettative gnostiche, ovvero nel venir meno della proiezione dell'intuizione teologica fondativa su di un orizzonte mitico, seppur oramai avvertito come insincero e strumentale – una «nur halbwegs Mythologie», per dirla con Kérényi.¹² Ad una tale prospettiva storico-evolutiva, Stroumsa ne affianca una teorico-concettuale, attraverso cui rendere conto del carattere finanche antitetico di mistica e gnosi: se la prima tenta, infatti, una interiorizzazione dell'esperienza religiosa, la seconda perviene ad una esteriorizzazione della coscienza, che si sostanzia in mito, immagine, narrazione, oggetto visibile.

La dipendenza di una simile proposta dall'interpretazione evolutiva del fenomeno gnostico sviluppata da Hans Jonas¹³ appare, del resto, evidente, assecondando il riconoscimento di una risoluzione del portato esoterico originario in una filosofia speculativa, entro l'orizzonte di una progressiva metaforizzazione del mito. La sconfitta sul piano storico e pubblico delle istanze dualiste e mitologizzanti fatte proprie dai diversi sistemi gnostici, quindi la loro disattivazione teorica e marginalizzazione pratica, coincide

Religions 30 (1990), 25–50; G.G. Stroumsa, *From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity*, in: H.G. Kippenberg / G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Leiden 1995, 289–310; G.G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Leiden-Boston 2005, 3–9; 46–62.

10 A parere dello studioso, l'esoterismo gnostico si sostanzia in una doppia prospettiva: da un lato, nel carattere segreto in sé delle dottrine rivelate, quindi del contenuto sostantivo dell'atto di apocalisse; dall'altro, nell'identificazione di una comunità eletta chiamata a custodire tale deposito di gnosi, che comincia ad interpretarsi come luogo privilegiato di accesso alla divinità stessa.

11 R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, New York / London 1976.

12 K. Kérényi, *Mythologie und Gnosis*, Winterthur 1942, 41.

13 Faccio qui riferimento, *in primis*, al celeberrimo H. Jonas, *Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie*, Göttingen 1954, e al denso H. Jonas, *Myth and Mysticism. A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought*, in: *The Journal of Religion* 49 (1969), 315–329.

con l'affermarsi di una filosofica attitudine monista, in grado di saldare la neo-formata antropologia cristiana con i migliori esiti della riflessione pagana.¹⁴

In ultima analisi, quindi, l'esperienza religiosa che la tradizione mistica cristiana è chiamata a sublimare e riconoscere come vertice ultimo del contatto con il divino, segreto di un uomo-interiore oramai platonicamente declinato, è, per l'appunto, ciò che aveva trovato squadernamento ed oggettivazione nel mito gnostico.

Agli occhi di Stroumsa, misticismo e gnosticismo sarebbero dunque categorie radicalmente contraddittorie, sia se guardate da una prospettiva storica di definizione ed evoluzione del dogma, sia se valutate nella propria essenza concettuale più intima.

In un recente contributo, Gaetano Lettieri sonda ciò che possiamo identificare come una *via media*,¹⁵ riconoscendo, nello sprofondamento gnostico dei semi spirituali nell'Abisso del Padre, la matrice – comunque ibrida nella propria struttura, poiché platonicamente dispiegata e, al contempo, dualisticamente connotata – dell'abbandono estatico di qualsiasi proprietà religiosa, sino all'attingimento dell'identità ontologica del singolo gnostico con il proprio Principio. Solo attraverso tale arditissima pretesa, certo ripensata cattolicamente ed universalizzata nella propria protologizzazione del corpo ecclesiale e del soggetto spirituale, “è stato storicamente possibile approdare a una *teologia spirituale cristiana* dogmaticamente articolata.”¹⁶

Il ventaglio delle posizioni che emergono anche da una tanto cursoria e limitata ricognizione è sintomatico dell'oscurità, storica e teorica insieme, della questione che stiamo cercando di mettere a fuoco. Del resto, le nozioni ed i termini in gioco sono davvero massimi e generalissimi. Se ‘gnosticismo’ è categoria da molti avversata, da alcuni dismessa, dai più guardata con crescente sospetto,¹⁷ quella di ‘mistica’ – e torneremo oltre su questo punto – è

14 Per una veloce analisi delle interpretazioni del mito gnostico fornite dalla critica novecentesca, mi permetto di rimandare a F. Berno, *L'Apocrifo di Giovanni. Introduzione storico-critica*, Roma 2019.

15 G. Lettieri, *Più a fondo. L'ontologia apocalittica valentiniana e le origini della teologia mistica cristiana*, in: I. Adinolfi / G. Gaeta / A. Lavagnetto (eds.), *L'anti-Babele. Sulla mistica degli antichi e dei moderni*, Genova 2017, 71–116.

16 Lettieri, 2017, 99; corsivo originale.

17 Oramai classiche le (pur divergenti) critiche all'utilizzo del termine ‘gnosticismo’ mosse in M.A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton 1996 e K.L. King, *What is Gnosticism?*, Cambridge 2003. Si veda, inoltre, l'equilibrato bilancio in G. Chiapparini, *Gnosticismo: fine di una categoria storico-religiosa?*, in: *Annali di Scienze religiose* 11 (2006), 181–217. Recente ed autorevole è infine la presa di posizione “pro-gnostica” in E. Thomassen, *The Coherence of “Gnosticism”*, Berlin-Boston 2020.

normalmente specificata da un aggettivo o da un genitivo limitativi. E con buoni motivi. Come pensare, dunque, di darne ragione e di indagarne la relazione? Come sperare anche solo di definirle? *Sed contra*, dietro i termini, riposano i testi, e le grandezze appena menzionate – fossero anche etichette di comodo – indicano nondimeno delle opzioni d'interpretazione di tali opere, che possono esprimersi anche diversamente: presenta lo gnosticismo una nozione piena di 'persona'? interpreta il contatto con il divino come il potenziamento estremo delle precondizioni e delle attitudini innate alla salvezza della natura creata? pianifica una prassi sacramentale che guidi l'adepto a sempre più sublimi misteri? ovvero, al contrario, nulla di tutto ciò è rinvenibile, ed anzi è possibile identificare un sistema di pensiero incompatibile con tali opzioni? tutte le esperienze unitive, di intimo contatto e di connessione profonda con il divino, possono e devono dirsi 'mistiche'?

Alla luce, dunque, di tali difficoltà definitorie e, al contempo, dell'urgenza di affrontare più direttamente lo spinoso rapporto tra mito e mistica, appare opportuno enunciare sin da subito le due tesi, intimamente correlate, che si intende qui sostenere, per procedere a ritroso e recuperare via via gli elementi che credo le supportino.

Il lettore non tarderà a notare la natura arrischiata e talvolta unilaterale di alcune delle argomentazioni affidate alle pagine che seguono. Esse, tuttavia, prima ancora che proporre affermazioni conclusive, intendono primariamente presentare le nozioni in campo nel modo più radicale e "nudo" possibile, così che possa mettersi a fuoco in modo maggiormente nitido il loro complesso intrecciarsi ed ibridarsi.

In primo luogo, quanto segue vuole mostrare che lo gnosticismo – ovvero quella forma di gnosi cristiana che conobbe il proprio massimo sviluppo nella seconda metà del II secolo per poi essere precocemente sconfitta dagli sforzi eresiologici dei polemisti della Grande Chiesa –¹⁸ presenta sì elementi che possono a buon diritto dirsi 'mistici', talvolta ben dispiegati e non recessivi, ma essi appaiono configurati all'interno di una struttura complessiva di pensiero che non esiterei a definire 'anti-mistica'. Essi, infatti, non solo appaiono quantitativamente minoritari rispetto ad una più generale tendenza della speculazione gnostica, ma quest'ultima pare concedere loro una

18 Si accoglie qui la nota distinzione, canonizzata dal *documento finale* del colloquio di Messina (atti in U. Bianchi (ed.) *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966*, Leiden 1967), tra una generica 'gnosi', ubiquitarmente rinvenibile – come aspirazione ad una sapienza superiore a quella correntemente rivelata – in ogni tradizione religiosa e sapienziale, ed il più discreto fenomeno della gnosi cristiana, cui si attribuirà convenientemente la denominazione di 'gnosticismo'.

specifica collocazione all'interno della propria struttura; e tale collocazione – come vedremo – è subordinata a ben individuabili istanze superiori.

Prima facie, lo gnosticismo appare infatti come un complesso e stratificato apparato teorico-mitico, capace di sublimare e diluire potenzialmente ogni definizione teorica. Lo sforzo narrativo gnostico si presenta all'interprete quale una delle più significative zone d'ombra che ancora persistono nello studio di questo fenomeno. All'interno del mito gnostico, ed in particolare all'interno della sua variante più raffinata, composita e scritturisticamente dedotta, ovvero il racconto pleromatico valentiniano,¹⁹ è possibile rinvenire virtualmente ogni affermazione teologica ed il suo contraddittorio. Parafrasando Jonas, tutto funge da materiale a portata di mano: la rivelazione veterotestamentaria, l'altra rivelazione giudaica – ovvero l'eresia enochica –, l'annuncio cristiano, l'opaca verità della filosofia pagana, quella ancor più opaca della mistagogia; tutto viene assunto e, quindi, implicitamente, tutto viene relativizzato, giacché sottoposto ad una radicale rilettura cristologica e cristocentrica.²⁰ Si è persino tentati d'affermare che, così come la tradizione

19 Nella sua forma più completa e coerente, esso è attestato dai primi otto capitoli del primo libro dell'*Adversus haereses* di Ireneo di Lione (collettivamente denominati come *Grande Notizia*). Postulato dall'*Epistola a Flora* tolemeana, il mito valentiniano ricorre, in forme parziali, contratte o riassunte, in numerosi scritti copti del fondo di Nag Hammadi. Basti qui menzionare il *Trattato Tripartito* (NHC 1.5) e la *Esposizione valentiniana* (NHC 11.2). La Grande Notizia fa esplicito riferimento ai discepoli di Tolomeo, ovvero alle dottrine elaborate in seno allo stadio d'evoluzione dell'insegnamento dell'eresiarca Valentino contemporaneo all'attività ireneana presso Roma, centro di irraggiamento della Scuola valentiniana; del fondatore, Ireneo pare avere conoscenza solo indiretta. Ciò, insieme alla scarsissima documentazione in nostro possesso sulla teologia di Valentino, ha indotto la critica a ritenere che il complesso mito valentiniano – almeno nella forma assai elaborata a noi nota – sia una creazione seriore rispetto al suo insegnamento, maggiormente orientato verso una esegesi di stampo medio-platonico delle scritture ispirate. Così C. Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur Valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, Tübingen 1992. Su una posizione ben più prudente, tendente ad identificare già agli albori della riflessione valentiniana tutte le precondizioni per lo sviluppo di una mitografia tanto raffinata, si è invece attestato E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the Valentinians*, Leiden-Boston 2006.

20 Cfr. G. Lettieri, *Deus patiens. L'essenza cristologica dello Gnosticismo*, Roma 1996. I fili che costituiscono la narrazione gnostica, corrispondenti ad altrettante "fonti", sono apprezzabili con particolare evidenza nel testo da molti reputato come la matrice fondamentale della speculazione gnostica tutta: l'*Apocrifo di Giovanni*. Su questo tema ci leggeranno con profitto le dense osservazioni in Z. Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe. Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John*, Leiden-Boston 2006, 43–73 e Z. Pleše, *Intertextuality and Conceptual Blending in the Apocryphon of John*, in: Adamantius 18 (2012), 118–135.

eresiologica sostiene che i seguaci di Carpocrate intendevano esaurire nel mondo tutti i peccati del mondo per poter sfuggire al mondo,²¹ allo stesso modo l'interprete valentiniano voglia esaurire tutte le narrazioni possibili delle modalità di rivelazione storica del divino giudicate come erranee o parziali, per poterle così superarle. Tanto antica è la novità cristiana che essa, da un lato, non può che attendere *ab aeterno* ad ogni sforzo umano di comprendere la natura di Dio, essendone la necessaria, silente precondizione, e, dall'altro, non può che denunciarli tutti come tentativi di *volar sanz'ali*, ossia di pervenire ad una conoscenza del Padre senza essere Figli.²² Fornire un *thesaurus* cifrato di ciò che la gnosi chiama a superare: questo è, ad avviso di chi scrive, il fine primo – *destruens*, sacrificale – del mito gnostico, così ingenuo, insincero, lontano dallo stesso vertice della teologia gnostica – che il pur tardo *Vangelo di Filippo* definisce con limpida semplicità ed immediatezza attraverso la compenetrazione di essenza tra Padre e Figlio: “il Padre è nel Figlio, il Figlio è nel Padre: questo è il Regno dei cieli”.²³ Si porrebbe qui – ma è, questo, un vaso di Pandora che è possibile solo additare con timore – lo spinosissimo problema della consapevolezza gnostica del carattere meramente artificiale dell'elaborazione mitografica: il mito che diviene trasparente, un mito “di ritorno”, poiché elaborato – altra fecondissima intuizione di Stroumsa – in un contesto storico-culturale in cui le più pressanti urgenze metafisiche erano state già affrontate mediante una concettualità non-mitica.²⁴

Ciò che è invece fondamentale notare è come tale vera e propria ἀνακεφαλαίωσις della rivelazione rappresenti un fecondissimo deposito di materiale pronto a rielaborazioni, con una straordinaria capacità plastica di essere assorbito e riconfigurato, riscritto ed emendato, in un processo non solo di pletorica produzione di nuovi testi e nuove rivelazioni – precocemente

21 Cfr. Ir., *adv.haer.* 1.25,4.

22 Si pensi a come tale incapacità storica di conoscere il Padre senza esserne abilitati da una identità di essenza sia ristrutturata nella narrazione gnostica del peccato di Sophia, colpevole di volersi unire al Padre senza aver un compagno legittimo che garantisca la liceità dell'atto.

23 NHC 2.3,74, 23–24.

24 G.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 1984, 2: “[i]n opposition to primitive, or even to early Greek mythology, the Gnostic myths arose in a mental world where metaphysical problems had already been addressed in non-mythological ways, and it arose precisely as a rejection of these ways. Thence stems the ambiguity of Gnostic thought, the artificiality of its mythology, whose figures are often hardly more than hypostasized abstract entities”. Si veda inoltre G. Bennett, *God as a Form: Essays in Greek Theology*, Albany 1976, 144, e soprattutto D.M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God. Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism*, Philadelphia 2014, 48–76.

riconosciuto e stigmatizzato dai polemisti della Grande Chiesa: si ricordi la “moltitudine indescrivibile di testi apocrifi” menzionata da Ireneo in *adv. haer.* 1.20,1 – ma anche di continua generazione di raffinatissima teologia speculativa.²⁵

Queste considerazioni introducono di necessità una *seconda tesi*: se noi scorgiamo nella gnosi cristiana una teologia mistica, o l’origine stessa della possibilità d’una teologia mistica, è per una sorta di inganno della vista, dovuto alla lente distorsiva della gnosi cattolica alessandrina, che fu in grado di selezionare ed arricchire con motivi allotrî la riflessione gnostica, stilizzandola e presentandola come ciò che invece essa intendeva trascendere, vale a dire come una modalità – pur imperfetta, quindi da perfezionare “cattolicamente” – di incontro mistico con il divino.

In tale contesto, appare particolarmente centrale il ruolo giocato dalla nozione valentiniana di ‘psichico’, identificante – sia detto, per ora, *grosso modo* – la natura non graziata, eppur credente, ovvero la massa dei fedeli della Grande Chiesa, non toccati dalla gnosi, esterni ai misteri paterni, ma comunque passibili di una salvezza parziale, di secondo livello.²⁶ In essa ed attraverso essa, lo gnosticismo comincia ad elaborare una nozione di ‘uomo naturale’, che, una volta eliminata la complessa speculazione sull’elemento pneumatico che risiede in alcuni eletti – quindi, detto altrimenti,

25 Per la nozione di ‘riscrittura’ come pratica eminente dell’elaborazione testuale e teorica gnostica, rimando a D.M. Burns, *Esotericism Recorded: Text, Scripture, and Parascripture*, in: A. DeConick (ed.), *Religion: Secret Religion*, Farmington Hills 2016, 213–229.

26 Questo scritto accoglie pressoché pienamente l’opzione “tradizionale” di interpretazione dell’escatologia gnostica, che vi scorge una conseguenza del rigido determinismo delle nature protologiche: gli illici, uomini puramente naturali dotati del solo simulacro del corpo carnale, subiranno la distruzione; gli psichici, fedeli devoti e moralmente retti, ma altro dal Padre, sono abilitati a scegliere, attraverso le opere, tra la distruzione illica o la cooptazione in uno stato di beatitudine eterna *all’esterno* del Pleroma, prossimi a Dio ma non in lui risolti; gli spirituali torneranno ad inabissarsi nel Padre. Recentemente (e, a parere di chi scrive, in modo non convincente), nuove proposte ermeneutiche hanno tentato di ammorbidire tale tripartizione, mostrandone, in sintesi, la natura originariamente volontarista. Altrimenti detto, non sarebbe la natura di ogni uomo a determinarne destino, ma è la diversa ricezione del messaggio di Cristo a configurare, in ogni interiorità, diversificati stati di relazione con il divino, che potevano essere altrimenti. Si vedano, in particolare, E. Thomassen, *Saved by Nature? The Question of Human Races and Soteriological Determinism in Valentinianism*, e I. Dunderberg, *Valentinian Theories on Classes of Humankind*, entrambi in: C. Marksches / J. van Oort (eds.), *Zugänge zur Gnosis. Akten zur Tagung der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft vom 02.-05. 01. 2011 in Berlin-Spandau*, Leuven-Walpole 2013, rispettivamente 129–150 e 113–128.

una volta “decapitato” il sistema gnostico – sarà chiamata a divenire apicale nella riflessione antropologica alessandrina. In estrema sintesi: i grandi pensatori della scuola d'Alessandria (e, tra tutti, Origene), attraverso un serrato dibattito critico con le più ardite opzioni gnostiche, restituirono ad una dimensione tecnicamente teologica la speculazione gnostica sull'uomo spirituale, rendendo di conseguenza autonoma la riflessione antropologica sull'uomo psichico. Il medesimo processo si può analizzare – ma solo cenni verranno forniti in tal senso in questo scritto – da una prospettiva ecclesiologicala, ovvero nella negazione “cattolica” e nel riassorbimento della pretesa gnostica di rappresentare il *verus Israel*, la minoranza egemonica invisibile del corpo visibile dei fedeli in Cristo, condotta sino all'apicalizzazione di quest'ultimo.²⁷ Come in sede antropologica la componente psichica – quindi l'anima – diviene la più alta istanza soterica del composto umano, così, parallelamente, in sede ecclesiologicala la componente psichica – la Grande Chiesa – afferma la propria autonomia.

2. *De comparando*: cosa si intende per ‘mistico’ in questo scritto.

Se la nozione di ‘gnostico’, pur nella propria più o meno condivisibile questionabilità storiografica, identifica già *in antico* una serie di fenomeni storico-religiosi discreti,²⁸ e se, di conseguenza, è riconoscibile un pur provvisorio perimetro di testi che pare lecito sussumervi, assai più evanescente e spinosa è quella di ‘mistica’. Essa, a rigore, designa un fenomeno tipicamente moderno.²⁹ Non mi è possibile soffermarmi adeguatamente su questo certo

27 Sul tema rimando a F. Berno, *Notes on a Leading Minority: Gnostic Para-Religious Self-Understanding*, in: Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni 83/2 (2017), 357–365.

28 Molto è stato scritto sul tema dell'utilizzo antico dell'etichetta di ‘gnostico’ da parte degli eresiologici. Mi limito a ricordare N. Brox, *Gnostikoi als häresiologischer Terminus*, in: Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 57 (1966), 105–114 e D. Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*, Harvard 2010, 29–50. Si veda, infine, il cursorio ma efficace bilancio in G. Chiapparini, *Valentino gnostico e platonico. Il valentinianesimo della ‘grande notizia’ di Ireneo di Lione: fra esegesi gnostica e filosofia medioplatonica*, Milano 2012, 14–15.

29 Si veda, per un primo orientamento, la voce “Mystique”, in M. Viller / C. Baumgartner / A. Rayez (eds.), *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, Paris 1932–1995. Cfr. inoltre R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, Oxford 1957; E. Ancilli, *La mistica: alla ricerca di una definizione*, in: E. Ancilli / M. Pappozzi (a cura di), *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione teologica*, Roma 1984, 17–40, B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western*

rilevantissimo aspetto, che pure riveste un ruolo centrale nella comprensione della storia del concetto prima dell'apparizione di quel *cluster* lessicale e tematico che permette di identificarlo ed analizzarlo con rigore scientifico. Emerge, in sintesi, una preistoria di analogia, a caduta ed in dipendenza da preesistenti forme giudaiche di relazione tra il fedele ed entità *praeter*-umane, quasi-divine, che lo abilitavano a personalissime *visiones Dei*.³⁰ Possiamo parlare solo analogamente di una mistica giovannea, di una mistica paolina,³¹ forse finanche, retrocedendo, d'una mistica gesuana –³² quindi di una mistica messianica –,³³ guidati dal marcatore suggerito e “codificato” da Michel de Certeau,³⁴ ovvero dalla dimensione esistenziale dell'assenza del corpo amato, sublimata nella ricerca di un *surplus* di presenza e di intimità. La sottrazione violenta ed improvvisa del corpo del figlio Dio, intercettando un percorso di progressivo innalzamento della cristologia, genera dunque dinamiche di intensificazione, rilancio e interiorizzazione della pretesa di un contatto diretto con il Senso nel/del mondo. Perfettamente “mistica”, in tale prospettiva, è quindi l'affermazione paolina circa la possibilità per il Padre di trarre Senso dal nulla, di costituire Essere dal non-Essere, di qualificare gratuitamente il luogo dell'indegnità – la carne – come luogo legittimo (ed anzi, più proprio, più pieno) della teofania.³⁵

La notevole potenza speculativa di tali nozioni, che ne ha garantito e ne garantisce tuttora una spiccata efficacia euristica, non può che decretarne

Christian Mysticism I. The Foundations of Mysticism, New York 1994, e C.-A. Bernard, *Le Dieu des mystiques*, Paris 2000.

30 Per una introduzione e generose indicazioni bibliografiche, cfr. P. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, Tübingen 2009.

31 Si pensi al fecondissimo A. Schweitzer, *Die Mistik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen 1930.

32 Si vedano le ampie osservazioni in M. Pesce, *Si può parlare di Mistica per Gesù?*, in: I. Adinolfi / G. Gaeta / A. Lavagnetto (a cura di), *L'anti-Babele. Sulla mistica degli antichi e dei moderni*, Genova 2017, 51–69.

33 Cfr. M. Idel, *Messianic Mysticism*, New Haven 2000. Si veda, inoltre, A. Destro, *Mystic Experience in Context. Representing Categories and Examining “Social Practices”*, in: S.C. Mimouni / M. Scopello (eds.), *La mystique théorique et théurgique dans l'Antiquité Gréco-Romaine. Judaïsmes et Christianismes*, Turnhout 2016, 109–118.

34 M. de Certeau, *La Fable mystique: XVI^e et XVII^e siècle*, Paris 1982.

35 Cfr. 1 Cor 1:26–29: Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλησιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σὰρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς· ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τὰ ἰσχυρά, καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

anche, di converso, un'assai problematica maneggiabilità sul piano storico, esponendo l'interprete al costante rischio di sovraesporre continuità tra fenomeni discreti. Come figurarsi, ad esempio, ciò che dovettero provare gli animi più fini dei secoli IV, V, VI, assistendo alla caduta dell'Impero – il Senso che, letteralmente, abbandona il mondo–,³⁶ se non in stretta analogia con la percezione dell'assenza sviluppata nella comunità di Giovanni, o in Paolo? Il suicidio di Virio Nicomaco Flaviano, raffinato “umanista”, *pontifex maior*, editore di Livio e di Virgilio, che preferì la morte alla vista del destino del mondo all'indomani della vittoria di Teodosio su Eugenio – di cui pur aveva erroneamente vaticinato il successo –,³⁷ non risponde, in ultima analisi, ad una omologa testimonianza martiriale?

In conseguenza di ciò, il nostro approccio deve farsi necessariamente “fenomenologico”, volto cioè all'identificazione di uno standard *comparativo* di definizione della mistica, sotto cui far ricadere la domanda circa la scaturigine cristiana della nozione ed il ruolo giocato dallo gnosticismo storico. Certo provvisoriamente, e con ampia possibilità di revisione e senza alcuna pretesa d'eshaustività, propongo qui non tanto dei “motivi” mistici – sarebbe operazione arrischiatissima, metodologicamente azzardata, finanche *naïve* –, quanto delle precondizioni storico-critiche di possibilità del darsi di un'esperienza mistica, che accorpo, per comodità d'esposizione, nei seguenti quattro punti:

- (a) la postulazione di una gerarchia di sostanze, quindi di una *scala entis* stabile ed ordinata, con (possibili) evidenti ripercussioni in sede cosmologica. La rivelazione mistica, l'apocalisse privata, si presenta, dunque, quale atto di gratuita effrazione di tale gerarchia, singolare, non partecipabile, solo problematicamente comunicabile;
- (b) la percezione di un effettivo iato tra soggetto e Dio, ovvero l'affermazione di una infinita distanza creaturale tra un principio monoteisticamente connotato ed il proprio prodotto, quindi la teorizzazione di uno scarto ontologico tra natura umana e natura divina;

36 Cfr. P. Dufraigne, *Adventus Augusti, adventus Christi. Recherches sur l'exploitation idéologique et littéraire d'un cérémonial dans l'antiquité tardive*, Paris 1994. Notevoli le osservazioni sul rituale dell'*adventus*, quindi sulla visibilità deitica dell'identità divina dell'Imperatore, in F. Guidetti, *Gerarchie visibili: la rappresentazione dell'ordine cosmico e sociale nell'arte e nel cerimoniale tardoromani*, in: C. O. Tommasi / L.G. Soares Santoprete / H. Seng (eds.), *Hierarchie und Ritual. Zur philosophischen Spiritualität in der Spätantike*, Heidelberg 2018, 9–42.

37 Cfr. G. Rinaldi, *Pagani e cristiani. La storia di un conflitto (secoli I-IV)*, Roma 2016, 268–269.

- (c) il completo sviluppo di un'antropologia dell'uomo ad immagine, pienamente platonizzata, attraverso cui si affermi la secolarizzazione e l'indipendenza delle attività psichiche umane dal principio creatore;
- (d) l'emersione di una piena nozione di 'persona', con particolare riferimento all'individuazione di un nucleo egemonico cui riferire volontà, intelligenza ed autodeterminazione del soggetto.

Quanto segue tenterà di dimostrare che a) lo gnosticismo cristiano è (intenzionalmente) sfornito di tale complesso di condizioni, e che b) tuttavia, esso comincia a elaborare al proprio interno una dottrina dell'uomo non-graziato, intesa *e contrario* rispetto alla natura che lo gnostico è chiamato a riattivare in sé ed esprimere.

3. Mistico, ovvero psichico.

Per stringere più dappresso l'argomento e fondarlo criticamente, è necessaria una pur cursoria analisi terminologica dei lemmi di nostro interesse. Preliminarmente si dirà che il *corpus* preso in considerazione è costituito dai testi e dai frammenti trasmessi in greco ed in latino,³⁸ principalmente d'ambito valentiniano, con solo sporadici sondaggi presso le opere preservate in lingua copta e presso il problematico orizzonte della corrente setiana.³⁹ Ciò risponde, in primo luogo, ad un'esigenza di controllo cronologico sulle fonti selezionate, stante la persistente difficoltà nel definire origine, natura, provenienza del fondo di Nag Hammadi.⁴⁰ L'incertezza nella collocazione, insieme cronologica e dottrinale, dei testi copto-gnostici ha infatti conseguenze di rilievo sulla nostra analisi, rischiando di fornirci dati che risentono dell'ibridazione di tali opere con fenomeni storico-religiosi seriori. I due secoli che separano la produzione gnostica in greco dalla sua traduzione (assai verosimilmente – e, in alcuni casi, certamente – accompagnata da un

38 L'edizione di riferimento è M. Simonetti (ed.), *Testi gnostici in lingua greca e latina*, Milano 1993.

39 Per una prima definizione di quest'ultima, rimando a H.-M. Schenke *The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism*, in: B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II, Leiden 1981, 588–616. Cfr. inoltre J.-M. Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien. Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique*, Québec 1986.

40 La bibliografia sul tema è sempre più cospicua. Si vedano le condivisibili osservazioni di carattere metodologico in S. Emmel, *The Coptic Gnostic Texts as a Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions*, in: J. Frey / E. Edzard Popkes / J. Schröter (eds.), *Das Thomasevangelium. Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, Berlin 2008, 33–49.

significativo processo di interpolazione e di riscrittura)⁴¹ conoscono l'emersione, infatti, di una serie di esperienze religiose ed opzioni dottrinali, quali il monachesimo, la strutturazione di una cristologia ortodossa, l'affermazione del monoepiscopato, tutte tese a conferire struttura e stabilità all'esperienza escatologico-carismatica delle origini, attingendo a piene mani dal platonismo coevo.⁴²

Ma soffermiamoci, appunto, sui nostri testi.

Prevedibilmente, il termine *μυστήριον* è assai raro.⁴³ In particolare, esso non compare mai nei dettati i cui processi di riscrittura eresiologica appaiono trascurabili, quali i frammenti di Valentino, i lacerti eracleoniani di commento al Quarto Vangelo, gli *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, la tolomeana *Epistola a Flora*, la cosiddetta *Lettera dottrinale valentiniana*. È invece ricorrente in quei testi in cui sicure tracce di rimaneggiamento ed accomodazione appaiono evidenti e profonde, quali, *in primis*, la Grande Notizia di Ireneo. Ciò non può che far ritenere che il termine risenta di un precoce uso polemico, quindi denigratorio, da parte del vescovo di Lione, che intende così accostare la gnosi agli empî misteri greci: “iniziati ai misteri” (*μεμυημένοι μυστήρια*; Ir. adv.haer. 1.6,1) è appellativo tipico,⁴⁴ ripreso con convinzione

41 Cfr. A. Camplani, *Sulla trasmissione dei testi gnostici in copto*, in: A. Camplani (ed.), *L'Egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica*, Roma 1997, 127–175.

42 Cfr. le (postume) riflessioni in E. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung. Fünf Vorträge*, Berlin 1924. Si veda inoltre G. Lettieri, *Un dispositivo cristiano nell'idea di democrazia? Materiali per una metodologia della storia del Cristianesimo*, in: A. Zambarbieri / G. Otranto (eds.), *Cristianesimo e democrazia. Atti del I Convegno della CUSCC (Pavia, 21–22 settembre 2009)*, Bari 2011, 19–134.

43 Ciò anche a motivo della sua pressoché totale assenza negli scritti evangelici – con la sola celeberrima eccezione dell'occorrenza del suo plurale in riferimento al Regno (Mc 4, 11 // Mt 13, 11 // Lc 8, 10), e del suo uso non-tecnico negli scritti paolini e nell'*Apocalisse* giovannea, in cui pur compare, complessivamente, venticinque volte. Per una introduzione, cfr. A.E. Harvey, *The Use of Mystery Language in the Bible*, in: JTS 31 (1980), 320–336. Si veda inoltre la voce *μυστήριον*, in G. Kittel (ed.), *Grande lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, Brescia 1971, vol. VII, coll. 645–716.

44 Cfr. Ir., adv.haer. 1.1,6 (“ci sarà consumazione allorché tutto l'elemento spirituale sarà stato formato e perfezionato secondo la gnosi: sono costoro gli uomini spirituali che hanno perfetta conoscenza di Dio e di Achamothe, iniziati ai misteri: sostengono che costoro sono essi stessi”). Cfr. inoltre Ir., adv.haer. 1.1, 3 (“questi sono i grandi e mirabili ed indicibili misteri [*τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά καὶ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια*] che essi presentano come loro frutto, se mai qualcuna delle cose dette in quantità nelle scritture si può accomodare ed adattare alla loro invenzione”). Si veda infine una occorrenza isolata, ove Ireneo qualifica come

anche dall'anonimo Autore della *Refutatio omnium haeresium*.⁴⁵ Filologicamente parlando, almeno nella sua fase pristina di elaborazione dottrinale, quella gnostica è dunque una interpretazione *senza mistero* dell'evento cristiano; l'accento sul carattere misterioso, obliquo della gnosi condivisa dalla comunità eletta, quindi sulla necessità di mantenere esotericamente il segreto sulla comunicazione elettiva delle dottrine dispensate dal Salvatore a sempre più ristrette cerchie di confidenti, emerge (seppur in modo assai problematico sul piano testuale)⁴⁶ con nettezza solo nelle tarde fonti copte. Non si può trattenere l'impressione – nell'attesa di studi sistematici sul tema –⁴⁷ che tale transizione sia segno di radicalmente mutati ambienti redazionali, portatori di altrettanto radicalmente mutate prospettive ed esigenze teologiche.

Diverso e ben più complesso è il panorama che emerge da una ricognizione, nel medesimo *corpus* testuale, sull'uso del lemma *μυστικ-*, che pare aver invece avuto un peso significativo nella riflessione gnostica, necessitando dunque di maggiore attenzione critica. Si rileverà subito che un'occorrenza assai rivelativa è rinvenibile proprio in un luogo in cui il dettato dell'autore gnostico è riportato verosimilmente *ad verbum*: ExTheo 66.⁴⁸ Il contesto prossimo entro cui interpretare l'*excerptum* è la riflessione valentiniana sulle

'mistero' i trent'anni di vita privata del Salvatore: Ir., adv.haer. 1.1,3 ("per questo dicono che il Salvatore – non lo vogliono chiamare Signore – per trent'anni non ha fatto nulla di manifesto, volendo mostrare il mistero di questi eoni [*ἐπιδεικνύνα τὸ μυστήριον τούτων τῶν Αἰώνων*]").

45 Ps.-Ippolito, Ref 6.36,1 ("egli ha rivelato e insegnato il grande mistero riguardante il Padre e gli eoni, ed egli non l'ha rivelato a nessuno"); sui setiani, Ref 5.8,26–29 ("questi sono i misteri che tutti dicono arcani [...] nessuno ha mai udito questi misteri se non i soli gnostici"). Sul rapporto tra misteri pagani e cristiani, si veda G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Dai misteri alla mistica: semantica di una parola*, in: E. Ancilli / M. Paparozzi (a cura di), *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione fenomenologica*, Roma 1984, vol. 1, 73–113.

46 Cfr. ad esempio E. Thomassen, *Gos. Philip 67:27–30. Not 'in a Mystery'*, in: L. Painchaud / P.-H. Poirier (eds.), *Coptica — Gnostica — Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, Québec-Louvain 2006, 925–939.

47 Per un primo sondaggio si veda K.L. King, *Mystery and Secrecy in The Secret Revelation of John*, in: C.H. Bull / L. Ingeborg Lied / J.D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixt*, Leiden-Boston 2012, 61–85, con relative ulteriori indicazioni bibliografiche.

48 Ὁ Σωτὴρ τοῦς ἀποστόλους ἐδίδασκεν, τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τυπικῶς καὶ μυστικῶς, τὰ δὲ ὕστερα παραβολικῶς καὶ ἠνιγμένος, τὰ δὲ τρίτα σαφῶς καὶ γυμνῶς κατὰ μόνας. L'annosa questione relativa alla possibile attribuzione a Clemente stesso di molti (se non di tutti gli) *excerpta* è stata recentemente riconsiderata in G. Chiapparini (ed.), *Clemente di Alessandria. Estratti da Teodoto, Frammenti delle perdute ipotiposi*, Milano 2020.

diverse modalità di manifestazione e, dunque, di rivelazione del Salvatore. *Teodoto* identifica – in modo, peraltro, perfettamente tipico –⁴⁹ tre livelli di comunicazione cristico-gesuana: in primo luogo il Salvatore ha insegnato ai proprî discepoli per figure e misteri (τυπικῶς καὶ μυστικῶς), in secondo luogo, per parabole ed enigmi (παραβολικῶς καὶ ἠνιγμένως), infine, chiaramente ed apertamente, da solo a soli (σαφῶς καὶ γυμνῶς κατὰ μόνας).

L'insegnamento μυστικῶς del Salvatore viene presentato come il più basso, iniziale, meramente protrettico, certo necessario eppur trasceso dall'intelligenza spirituale dell'interprete gnostico. Si noti che l'isomorfismo tra la tripartizione proposta dal frammento e la più generale tripartizione valentiniana delle nature⁵⁰ non deve condurre in alcun modo a proposte di sovrapposizione – come invece intende Simonetti⁵¹ –, poiché diversa è la scala di applicazione. A tal proposito, tutte le nostre fonti sono concordi: Cristo non si rivela agli illici, essendo questi totalmente esclusi dalla salvezza – con, del resto, evidentissime ricadute cristologiche;⁵² ergo, la proposta di *Teodoto* deve collocarsi interamente all'intero dell'ambito psichico-pneumatico.

Un interessante parallelo lo dimostra con chiarezza.

In AdvHaer 1.3,1,⁵³ Ireneo entra nel merito della speculazione valentiniana sulla relazione iconica tra Pleroma e mondo, identificando ciò che assai più modernamente è stato definito da Sagnard come 'esemplarismo inverso':⁵⁴ ogni evento pleromatico si riverbera nel mondo visibile – e, quindi, nella rivelazione del Salvatore – in forma parziale e cifrata. Così, tutti gli *ipsissima*

49 Si vedano le complesse tripartizioni dell'origine e della natura della Legge giudaica delineate da Tolomeo nel proprio *enchoridion* cifrato, l'*Epistola a Flora*, riguardo cui rimando a G. Lettieri, *Tolomeo e Origene: divorziollettera e sizigial/Spirito*, in: *Auctores Nostri* 15 (2015), 79–136.

50 Cfr. *supra*, nota 26.

51 Simonetti, *Testi gnostici*, 1993, 521–522.

52 Cristo assume su di sé esclusivamente le primizie della natura psichica e pneumatica. Per una bibliografia sul tema, unitamente a nuove proposte di interpretazione intorno all'annoso dibattito sulla 'divisione in due scuole' della speculazione valentiniana, mi permetto di rimandare a F. Berno, *Inauguratio quaedam dividendae doctrinae Valentini: Inconsistencies about Valentinianism's Split into duae cathedrae between Adversus Valentinianos and De Carne Christi*, in: A. Destro / M. Pesce et alii (eds.), *Texts, Practices, and Groups. Multidisciplinary Approaches to the History of Jesus Followers in the First Two Centuries. First Annual Meeting of Bertinoro (2–4 October 2014)*, Turnhout 2017, 317–334.

53 [Τ]αῦτα δὲ φανερώς μὲν μὴ εἰρῆσθαι διὰ τὸ μὴ πάντας χωρεῖν τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτῶν, μυστηριωδῶς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Σωτῆρος διὰ παραβολῶν μεμνηῦσθαι τοῖς συνεῖν δυναμένοις οὕτως.

54 F.M.M. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de saint Irénée*, Paris 1947, 239–265.

verba appaiono intimamente ambigui, veicolando, da un lato, una verità puramente letterale, trasparente quanto incompleta, dall'altro, facendosi veicolo d'una rivelazione eccedente la capacità di comprensione della *massa* cattolica. Vi è dunque la necessità di una comunicazione equivoca tra Gesù ed i suoi discepoli spirituali, affinché il messaggio sia oggetto di interpretazione, quindi sia (potenzialmente) comprensibile solo agli eletti.⁵⁵ Cristo non parla loro in modo aperto, ma μυστηριωδῶς e διὰ παραβολῶν (e si noti come qui si identifichino e si unifichino le prime due categorie del testo precedente), alludendo cifratamente alle verità pleromatiche, che non possono essere trasmesse φανερώς. Esse, infatti, devono venire consegnate ad una realtà spuria, non unitaria, necessitante di diversi livelli di comunicazione.

Mistica è, quindi, la parola storica del Salvatore, capace di concentrare provvisoriamente il darsi del pieno possesso della gnosi e, al contempo, l'appello alla volontà di προκοπή dello psichico, ovvero dell'uomo non dotato di Spirito, non consustanziale al Padre, che pure è abilitato ad una ermeneutica parziale della scrittura divina.⁵⁶ Altrimenti detto, la parola μυστική è quella che dice la potenzialità dell'atto di rivelazione, la sua natura necessariamente ibrida, capace dunque di intercettare la protensione naturale degli elementi psichici, che solo in alcuni di essi diverrà matura, facendosi frutto compiuto che toglie e supera la propria stessa matrice mistica.⁵⁷ Su questo punto, dalle

55 Vi è, poi, una seconda, più profonda motivazione: vi è una differenza – non ontologica, ma avventizia, storica – tra il divino intra-pleromatico e quello alienato nel mondo (=gli gnostici), tipicamente esemplificate nella relazione tra 'destra' e 'sinistra' (cfr., ad esempio, *ExTheo* 21–23). L'elemento spirituale decaduto necessita d'una formazione secondo la gnosi, che riattivi il ricordo delle realtà pleromatiche e lo abiliti all'attingimento del proprio luogo naturale. Sulla nozione di mondo come "scuola comune" per psichici e pneumatici, si vedano Ir., *adv.haer.* 1.6,1; 1.7,5, e *TratTrip* 104.18–25 e 123.11–16. Cfr. infine A. Kocar, "Humanity Came to Be According to Three Essential Types": *Ethical Responsibility and Practice in the Valentinian Anthropogony of the Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I, 5), in: L. Jenott / S. Kattan Gribetz (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, Tübingen 2013, 193–221.

56 Assai problematico è, invece, il caso del valentiniano Marco, detto 'il mago', giacché la Verità che gli si rivelò in corpo di donna è presentata da Ireneo – presumibilmente citando *verbatim* da testimonianze (scritte o orali) attribuibili alla cerchia del valentiniano – come μυστική (Ir., *adv.haer.* I, 13, 6). Del resto, la posizione di Marco all'interno dell'evoluzione del pensiero gnostico è oggetto di acceso dibattito. Cfr. in merito N. Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen 1999.

57 Cfr. EpFl 7, 10: ἄ καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐξῆς τὰ μέγιστα σοὶ συμβαλεῖται, ἐάν γε ὡς καλὴ καὶ ἀγαθὴ γονίμων σπερμάτων τυχοῦσα τὸν δι' αὐτῶν καρπὸν ἀναδείξῃς.

fonti a nostra disposizione emerge infatti un riconoscibile consenso: l'intelligenza spirituale è chiamata a superare l'intellezione mediana della parola sacra che è propria di coloro che sono in cammino verso il Padre.

Si noti, inoltre, che ExTheo 67, ovvero il testo che segue immediatamente il luogo da cui avevamo principiato l'analisi, nel commentare Rm 7, 5 (“Allorché eravamo nella carne”) disegna una dialettica tra una “verità parziale” della parola di Cristo – necessaria alla salvezza di coloro che credono!⁵⁸ – ed una “verità piena”, espressa per allusione, dunque comunque interna e concentrata nell'unico e medesimo atto di rivelazione. L'insegnamento di Cristo a Salome (“la morte ci sarà fino a quando le donne partoriranno”; dal *Vangelo degli Egiziani*; cfr. *Strom* III, 63, 1), destinato a straordinaria fortuna nell'esegesi gnostica,⁵⁹ contrae in sé la propria intellesione psichica – ovvero il riferimento alla generazione terrestre – e, nascosta in essa, la propria intellesione spirituale – ovvero il riferimento alla generazione celeste di Sophia. Il Rivelatore consegna alla creazione una apocalisse unitaria; è l'intelligenza del singolo interprete che opera da amplificatore della differenza, risolvendo l'unitarietà del messaggio in funzione della natura cui appartiene. In alcuni – gli psichici –, la rivelazione *rimarrà mistica*, ovvero opaca ed allusiva, capace di guidare e condurre al fine etico-morale su cui modellare le proprie opere, rimanendo dunque ultimamente estrinseco dato di fede, estraneo dall'intimità con il Padre; in altri – gli spirituali –, essa si scoprirà capace di farsi altro da sé e di trasformarsi nel pieno possesso della conoscenza, nell'attinimento diretto dei pensieri del Padre, nella visione senza mediazione della fonte stessa della sua Parola.

4. Un abbozzo d'antropologia?

L'orizzonte fin qui segnalato si inquadra coerentemente in un più vasto disegno in cui la componente psichica di Adamo è sistematicamente connotata dai caratteri della razionalità e della giustizia,⁶⁰ della attiva libertà di scelta e della autodeterminazione,⁶¹ della progressione

58 [A]ναγκαίαν οὖσαν διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν πιστευόντων.

59 Cfr. G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Le motivazioni protologiche dell'enkrateia nel cristianesimo dei primi secoli e nello gnosticismo*, in: U. Bianchi (ed.), *La tradizione dell'enkrateia. Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale, Milano 20-23 aprile 1982*, Roma 1985, 149-237; 239-252.

60 Cfr. ExTheo 54,1: Ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ Ἀδάμ τρεῖς φύσεις γεννῶνται, πρώτη μὲν ἡ ἄλογος, ἥς ἦν Κάιν, δευτέρα δὲ ἡ λογικὴ καὶ ἡ δικαία, ἥς ἦν Ἄβελ, τρίτη δὲ ἡ πνευματικὴ, ἥς ἦν Σήθ.

61 Cfr. ExTheo 56,3: τὸ μὲν οὖν πνευματικὸν φύσει σφζόμενον, τὸ δὲ ψυχικὸν αὐτεξούσιον ὄν επιτηδεύεται ἔχει πρὸς τε πίστιν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ πρὸς ἀπιστίαν καὶ φθορὰν κατὰ

morale,⁶² dunque dello stesso desiderio estatico di congiungersi a ciò che, κατὰ φύσιν, essa non possiede.⁶³

Alla luce di quanto abbiamo sopra evidenziato, appare lecito concludere – seppure, per ora, solo provvisoriamente – che la natura psichica sia mistica per eccellenza, poiché chiamata ad uno sforzo di compensazione del proprio *defectus naturae*, declinato nel superamento della distanza ontologica tra creatore e creatura e delle strutture di mediazione che tale iato postula; sforzo che, pur compiuto, non condurrà ad una salvezza piena.⁶⁴ Gli psichici non sono Figli, sono esclusi dall’eredità paterna e dunque si scoprono sottoposti a quella perversa logica di subordinazione rispetto al creatore che, agli occhi degli gnostici, permea il rigido monoteismo giudaico-cattolico, esemplificato dal dominio – giusto ed imparziale, *legale*, pertanto del tutto inconsapevole dell’economia del Dio sommo, che lo trascende – esercitato dal Demiurgo sulla *propria* creazione. L’alienazione dello psichico è dunque *eo ipso* desiderio di *unio mystica* con il Dio che crea, non con quello che salva, identificando proprio nella nozione di mediazione, che caratterizza la relazione subordinata tra Demiurgo e creazione, la possibilità del realizzarsi di una intimità con la propria origine.⁶⁵ Le quattro “precondizioni” sopra evidenziate – distanza ontologica tra Creatore e creatura con conseguente percezione di una *scala entis* che garantisca tale margine; identificazione di

τὴν οἰκείαν αἴρεσις, τὸ δὲ ὑλικὸν φύσει ἀπόλλυται; Ir., adv.haer. 1, 6, 1: καὶ τὸν Σωτῆρα δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦτο παραγεγομέναι τὸ ψυχικόν, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτεξουσίον ἐστίν, ὅπως αὐτὸ σώσῃ; Ir., adv.haer. 1.7,5: τὸ ψυχικόν, ἐὰν δὲ τὰ βελτίονα ἔλθῃται, ἐν τῷ τῆς Μεσότητος τόπῳ ἀναπαύεσθαι, ἐὰν δὲ τὰ χεῖρω, χωρήσειν καὶ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὰ ὅμοια; cfr. inoltre Ir., adv. haer. 1.6,4.

62 Cfr. ExTheo 57: γίνεται οὖν ἐκ τῶν γενῶν τῶν τριῶν τοῦ μὲν μόρφωσις τοῦ πνευματικοῦ, τοῦ δὲ μετὰθεσις τοῦ ψυχικοῦ ἐκ δουλείας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν; Ir., adv.haer. 1.4,2: ἐκ μὲν γὰρ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς τὴν τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ πάσαν ψυχὴν τὴν γένεσιν εἰληφέναι; fr. 40 di Eracleone (*apud* Origene, *InGv* 13.60 – *ad Gv* 4:46): καὶ οὐκ ἀθάνατόν γε εἶναι ἡγείται τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ Ἡρακλέων, ἀλλ’ ἐπιτηδείως ἔχουσαν πρὸς σωτηρίαν, αὐτὴν λέγων εἶναι τὸ ἐνδύομενον ἀφθαρσίαν φθαρτὸν καὶ ἀθανασίαν θνητόν, ὅταν καταποθῇ ὁ θάνατος αὐτῆς εἰς νεῖκος.

63 Si vedano le osservazioni in merito in M. Simonetti, *Ψυχὴ e ψυχικός nella gnosi valentiniana*, in: *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 2 (1966), 1–47.

64 Vero e proprio *leitmotiv* gnostico è che “nulla di psichico entrerà nel Pleroma”. Si veda, a mero titolo d’esempio, Ir., adv.haer. 1.7,1. Sul tema, rimando a E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the Valentinians*, Leiden-Boston 2006.

65 È appena il caso di notare che, nelle fonti gnostiche, il riassorbimento escatologico del divino extra-pleromatico nella pienezza paterna è sempre narrato come ritorno e reintegrazione dell’elemento pneumatico nel proprio luogo naturale, e mai come μετáβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος. Cfr., in proposito, *Vangelo di Verità* (NHC II, 3) 20.30 – 22.8.

una autonomia personale di un centro egemonico creato (anima), in pieno e libero potere del soggetto – sono tutti coerentemente dislocati dalla riflessione gnostica a livello psichico, come strutture imperfette e anamorfiche di un rapporto comunque mediato con Dio, da cui lo gnostico è *naturalmente* esentato.

Ciò conduce ad un ultimo, fondamentale passaggio dell'argomentazione, che getta retrospettivamente la propria luce su quanto finora evidenziato. Dobbiamo infatti chiederci se e quanto, nella gnosi cristiana del II secolo, queste complesse speculazioni giungano ad essere pensate come antropologicamente identificative, vale a dire, se vengano spinte sino all'emersione d'una nozione di 'persona'. È infatti da sottolineare con la massima chiarezza un assioma di primaria importanza per il "sistema gnostico": le tre classi che strutturano la creazione rappresentano altrettante modalità di relazione con il divino, e non proprietà ontologiche del soggetto. *Sed contra*, se una precoce (sebbene, a parere di chi scrive, ultimamente inessenziale) platonizzazione delle categorie concettuali gnostiche conduca ad elaborare un abbozzo di riflessione veracemente antropologica, esso è da rinvenire proprio nella proposta valentiniana in merito alla nozione di uomo psichico – uomo pensato, dalla gnosi, *greicamente*.

Tale dialettica fonda l'oscura ambiguità della riflessione gnostica sulla nozione di individuo, ove riconosciamo la chiara tendenza a risolvere ogni istanza antropologica in una cristologia,⁶⁶ apparendo solo embrionali i tentativi di qualificare diversamente, nella loro componente antropologica, i primi due elementi (ilico e psichico), rispetto al terzo (pneumatico): Adamo non semina nello Spirito e nel soffio,⁶⁷ poiché questi sono divini. La generazione umana si impegna a tramandare, dunque, esclusivamente l'animalità del sinolo, mentre l'inserimento della particella pneumatica nell'uomo risponde a logiche su cui la teologia (pur gnostica, illuminata dallo Spirito) non ha presa. Ancor più incisivamente, si veda la ricorrente affermazione secondo cui le nozioni di immagine e somiglianza, di genesiaca dipendenza, sono riferibili unicamente al composto ilico-psichico,⁶⁸

66 A. Orbe, *Cristología gnóstica. Introducción a la soteriología de los siglos II y III*, 2 volumi, Madrid 1976.

67 ExTheo 55.2: οὐτ' οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος οὐτ' οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐμφυσηματος σπείρει ὁ Ἀδάμ. θεία γὰρ ἄμφω καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ μὲν, οὐχ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δέ, προβάλλεται ἄμφω. τὸ δὲ ὑλικὸν αὐτοῦ ἐνεργὸν εἰς σπέρμα καὶ γένεσιν, ὡς ἂν τῷ σπέρματι συγκεκραμένον καὶ ταύτης ἐν ζωῇ τῆς ἁρμονίας ἀποστήναι μὴ δυνάμενον.

68 Si veda la strutturalmente equivoca (ma assai netta) attestazione della redazione lunga dell'*Apocrifo di Giovanni* (NHC 2.1,15, 2–3 // BG 8502, 1.23,16–19), ove vediamo il Demiurgo ordinare agli angeli di fare l'uomo ad immagine

giacché lo spirituale – è proprio il caso di dirlo – fa storia a sé.⁶⁹

Nondimeno, pur nella diversità essenziale della trattazione gnostica di tali componenti, la gnosi storica pensa le proprie nature come stati di relazione con Dio (due statiche – ilica e pneumatica –, ed una – quella psichica – mistica), quindi in senso universalistico, non personale. Lo Spirito che qualifica gli eletti altro non è se non Dio stesso che si manifesta, nolente, *ad extra*.

Una simile articolazione appare nitida quando si volga lo sguardo ad un aspetto spinosissimo ed ambiguo della speculazione valentiniana, vale a dire l'uso della nozione di "immagine". Le fonti greche a nostra disposizione ci restituiscono due evidenze di primario interesse: da un lato, (1), i casi in cui εἰκὼν è connotata in senso esplicitamente antropologico sono straordinariamente rari, e *de facto* limitati ad Ir., adv.haer. 1.5, 2; dall'altro lato e correlativamente, (2) tale nozione è dislocata in modo sistematico a livello psichico: è il Demiurgo ad essere immagine del Dio sommo; sono le realtà psichiche ad essere immagine di quelle pneumatiche.⁷⁰ In sintesi: la struttura ad immagine del sistema valentiniano (il già ricordato "esemplarismo inverso" di Sagnard) pare governare il rapporto tra psichico e pneumatico molto più di quello tra pneumatico intra- ed extra-pleromatico.

È solo con la complessa fase storica descritta dalla ricezione alessandrina del sistema dottrinale valentiniano⁷¹ che assistiamo a quella disarticolazione

dell'apparizione luminosa riflessa sulle acque ed a propria (=del Demiurgo) somiglianza: ἀμειβεῖ πῆτι γάμιο πύργωμε κατὰ θικωῖν μῆπουγτε λγω κατὰ πιέϊνε.

69 Cfr. ExTheo 54, 1: ὅτι δὲ πνευματικὸς ὁ Σήθ, οὔτε ποιμαίνει οὔτε γεωργεῖ, ἀλλὰ παῖδα καρποφορεῖ, ὡς τὰ πνευματικά. καὶ τοῦτον, ὃς ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, ἄνω βλέποντα, οὗ τὸ πολιτεῦμα ἐν οὐρανῷ, τοῦτον ὁ κόσμος οὐ χωρεῖ.

70 Cfr. Valentino, fr. 5 (ὁπόσον ἐλάττων ἢ εἰκὼν τοῦ ζῶντος προσώπου, τοσοῦτον ἦσσαν ὁ κόσμος τοῦ ζῶντος αἰῶνος. Τίς οὖν αἰτία τῆς εἰκόνας; μεγαλωσύνη τοῦ προσώπου παρεσχημένου τῷ ζωγράφῳ τὸν τύπον, ἵνα τιμηθῇ δι' ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ. Οὐ γὰρ αὐθεντικῶς εὐρέθη μορφή, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὄνομα ἐπλήρωσεν τὸ ὑστερήσαν ἐν πλάσει); EpFl 6.5 (αἱ γὰρ εἰκόνες καὶ τὰ σύμβολα παρασιτικά ὄντα ἐτέρων πραγμάτων καλῶς ἐγίνοντο μέχρι μὴ παρῆν ἡ ἀλήθεια. παρουσίας δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας τὰ τῆς ἀληθείας δεῖ ποιεῖν, οὐ τὰ τῆς εἰκόνας); ExTheo 15.5 (εἰκόνα δὲ τοῦ Μονογενοῦς τὸν Δεμιουργὸν λέγουσιν. διὸ καὶ λυτὰ τῆς εἰκόνας τὰ ἔργα, ὅθεν καὶ ὁ κύριος εἰκόνα τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀναστάσεως ποιήσας τοὺς νεκροὺς οὓς ἤγειρεν, οὐκ αφάρτους τὴν σάρκα, ἀλλ' ὡς αὐθις ἀποθανομένους ἤγειρεν) e 32.1 (ἐν πληρώματι οὖν ἐνόητος οὐσης ἕκαστος τῶν Αἰώνων ἴδιον ἔχει πλήρωμα, τὴν συζυγίαν. ὅσα οὖν ἐκ συζυγίας, φασί, προέρχεται, πληρώματά ἐστιν, ὅσα δὲ ἀπὸ ἐνός, εἰκόνες).

71 Sulle complesse dinamiche di riprovazione e accettazione, fluidificazione ed assimilazione che legano lo gnosticismo alla cosiddetta gnosi cattolica, rimando a G. Lettieri, *Reductio ad unum. Dialettica cristologica e retractatio dello gnosticismo valentiniano nel Commento a Matteo di Origene*, in: T. Piscitelli (ed.), *Il*

programmatica del paradigma cristologico/antropologico gnostico, che condurrà a pensare la mistica come atto eminentemente umano, dunque come tensione estatica verso un Dio sempre sfuggente ed ontologicamente eccedente la propria creatura. Tale radicale riconversione sarà realizzata dalla gnosi cattolica (e, più generalmente, dalla teologia cattolica contemporanea e successiva; si pensi al ruolo non sottostimabile svolto da Tertulliano⁷² e dalla scuola cappadoce),⁷³ mediante un duplice livello di intervento: (1) da un lato, attraverso l'autonomizzazione dell'elemento psichico, ricettacolo oramai pienamente platonizzato di una nozione piena di individuo, e, dall'altro, (2) mediante lo svincolamento della sua natura relazionale con il divino, verso la definizione di un soggetto indipendente ed autonomo. Emerge così la centralità dell'anima come organo apicale (ovvero senza alcunché di antropologicamente eccedente e identificata *iuxta propria principia*, sebbene comunque in dipendenza da una memoria del sua origine spuria)⁷⁴ e veramente umano dell'azione morale, cui attribuire la *Spannung* estatica del differire di Dio dall'uomo,⁷⁵ insieme al conseguente esercizio d'attenzione,

Commento a Matteo di Origene. Atti del X Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina, Brescia 2011, 237–287.

- 72 Esplicita è, nel pensatore africano, l'identificazione tra la natura dell'anima umana e l'elemento intermedio valentiniano, condotta attraverso la negazione ad Adamo del possesso della natura ilica e pneumatica. Cfr., ad esempio, *De Anima* 21.
- 73 Si ricordino, ad esempio, i celebri luoghi in cui Gregorio di Nissa, nutrito della migliore tradizione apofatica pagana (su cui si vedrà D. Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain 1995), afferma la conoscibilità della sola economia divina e la corrispettiva inconoscibilità della natura di Dio in sé, avvolta nella tenebra, sino all'appropriazione per fede dell'oggetto amato, in attesa della chiarificazione escatologica (cfr., ad es., Greg. Nys. In Cant 6; Greg. Nys., c. Eun. 1.371). Medesime tematiche ed espressioni in Gregorio di Nazianzo (Greg. Naz. or. 28.3; 38.7). Cfr. E. Peroli, *Il Platonismo e l'antropologia filosofica in Gregorio di Nissa. Con particolare riferimento agli influssi di Platone, Plotino e Porfirio*, Milano 1993.
- 74 Cfr. F. Berno, *Intelletto e anima / caldo e freddo: una dialettica valentiniana in Origene?*, in: *Adamantius* 22 (2016), 130–138.
- 75 Cfr. Clem. Al. strom. 2.10,47, ove si afferma che la conoscenza della Sapienza, la più alta contemplazione, è lo sforzo di conoscere di Dio come più è possibile (ὑπομνήσκει δὲ ἡμέρα ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν καὶ ὡς οἶόν τε γινώσκειν ἐπιχειρεῖν, ἥτις ἂν εἴη θεωρία μεγίστη, ἢ ἐποπτική, ἢ τῶ ὄντι ἐπιστήμη, ἢ ἀμετάπτωτος λόγῳ γινομένη. αὕτη ἂν εἴη μόνη ἢ τῆς σοφίας γνώσις, ἧς οὐδέποτε χωρίζεται ἢ δικαιοπραγία), ovvero – come si legge in Strom 7.10,57 – attraverso la progressione per l'ascesa mistica sino al luogo in cui l'anima troverà il proprio riposo (ὄθεν καὶ ῥαδίως εἰς τὸ συγγενὲς τῆς ψυχῆς θεῖόν τε καὶ ἅγιον μετοικίξει καὶ διὰ τινος οικείου φωτὸς διαβιβάζει τὰς προκοπὰς τὰς μυστικὰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἄχρις ἂν εἰς τὸν κορυφαῖον ἀποκαταστήσῃ τῆς ἀναπαύσεως τόπον, τὸν καθαρὸν τῆ καρδία πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον ἐπιστημονικῶς καὶ καταληπτικῶς τὸν θεὸν ἐποπτεῦεν διδάξασα).

apprendimento, incessante messa alla prova d'una conoscenza acquisita, chiamata a divenire *habitus*;⁷⁶ differenza che abbiamo visto essere solo puramente apparente (e, comunque, non antropologicamente connotata) per lo gnostico, giacché l'essenza inalienabile di questo era qualificata come eternamente identificabile con il Padre e solo storicamente da questi distolta.

L'oscurità delle parole del Salvatore – argomenta Origene⁷⁷ – è funzionale a rallentare la conversione degli *estranei*, affinché essi possano adeguatamente ponderare il proprio difetto e non sottovalutarne l'entità, sì che l'identificazione gnostica di diversi livelli, reciprocamente “isolati” e non comunicanti, di esegesi scritturistica risponda paradossalmente ad una incapacità di corretta interpretazione spirituale della Scrittura, quindi ad una solo parziale allegorizzazione:⁷⁸ gli gnostici sono tacciati di letteralismo, poiché inabili ad

76 Cfr. Clem. Al. strom. 6. 9, 77, 5–78, 6, 1: σωτήριος γάρ τις ὁ τῷ σωτηρί ἐξομοιούμενος, εἰς ὅσον ἀνθρωπίνη φύσει χωρῆσαι τὴν εἰκόνα θέμις, ἄπαρα βᾶτως τὰ κατὰ τὰς ἐντολάς κατορθῶν· τὸ δ' ἔστι ἔχει θρησκεύειν τὸ θεῖον διὰ τῆς ὄντως δικαιοσύνης, ἔργων τε καὶ γνώσεως· τούτου φωνὴν κατὰ τὴν εὐχὴν οὐκ ἀναμένει κύριος, «αἰτήσαι» λέγων «καὶ ποιήσω· ἐννοήθητι καὶ δώσω». Καθόλου γὰρ ἐν τῷ τρεπομένῳ τὸ ἄτρεπτον ἀδύνατον λαβεῖν πῆξιν καὶ σύστασιν, ἐν τροπῇ δὲ τῇ συνεχεῖ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἀστάτου τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ γινομένου, ἡ ἐκτικὴ δύναμις οὐ σφίζεται. ὁ γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐξωθεν ὑπεισιόντων καὶ προσπιπτόντων αἰεὶ μεταβάλλεται, πῶς ἂν ποτε ἐν ἔξει καὶ διαθέσει καὶ συλλήβδην ἐν ἐπιστήμῃ κατοχῇ γένοιτ' ἄν; καίτοι καὶ οἱ φιλόσοφοι τὰς ἀρετὰς ἔξεις καὶ διαθέσεις καὶ ἐπιστήμας οἴονται. ὡς δὲ οὐ συγγενᾶται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλ' ἐπίκτητός ἐστιν ἡ γνώσις καὶ προσοχῆς μὲν δεῖται κατὰ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἢ μάθησις αὐτῆς ἐκθρέψεώς τε καὶ αὐξήσεως, ἔπειτα δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἀδιαλείπτου μελέτης εἰς ἕξιν ἔρχεται, οὕτως ἐν ἔξει τελειωθείσα τῇ μυστικῇ ἀμετάπτωτος δι' ἀγάπην μένει· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον καὶ τὸ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γεγεν<ν>ημένον αἴτιον κατεῖληφεν καὶ περὶ τούτων ἐμπέδως ἔχει, μονίμως μονίμους καὶ ἀμεταπτώτους καὶ ἀκινήτους λόγους κεκτημένος, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ περὶ κακῶν περὶ τε γενέσεως ἀπάσης καὶ συλλήβδην εἰπεῖν, περὶ ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ κύριος, τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐκ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἰς τέλος ἀλήθειαν παρ' αὐτῆς ἔχει τῆς ἀληθείας μαθῶν, οὐκ, εἴ ποῦ τι φανείη πιθανὸν ἢ κατὰ λόγον Ἑλληνικὸν ἀναγκαστικόν, πρὸ αὐτῆς αἰρούμενος τῆς ἀληθείας, τὰ δὲ εἰρημένα ὑπὸ κυρίου σαφῆ καὶ πρόδηλα ἔχει λαβῶν. L'intelligenza dei misteri è rivelata, potenzialmente, all'interrezza della creazione, come affermato da Origene in Or., princ. 1.2, 3. Essa è pertanto chiamata ad un inesausto sforzo di ricerca: cfr. Or., princ. 4.3,13.

77 Cfr. Or., princ. 3.1,16 13–14 (τὸ ὅτι οὐκ ἐβούλετο τοὺς μὴ ἐσομένους καλοῦς καὶ ἀγαθοῦς συνιέναι τῶν μυστικωτέρων ὁ σωτὴρ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς. νῦν δέ, κειμένου τοῦ μήποτε ἐπιστρέψωσι, καὶ ἀφεθῆ αὐτοῖς, ἢ ἀπολογία ἐστὶ χαλεπωτέρα). Cfr. inoltre Or., princ. 3.1,16, 20–25.

78 Cfr. princ. 4.2,2,1–4 (Αἰτία δὲ πᾶσι τοῖς προειρημένοις ψευδοδοξιών καὶ ἀσεβειῶν ἢ ἰδιωτικῶν περὶ θεοῦ λόγων οὐκ ἄλλη τις εἶναι δοκεῖ ἢ ἡ γραφὴ κατὰ τὰ πνευματικὰ μὴ νευοημένη, ἀλλ' ὡς πρὸς τὸ ψιλὸν γράμμα ἐξειλημμένη).

articolare una reale dinamica evolutiva dell'esegesi, a motivo della natura intimamente statica, non comunicante con il divino, dell'anima gnostica.

Si risolve così, in altri termini, il dipolo che conflava insieme ciò che, *ex post*, è cattolicamente definibile come antropologia e teologia, con una netta (quanto anti-agnostica) separazione dei due ambiti. Il vertice della tripartizione gnostica delle nature (e quindi della teologia gnostica *tout court*), lo Spirito, viene – certo problematicamente⁷⁹ – sottratto all'ambito del possesso elettivo da parte di una *élite* pneumatica e ricollocato in una sfera di assoluta trascendenza, istituendo una relazione di desiderio con la natura creata. Non più un monologo tra Dio e la sua componente incarnata nella materia, ma un dialogo tra Creatore e creatura, del tutto analogo a quello che univa Demiurgo ed elemento psichico. Ciò che, infatti, la gnosi chiamava a superare, ovvero l'anima e la limitatezza demiurgica cui essa è vincolata, diviene perno e motore della protensione verso tale assoluta trascendenza, facendosi organo, oramai pienamente configurato, della libera ricerca di Dio.

5. Considerazioni conclusive

Obiettivo di questo scritto è stato mostrare la complessità strutturale della nozione di mistica, quando applicata alla riflessione gnostica. Se da un lato, infatti, essa coglie un movimento di fondo, una pretesa sottesa all'intera impalcatura concettuale eterodossa, ovvero la rivendicazione di un contatto diretto, immediato, unitivo con il Padre, quindi una obliterazione amorosa d'ogni identità personale, dall'altro, intercetta specifiche opzioni dottrinali elaborate dalle scuole gnostiche in relazione alla parzialità della capacità redentiva e conoscitiva dell'anima.

Da una analisi lessicale del *corpus* testuale selezionato, è emerso un uso ricorrente e tecnicamente avvertito del termine 'mistico', sempre connesso alla natura mediana degli psichici, quindi alla potenzialità della rivelazione, chiamata a superare il proprio stesso carattere *mistico* – protettivo, parziale, opaco – per farsi conoscenza limpida della medesima natura che identifica il Padre ed il proprio corpo, gli pneumatici.

⁷⁹ Si pensi alla "indecisa" collocazione dello Spirito nel pensiero origeniano, scisso tra una dimensione propriamente trinitaria (intra-pleromatica) ed ipostatizzata ed il ruolo di ricettacolo della beatitudine degli eletti, quindi come Chiesa extra-pleromatica. Cfr. L. Perrone, *La pneumatologia di Origene alla luce delle nuove Omelie sui Salmi*, in: F. Pieri / F. Ruggero (eds.), *Il divino inquieto. Lo Spirito santo nelle tradizioni antiche. Atti del IX convegno annuale della Facoltà Teologica dell'Emilia-Romagna. XV convegno annuale del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina (Bologna 2-3 dicembre 2014)*, Brescia 2018, 101-117.

Abbiamo inoltre visto come lo gnosticismo sempre più evidentemente si imponga quale straordinario laboratorio teologico, in grado di elaborare veri e propri *ambiti specializzati* di riflessione dottrinale. Tra tali “teologie minori”, vale a dire tra tali contesti di elaborazione teorica non coincidenti con il vertice dell’interpretazione gnostica del messaggio cristiano, ma ad esso subordinati, si è ulteriormente rilevata la raffinatissima speculazione intorno alla nozione di ‘psichico’, che viene dalla gnosi identificata con l’ambito della teologia naturale, della ricerca di Dio (genitivo esclusivamente oggettivo) non sostenuta in modo efficace della Spirito, dunque disponibile agli sforzi non graziati della creatura. Essa appare, dunque, come il marcatore d’uno stato di relazione con il Padre: non Figli, non consustanziali al Principio, ma creature, prodotti.

All’interno di tale categoria, nondimeno, comincia ad emergere un principio di autonomia del soggetto desiderante ed estatico, che è messo in grado – sebbene ancora embrionalmente – di esercitare le proprie capacità epistemiche e morali; l’uomo psichico è colui che può esprimere in modo potenzialmente efficace volontà e libero arbitrio, approssimandosi ad una delle due classi che specificano il dualismo terminale d’ogni sistema gnostico: quella degli spirituali – qualora le sue opere rispondano alle richieste *letterali*, etiche, della parola evangelica; quella degli ilici – qualora la sua volontà *fallisca*.

Su tale ibrido principio si innesta in modo assai efficace l’opera di ricezione cattolica della speculazione gnostica, che 1) identifica tale ambito non più come una condizione riservata ad uno specifico elemento antropologico, ma come lo *status* universale dell’essere umano, quindi come il dono concesso all’interrezza della creazione in misura eguale, e 2) supplisce alle categorie gnostiche (ontologicamente povere) di identificazione di un soggetto ancora semitico, carismatico, paolino, con categorie (ontologicamente forti) di identificazione di una soggetto “greco”.

Non può che seguirne che la pretesa (veracemente gnostica) di andare più a fondo di Platone, di conoscere intimamente i misteri paterni, differisca radicalmente dalla risultante storica della sua assimilazione all’interno del corpo dogmatico cristiano; ed in tale distanza di mostra l’equivocità, finanche la mera omonimia, della nozione di ‘mistica’. Se la teologia alessandrina “ortodossa” realizza il contatto tra anima e Dio nel perfezionamento e nel potenzialmento, attraverso la costanza dell’esercizio, delle facoltà naturali della creatura – sostenute da un *iter* contemplativo variamente codificato e, parallelamente, da una stabile prassi rituale –,⁸⁰ lo gnosticismo identifica nell’anima l’organo di mediazione per eccellenza, che condanna lo psichico

80 Fenomeni non a caso guardati con altalenante sospetto dalle fonti gnostiche, ben al di là del quadro, comunque opacissimo, offerto da Ireneo in Ir., adv.haer. 1.21,2–5. Sul tema del “sacramento gnostico”, cfr. F. Berno, *L'allegoria templare e la*

ad un rapporto di subordinazione con il proprio Creatore; lo Spirito che qualifica alcuni uomini come eletti è invece sottratto ad ogni logica “prestazionale”:⁸¹ esso è l'essenza segreta che, senza merito, senza sforzo, senza esercizio, senza ordine, condividono Cristo e Cristi, sì che nessuna protensione, nessuna estasi, è richiesta al Padre per farsi Figlio e Figli, e a questi per conoscerlo. Ci si può spingere ad affermare – certo con generosa approssimazione – che, per i valentiniani, la natura o nega Dio, pervertendolo e cercandolo idolatricamente (elemento ilico) o si converte (elemento psichico), mentre gli gnostici sono “tutto Grazia”, marcando uno iato profondo rispetto alla tendenza mistica a naturalizzare il dono, divinizzare la natura, assorbire il divino nell'umano.

E tuttavia, è proprio grazie all'esperienza gnostica ed al suo larvale platonismo che la mistica penetra nel DNA del cristianesimo, muovendo dallo scavo in una dimensione antropologica non identificata come veracemente salvifica, seppure apicale quanto agli sforzi della volontà e della razionalità creaturali.

topologizzazione del corpo di Cristo nel Vangelo di Filippo (NHC II, 3), in: Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni 82/2 (2016), 992–1008, con relative indicazioni bibliografiche. Cfr. inoltre A. Cosentino, *Il battesimo gnostico. Dottrine, simboli e riti iniziatici nello gnosticismo*, Cosenza 2007.

81 Si pensi alla natura originariamente prestazionale della ἀρετή classica, qui interpretata come psichica potenzialità naturale, efficace nell'orizzonte del proprio mediano campo di applicabilità. Cfr., ad esempio, A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greek from Homer to the Fifth Century*, London 1972.

Patricia Ciner

The Tradition of Spiritual Progress in the West: The Legacy of Plotinus and Origen for Contemporary Neuroscience

Abstract: Plotinus and Origen have left beautiful words of love for the divine as a legacy to the history of humanity. In this paper, we attempt to show that the mystical framework of the West was forged in their conjunction and that their reflections, along with the subsequent tradition that they began, were decisive for reflections on mysticism that neuroscientists currently carry out. Our proposal seeks to be a continuation and update of the so-called “mystical tradition” for the third millennium.

Keywords: Plotinus, Origen, Mystical anthropology, Neuroscience

1. Introduction

Plotinus and Origen have left a legacy of beautiful pages of love for the divine to all of humanity. Throughout their work, they have shown the path of return to the first beginning, teaching us that only there may the human soul find fullness and meaning.¹ In this paper, we will attempt to demonstrate how together these thinkers shaped the mystical foundation of the West, and how their reflections established the beginnings of a mystical tradition that was decisive, not only for philosophers and theologians writing about mysticism in the West, but also for research currently being carried out by neuroscientists. Here we seek to provide a continuation for and update of the so-called “mystical tradition” for the third millennium. From this initial hypothesis, we formulate three main objectives that will allow us to prove our point:

- (a) To highlight the characteristics of mystical anthropology, understood as a philosophical position that assumes the existence of a dimension independent from the psychophysical compound.
- (b) To point out the distinctive characteristics of Plotinus’s and Origen’s mysticism, placing special emphasis on the notion of spiritual progress

1 See P. Ciner, *Plotino y Orígenes. El amor y la unión mística*, Mendoza 2000.

as an engine that allows for the reinstallation and contemplation of the mystical dimension.

- (c) To initiate wider reflection on the possibility of accepting this mystical dimension or not, as part of the great debate that contemporary neuroscience has begun.

2. Characteristics of Mystical Anthropology

In his wonderful and almost unbeatable work *The Mystical Phenomenon: Comparative Studies*, Juan Martín Velasco has characterised mystical anthropology as follows:

The expressions that the mystics offer this anthropology are notably different and are conditioned by the historical, cultural and religious circumstances in which they live and think. But all have one fact in common: the presence in each man of a space beyond himself, his condition of being inhabited by an *excessus* that fills and overflows him.²

With this fundamental characteristic as a base, the mystics discover a dimension that exists independently of the biological, psychological, or cultural dimension. We have given the name “mystical dimension” to this non-spatial and independent place that allows for objective contemplation, both of the human being himself and of the cosmos, a space that undoubtedly gives the human being freedom with respect to all interior and exterior conditioning.³ The various names and metaphors that the mystical traditions have used to refer to this sacred space – Atman, the Center of the Soul, the Depth of the Soul, the Secret Tabernacle, etc. – provide evidence for the existence of this eternal dimension where communication between the soul and the divine is produced. In order to understand the fundamentals of this anthropology, which, of course, underlie both Plotinus’s and Origen’s works, it is necessary to remember that the word mystic comes from the Greek verb μύω which means to close, to shut down.⁴ Evidently, in this expansive shutting down of the soul to the divine, we find the point common to all of humanity’s spiritual traditions. In this sense, and with a very synthetic definition, we may state that “mysticism is the expansion of the human soul that leads to an

2 J. Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico: estudio comparado*, Madrid 1999, 260.

3 P. Ciner, *Neurociencias y Experiencia Mística: Aportes para la constitución de una antropología mística*, in: *Conocimiento y curación de sí. Entre filosofía y medicina*, in R. Pereto Rivas / S. Vásquez (eds.), *Conocimiento y curación de sí. Entre filosofía y medicina*, Buenos Aires 2017, published online.

4 F. García Bazán, *Aspectos inusuales de lo sagrado*, Madrid 2000, 79–80; R. Panikkar, *De la Mística. Experiencia plena de la Vida*. Barcelona 2005, 31–56.

integral state of union. This expansion is possible because, in one way or another, human beings participate in the divine and can therefore know him, love him and become closer to him.”⁵ One of the fundamental bases of universal mysticism, which was initiated in the West by Plotinus and Origen, is precisely the inherent capability of human beings for spiritual progress. This clear anthropological optimism is the distinctive stamp of the mysticism of Plotinus and Origen.

3. The Issue of Spiritual Progress in Plotinus’s and Origen’s Work

Our specific objective in this section – beyond the controversial topic of whether or not both of these thinkers had a common teacher in Ammonius Saccas –⁶ will be to highlight the larger coincidences between the two with respect to the issue of spiritual progress, as well as with respect to the metaphysical and theological coordinates of their respective systems. We believe that only in this way will we be able to completely understand the great originality and depth of both thinkers, allowing for clarification of their true legacy for Western mystical tradition. With respect to some coincidences, coincidences which allow for the possibility of spiritual progress, it is important to point out the following: (a) the ontological similarity between divinity and all human souls which brings with it the possibility for interaction between both natures, (b) free will as a constitutive condition of the human soul,⁷ and (c) both authors’ understanding that all interior transformations must be manifested in coherent conduct with each and every one of the existing beings.

With respect to the differences between these thinkers, our decision to begin our analysis first with Plotinus and to later continue with Origen is neither a mere whim nor evidence of a misunderstanding of chronological criteria.⁸ We are perfectly aware that Origen was approximately twenty years older than Plotinus, according to data provided by various historical accounts. Therefore, the decision to order our work in this way forms part of our working hypothesis, as we attempt to both show and respect the traditions that both thinkers assumed, and not only follow the chronology

5 See Ciner, 2017.

6 See J. Igal, *Introducción*, in Plotinus, *Enéadas: III-IV*, Madrid 1985, 14–16; H. Crouzel, *Orígenes un teólogo controvertido*, Madrid 1998, 19–21.

7 See A. Fürst, *Origen’s Legacy to Modern Thinking about Freedom and Autonomy*, in: A. C. Jacobsen (ed.), *Origeniana Undecima, Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought*, Leuven 2016, 3–27.

8 See Ciner, 2000, 29–30.

in which their lives developed. Plotinus is fundamentally a continuation of and of course also an innovator of the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, while Origen, despite all the philosophical influences that he may have received and all the criticism that he had to withstand throughout history, is an eminently Christian theologian. Having said this, we will now begin our task, presenting a selection of texts belonging to both thinkers in order to exemplify the characteristics that spiritual progress assumes for each. Our analysis will focus on the model of the wise man that both advocate; *σπουδαῖος* in Plotinian terms and *τέλειος* in the language of Origen. We will begin with Plotinus.

4. The Legacy of Plotinus

On this occasion we will focus our reflections on the Ennead Treatise 5.1,10, as the fundamental postulates of Plotinus's system are condensed magnificently in this text. We will then proceed to open the rest of Plotinus's *corpus*.

The Neoplatonic teacher begins this treatise, which Porphyry entitled *On the Three Primary Hypostases*, looking for the cause of the distance that he sometimes observed in human souls. With words that continue to have great impact despite the passing of the centuries, he states:

What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him, even though they are parts which come from his higher world and altogether belong to it? The beginning of evil for them was audacity and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves. Since they were clearly delighted with their own independence, and made great use of self-movement, running the opposite course and getting as far away as possible, they were ignorant even that they themselves came from that world; just as children who are immediately torn from their parents and brought up far away do not know who they themselves or their parents are. Since they do not anymore see their father or themselves, they despise themselves through ignorance of their birth and honour other things admiring everything rather than themselves, and astonished and delighted by and dependent on these [earthly] things, they broke themselves loose as far as they could in contempt of that from which they turned away; so that their honour for these things here and their contempt for themselves is the cost of their utter ignorance of God⁹ (ἀτιμάσασαι ἑαυτὰς ἀγνοίᾳ τοῦ γένους).⁹

This fragment clearly explains Plotinus's conception that the nature of the human soul is similar to the divinity and that precisely from this ontological lineage comes the possibility of joining the first beginning. Upon forgetting this lineage, souls momentarily lose the meaning and direction of their existence. We use the term "momentarily" because in Plotinus the theological

9 Plot. (edit. En 5.1 (10), 1–10).

category of “original sin” does not exist, and for this reason ascension towards the One consists of remembering original nature, which cannot be erased or destroyed by anyone or anything. This is precisely the path of spiritual progress.¹⁰

In this fragment, Plotinus, who was undoubtedly one of humanity’s great mystical teachers, urges souls to remember their true destiny and to not cease attempting to do so. This is why he also insists that they remember that they possess an eye capable of seeing. This eye, according to what is detailed in 3.5,50, is the ἔπος. The reunion of the soul with its true lineage happens when it makes contact with the three Hypostases: the One, the Intelligence and the Soul. These are transcendental, but at the same time immanent to the soul itself. For this reason, this journey is not carried out in time or space but rather consists of discovering the divinity that inhabits each soul. As they are fundamentally omnipresent, the three Hypostases are in all beings; however, they are in the human soul in a special way. Therefore, we may say that the presence of the One is received with “what is similar to him in us, as in us there is some of him.”¹¹ Plotinus calls this point the “center of the soul” (τὸ κέντρον),¹² a point which coincides with the Universal Center, and which will be the mystical location where the soul arrives at a state of complete happiness. These considerations of the three hypostases allow us to characterise Plotinism as “a mysticism of immanence within a metaphysics of transcendence.”¹³ This characterisation can be understood through the notion of παρουσία, as in this notion we find the key for access to this incredible system: the possibility of a presence that manifests itself to all beings, but without exhausting itself in any one of them, as all that which follows the One is the image of him and therefore capable of understanding him.¹⁴ Plotinus ends 5.1 by presenting the existence of a supraintellectual level in the human soul, which in reality never makes any contact with matter. Upon activating this level, the wise man can not only direct and control the passions and wishes of the psychophysical compound but can also carry out the specific task of spiritual progress, joining itself directly to the One.

In the words of the Neoplatonic teacher:

10 P. Ciner, *Plotino y el linaje divino* in: G. Grammatico / A. Arbea (eds.), *El ascenso. Pegaso o las almas del mundo*, Santiago de Chile 2001, 87–96.

11 En 3., 8.9,21–23 “Ἔστι γὰρ τι καὶ παρ’ ἡμῖν αὐτοῦ· ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν, ὅπου μὴ ἔστιν, οἷς ἔστι μετέχειν αὐτοῦ. We use in this paper the following translation: A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, (Loeb Classical Library. Tomes I-VII, Cambridge 1966–1989).

12 En 6. 9(9).10,16–18.

13 See H.Ch. Puech, *Position spirituelle et signification de Plotin*, in: Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé 61 (1938), 13–46, 31.

14 P. Ciner, *Plotino y Orígenes. El amor y la unión mística*, Mendoza 2000, 83–106.

How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop working on your statue" till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see self-mastery enthroned upon his holy seat.¹⁵

5. The Legacy of Origen

During the twentieth century, scholars Margarite Harl,¹⁶ Josep Rius Camps,¹⁷ and Henri Crouzel¹⁸ have emphasised the key role that the doctrine of divinisation has played in Origen's theology. In one way or another, all three have shown that the ontological similarity between the soul and the divine allows for access to the Son's mysteries themselves, considered as the *Logos-Sofia*. Respecting the contributions made by these specialists, and through an analysis of fragments from Book 20 of the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, in this section we will highlight the characteristics of the process which leads to divinisation of the human soul. We have chosen this book because it is undoubtedly one of the true gems to be penned by the Alexandrian, as in this work readers find the distinctive notes of the true children of God¹⁹ to be magnificently condensed.

On this occasion, we will only delve into Origen's exegesis of one verse of the Gospel of John in order to understand the Alexandrian's position on divinisation. The verse in question is John 8:37, the verse with which Origen begins Book 20. The corresponding exegesis extends from fragment 2 to fragment 47 of the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. John's verse can be translated as follows: "I know that you are Abraham's seed, yet you seek to kill me because you have no room for my word."²⁰

We have translated the term σπέρμα as seed and not as descendants because in this way the comparison that Origen makes with the term son τὸ τέκνον (son), makes sense. In all cases, this term is identical in meaning to the word semen, and as such Origen's constant references to the medical

15 En 1.6, 91–15.

16 M. Harl, *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice du Verbe Incarné*, Paris 1958.

17 J. Rius-Camps, *El dinamismo trinitario en la divinización de los seres racionales según Orígenes*, Rome 1970.

18 H. Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, Toulouse 1959.

19 See P. Ciner, *Devenir hijo de Abrahán: exégesis y mística en el Comentario al Evangelio de Juan de Orígenes*, in: *Patrística, Biblia y Teología. Caminos de diálogo*, Buenos Aires 2017, 73–81.

20 John 8:37.

theories of his time can be understood.²¹ Therefore, using the somatic paradigm as a base, in which male semen allows for the development of a child in the maternal womb until reaching maturity, Origen develops a beautiful doctrine of the laws of spiritual inheritance. In this doctrine, the possibility of being born a child of God is given with the activation of contemplation and the spiritual senses. For this reason, Origen teaches that though not all men have come into existence with the same seminal reasons activated, and as such not all men can be called “sons of Abraham,” all do indeed have in their ontological base, which is none other than the *voûc* of preexistence,²² seeds of justice.²³ Contemplation and its subsequent manifestation

21 See J. C. Alby, *La medicina filosófica del cristianismo antiguo*, Santa Fe 2015, chp. III.

22 See P. Ciner, *Pensar y escribir desde un paradigma de la relacionalidad: El Comentario al Evangelio de Juan de Orígenes*, in: *Adamantius* 23 (2017), 406–407: “We will focus our analysis on the controversial doctrine of preexistence which the French specialist H. Crouzel maintains is «Origen’s favorite hypothesis and at the same time the strangest of his theology». Nevertheless, we do not accept that this doctrine is simply a hypothesis for the Alexandrian. Rather, we believe it is a fundamental pillar of his doctrine, without which all the beauty and depth of his subsequent developments would crumble completely. For this reason, we have attempted to clarify the word preexistence (in Latin *praexistentia*) as we believe that this word does not do justice to Origen’s intention of explaining how the eternity of the beginning is communicated and coexists with the material dimension that is subject to time and space. It is essential to highlight that the verb used in the text of the Condemnations of the Council of Constantinople was *προϋπάρχω*, which is also the verb Origen uses (Or., Joh. 2.129) to refer to the Logos that exists from the beginning in the soul. This verb is made up of the prepositions *πρό* and *ὑπό*, which mean before and under, and of the verb *ἄρχω*, which among its multiple meanings could be translated as “to give origin to, to begin, to precede, to be the cause of,” etc. If we join the nuances of this complex verb and apply them to Origen’s work in which “to give origin to” makes reference to the eternal wisdom of God and his Son, we believe it should be understood as “the eternity of the beginning that exists before time and which underlies it.” It is also important to mention that the term preexistence has not been utilised by Rufinus in the Latin text of *Prin*, as when he refers to this doctrine which appears repeatedly in this work, he uses the expression «first creation». This implies that perhaps this term began to be both popular and ambiguous perhaps with the Council of Constantinople. We believe that this clarification is evidence of the relationality paradigm from which Origen thought and wrote, as it explains the connection between the state of intellectual creatures before the fall and their subsequent existence in the physical dimension. It is therefore essential to show the lack of precision that the term preexistence has, attempting in this way to achieve a better and more precise proposal.”

23 Or., Joh. 20.14: “It is not possible, however, that one participates in no way at all in the seed of the just” (*πλὴν οὐκ ἔστιν τις μηδαμῶς μετέχων σπέρματος δικαίων*).

in works will allow them to diligently watch over and cultivate these seeds in order to become children of God. The comparison that Origen makes between Abraham and his brothers Nahor and Haran is illuminating.²⁴ With clear anti-gnostic intention, Origen chooses three brothers to show that their “spiritual genes” were identical, but that the decisions made by each led them to three different moral ways of life. This identity of the beginning will allow for an understanding of the equal conditions of preexistence and the causes of the subsequent emergence of evil seeds. In effect, for Origen, the seeds of evil (for example, those of Cain) which appear in human souls are neither the result of a being’s original constitution nor of a decision made by God to privilege some creatures over others. If the former occurred, there would be no free will, and if the latter occurred, God would be unjust. Contrasting these two theological and anthropological situations has certainly been a large effort on the part of Origen against Gnostic teaching. The seeds of evil emerge as a consequence of carelessness in the harvesting of original seminal reason. One of the most interesting aspects of this exegesis is Origen’s clarification of the fact that Abraham was not really the son of Abraham, which, in the words of J. Rius Camps, supposes a “manipulation”²⁵ of the same seminal reasons that allow for the fulfillment, through the use of responsibility and diligence, of the lot of seeds given by God. For this reason, Origen optimistically states:

For just as Abraham became Abraham although he was not of the seed of Abraham, but of the seed of those mentioned previously, so it is possible that someone, by cultivating the better seeds which were sown in himself, become another Abraham, not all being of Abraham’s seed, but himself being sufficient to sow seed even as Abraham.²⁶

24 See Or., Joh. 20.3,13: “What we said, therefore, about the seed of Abraham must be understood as the seed of Sem, Noah and the just men who preceded them, whose distinctive properties Abraham, Nahor and Aran seem to have taken up in common germinally when they were born. Abraham, however, must be understood to have cultivated the generative principles of all the just men before him that he had in himself, and to have added to these his own distinctive holy quality so far as his own distinctive seed is concerned, in which those after him who are called “seed of Abraham” could participate. Aran, on the other hand, must be understood to have paid very slight attention to himself and the ancestral seeds in himself, whence he could produce Lot, who even for a certain time was redolent of salvation. And Nahor must be understood to have been inferior to both brothers”.

25 See Rius Camps, 1970, 199.

26 Or., Joh. 20.3, 16: ὡς γὰρ Ἀβραάμ, οὐκ ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ τυγχάνων ἀλλὰ τῶν προειρημένων, γέγονεν Ἀβραάμ, οὕτω δυνατόν τινα τὰ κρείττονα τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐγκατασπαρέντων γεωργήσαντα γενέσθαι ἄλλον Ἀβραάμ, οὐ πάντως ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν ἰκανὸν σπεῖρειν ὡς Ἀβραάμ.

It is also necessary to show that another of the hermeneutic keys important for understanding this book is Origen's use of the following verbs: χωρέω, γίγνομαι and προκόπτω. Through the use of these verbs, the Alexandrian explains the dynamic quality of the process of becoming a child of God, going against the Gnostics to show that true filiation is not given by nature (φύσις), but rather through adoption (τῆς υιοθεσίας χωρήσαι). Of course, this does not in any way invalidate his doctrine of preexistence, which states that since the eternity of the beginning²⁷ intellectual creatures do not ever lose direct contact with the divine, independent of the transitory state that they assume when making use of their free will (angel, man, or demon).

We shall see how Origen applies these three verbs in the following fragment:

These, however, to whom the Word speaks are not likely to receive the Word since he cannot proceed into them because of the surpassing superiority of his greatness, since they are still only seeds of Abraham. But if, in addition to being seed of Abraham, they had cultivated the seed of Abraham and given it over to greatness and growth, the Word of Jesus would have proceeded in the greatness and growth of the seed of Abraham. And you will add that to the present time the Word does not continue in those who have not advanced beyond being seed of Abraham nor come into the state of being his children. But these also wish to kill the Word, and to crush him, as it were because they do not contain his greatness. It is also possible to see those who do not contain the Word because their vessels are too small wishing to kill the unity of the Word's greatness, since they can contain his members after he has been destroyed and crushed. If the Word should in this way, come to be in those who will destroy him, as it were, he will say, "All my bones were scattered." If indeed, then, anyone of us is seed of Abraham, and the Word of God does not continue in him still, let him not seek to kill the Word, but by changing from being seed of Abraham to having become a child of Abraham, he will be able to contain the Word of God whom he did not contain till then.²⁸

Briefly analysing the meaning of these verbs, we can state the following:

- (a) With respect to the verb χωρέω, which is the first to appear in this fragment, we can say, just as H. Crouzel explains,²⁹ that it is one of Origen's favorites throughout his work. This term, which can be translated as "to make space, to be capable of," indicates that the increase in the ability to contain the Logos is precisely a fundamental characteristic of the perfects (οἱ τέλειοι). In this sense, the active potential of the soul to activate

27 P. Ciner, *Unidad y Polisemia de la noción ἀρχή en el Comentario al Evangelio de Juan de Orígenes*, in: *Teología y Vida*, LII 1–2 (2011), 93–104.

28 Or., Joh. 20.6,40, 45.

29 χωρεῖ. For the uses of this verb, see H. Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"*, Paris 1960, 393–395.

the seminal reason, provided by the Logos as a type of maternal womb, represents the value given to the feminine aspect, both in his theology and in his mysticism.

- (b) With respect to the verb *προκόπτω* and its noun form *προκοπή*, Origen has pointed out in this fragment, and throughout the entire *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, that the path of spiritual progress, which is the only path to divinisation, requires both humility and consistency on the part of the human being, as well as the grace of God and his Son, in order to be realised.³⁰
- (c) Through the use of the verb *γίγνομαι*, which can be translated as “to become”, Origen explains that to be a child of God it is necessary to perfect the seminal reason given by God in preexistence in order to become completely similar to the Son. We can almost state that these seminal reasons coincide with the *ἐπίνοιαι* of the Son, as is stated in Book II, that the Son of God could be called the son of wisdom and justice.³¹

We conclude this section by stating that the birth of the condition of the Son of God represents the culmination of spiritual progress and implies, as Lorenzo Perrone has shown in his article on free will,³² the complexity of Origen’s synergic model, “where divine initiative does not suppress the responsibility of man, but rather requires it.”³³

30 On some occasions, sufficient importance has not been given to the doctrine of grace and this has caused unjust accusations. The most significant of these accusations was that of Jerome, which lasted for centuries, and by way of which he accused the Alexandrian of inspiring the Pelagian doctrine in these terms: *doctrina tua origenis ramusculus est*. This accusation was based on the false idea that the Alexandrian considered that salvation could be achieved exclusively by one’s own effort. Nothing could be further from Origen’s theology. In this sense, we believe it is essential to show that in his system the doctrine of free will and the doctrine of grace are absolutely inseparable.

31 Or., *Joh* 2.1,5–6: “It is not strange for the saint thus to be a son of Wells, for a son frequently receives his name from virtuous deeds. One may be called a son “of light” because “his works” shine “before men”; another a son “of peace” because he has the “peace of God which surpasses all understanding,” and further, one may be called a “child of wisdom” because of the benefit that comes from wisdom, for Scripture says, “Wisdom is justified by her children.” So, therefore, he who searches all things by the divine Spirit, even the depths of God, in order to speak plainly about him “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!”- can be a “son of wells” to whom the Word of the Lord comes.”

32 See L. Perrone, *Libre Albedrío*, in *Diccionario de Orígenes*, en A. Castagno, Burgos 2003, 499–508.

33 Perrone, 2003, 508.

6. Neuroscience and Mystical Experience³⁴

Continuing with the question referring to the existence of a strictly “mystical” dimension, it is necessary to analyse an issue that seems to have divided specialists in the fields of Neuroscience and Phenomenology of Religion. Here we refer to the existence or not of an entity that transcends the psychophysical compound, and which in the West has been called the soul. The starting point for this debate is precisely the search for an explanation of the process that leads human beings to reach that experience for which, in the words of Plotinus, “it is necessary to cast aside kingdoms and control of the entire earth, sea and sky,”³⁵ etc.

We will start by saying that the “majority” of neurobiologists working before the 1980s seemed to have had a unanimous opinion on the complex topic of the relationship between the notions of soul-mind-brain-body, concepts loaded with metaphysical history. Generally speaking, almost all affirmed that Platonic or Cartesian dualism had only been a product of immense ignorance of the functioning of the brain, and in this sense it was necessary to set these ideas aside in favor of more certain explanations. Francis Crick, 1962 Nobel Prize winner for his discovery of the molecular structure of DNA together with James Watson, was one of the first to denounce dualism as an “error of the philosophical and spiritual tradition of humanity”:

The explanation of consciousness is one of the great unresolved issues of modern science. In fact, one of the problems that burdens current neurobiology is the relationship between the mind and the brain. In the past, the mind (or soul) was considered separate from the brain, though it interacted with it in some way. Currently, the majority of neurologists believe that all the aspects of the mind, including its most disconcerting attribute, consciousness or knowledge of itself, can probably be explained as the behavior of large sets of neurons that interact.³⁶

Nevertheless, this paradigm has begun to change substantially in the last two decades. In effect, there are some prestigious specialists who have clearly warned that the “paradigm of the soul” is not incompatible with the affirmation of the location of brain structures that make possible the mystical experience. Among them is Canadian scientist Mario Beauregard, author of *The Spiritual Brain*,³⁷ who together with Denyse

34 See P. Ciner, *Alma versus cerebro: un debate acerca del origen de la experiencia mística*, in: *El Hilo de Ariadna* 6, (2009), 46–52.

35 En 1.6.6, 35.

36 See R. Carter, *El Nuevo Mapa del Cerebro Humano*, Barcelona 2002, 204.

37 M. Beauregard, *The Spiritual Brain. A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul*, New York 2008.

O'Leary has opened an interesting dialogue between neuroscience and the thousand year old mystical traditions, setting forth a paradigm which has been called "post-materialist science."³⁸ In this book, and opposing other neurological suppositions, Mario Beauregard explains and demonstrates, through the use of MRI studies, that neither consciousness nor mystical experience are sub-products of the brain, though of course they are experienced through the use of the brain. That is to say that there exists a level or dimension independent of the brain from which it is possible to understand this experience. In this sense, Beauregard's work continues the tradition of the soul in Western terms, or the tradition of the simple witness in Eastern terms. Allan Wallace's book, *Contemplative Science. Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*, has also shown that contemplation has just as much scientific rigor as any other method of positivist science. The works of Plotinus and Origen are cited in both texts, as well works by mystics who continued with the traditions opened by these teachers.

7. Conclusions

We are completely aware of the fact that our ideas regarding the possibility of a mystical anthropology could be harshly criticised by approaches coming from various current psychological and philosophical positions, as they consider it impossible to separate the integrality of the dimensions which constitute the human being. Nevertheless, our objective has been to show that human freedom requires an independent dimension capable of objectifying all that which happens to a person, both internally and externally, in such a way as to allow for contemplation of the situation, and from this contemplation to effect transformations and changes. Only in this way will a human being have true ownership of himself. For this reason, we believe that it is essential and necessary to update the mystical tradition of spiritual progress set forth by Plotinus and Origen for the third millennium. The fact that various neuroscientists have taken up these thinkers' ideas once again shows promise for a fruitful dialogue between fields that have at times been completely separated. In addition, it allows for understanding that a human being is a multiple unit, where the different levels of its entity can and should coexist harmoniously and

38 M. Beauregard / G.E. Schwartz / L. Miller / L. Dossey / A. Moreira-Almeida / M. Schlitz / R. Sheldrake / C. Tart, *Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science*, in: *Explore* 10 (2014), 272–274.

in balance. This great truth of Mystical Anthropology seeks to recognise and discover this secret space where the most marvelous experiences of human life take place, and from where one can contemplate the transitory and contingent nature of life, knowing that there exists a reality which transcends us.

Ryan Haecker

The First Principles of Origen's Logic: An Introduction to Origen's Theology of Logic

Abstract: Origen has been acknowledged as a great theologian, but he has not yet been recognised as a logician. He hardly ever appears today in histories of logic. Ancient logic has typically been narrated to begin with Aristotle and end with the early Stoa. Origen's logic has come to be relegated to little more than a footnote to Stoic logic. Robert Somos has recently argued that Origen's logic cannot be simply reduced to Stoic logic. Yet he has declined to develop its implications into a genuinely theological interpretation of Origen's logic. Origen has, however, clearly indicated a theological interest in logic, when, in the prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, he describes how logic may be "interwoven" in and through all of the sciences, even as it is presupposed in language and rhetoric, and, most of all, as it is completed in what he calls the mystical or "epoptic" science of theology. This "epoptic" science appears to supersede logic as the science of the intelligible attributes or *epinoia* of the *Logos*, communicated by Christ, through the Trinity. Origen's logic is, on this account, not, as it has so often been misread, simply a machinic calculation of Stoic or Peripatetic syllogisms, but, more mysteriously, a way of speaking in and with the *Logos*, which, beginning with the *Sophia*, can be communicated by Christ, in and through the divine hypostases of God as Trinity.

Keywords: Logic, Trinity, Sophia, Logos, Dialectic, Syllogism, Platonic logic, Aristotelian logic, Stoic logic, Theology of logic

1. Introduction: Origen's Theology of Logic

Origen has been acknowledged as a great theologian, but he has not yet been recognised as a logician. He hardly ever appears in histories of logic. Ancient logic has, instead, typically been narrated to begin with the first formalisation of logic by Aristotle and end with the early Stoa. Nothing of any importance is thereafter thought to have been added again before the second formalisation of logic among the medieval scholastics. No notable innovations are observed to have been introduced by the Middle Platonists or the Church Fathers. And Christian theology has come to be written out of the history of logic. Historians of logic have, accordingly, tended to exclude the theological from the logical. Origen has come to be almost entirely forgotten from the history of ancient logic. Neither he nor any of his illustrious contemporaries now feature in our standard historical narrative. And when he is mentioned at all, he usually appears as little more than a marginal

source for only a few lost Stoic syllogisms. Origen's contributions to the history of logic have thus regrettably come to be considered among Origen scholars as little more than a marginal footnote to ancient Stoic logic in anticipation of modern mathematical logic.

This near complete neglect of Origen's contributions to logic is all the more regrettable in that Origen had, perhaps uniquely among the Church Fathers, not only deployed the tools of Stoic syllogisms, but had on at least one occasion offered a tantalising description of the place of logic within theology. He describes, in the prologue to the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, how logic may be "interwoven" in and through all of the sciences, even as it is presupposed in language and rhetoric, and, most of all, as it can be completed in what he calls the "epoptic" or mystical science of theology.¹ Plato had previously spoken of the "epoptic" as an initiation into the philosophical mysteries, of the wisdom of love, and of the divine ideas.² Plutarch had thereafter provided the first testimony for this tripartite hierarchical classification of philosophy into Ethics, Physics, and Eoptics.³ And Clement of Alexandria, in the *Stromata*, had previously divided philosophy into four parts: (1) History; (2) Ethics; (3) Physics; and (4) Eoptics.⁴ The word "epoptic" designates, for Origen, that which is beyond the bounds of the optical, the invisible and incorporeal *epinoiai*, like the love that can be shared between the Church and Christ in God as Trinity.⁵ Origen's description of the interweaving of logic in and through the mystical or "epoptic" science of theology thus sets logic in a direct relationship to theology, a relationship which we can call a "theology of logic".

The "theology of logic" is, I propose, a new way to study the subject of logic as it should now and always be studied for the sacred science of theology. It does not hold the logical apart from the theological, but rather and more radically begins and ends before any separation of logic and theology. It can be doubly distinguished, on the one hand, from theoretical or philosophical logic, which asks what are the rules of logic, and from practical

- 1 The translation is from R. P. Lawson, *Origen. The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers 26, Westminster Maryland 1957, 39–46. The manuscript translation of "enoptics" has recently been revised as "epoptics", meaning beyond the optical, and, implicitly, the intelligible aspects or *epinoiai* of the first principles. Cf. R. Somos, *Logic and Argumentation in Origen*, Münster 2015, 20–27.
- 2 Plat., smp. 210a; Plat., Phdr. 250c; Plat. L. 7, 333e.
- 3 Plut., De Iside 382d. Cited in P. Hadot, *Die Einteilung der Philosophie in Altertum*, in: ZPhF 36/ 3 (1982), 439–440.
- 4 Clem., Strom., 1.28. Cited in Hadot, 1982, 439–440.
- 5 Lawson 1957, 21–24. 30–39. 47–52.

or applied logic, which asks how these rules of logic can be programmed as an instrument with which to compute any and all conclusions. It asks, not merely “what is logic?”, but, more importantly, “why is there logic at all?” The theology of logic thus starts with no standing presumption as to the universal and invariant necessity of logic, but rather asks so as to answer what we can consider to be the more originary, absolute, and genuinely theological question of the contingent grounds for our very belief in the truth of logic. I wish, with this essay, to explore the first principles of Origen's logic as an early contribution to a Christian theological interpretation of logic, that is, to a theology of logic.

2. The Controversy Concerning Origen's Logic

Origen has, in the Preface to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, illustrated how the science of logic can be interwoven in and through all three of the philosophical sciences of Ethics, Physics, and Eoptics.⁶ This “interweaving” of logic in and through theology can, as I have argued, be studied as the *locus classicus* for any theological interpretation of Origen's logic, or of Origen's “theology of logic”.⁷ Yet its precise meaning has come to be contested. Origen initially appears simply to have substituted the old Stoic science of “Logic” for the new Platonic science of “Eoptics”. Since the Stoic science of “Logic” had included the study of language, such a substitution has suggested that Origen had intended to reduce the study of logic to language.⁸

Marguerite Harl has, for this reason, read Origen to restrict the scope of logic to the first science of ethics, and to reduce the science of logic to little more than a “science of language”.⁹ In contrast, Róbert Somos has observed that such a reduction of logic to language conflicts with Origen's own statement, preserved in the Greek text of the *Commentary on Genesis* and extant in the *Philocalia* (14.2), that it is not possible to discuss ethical, physical and theological problems “without precise knowledge of how to explain

6 Lawson, 1957, 40–44.

7 R. Haecker, *Restoring Reason: Theology of Logic in Origen of Alexandria*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Cambridge 2021.

8 P.W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture. The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford 2012, 79

9 M. Harl, *Les trois livres de Salomon et les trois parties de la philosophie dans les Prologues des Commentaires sur le Cantique des Cantiques d'Origène aux Chaînes exégétiques grecques*, in J. Dummer (ed.), *Texte und Text-Kritik* 133, Berlin 1987, 249–269. 252.

their meaning and without elucidating them according to the logical part.”¹⁰ Since not only ethical and physical, but even theological problems can only be answered by logic, and a science of language that lacks the analytical validation of the syllogism, cannot legitimately distinguish the valid, invalid, or sophistical arguments of which he speaks, Origen could not be understood to have reduced the study of logic to language.¹¹

Origen has, on the contrary, not at all dispensed with logic, but rather described the study of logic (*logice / logike*), “connected and intertwined throughout with the three studies” of ethics, physics, and epoptics, as it concerns “the meanings and proper significances” of words “and their opposites”, “the classes and kinds of words and expressions”, and “the form of every saying.”¹² Logic is, for Origen, this science of speaking reasonably of any science. Although it is admittedly never located in any separate or secular science, it can continue to operate in and with the sciences of Ethics and Physics until it can be completed in and by this Epoptic or mystical science of theology. Logic is “interwoven” in and through all of the sciences, not, as it ostensibly appears, because it is not scientific, but, to the contrary, because it is virtually presupposed to operate in the immanent exercise of all of the philosophical sciences, as ultimately in the science of theology.

Origen appears, at this point, to signal the irreducibility of logic to any study of language. Yet his logic has continued to be treated as little more than a scholastic exercise in Stoic logic. For he has, in two clear cases from *Contra Celsum*, deployed otherwise unknown examples of Stoic syllogisms. Origen presents the “Idle Argument” for the purpose of answering Celsus’ argument that Christ can, by his foreknowledge, be culpable for his betrayal, by arguing, to the contrary, that if foreknowledge of an event is true, then the cause of this event must be necessarily true, and not at all dependent upon foreknowledge.¹³ Similarly, Origen presents the “Argument of Two Conditionals” for the purpose of answering Celsus’ argument that, if even the prophets prophesied that God “would serve as a slave and be sick and die”, then, because, for Celsus, God cannot be supposed to suffer and die, “it would be impossible to believe in the predictions that he should suffer and do these things.”¹⁴

Origen has thus responded to Celsus on his own terms with the standard repertoire of Stoic logic. However he has not deployed these arguments as primary exemplars of logic, much less of the dialectic of the *Logos*,

10 Somos, 2015, 22–23.

11 Lawson, 1957, 42.

12 Lawson, 1957, 40.

13 Translation in H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, Cambridge 1980, 84.

14 Translation by Chadwick, 1980, 406.

but rather, more selectively and strategically, as a “second-best” apologetic device with which to dialectically neutralize criticisms of Christianity. He has introduced the *Contra Celsum* as a work of persuasion with which to respond to the accusations against Christianity, in imitation of the accusations against Christ, who, once he had been accused, remained silent, “but despised and nobly ignored his accusers.”¹⁵ In imitation of Christ, apologetics is only a second-best counter-argument, as such arguments can neither create nor destroy the “love of Christ and the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.”¹⁶ Since, furthermore, these syllogisms can destroy the key premises of Celsus' criticisms, but cannot create the conditions for the “love of Christ”, the Idle Argument and the Argument from Two Conditionals cannot, as has often been mistakenly believed, be considered as primary exemplars of Origen's logic, but, rather, and more restrictively, can only be regarded as logical devices of a secondary, prophylactic, and apologetic dialectic.

Origen has, in his exercise of the “Idle Argument” and the “Argument from Two Conditionals”, preserved for posterity two arguments that show a signature of Stoic logic. Scholars have since scoured the Origenian corpus for further evidence of an abiding influence of Stoic logic. Henry Chadwick first called attention to this Stoic influence.¹⁷ John Rist described how “Origen is a considerable supplier of material, some of it of great interest to the historian of Stoic logic”; how he “seems to know [Chrysippus'] work at first hand”; and how he confidently uses such arguments without any comment.¹⁸ Louis Roberts further observed how “Origen's works [...] have been greatly influenced by Stoic logic” and “a good deal more Stoic logic may lurk hitherto undetected in Origen.”¹⁹ And Ronald Heine has summarised this scholarly consensus when he writes that “nearly everyone who has worked on Stoicism in Origen's thought, has focused almost exclusively on the *Contra Celsum*,” which, he concludes, shows that “there is a structure beneath the discursiveness, and the structure comes from Stoic logic.”²⁰ Chadwick, Rist, Roberts, and Heine have thus concluded the scholarly *communio opinio*

15 Translation by Chadwick, 1980, 3.

16 Translation by Chadwick, 1980, 4.

17 H. Chadwick, *Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa*, in: JTS 48/189/190 (1947), 34–49.

18 J.M. Rist, Importance of Stoic Logic in the *Contra Celsum*, in: H.J. Blumenthal / R.A. Markus (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong*, London 1981, 64–78.

19 L. Roberts, *Origen and Stoic Logic*, in: Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 101 (1970), 433–444.

20 R.E. Heine, *Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John*, in: JTS 44/1 (1993), 90–117.

that the underlying structure of Origen's logic is little more than an adjunct to Stoic logic in anticipation of modern mathematical logic.

However, Róbert Somos has, in the only full-length monograph on Origen's logic, *Logic and Argumentation in Origen*, resolutely rejected this *communio opinio*. He argues, against the reduction of Origen's logic to Stoic logic, that Origen had already adapted the arsenal of early imperial argument for a new Christian theological agenda. He observes that, due to the proliferation of handbook manuals of Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonic logic, the Church Fathers had generally used Stoic technical terms, without, for this reason, presupposing any direct Stoic influence. The terms of Origen's logic may thus admittedly appear Stoic even as these terms had been adapted for new theological purposes. And since, already in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, there appears something of a syncretism of logical elements, Somos concludes that it is not possible to demonstrate that Origen's use of logic was directly influenced by or at all definitively indebted to any particular philosophical school.²¹ The evidence for such a direct Stoic influence upon Origen thus seems to run dry, for the extant sources of ancient logic appear to scarce, and the available evidence, too conflicting, to come to any certain conclusions about a clear chain of influences flowing from the Stoa to Alexandria. The technical vocabulary of Origen's logic may thus admittedly often appear Stoic, even as he had adapted Stoic terms for new Christian theological purposes.²²

Somos recommends that we should read Origen's logic as "a mixed Stoic-Aristotelian logic intermediated by Middle Platonism than direct Stoic sources."²³ We can trace the sources of Origen's logic, through the branches of these Stoic formulae, to its roots in Platonic ontology. And it is, I suggest, this Platonic ontology, rather than Stoic logic, that hints at the overriding theological purpose of Origen's logic. Philo had allegorically interpreted the Stoic tripartition of Logic-Physics-Ethics, and interpreted logic as a prophylactic "hedge" with which to defend the physical community and ethical virtues.²⁴ And Clement had similarly presented logic, not only as a prophylactic, but moreover as a propaedeutic for faithful Christian "gnosis". Somos has attributed to Clement, before Origen, an anti-Stoic view of logic as an "anagogical process" with a "theological function", which, he says, is "a central element of Christian theological consideration" centred on the first principles of Christian theology.²⁵ Logic is for Origen, not merely, as it has

21 Somos, 2017, 17. 206.

22 Somos, 2017, 17.

23 Somos, 2017, 202.

24 Somos, 2017, 18. Cf. Gen. 9:20.

25 Somos, 2017, 19.

been for Philo, a prophylactic instrument for defending virtue from sophistical and sceptical dissolution, but, rather, and more radically than Clement, “pervades the entirety of knowledge” with “theological relevance.”²⁶

3. Conclusion: The First Principles of Origen's Logic

Origen should, I suggest, be read, not only as a theologian, but also as a logician. For he has, more radically than Clement and Philo, linked logic to the first principles of theology. The first principles are, in Origen's *On First Principles*, those of the three *archai* that are indexed by the titular headings of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. He summarises these three *archai* when he writes: “Therefore we call this blessed and *archiken* (sovereign, sustaining all things) <power> the Trinity.”²⁷ The titular “first principles” of *On First Principles* are thus defined and distinguished as the “*archiken trinitatem*” of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God as Trinity is the first principle, not only of Origen's theology, but also of Origen's logic. For Christ the Son contains all of the intelligible attributes (*epinoiai*), of the Wisdom (*Sophia*) and the Word (*Logos*), which can be communicated by Christ to the created cosmos of signs, language, and logic. Logic is thus for Origen a determinate speech (*logoi*) of the *Logos*, which has, as its first beginning, the *Sophia* of Christ in God as Trinity.

The *Sophia* and the *Logos* of Christ are the first principles of Origen's logic.

Sophia is the first of the divine attributes or *epinoia*. It is announced to Solomon before it had been articulated by Socrates.²⁸ It is called the “flawless mirror of the working of God” as the “image of his goodness” in the reflection of the radiance in creatures from and for God. It is prior to any and all other *epinoiai*. Yet it can, by its beginning (*arche*), also contain the reasons (*logoi*) and the species (*logoi spermatikoi*) of all created spirits, substances, and signs.²⁹ All of the forms of logic can then be “prefigured in Wisdom herself”, where Wisdom, Solomon says, “was created the beginning of the ways of God”, which “contain[s] within herself the beginning and the reasons and the species of the entire creation.”³⁰ Hence, it is, Origen writes, “begotten beyond the limits of any beginning that we can speak of or understand”, whether of the *Logos*, of language, or of logic.³¹ *Sophia* is thus the

26 Somos, 2017, 24.

27 The translation is from J. Behr, *Origen. On First Principles*, I, Oxford 2017; cf. Or. Joh. 1.4.3., 84–5, fn.78; I.L.E. Ramelli, *Origen and the Platonic Tradition*, in: *Religions* 8/21 (2017), 5.

28 Or. prin. 1.2.2, Behr, 2017, 43.

29 Or. prin. 1.2.2, Behr, 2017, 43.

30 Or. prin. 1.2.2, Behr, 2017, 43.

31 Origen, *Origen. On First Principles*, 2017, 1.2.2, 43.

first divine attribute that virtually contains all of the divine attributes, the *Logos*, and its logic.

The Word (*Logos*) is the totality of words (*logoi*, which can be formulated into language, and formalised into logic (*logike*).³² Logic is, accordingly, not simply a static inventory of Academic, Peripatetic, or even Stoic argument forms, but, in Origen, the dynamic formalisation of the *logoi* of natural language into the formulae of *logike*, which forever reflects the *Logos* of Christ into the logic of the *Logos*. This logic of the *Logos* may, moreover, be “outlined and prefigured” in *Sophia*, as it envelops any alternative logic within the dialectical circuit of *Sophia*.³³ And the eternal completion of the dialectic of the *epinoiai*, implies, that logic is, not primarily a simulation of argument in the formal syllogistic, but rather has been eternally begotten in the dialectical circuit of the divine attributes or *epinoiai* of Christ in God as Trinity.

Origen’s logic is, as this essay has argued, not, as it has so often been misread, a machinic computation of Stoic or Peripatetic syllogisms, but, more mysteriously, a determinate speech of the *Logos*, which, with *Sophia*, can be communicated by Christ, through the divine hypostases of God as Trinity. *Sophia* can, accordingly, be said to contain “within herself the beginning and the reasons and the species of the entire creation,” of the *Logos*, and of logic, as she can “prefigure” the divine attributes, of the *Logos*, and of this logic of the *Logos*.³⁴ The logic of the *Logos* is “outlined and prefigured” in *Sophia*, not only posterior to, but prior to any articulation of formal logic. And any articulation of the formal logic of the Aristotelian and Stoic syllogistic is, thereafter, no more than the formal simulation of the *Logos* into so many forms of valid arguments. Since, finally, the *Logos*, is itself the totality of the *logoi*, and, as such, the totality of all forms that can be formulated in language, and formalised into logic, Origen’s logic must, in the last analysis, be absolutely irreducible to any articulation of secular, formal, and mathematical logic. The *Logos* is, for Origen, an operation that is begotten in eternity, even as it is articulated in time, and, indeed, in any use of logic.

32 I.L.E. Ramelli, *The Logos/Nous One-Many between ‘Pagan’ and Christian Platonism. Bardaisan, Clement, Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa*, in: N. Baker Brian / J. Lössl / M. Vinzent (eds.), *Studia Patristica CII: Including Papers Presented at the Seventh British Patristics Conference, Cardiff, 5–7 September 2018*, Leuven 2021, 11–44.

33 Or., prin. 1.2.2; Behr, 2017, 43.

34 Or., prin. 1.2.2; Behr, 2017, 43.

Vito Limone

The Use of Eros in Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Song of Songs*

Abstract The chief aim of this paper is to explore the use of the term *eros* in Gregory's homilies on the *Song of Songs*. After an overview of the state of the art and the purpose of the research, the paper will focus on the use of *eros* in two main sources of Gregory, respectively in the Greek fragments of Origen's commentary on the *Song*, and in Plotinus' *Ennead* III 5. The paper will then investigate the use of *eros* in Gregory's homilies, in particular in three key texts in which *eros* occurs.

Keywords: Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Song of Songs, Eros, Agape

1. State of the Art and Aim of the Research

The study by Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, published in 1930, formulates a key distinction between the meanings of two terms occurring both in the Greco-Roman and in the Christian lexica.¹ According to A. Nygren, the word "agape" (ἀγάπη) is not very frequently applied in classical Greek,² but it is popular in the early post-apostolic era,³ and it denotes, on the one hand,

1 I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Vera Obbágy for her revision of the English, and to Prof. Giulio Maspero for having carefully read a draft of this paper.

The study of A. Nygren was originally in Swedish; in the course of this research we shall follow the Italian translation of it: A. Nygren, *Eros e agape. La nozione cristiana dell'amore e le sue trasformazioni*, It. trans. N. Gay, Collana di Studi Religiosi, Bologna 1990 (see, in particular, 431–443). For an overview of the occurrences of the term "eros" in the literary corpus of Gregory of Nyssa see also: G. Horn, *L'amour divin. Note sur le mot «eros» dans S. Grégoire de Nysse*, in: RAM 6/24 (1925), 378–389.

2 As already demonstrated by C. Spicq, in the classical Greek agape means "hospitality" and, especially in the philosophical terminology of Aristotle, "disinterested love"; on this topic see: C. Spicq, *Agape: Prolégomènes à une étude de théologie néo-testamentaire*, Studia Hellenistica 10, Louvain 1955, 38–40; see also: Aristot., eth. nicom. 1167B.31.

3 See: Nygren, 1990, 91–134. Concerning the circulation of this term in the Christian everyday language see: C. Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament. I: Analyse des textes*, Études bibliques, Paris 1958, 179; with respect to the reception of this term in the theological vocabulary of the Christians, with a focus on Clement of Alexandria, see: F. Draczkowski, *Kościół-Agape według Klemensa Aleksandryjskiego*, Lublin 1983, 73–74.

the spiritual and incorporeal love and, on the other hand, the love of God towards humankind or the divine Son, or the love of each man towards God or other men. On the contrary, the word “eros” (ἔρως) signifies, in general, the desire for appropriation and, in particular in the Platonic vocabulary, the ascent of man to the divine, as it results from the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.⁴ On the basis of this theory, A. Nygren argues that, in the attempt to harmonise the Greek terminology with the content of Revelation, the Christians end up overlapping the aforementioned meanings of eros and agape; in the case of Gregory of Nyssa, A. Nygren is persuaded that he is responsible not only for the superimposition of eros and agape, but also for the identification of agape with eros, so that in Gregory’s corpus agape is utilised with the meaning of eros.⁵

Over the past few years the above-mentioned thesis of A. Nygren has received criticisms. In the view of some scholars, A. Nygren’s approach to Gregory is affected by two biases: firstly, he claims that Gregory does not distinguish the meaning of eros from that of agape, in contrast with what is documented in his writings;⁶ secondly, he implies that Gregory’s lexical choices are strongly influenced by his intention to combine Platonism and the holy Scripture. In particular, J. Daniélou thinks that the overlap of the meanings of agape and eros in Gregory originates from the fact that Gregory understands eros as a specification of agape; in light of this argument, J. Daniélou underscores that the use of eros and agape in Gregory’s corpus is not simply a replacement of the Platonic eros with the Pauline agape, but it is an original reformulation of both of them.⁷ Both F. Dünzl and

4 As it was already proved by A. Nygren in: Nygren, 1990, 150–155.

5 See *supra*, fn. 1. Given that Gregory identifies agape with eros, one of the paradoxical consequences is that, since in 1 John 4:8 God is defined as agape, Gregory needs to explain why an egoistic form of love is ascribed to God himself. This is evidenced by A. Nygren in: Nygren, 1990, 442–443; on this: Greg. Nys., de an. et res. (PG 46, 96C).

6 Gregory is aware of the meaning of agape as love of God for humankind, see: Greg. Nys., orat. cat. (GNO 3/4, 17.2–3); hom. in Cant. 4 (GNO 6, 123.5–11); XV (GNO 6, 461.14), or as love of man for the divine, see: Greg. Nys., c. Eun. I (GNO 1, 127.7); hom. in Eccl. VIII (GNO V, 425.10); inst. (GNO 8/1, 61.7). At the same time, he knows that the term eros is also provided with a meaning which refers to passions and desires, as it is evidenced by the adjectives οὐράνιος and καθαρός, see: Greg. Nys., virg. (GNO 8/1, 328.11), μακάριος ε ἀπαθής, as it results from: Greg. Nys., inst. (GNO 8/1, 40.10), and θεϊός, see: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. VI (GNO VI, 192.1.4); see also: Greg. Nys., hom. in Eccl. VI (GNO 5, 387.18).

7 J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nyse*, Théologie 2, Paris 1944, 199–208, in particular 205. The key text on which the interpretation of J. Daniélou is based is the following: Greg.

W. Völker are in line with the argument of J. Daniélou: the former evidences that the meanings of agape and eros in the corpus of Gregory are not to be interpreted on the basis of their meanings in the ancient lexicon;⁸ the latter reinforces the reading of J. Daniélou, and assumes that Gregory attributes a totally new meaning to eros.⁹ Finally, C. Moreschini underestimates the distinction that A. Nygren makes between eros and agape, considering it as too strict, and emphasises the semantic fluidity of the mystical terminology of Gregory, which stands up against the aforesaid scheme of A. Nygren.¹⁰

Given the distance of Gregory's language from the traditional vocabulary, the main objective of the present research is to focus on the use of eros only in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (henceforth, hom. in Cant.).¹¹ Without any claim to reassessing the genesis and fortunes of eros in the early imperial period, especially in the background of Gregory, since this topic has already been explored in detail by A. Nygren himself and other scholars,

Nys., hom. in Cant. 13 (GNO 6, 383.7–12) – we shall mention this text again in the course of the present article (see *infra*, fn. 48). The view of J. Daniélou has been recently restated by G. Maspero in: G. Maspero, *Amore* (ἀγάπη, ἔρωσ), in: G. Maspero / L.F. Mateo-Seco (eds.), *Gregorio di Nissa: Dizionario*, Rome 2007, 60–66.

- 8 F. Dünzl, *Braut und Bräutigam. Die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese 32, Tübingen 1993, 369–379, in particular 372.
- 9 W. Völker, *Gregorio di Nissa filosofo e mistico*, It. trans. C.O. Tommasi, Milan 1993, 223–224.
- 10 C. Moreschini, *L'amore nei Padri Cappadoci*, in: *Dizionario di spiritualità biblico-patristica. I grandi temi della S. Scrittura per la «lectio divina»*. III: *Amore-Carità-Misericordia*, Rome 1993, 287–290. See also what C. Moreschini says in: C. Moreschini, *I padri cappadoci. Storia, letteratura, teologia*, Rome 2008, 337–339; id., *Le "Omèlie sul Canticum dei Cantici" di Gregorio di Nissa*, in: V. Limone / C. Moreschini (eds.), *Origene, Gregorio di Nissa. Sul Canticum dei Cantici*, Milan 2016, 129–131.
- 11 They are dated after the year 394, in particular the *Life of Moses*; on this see: Dünzl, 1993, 32; see also: id., *Gregor von Nyssa's Homilien zum Canticum auf dem Hintergrund seiner Vita Moysis*, in: VChr 44/4 (1990), 371–381. Two comprehensive studies on Gregory's hom. in Cant. are: A. Meis, *Origenes y Gregorio de Nisa, «In Canticum»*, in: G. Dorival / A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta: Origen and the Bible / Origène et la Bible*, BEThL 118, Leuven 1995, 599–616; ead., *Das Paradox des Menschen im "Canticum-Kommentar" Gregors von Nyssa und bei Origenes*, in: W.A. Bienert / U. Kühneweg (eds.), *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, BEThL 137, Leuven 1999, 469–496.

our study will consist of three main sections.¹² The first section (2.) will be devoted entirely to the main patristic source of Gregory's exegesis of the Cant., that is, Origen of Alexandria, who is explicitly quoted and consulted by Gregory in the course of the hom. in Cant.¹³ In this section a particular attention will be dedicated to the Greek fragments of Origen's commentary on the Cant. (henceforth, com. in Cant.), passed down to us in the partial Latin translation of Rufinus. The second section (3.) will mention the use of eros in the philosophical backdrop of Gregory, in particular in Plotinus: this section will take into account the *Ennead* 3.5, which is entirely about eros (*Περὶ ἔρωτος*). In conclusion, on the basis of the data collected in Sections 2 and 3, we shall investigate the main passages of the hom. in Cant. in which eros occurs, and we shall demonstrate that Gregory exposes a view of eros already documented in his Origenian and Neoplatonic sources.

2. The Use of Eros in the Greek Fragments of Origen's com. in Cant.

As mentioned above, Origen's com. in Cant., originally in ten books, has been passed down to us in the partial Latin translation by Rufinus, dated to 410–411.¹⁴ Nevertheless, an epitome, transmitted under the name of Procopius of Gaza (V century AD), contains several Greek fragments of Origen's comment on the Cant. (henceforth, fr. in Cant.). These fragments were edited, for the first time, by C. de la Rue in 1740,¹⁵ then published by F. Oberthür in 1785 and by K.H.E. Lommatzsch in 1842–1843,¹⁶ re-edited by A. Mai in 1837,¹⁷ and finally collected by M.A. Barbàra in a recent

12 Concerning the use of eros in the early imperial period see: A. von Harnack, *Der »Eros« in der alten christlichen Literatur*, in: SPAW 1 (1918), 81–94. For A. Nygren see *supra*, fn. 1.

13 The explicit reference to Origen in Gregory's comment on the Cant. is: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 1 (GNO 6, 13.3). Concerning the debts of Gregory's exegesis of the Cant. to Origen's reading of the Cant. see: F. Dünzl, *Die Canticum-Exegese des Gregor von Nyssa und des Origenes im Vergleich*, in: JbAC 36 (1993), 94–109.

14 On the dating of Origen's com. in Cant. see: G. Fedalto, *Rufino di Concordia (345c.–410/411): tra Oriente e Occidente*, Rome 1990, 149; see also: C.P. Hammond, *The Lat Ten Years of Rufinus' Life and Date of his Move South from Aquileia*, in: JThS n.s. 28.2 (1977), 372–429 (393–394, 429).

15 C. de la Rue (ed.), *Origenis opera omnia. III*, Paris 1740, 11–104 = PG 13, 36–216.

16 On this see: H. Crouzel, *Bibliographie critique d'Origène*, Instrumenta Patristica 8, Steenbrugis 1971, 156–167, 173.

17 A. Mai (ed.), *Procopi Gazaei veterum Patrum in Canticum Canticorum*, in: id. (ed.), *Classicorum Auctorum e Vaticanis codicibus editorum. X*, Rome 1837, 257–430 =

edition which also includes other fragments from the *Philocalia* and further exegetical catenae.¹⁸ Though the scholars still disagree about the significance of these fragments,¹⁹ they give us access to some original Greek passages of Origen which are left out in the Latin translation by Rufinus, for instance the fr. in Cant. 1 (app.), and they allow us to compare the original Greek text that they pass down to us with the Latin version by Rufinus. This comparison between the original Greek text of the fr. in Cant., on the one hand, and the com. in Cant. in Rufinus' Latin translation, on the other hand, has led us to prove that Rufinus translates the terms ἔρωϝ and ἀγάπη, which recur in the fr. in Cant., respectively with *amor*, or *cupido*, and *caritas*, or *dilectio*, and that sometimes he uses the Latin word *amor* to translate both ἔρωϝ and ἀγάπη.²⁰ The fact that the word *amor* is used by Rufinus to translate both eros and agape discourages us from assuming that the Latin version of the com. in Cant. is the most faithful source for our exploration of the use of eros in Origen, and it urges us rather to focus on the Greek fr. in Cant.

PG 87, 1545–1780; id. (ed.), *Origenis: Scholia in Canticum Cantiorum* = PG 17, 253–288, 369–370.

- 18 M.A. Barbàra (ed.), *Origene: Commentario al Cantico dei Cantici: Testi in lingua greca*, BP 42, Bologna 2005.
- 19 M.G. Guérard in: M.G. Guérard, *Procope de Gaza: Épitomé sur le Cantique des Cantiques: Les trois plus anciens témoins*, Paris. Gr. 153, 154, 172, in: *Byzantion* 73 (2003), 9–59, is persuaded that the fr. in Cant. are our main source for the reconstruction of the original Greek text of Origen's com. in Cant., whereas A. Rickenmann in: A. Rickenmann, *Sehnsuch nach Gott bei Origenes: Ein Weg zur verborgene Weisheit des Hohenliedes*, StSSpTh 30, Würzburg 2002, 204, and J.M. Auwers in: J.M. Auwers, *Cant. 2,1 au miroir de la chaîne de Procope*, in: *EThL* 79 (2003), 329–346, are more cautious about considering the fr. in Cant. as totally Origenian. M. Harl has put forward a further hypothesis: according to her, the Greek text of Origen's com. in Cant. known to the compiler of the epitome might have been different from the original Greek text of the com. in Cant.; on this see: M. Harl, *La bouche et le coeur de l'apôtre: deux images bibliques du sens divin de l'homme (Proverbes 2,5) chez Origène*, in ead., *Le déchiffrement du sens: Études sur l'herméneutique chrétienne d'Origène à Grégoire de Nysse*, EAA 135, Paris 1993, 157, fn. 8. Nevertheless, the quotations of biblical texts in Origen's fr. in Cant. are the same as in the parallel Latin texts in com. in Cant.; on this see: Barbàra, 2005, 97–99.
- 20 On this see: V. Limone, *I nomi dell'amore: Un'indagine sulla traduzione latina del Commento al Cantico dei Cantici di Origene*, in: *ZAC* 19/3 (2015), 407–429; id., *Amore e bellezza in Origene. Una ricerca sui lessici erotico ed estetico nella traduzione latina del Commento al Cantico dei Cantici*, in: *RCCM* 58/1 (2016), 123–142; id., *Il Commento al Cantico dei Cantici di Origene. Aspetti esegetici e letterari*, in: Limone / Moreschini, 2016, 35–51.

First of all, it is worth noting that Origen is aware that there is a difference between the meanings of eros and agape, as results from the fr. in Cant. 2 (app.), transmitted by the so called Barberinian catena (thirteenth century), of which we also have the corresponding Latin translation of Rufinus.²¹ At the beginning of this fragment we read the caveat that some Greeks have understood eros as the tension of the soul to the “vault of heaven” (οὐρανία ἀψίς), an expression which reminds us of Plato’s *Phaedrus* (247B.1),²² and that the holy Scripture does not ignore the ambivalence of eros, so that it uses eros for passionate and carnal love, for example that of Amnon for his sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1–2), and agape for spiritual and theocentric love, for example that of Isaac for Rebekah (Gen. 24:67), or that of Jacob for Rachel. Nonetheless, Origen points out that the Scripture is not always consistent with this distinction: in fact, in Prov. 4:6 eros is applied to a spiritual entity, namely, Wisdom.²³ In sum, we can deduce two main results from what is contained in the fr. in Cant. 2 (app.): firstly, eros is an ambiguous term; secondly, though the holy Scripture intends to prevent the reader from falling victim to the ambivalence of eros and to apply two different terms, eros and agape, to denote two different meanings of eros, it ends up treating them as synonyms.

Besides the above-mentioned occurrence of eros, this word recurs another five times in the Greek fr. in Cant. In particular, in the fr. in Cant. 10 Origen comments on Cant. 1:8: “If you do not know yourself, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds”, and defines ἐραστής, “lover”, the bridegroom, that is, Christ, who threatens the bride, that is, the Church, to abandon her, if she follows the shepherds, namely, the demons.²⁴ In the fr. in Cant. 23 and

21 Orig., fr. in Cant. 2 (app.) (290, ed. Barbàra). See: M.A. Barbàra, *La catena sul Cantico dei Cantici trasmessa dal codice Barberiniano gr. 388*, in: Adamantius 14 (2008), 329–351.

22 This formula is quoted by Origen also elsewhere, see: Orig., c. Cels. 1.20 (SC 132, 126); 5.2 (SC 147, 18); 8.44 (SC 150, 118). On the use of this formula in the early Christian literature, with a focus on Origen, see: A. Méhat, *Le «lieu supracéleste» de saint Justin à Origène*, in: P. Courcelle (ed.), *Forma futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino*, Turin 1975, 282–294; see also: C. Marksches, *Gott und Mensch nach Origenes. Einige wenige Beobachtungen zu einem großen Thema*, in: A. Raffelt (ed.), *Weg und Weite. Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, Freiburg 2001, 98, fn. 8 (now in: C. Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe. Gesammelte Studien*, TU 160, Berlin 2008, 92, fn. 8).

23 The parallel Latin translation also mentions Wis. 8:2: Orig., com. in Cant., prol. 2, 22 (SC 375, 106–108). With respect to the difference between fr. in Cant. 2 (app.) and the corresponding Latin version of Rufinus see: Limone, 2015, 424–425.

24 Orig., fr. in Cant. 10 (162, ed. Barbàra).

25, respectively about Cant. 2:8 and 2:9, the Alexandrine uses the adverb ἐρωτικῶς to express, in the former case, the tension of Christ to the soul and, in the latter case, the tension of the soul to Christ.²⁵

A particular attention is to be paid to the fr. in Cant. 32 and 44. On the basis of what we read in these fragments, Origen believes that Christ progressively moves away from the soul, and that this progressive separation of Christ and the soul increases the love of the soul for Christ, so that at the height of the soul's desire Christ appears to the soul. In this context Origen uses the formula ἐπιτείνειν τὸν ἔρωτα to signify that the love of the soul for Christ is intensified and increased by the absence of Christ.²⁶

In light of the data collected so far we can infer the following consequences.

First, Origen is informed about the semantic ambivalence of eros, which can denote either carnal and passionate love, or spiritual love, as it is evident from the *Phaedrus*.

Then, the holy Scripture attempts to distinguish the opposite meanings of eros, and names the carnal and passionate love "eros", and the spiritual love "agape". Nevertheless, the Scripture is not faithful to this distinction.

While in his writings Origen generally attributes to eros the meaning of carnal love, as results from his comments on Prov. 30:16, or on the biblical episodes in which the passion of Samson (Judg. 13:1–7), or that of the old men for Susanna (Dan. 13:10) are narrated,²⁷ in the fr. in Cant. he applies to eros a solely spiritual meaning, since it signifies only the love of Christ for the soul, and vice versa.

Finally, it is worth mentioning once again that the Alexandrine uses the formula ἐπιτείνειν τὸν ἔρωτα to mean that the love of the soul for Christ is "intensified" by the absence of Christ himself. We shall return to this formula later.

3. The Use of Eros in Plotinus' *Ennead* 5

As said above, the treatise n. 50 on eros (Περὶ ἔρωτος) of Plotinus, corresponding to the *Ennead* 3. 5 and dated to 268–269, contributes to the understanding of the use of eros in the hom. in Cant. of Gregory.²⁸ This

25 Orig., fr. in Cant. 23; 25 (186; 190–192, ed. Barbàra).

26 Orig., fr. in Cant. 32; 44 (208; 224, ed. Barbàra).

27 Respectively: Orig., fr. in Prov. 30.16 (M. Richard [ed.], *Les fragments d'Origène sur Prov. XXX, 15–31*, in: J. Fontaine / C. Kannengiesser [eds.], *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, Paris 1972, 389); fr. in Prov. 30.17 (Richard, 1972, 390); com. in Ioh. 28.5,34 (SC 385, 74–76).

28 On this see: Porph., vit. Plot. 6.13–14 (10, eds. Henry / Schwyzer); see also: J. Igal, *Cronología de la Vida de Plotino de Porfirio*, Bilbao 1972, 124–126; L. Brisson,

treatise consists of two main parts: the former, that is, enn. 3.5,1, contains a discussion about the definition of eros as “passion” (πάθος) of the soul; the latter, namely, enn. 3.5,2–9, is an exegesis of what Plato says about eros, especially in the *Symposium*.²⁹

With respect to the former part, it recovers the Platonic definitions of eros as “passion”, as evidenced in the *Phaedrus* (252B.2) and restated by Aristotle,³⁰ and as “desire for beauty”, as is documented in the *Symposium* (240C–209E), and it conflates them. In fact, Plotinus argues that eros is a passion, since it is the desire for beauty which is activated by the experience of beauty, or by the remembrance of it.

In relation to the latter part, Plotinus compares what Pausanias says in the *Symposium* (180C.3–E.3), that there is an Aphrodite Urania and an Aphrodite Pandemia and that, as a consequence of this, there is a Eros Uranius and a Eros Pandemius,³¹ with what Socrates in the same dialogue declares to have learned from Diotima of Mantinea; that Eros is a daemon, son of Penia and Poros.³² The allegorical interpretation leads Plotinus to solve the above contradiction: on the one side, he understands the Aphrodite Pandemia as the third hypostasis, namely, the World Soul, and the Eros Uranius as the desire of the World Soul for the Noûs, which is the second hypostasis, and he intends the Aphrodite Pandemia as the individual soul and the Eros Pandemius as the desire of the individual soul for the One, or Good, that is, the first hypostasis;³³ on the other side, combining the Platonic perspective with the Aristotelian categories, Plotinus underlines that the

Plotin: une biographie, in: id. *et alii* (eds.), *Porphyre. La vie de Plotin. II*, Paris 1992, 1–29.

29 Respectively: Plot., enn. 3.5,1 (319–321, eds. Henry / Schwyzer), and: 3.5.2–9 (321–333, eds. Henry / Schwyzer).

30 Aristot. *apud* Herm. Alex., in Plat. *Phaedr.* 252B.2 (34.4–6, ed. Couvreur).

31 What Plato has Pausanias say in *symp.* 180C.3–E.3 is also documented in the Greek mythological tradition, for instance: Hesiod., *theog.*, v. 190; Hom., *iliad.* 5311–372; Xenoph., *symp.* 8.9–10.

32 Plot., enn. III 5, 2 (321–323, eds. Henry / Schwyzer). For an overview of the conception of eros in Plotinus see: A.H. Armstrong, *Platonic Eros and Christian Agape*, in: *The Downside Review* 79/255 (1961), 105–121 (now in: id., *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, VCSS 102, London 1979, sec. IX).

33 Plot., enn. III 5, 2 (322–323, eds. Henry / Schwyzer). Plotinus interprets the Aphrodite Pandemia as the World Soul and, at the same time, the individual soul; on this see: A.M. Wolters, *Plotinus on Eros: A Detailed Exegetical Study of Ennead III. 5*, Toronto 1984, 83.

Eros Pandemius in the individual soul results from the co-existence in the soul itself of a formal principle (Poros) and a material principle (Penia).³⁴

To sum up, there are two main aspects of eros which Plotinus evidences in *enn. III 5*.

First, in line with the Platonic *Phaedrus*, eros is considered as a passion, since it is the desire for beauty which is activated by the experience, or the reminiscence, of beauty.

Secondly, on the basis of the myths in the *Symposium*, Plotinus regards eros as the desire of the World Soul for the Noûs, or of the individual soul for the One.

4. The Use of Eros in the hom. in Cant. of Gregory of Nyssa

As is Origen, Gregory too is aware of the semantic ambiguity of the word "eros". This is documented by many passages in the writings of Gregory in which he adds to this word some adjectives which specify the incorporeal nature of eros, for example "heavenly", "pure", "blessed", "impassible", and "divine".³⁵ Although he attributes to eros a material meaning, he sometimes overlaps eros with agape, and he indifferently speaks of a disposal of eros and agape (διάθεσις ἐρωτική, and ἀγαπητική),³⁶ or of an arrow of eros and agape (βέλος τοῦ ἔρωτος, and τῆς ἀγάπης).³⁷ In addition, the definition of Gregory of agape as "intimate relationship to what is desired"³⁸ is identical to the definition of *phíltron*, which is originally equivalent to eros and is used already by Gregory of Nazianzus with reference to the love of God.³⁹ On the basis of what we saw above in Origen and Plotinus, we shall now explore the use of eros in the hom. in Cant. of Gregory of Nyssa: though these homilies attest to a limited number of occurrences of eros, they present

34 Plot., *enn. III 5*, 4 (325, eds. Henry / Schwyzer). This harmonisation of Platonic and Aristotelian elements is in line with the philosophical method which Plotinus learned at the Alexandrian school of Ammonius Saccas; on this see: H. Langerbeck, *The Philosophy of Ammonius Saccas and the Conception of Aristotelian and Christian Elements Therein*, in: JHS 77/1 (1957), 67–74.

35 About this see *supra*, fn. 239.

36 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 1 (GNO 6, 38.4); 9 (GNO 6, 264.5).

37 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 4 (GNO 6, 128.1); XIII (GNO 6, 383.8).

38 Greg. Nys., an. et res.: ἡ πρὸς τὸ καταθύμιον ἐνδιάθετος σχέσις (PG 46, 93C). On this: Daniélou, 1944, 201–202.

39 Greg. Nys., hom. in Eccl. 8: φίλτρον ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνδιάθετος περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ προσπαθείας ἐνεργουμένη (GNO 5, 417.13–14). About this see: Moreschini, 1993, 281–283, 289–290. See also: Orig., fr. in Cant. 30 (200, ed. Barbàra).

the semantic scheme in which Gregory utilises it. In this regard, there are three key texts (a.-c.) to which we shall recall the attention of the reader.

The first text (a.) is found in the opening lines of the hom. in Cant. I, in particular in the course of the allegorical interpretation of the characters of the bridegroom and the bride of the Cant. This text runs as follows:

What is described there is an account of a wedding, but what is intellectually discerned is the human soul's mingling with the Divine. That is why the one who is called "son" in Proverbs is here called "bride", and Wisdom, correspondingly, is transferred into the role of bridegroom. This is to assure that the human person, once separated from the bridegroom, might be betrothed to God as a holy virgin (see: 2 Cor. 11:2), and, once joined to the Lord, may become "one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17) through being mingled with that which is inviolate and impassible, having become purified thought rather than heavy flesh. Therefore since it is Wisdom who speaks, love (ἀγάπησον) her as much as you are able, with your whole heart and strength; desire (ἐπιθύησον) her as much as you can. To these words I am bold to add, «Be in love» (ἐράσθητι), for this passion, when directed toward things incorporeal, is blameless and impassible, as Wisdom says in Proverbs when she bids us to be in love (ἔρωτα) with the divine Beauty.⁴⁰

In line with Origen's reading, Gregory identifies the bridegroom with the Wisdom, the bride with the individual soul. He explains that the content of the Cant. is the "union" (ἀνάκρασις) of the Wisdom and the individual soul,⁴¹ and states that this union originates from the erotic desire of the individual soul for the divine Wisdom. In support of this interpretation, Gregory quotes Prov. 4:6, in which we read the exhortation that the Wisdom be the object of eros, depending upon an argument already formulated by Origen. Therefore, both Origen and Gregory, based on Prov. 4:6, define eros as the desire of the soul for the divine Wisdom. In addition, Gregory states that, in the desire for the divine Wisdom, which is an incorporeal being, the soul sees its passion transforming into impassibility.⁴² Gregory repeats this thesis some lines later, in the course of his interpretation of the Holy of Holies,

40 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 1 (GNO 6, 22.18–23.12). See also: Orig., com. in Cant., prol. 2. 22 (SC 375, 106–108); fr. in Cant. 2 (292, ed. Barbàra), see *supra*, fn. 21. The English translation of the texts a.-c. is by R.A. Norris Jr.; see: R.A. Norris Jr. (ed.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, WGRW 12, Atlanta 2012, respectively 25 (a.), 203–205 (b.), and 403–405 (c.).

41 This word is derived from the terminology of the ancient mysteries, as is also attested in Clement, see: Clem. Alex., strom. 7.12, 79, 4 (SC 428, 244), and Origen, see: Orig., c. Cels. 3.41 (SC 136, 196); com. in Ioh. 13.11,67 (SC 222, 66). Additionally, in the just mentioned texts of Origen this word occurs together with another word typical of the mysteric terminology, that is, ἔνωσις. This formula is also quoted by Gregory; see: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 1 (GNO 6, 23.5).

42 See: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. I (GNO 6, 23.9–10).

which he understands as the inaccessible, divine beauty, to which the soul turns its own gaze towards, and thanks to which it transforms its own passion into impassibility.⁴³ To sum up, Gregory defines the eros for Wisdom as the passion for an impassible being, and he also highlights that this passion progressively converts itself into impassibility and disappears only as soon as it is totally converted into impassibility.

This occurrence of eros displays Gregory's attempt to harmonise two principles, inconsistent with each other. The first principle is that the passionate faculty is a natural constituent of the soul, as mentioned above in Plotinus, and the soul has the opportunity to keep the passions under control, that is, the so called "metropátheia". In this regard, Gregory is in accordance with the view of Plato, who in the *Phaedrus* (246A–257B) divides the faculties of the soul into rational, spirited, and appetitive, later restated by Aristotle⁴⁴ and Posidonius, who divides the faculties of the soul in rational (λογιστικόν) and passionate (παθητικόν).⁴⁵ According to this principle, eros is that passionate faculty of the soul which belongs to the soul by nature, from which it can not get free, and which it is committed to control. With respect to the second principle, it is the impassibility, that is, the so called "apátheia": this is formulated by the most orthodox Stoics, for instance Chrysippus and Zeno, who regard the passions as the psychophysical effects of wrong judgments, and are persuaded that the passions can be eradicated by the proper functioning of our rational capacity, but it is also restated by the Neoplatonists, for example Plotinus, who understands the rational faculty of the soul as separable from its passionate faculty.⁴⁶ In contrast with the former principle, for the latter principle eros is a passion of the soul, from which the soul can and has to get free. As aforesaid, the occurrence of eros in the text (a.) shows the purpose of Gregory to combine the above opposite principles: on the one hand, he considers eros as a passion of the soul and, in

43 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. I (GNO 6, 27.12).

44 Aristotle shares the theory of the "metropátheia", as in: Aristot., eth. nicom. 1227B.6–12; eth. eud. 1221B.11–17, and strongly rejects the opposite theory of the "apátheia", that is, the eradication of passions, which he ascribes to the Academy, in particular Speusippus; see: Aristot., eth. nicom. 1104B.25; eth. eud. 1222A.3. On this topic see: R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, Oxford 2002, 195–196.

45 Posidonius *apud* Galen., placit. philos. 4.7,23–24 (284–286, ed. de Lacy). For an overview of Posidonius' theory of passions, which attempts to combine Stoic and Platonic elements, see: I.G. Kidd, *Posidonius on Emotions*, in: A.A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism*, London 1972, 200–215.

46 Plot., enn. 1.1,1–6 (48–54, eds. Henry / Schwyzer); 1.8,4 (125–126, eds. Henry / Schwyzer); 2.3,9 (171–173, eds. Henry / Schwyzer).

particular, as a passional desire for the impassibility; on the other hand, he claims that at the height of eros the passion converts itself into impassibility.

The second text (b.) further demonstrates that the former of the above two principles, that the passional faculty belongs to the soul by nature, is essential to the use of eros in Gregory's hom. in Cant. The passage which is worth mentioning is found in his exegesis of the "bridal bed" of Cant. 3:7–8, that in his description is surrounded by scary and armed warriors. The text runs as follows:

For what ornamentation can be supplied for a bridal bed by sixty hoplites, whose study is the terror of battle, whose finery is a sword held before the body, whose terror is that which comes by night? (By the term "fear", after all, the text indicates the fearful consternation aroused by certain nocturnal terrors, and this is what it attributes to these hoplites). So we ought by all means to look for a sense in these expressions that is consonant with our earlier interpretations.

What sense is that, then? It seems that the divine beauty evokes love (ἐράσιμιον) because it is fearsome; it reveals itself as coming from elsewhere than any corporeal beauty. For here it is what is pleasant to the eye and gentle, and set apart from any fierce or fearsome disposition, that induces passionate desire in us, but that unsullied Beauty is a fearsome and terrible strength. For since the passionate and filthy lust for things bodily, which resides in the fleshly members like a band of robbers, lays snares for the intellect and frequently seizes it and carries it off captive to its own will, which has become hostile to God, as the apostle says: «The mind of the flesh is hostile toward God» (Rom. 8:7), on this account it is appropriate for a divine love (θεῖον ἔρωτα) and longing to originate out of what stands in opposition to corporeal desire, so that wherever feebleness and indulgence and lazy relaxation give rise to such desire, in that place a terrible and astonishing strength may become the stuff of divine love (θεῖου ἔρωτος). For it is when manly strength has given fright to that which mothers pleasure, and has put it to flight, that the soul's pure beauty is revealed, it being unsullied by any affliction of corporeal desire.⁴⁷

Recovering a distinction already known to Origen and Plotinus, Gregory mentions two forms of eros: one is directed to corporeal things, the other is directed to incorporeal things, in particular to God. Then, he comments that the desire for incorporeal things entails control over the pleasures, so that the scary appearance of the warriors around the bridal bed is an allegory of control over the corporeal passions. Once again, Gregory consents to the Platonic perspective, that the passional faculty is a constituent of the soul and is divided into two main forms.

Finally, the last and most known text on eros (c.) is found in the comment on Cant. 5:8: «I am wounded with love», in which Gregory utilises the formula that eros is an «intensified agape» (ἀγάπη ἐπιτεταμένη). The text is as follows:

47 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 6 (GNO 6, 191.6–192.7).

Anyone, therefore, who focuses attention on the church is in fact looking at Christ – Christ building himself up and augmenting himself by the addition of people who are being saved. She, then, who has put the veil off from her eyes sees the unspeakable beauty of bridegroom with a pure eye and in this way is wounded by the incorporeal and fiery arrow of love, for agape when intensified is called love (ἐπιτεταμένη γὰρ ἀγάπη ὁ ἔρως λέγεται). This occasions people no shame if love's archery is not fleshly; on the contrary, they boast the more in their wound when they receive the dart of immaterial desire in the very depth of the heart. And this is exactly what the bride did when she said to the young women: «I am wounded by love» (Cant. 5:8).⁴⁸

Concerning the above text, two aspects are to be singled out. First, what the scholars have completely overlooked is that Gregory's definition of eros as intensified agape (ἀγάπη ἐπιτεταμένη) is a rephrase of Origen's formula: ἐπιτείνειν τὸν ἔρωτα, as said above.⁴⁹ Moreover, since in the aforementioned text Gregory uses the expression «is called» (λέγεται), he must depend upon an external source, namely, Origen himself or a popular view of eros.⁵⁰ As was stated above, and as we saw in Origen, the notion of agape and that of eros as passionate desire for impassibility overlap with each other.⁵¹ In the last text of the hom. in Cant. Gregory applies to the notion of eros that of intensification,⁵² which is also found at the beginning of his homilies:⁵³ the inextinguishable transcendence of the divine nature in relation to human nature entails that the passionate desire of the soul for the impassible God is not destined to get to the end, but it increases progressively and indefinitely – the higher the divine nature is in relation to the human nature, the more “intensified” is the passionate desire of the soul for the impassible.⁵⁴ From this conception we can infer a significant difference

48 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 13 (GNO 6, 383.3–14).

49 See *supra*, fn. 26.

50 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 13 (GNO 6, 383.9).

51 In the hom. in Cant. eros is generally used by Gregory with reference to the incorporeal love of the soul for the divine Logos, for instance: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. XV (GNO 6, 416.11). Furthermore, in: Greg. Nys., 13 (GNO 6, 378.12–21) eros and agape are utilized as synonyms and treated as interchangeable.

52 See also: Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 2 (GNO 6, 46.8–9).

53 Greg. Nys., hom. in Cant. 1 (GNO 6, 31.8).

54 This is at the heart of the mystical doctrine of Gregory, as has already been outlined by: G. Lettieri, *Il corpo di Dio. La mistica erotica del Cantico dei Cantici dal Vangelo di Giovanni ad Agostino*, in: R.E. Guglielmetti (ed.), *Il Cantico dei Cantici. Atti del Convegno Internazionale dell'Università degli Studi di Milano e della Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino (S.I.S.M.E.L.) (Gargano sul Garda, 22–24 maggio 2006)*, MM 76, Florence 2008, 3–90 (69–80). A different view of the relation between Origen and Gregory about the notion of eros is found in: I. Ramelli, *Apokatastasis and Epektasis in Hom. in Cant.: The Relation between Two Core Doctrines in Gregory and Roots in Origen*, in:

between Origen and Gregory: in fact, for the Alexandrine, at the height of the passional desire of the individual soul for Christ the desire itself is satisfied and exhausted by the appearance of Christ.

The definition of eros attested in the text (c.) leads us to prove the argumentative strategy through which Gregory attempts to harmonise the above-mentioned opposite principles. On the one side, he acknowledges the passional faculty of the soul as a constituent of the soul itself and, therefore, he underscores that the soul is not allowed to get free from that faculty; on the other side, he argues that in the passional desire of the soul for impassibility the passion transforms itself into impassibility. The notion of “intensification”, which reminds us of another key idea in Gregory’s thought, that is, the so called “epéktesis”, is the basis on which the above opposite principles have the chance to co-exist: by nature, the soul is affected by the passional desire for impassibility; nevertheless, the impossibility for the passional desire to be converted into impassibility urges the passional desire to seek for impassibility, namely, to be “intensified” indefinitely up to the impassibility.

5. Concluding Remarks

In light of what was claimed above about the use of eros in Origen and Plotinus, respectively in the above Sections 2 and 3, we can now summarise the outcomes of our exploration on the use of eros in Gregory’s hom. in Cant. as follows.

First, though Gregory is aware of the semantic difference between eros and agape in his hom. in Cant., he attributes to eros the meaning of incorporeal love, so that the terms, eros and agape, overlap with each other in line with what Origen already did.

Secondly, Gregory defines eros as the passional desire for impassibility, on the basis of the view that the passional faculty belongs to the soul by nature. As mentioned before, eros is a passion also for Plotinus, although he regards the rational faculty as separable from the passional faculty.

Finally, Gregory’s doctrine of the infinite difference between human nature and the divine nature is conflated with the theory of the “intensification” of eros: though the passional desire for impassibility can not transform itself in the impassibility and is not to be exhausted, it seeks for impassibility endlessly. As said earlier, this is a breaking point between Gregory and Origen.

Tobias Georges

From reading to understanding: *Profectus* in Abelard and Origen

Abstract: In the final passage of his letter 8 (“The rule”), Abelard talks of “advancing by understanding” (*intelligendo proficiens*) – meaning understanding the Scriptures. It is argued that this formulation is strongly influenced by Origen, namely his homily on Genesis 13. Abelard actually seems to have had great sympathy for Origen’s focus on understanding (*intellectus*) and rational perception (*rationabilis sensus*).

However, the term *profectus* is not a key one for Abelard; and when he refers to Origen as a role model for his theological method of moving from reading to understanding the Scriptures in letter 1 (*Historia Calamitatum*), it becomes difficult to say where he is really influenced by Origen and where he imagines it. Following Jerome, Abelard praises Origen in the exegetical context, but in his “theological” treatises, most of his – rare – references to him are polemic.

Keywords: Exegesis, Monasticism, Reception History.

Introduction

If one reflects on progress in the Origenian tradition with a special focus on Peter Abelard, initially the Latin term *profectus* (“progress”) does not seem to be a key one for him: On the whole, the concept of *profectus* does not play a major role in Abelard’s writings.¹

Nevertheless, there is a special and interesting passage where Abelard is indeed speaking of *profectus* with a certain emphasis, and in this very passage Origen might be standing in the background. In his letter 8, Abelard says: “It is clear that sacred Scripture is a mirror of the soul, in which anyone who lives by reading and advances by understanding perceives the beauty of his own ways or discovers their ugliness, so that he may work to increase the one and remove the other.”²

1 As evidence for this, one might scroll through the vocabulary indices in modern critical editions of Abelard’s works: the terms *profectus* or *proficere* do not figure there. For a general approach to Abelard’s thought, see J. Jolivet, *La théologie d’Abélard*, Paris 1997; J. Marenbon, *The philosophy of Peter Abelard*, Cambridge 1997; S. Ernst, *Petrus Abaelardus*, Zugänge zum Denken des Mittelalters 2, Münster 2003.

2 *Speculum anime Scripturam sacram constat esse in quam quilibet legendo uiuens, intelligendo proficiens, morum suorum pulcritudinem cognoscit vel deformitatem apprehendit, ut illam uidelicet augere, hanc studeat remouere.* Abelard, Ep. 8.115

“Advancing by understanding”, *intelligendo proficiens* is a concept which at least fits well into Abelard’s overall thought, and the formulation sounds like it was taken from Origen. So, in the context of this volume it might be worth starting from this passage in order to investigate the role of *profectus* in Abelard, and Origen’s impact on him.

As it is not that clear from the start if, when talking of *intelligendo proficiens*, Abelard consciously refers to Origen, this connection first has to be substantiated. Thus this contribution’s aim is, firstly, to argue that in this special passage Abelard is actually influenced by Origen when talking of progress by understanding. Secondly, it will be discussed how far-reaching Origen’s influence is on Abelard, as reflected in this passage.

1. *Intelligendo proficiens* as a formulation taken from Origen

In order to shed light on the passage quoted above, explain it, emphasise its importance, and see how Origen fits in, it first needs to be contextualised. It is taken from Abelard’s letter 8 directed to Heloisa and her nun’s convent that she led at the place called Paraclete, which he had founded – the authenticity of Abelard’s letter exchange with Heloisa (Abelard’s letters 1–8) is assumed here, with good reason.³ In letter 6, Heloisa had asked Abelard to send her a history of women living a *vita religiosa* and a rule for her convent;⁴ Abelard fulfilled this wish with his letters 7 (“the history”) and 8 (“the rule”). So the quote stems from a monastic context, is part of Abelard’s rule written for Heloisa and her nuns’ community, and comes at a very prominent place of that rule.

After depicting his ideal of the nuns’ communal life, its spiritual foundations, virtues, and also practical issues like daily routine, special tasks and duties, dressing, eating and drinking, with this quote he starts the rule’s final paragraph which is clearly marked as dealing with a new topic, that is, extraordinary praise of the sacred Scripture and his urgent request to study it.⁵ In this paragraph, the Bible is characterised as the source for knowing God, his will and oneself, for knowing about good and evil and about how

(D. Luscombe (ed.), *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, OMT, Oxford 2013, 494f.).

3 On Abelard’s letters 1–8 and their original background, see Luscombe (ed.), 2013. On the authenticity of letters 1–8 – which has been thoroughly discussed – see especially Marenbon, 1997, 82–93; T. Georges, *Quam nos divinitatem nominare consuevimus. Die theologische Ethik des Peter Abaelard*, Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologieggeschichte 16, Leipzig 2005, 127–133.

4 Abelard, Ep. 6.3 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 218–220).

5 On those contents, see Georges, 2005, 140–160.

to live and act in the world, especially for those following a religious life.⁶ As the Bible is that source, Abelard urges his readers to study it intensively, meaning they should not only read and hear it – in a superficial sense without any real understanding – but they should grasp its meaning and be transformed within the soul: as Abelard puts it, the Scripture is a mirror of the soul in which the latter can see its own behaviour – of course, in the light of God’s truth. Helped by this insight, it can increase the beauty and remove the ugliness of its ways, that is, direct its acts according to God’s will. In order to reach this goal, the soul’s understanding is fundamental, and the crucial step from mere reading to deeper understanding is, in this introduction to the rule’s final paragraph, expressed as *profectus*, by the formulation *intelligendo proficiens*. The term *proficere* / *profectus* gets even more emphasised in this opening passage when, with the following sentences, Abelard underlines his picture of the Scripture as a mirror of the soul by referring to Gregory the Great, in whose words this term is reiterated twice:

“Reminding us of this mirror, St Gregory says in the second book of his *Morals*: ‘Sacred Scripture is set before the mind’s eye as if it were a mirror in which our inward face may be seen reflected. For there we see our beauty or recognize our hideousness, there we perceive how far we are advancing and how far we are from advancing.’”⁷

This quote seems to be the model for Abelard’s initial phrase: Not only do we find the term *proficere* / *profectus* twice (*Ibi sentimus quantum proficimus, ibi a profectu quam longe distamus*), but also the picture of the Scripture as a mirror for one’s inner being (*anima* or *mens*) and its beauty (*pulcra* or *pueritudo*) or the opposite (*fedra* or *deformitas*). So, if this quote was taken from Origen, we would have clear evidence for Abelard referring to him with this idea of progress. Unfortunately, the quote is not from Origen, but St. Gregory, and in the sentences directly following Origen is not mentioned: Abelard points to many authorities – especially biblical authorities – underlining his incitement to study and to understand the Scripture, but initially Origen is not among them. So why should it be assumed that Origen stands in the background of Abelard’s idea of “advancing by understanding”?

If we look closely at his quote from St. Gregory, we find one aspect that is fundamental for Abelard but missing in the citation: “understanding the

6 Abelard. Ep. 8.115–128 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 494–516).

7 *Hoc nobis speculum beatus commemorans Gregorius in secundo Moraliū ait: ‘Scriptura sacra mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur ut interna nostra facies in ipsa uideatur. Ibi etenim fedra, ibi pulcra nostra cognoscimus. Ibi sentimus quantum proficimus, ibi a profectu quam longe distamus.’* Abelard, Ep. 8.115 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 494f.).

Scripture”, *intelligere*. Together with Abelard, Gregory stresses the inner transformation caused by perceiving biblical texts as “progress”, but he does not place emphasis on the act of “understanding”. On the contrary, this feature is crucial for Abelard, who in the final paragraph does not tire of urging his readers to move from reading the scripture to understanding it. *Intelligere / intellectus* is the term Abelard stresses most in the final paragraph.⁸ Right after the above quote from St. Gregory, Abelard says: “But whoever looks at scripture without understanding is like a blind man holding a mirror to his eyes, unable to see what sort of man he is.”⁹ So it seems to be Abelard who introduces the emphasis on “understanding” into Gregory’s picture.¹⁰ He pursues this emphasis until the end of the rule, where just before concluding he asks: “But who can obediently keep the words or the precepts of the lord unless he has first understood them?”¹¹

The question of the authorities that Abelard gives for his emphasis on understanding leads us to Origen. Of course, from the start of the final passage, Abelard tries to give authorities for this emphasis, but most of the texts he quotes as authorities appeal to perceiving or studying the Scripture or the word of God in a way that is rather unspecific. Further, it is Abelard who reads the precise focus on *intelligere* into those texts. Just to give an example, Abelard can refer to “the Apostle” (Paul – in fact, the quote is from Eph 5:18f.) and his “general exhortation to study the Scriptures [...]: ‘Be filled with the Holy Spirit; speak to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.’”¹² And then Abelard interprets this quote in his special way: “For a man who speaks to himself or with himself understands what he is saying or by understanding makes his words fruitful.”¹³

8 The only units within the final paragraph (Abelard, Ep. 8.115–128) where the term *intelligere / intellectus* is not mentioned explicitly are Ep. 8.124 and 8.128! In most of the units it is mentioned several times.

9 *Qui autem Scripturam conspicit quam non intelligit quasi cecus ante oculos speculum tenet in quo qualis sit cognoscere non ualet.* Abelard, Ep. 8.115 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 494f.).

10 Abelard’s combination of Gregory’s picture and his emphasis on understanding also seems to be echoed in the preface to the *Problemata Heloissae* (PL 178, 678B).

11 *Quis autem uerba vel praecepta Domini sui seruire obediendo poterit, nisi hec prius intellexerit?* Abelard, Ep. 8.128 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 516f.).

12 *Vnde et Apostolus generaliter ad Scripturarum stadium nos adhortans [...] inquit: [...] ‘Implemini Spiritu sancto, loquentes uobismetipsi in psalmis et ymnis et canticis spiritalibus’.* Abelard, Ep. 8.116 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 496f.).

13 *Sibi quippe uel secum loquitur qui quod profert intelligit uel de intelligentia uerborum suorum fructum facit.* Abelard, Ep. 8.116 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 496f.).

Even if there are some authorities' texts mentioning the term *intellectus / intelligere en passant*,¹⁴ in Abelard's quotes his special focus on moving from reading to understanding only becomes apparent when he finally moves to Origen. Having observed that in his own time, the zeal to study and understand the Scripture was fading, namely in the monasteries, he turns to the imagery of the "Philistines who harassed Isaac when he was digging wells by filling them with heaps of earth to try to keep water from him"¹⁵ taken from Gen 26:12–33 in order to sharply criticise those who keep monks and nuns away from studying the Bible – and, on the contrary, to exhort the ascetics to continue striving for understanding of the Bible. Abelard's allegorical interpretation of this imagery relies totally, as we will see, on Origen. Abelard first explains his imagery explicitly by saying:

For we are surely digging wells when we penetrate deeply into the hidden meanings of Holy Scripture. As we reach into the depths Philistines furtively fill them up, letting loose the earthly thoughts of an evil spirit and, as it were, taking away from us the water we found of sacred learning.¹⁶

The first authority he refers to for this imagery's interpretation is actually, once more, St. Gregory. Perhaps this reference to Gregory is supposed to link with that of the Scripture as mirror of the soul and make Gregory the overarching authority for Abelard's imagery. Yet in fact we do not find the source for the imagery of the "Philistines who harassed Isaac when he was digging wells" in Gregory, but rather in Origen, and even Abelard quickly goes on to say: "St. Gregory, if I am not mistaken, had read the *Homilies* on Genesis of the great Christian philosopher Origen on Genesis."¹⁷

Again, it is true that in the context Abelard points to¹⁸ we do not find a trace of Gregory referring to Origen, at least explicitly or consciously. Nevertheless, with those words, Abelard points to Origen as the fundamental authority, and we can infer from what he goes on to say that this is entirely correct. Abelard continues, praising Origen with the words: "For that zealous digger of spiritual wells [scil. Origen] strongly urges us not only to

14 See Abelard, Ep. 8.119; 8.120; 8.121.

15 *[I]lli sunt qui tamquam Allophili fodientem puteos Ysaac persecuntur et eos replendo congerie terre aquam ei satagunt prohibere.* Abelard, Ep. 8.125 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 510f.).

16 *Nos enim nimirum puteos fodimus cum in Scripture sacre abditis sensibus alta penetramus. Quos tamen occulte replent Allophili quando nobis ad alta tendentibus immundi spiritus terrenas cogitationes ingerunt et quasi inuentam diuine scientie aquam tollunt.* Abelard, Ep. 8.125 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 510–513).

17 *Legerat iste, nisi fallor, magnis Christianorum philosophi Origenis homelias in Genesi.* Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512f.).

18 The text of St. Gregory quoted here is from *Moralia in Iob* 16.18,23.

drink of them but also to dig our own. He says in the eleventh¹⁹ *Homily* of his exposition:²⁰

In what follows, Abelard gives five long quotes from Origen's homilies 12 and 13 on Genesis, that is, from Rufinus' translation. The quotes remain close to the text and perfectly show that those homilies are the source for his imagery taken from Gen 26:12–33 and its interpretation. Furthermore, in those quotes we finally find a true model for Abelard's urgent request to study the Scripture and struggle for understanding it. This is especially highlighted by Origen's / Rufinus' following words quoted in that context:

So try also, my listener, to have your own well and your own spring, so that, when you take up a book of the Scriptures, you also may start to show some understanding of it from your own perception; and try too [...] to drink from the spring of your own ability. You have within you a source of living water, open channels and flowing streams of rational perception, as long as they are not clogged with earth and rubbish.²¹

According to those words, the one who gets in touch with the "Scripture" should move on to "show some understanding" (*intellectum proferre*) from his or her "own perception" (*ex proprio sensu*). This comes very close to what Abelard wants in his final paragraph, much closer than all the quotes from other authorities. The quotes from Origen / Rufinus stress "understanding" (*intellectus*) and "rational perception" (*rationalis sensus*), two key terms that closely match Abelard's focus and are reiterated in the following sentences: "Those which the Philistines had filled with earth are surely men who close their spiritual understanding, so that they neither drink themselves nor allow others to drink."²² – "He who is a Philistine, and has a taste

19 Actually, the homily Abelard refers to here is the twelfth. See also Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512.

20 *Ille quippe spiritualium puteorum fossor studiosus non solum ad eorum potum sed etiam effossionem nos vehementer adhortans, expositionis praedictae Homelia undecima ita loquitur.* Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512f.).

21 *Tempta ergo et tu, o auditor, habere proprium puteum et proprium fontem ut et tu, cum apprehenderis librum Scripturarum, incipias etiam ex proprio sensu proferre aliquem intellectum et [...] tempta et tu bibere de fonte ingenii tui. Est intra te natura aque vive, sunt vene perhennes et irrigua fluenta rationalis sensus, si modo non sint terra et rudibus completa.* Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512f.).

22 *Quos [...] Philistini terra repleuerant, illi sine dubio qui intelligenciam spiritalem claudunt ut neque ipsi bibant, neque alios bibere permittant.* Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512f.).

for earthly things, does not know where in earth to find water, where to find a rational perception.”²³

Thus, we have good evidence that Origen is indeed Abelard’s first authority for his efforts at understanding the Scripture. Nevertheless, the term *profectus* does not figure in the quotes from Origen / Rufinus.

Is Gregory his only authority for this term? Does Abelard use the term rather independently of Origen, and does he mix the two authorities for his idea of “progressing by understanding”? It can be assumed with good reason that at least the term *intelligendo proficiens* is shaped by Origen, because even if it does not figure in Abelard’s quotes, we find a close parallel to it in Origen / Rufinus, in the very context where the former is taking his quotes from: in his homily 13 on Genesis, exactly between the passages quoted by Abelard, Origen / Rufinus states:

If, therefore, also you hearing those words today should faithfully perceive what is said, Isaac would work also in you, he would cleanse your hearts from earthly perceptions. And seeing these mysteries which are so great to be lying hidden in divine Scriptures, you progress in understanding, you progress in spiritual perceptions.²⁴

Here we not only find the term *proficere*, but also its combination with the term *intellectus: proficitis in intellectu* (“you progress in understanding”). It is very probable that this formulation in this very context strongly influenced Abelard’s expression *intelligendo proficiens*. Seeing Abelard’s quotes from homily 13 on Genesis, it is quite certain that he also knew this passage. It is easy to imagine that Abelard, with those words of Origen / Rufinus in mind, gave his final paragraph a concise title and read it into St. Gregory whom he thought to be influenced by Origen as well.

2. *Intelligendo proficiens* – how far-reaching is Origen’s impact on Abelard?

As we see from the final section of letter 8 – and this is true for Abelard’s whole work as well²⁵ – *intelligere* (“understanding”) and the move from

23 *Qui Philistinus est [...] et terrena sapit, nescit in omni terra inuenire aquam, inuenire rationabilem sensum.* Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 514f.).

24 *Si ergo et uos hodie haec audientes fideliter percipiatis auditum, operator et in uobis Isaac, purgat corda uestra a terrenis sensibus, et uidentes tanta haec mysteria in scripturis diuinis esse latentia proficitis in intellectu, proficitis in spiritualis sensibus.* Or., hom. 13.4 in Gen. (A. Fürst / C. Marksches (eds.), *Origenes. Die Homilien zum Buch Genesis*, trans. P. Habermehl, Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung 1/2, Berlin 2011, 244). The translation is taken from R.E. Heine (trans.), *Origen. Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FaCh 71, Washington 1982, 192.

25 On this, see the following reflections about Abelard’s *Theologia*.

reading to understanding were crucial *topoi* for Abelard. But if his expression *intelligendo proficiens* in letter 8 was strongly influenced by Origen, then we must ask: How far-reaching is Origen's impact on Abelard's conception of moving from reading to understanding?

First of all, in Abelard's references to Origen highlighted above, there is an important link that leads us to Abelard's reception of Origen that goes beyond letter 8. When Abelard praises "the great Christian philosopher Origen"²⁶, he uses a wording that we find several times in his letter exchange with Heloisa.²⁷ In that context, Origen is depicted as "the great" or even the "greatest of the Christian philosophers" because he is a model for ascetic life, especially for Abelard, with his longing for chastity that he illustrates by pointing several times to Origen's assumed self-castration.²⁸ However, the role of Origen, "the philosopher", reaches further: It is even his way of teaching that Abelard describes as a model. This becomes obvious from the passage in letter 1 (*Historia Calamitatum*), where Abelard calls him *summum Christianorum philosophorum*²⁹: Abelard tells how he entered, after his castration, the monastery of St. Denis, and how his former students from Paris urged him to continue teaching. So he withdrew to a monk's cell where he could "devote" himself "to teaching as before". But while, before, he had primarily taught the "profane arts" (*secularium artium disciplinam*), now he "applied" himself "mainly to the study of the Scriptures (*sacre plurimum lectioni studium intendens*)", using his former skills to attract his students. The *sacra lectio* is what he then calls "the true philosophy", *uera philosophia*, and subsequently he refers to Origen, the "greatest of the Christian philosophers", as a model for his procedure. For our perspective on "from reading to understanding", it is very interesting how Abelard depicts the

26 *magnis Christianorum philosophi Origenis*. Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 512f.).

27 On this, see T. Georges, "Summus Christianorum philosophorum" – Origen as Christian philosopher in Peter Abelard, in: A.-C. Jacobsen (ed.), *Origeniana undecima: Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought*, Leuven 2016, 435–439. Abelard talks of Origen as a "great" or even the "greatest Christian philosopher" twice in *Historia Calamitatum* (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 52f. 104f.), once in Ep. 5 (id. (ed.), 2013, 200–203), once in Ep. 7 (id. (ed.), 2013, 344f.), and once in Ep. 8 (id. (ed.), 2013, 512f.), see above. In addition, in Ep. 7 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 344f.), Abelard refers to Origen as the first among the great doctors of the church.

28 See *Historia Calamitatum* (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 104f.); Ep. 5 (id. (ed.), 2013, 200–203); Ep. 7 (id. (ed.), 2013, 344f.). While Abelard cannot approve of Origen's laying hands upon himself, he praises his "purity", linking his castration to his own that was, on the contrary, acted upon him by God's mercy.

29 Abelard, Ep. 1.34 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 52f.).

contents of his teaching the Scriptures, that is, of *sacra lectio* or *uera philosophia*, right at the start of the next paragraph:

Now it happened that I first applied myself to expounding the basis of our faith using analogies based on human reason, and I composed a treatise on the theology of the Divine Unity and Trinity for the use of my students who were asking for human and philosophical reasons and who were demanding something intelligible rather than mere words.³⁰

In fact, the treatise he refers to seems to be the first draft of what was to become his *Theologia*, and the method he describes exactly matches the one he shows in that writing:³¹ “expounding the basis of our faith using analogies based on human reason”, and moving from “mere words” – that is, mere reading and hearing the Scriptures – to “something intelligible” (*que intelligi possent*). So it becomes clear that when Abelard calls Origen *summum Christianorum philosophorum*, he imagines him to be the model for the method he himself uses in his theological masterpiece – and which, of course, he echoes in the final passage of letter 8. In that perspective, Abelard even imagines Origen as a model for himself. It is no surprise that Abelard, as a theologian, several times depicts himself as a Christian “philosopher”³².

The question is: In what way does this idea of Origen as a theological role model reach beyond mere imagination? This question must be asked because in Abelard’s *Theologia*, as well as in his other “theological” treatises, as distinguished from his “exegetical” and “ascetic” works, there are few references to Origen, none of which are clearly positive, most even polemic,³³ e.g., when, in *Theologia scholarium* 2.11, he points to “those innumerable

30 *Accidit autem mihi ut ad ipsum fidei nostre fundamentum humane rationis similitudinibus disserendum primo me applicarem, et quendam theologie tractatum de unitate et trinitate divina scolaribus nostris componerem, qui humanas et philosophicas rationes requirebant, et plus que intelligi quam que dici possent efflagitabant.* Abelard, Ep. 1.35 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 54f.).

31 To illustrate this, the quote from the *Historia Calamitatum* should be compared with the prologue of the *Theologia Scholarium* (E.M. Buytaert / C. Mews (eds.), *Petri Abaelardi opera theologica*, 3, CChr.CM 13, Turnhout 1987, 313). On the *Theologia* and its different versions, see I. Klitzsch, *Die „Theologien“ des Petrus Abaelardus: Genetisch-kontextuelle Analyse und theologiegeschichtliche Relektüre*, Leipzig 2010.

32 See, e.g. Abelard, *Confessio fidei ad Heloisam* 3 (C.S.F. Burnett, ‘*Confessio fidei ad Heloisam*’: Abelard’s Last Letter to Heloise? A Discussion and Critical Edition of the Latin and Medieval French Versions, in: *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 21 (1986), 152f.); id., *Historia Calamitatum* (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 52f.); id., Ep. 13 (E.R. Smits (ed.), *Peter Abelard: letters IX–XIV*, Groningen 1983, 275).

33 On this, see Georges, 2016.

heretic doctrines that Origen had said in his books ‘Periarches’³⁴ – actually, Abelard edited his *Theologia* in at least three versions, as the *Theologia summi boni*, *Theologia Christiana* and *Theologia scholarium*.³⁵ The wording *intelligendo proficiens* from letter 8 or the praise of Origen, the philosopher, do not reappear from this or the other letters, and in the methodological reflections that we find at the start of the *Theologia scholarium*, Origen is not mentioned at all.

For an initial understanding of those contradictory findings, some background about Abelard’s general reception of Origen is useful.³⁶ This reception entails a clear-cut distinction between two realms of Origen’s works, and this distinction as such echoes the general way Origen was treated in the West in Abelard’s days: For this treatment, Jerome was most responsible. This is because he had distinguished sharply between Origen the “theologian” (*dogmatistes*), and the biblical “commentator” (*interpretes*), e.g., in the crucial words: “I have merely praised the simplicity of his [scil. Origen’s] rendering and commentary and neither the faith nor the dogmas of the Church come in at all. [...] I have praised the commentator but not the theologian (*laudavi interpretem, non dogmatisten*).”³⁷

This distinction was echoed by the *Decretum Gelasianum*, which referred explicitly to Jerome’s outlook on Origen.³⁸ Jerome and the *Decretum Gelasianum* were important authorities showing that the Alexandrian had to be dealt with cautiously. Furthermore, a severe distinction had to be made between the biblical “commentator” and the *dogmatistes*, and further the idea that Origen’s exegetic works could be rich and used legitimately, while his dogmatic writings and views clearly had to be rejected. In fact, those

34 *Unde et beatus Ieronimus epistolam ad Avitum presbyterum direxit, ut haeretica illa quae in libris Periarches Origenes innumera posuerat ex parte manifestet.* Abelard, *Theologia scholarium* 2.11 (Buytaert / Mews (eds.), 1987, 412).

35 On the *Theologia* and its different versions, see above, n. 318.

36 For this background, refer to Georges, 2016.

37 *Simplex interpretatio atque doctrina simplici voce laudata est. Nihil ibi de fide, nihil de dogmatibus comprehensum est. [...] Laudavi interpretem, non dogmatisten.* Hier., Ep. 84.2 (I. Hilberg (ed.), *Hieronymus Epistulae*, CSEL 55, Vienna 1996, 122). The translation is taken from P. Schaff / H. Wace (eds.), *Jerome: Illustrious Men. Commentaries. Letters. Etc.*, NPNF 6, Grand Rapids 1986, 176.

38 *Decretum Gelasianum* (H. Denzinger / P. Hünermann (eds.), *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, Freiburg ³⁹2001, 165): *Item Origenis nonnulla opuscula, quae vir beatissimus Hieronymus non repudiat, legenda suscipimus. Reliqua autem omnia cum auctore suo dicimus renuenda.*

authorities shaped Origen's general reception in the medieval West.³⁹ Like his contemporaries, Abelard knew this distinction very well,⁴⁰ and he strictly adhered to it, at least on the surface. While, as we have seen, he openly rejected Origen in his "theological" works, in his commentary on Romans, that is, his major contribution in the field of commenting on the bible, we find the exact opposite:⁴¹ Abelard often referred to Origen and quoted long passages from his commentary on Romans, that is, from Rufinus' Latin translation. Abelard quoted Origen to support or add to his own interpretation and held him in high esteem. It is this side of his reception that is echoed in his letter exchange with Heloisa when he praises Origen as the "greatest of the Christian philosophers". Here, he is writing in a monastic-spiritual milieu where he feels free to praise the great ascetic Origen, that is, the biblical commentator and not the theologian. Of course, this distinction is artificial, as can be seen from Abelard's reference in letter 8: He praises Origen, the great biblical exegete and his urge to understand the Scriptures; but at the same time, he takes his method as a model for what he does in his *Theologia*. So, Origen's reception certainly crosses the borders between the *interpretes* and the *dogmatistes*, and Abelard must have been aware of this. It can be assumed with good reason that Origen's different treatment in Abelard's different genres is influenced, at least to a certain extent, by tactics. Someone like Abelard, condemned as a heretic twice during his lifetime, knew that he was suspected, that he had to play things shrewdly and that it was not a good idea to praise Origen in a work called *Theologia*.⁴²

So, this background about Abelard's general reception of Origen would leave us the possibility that the former's theological method and his urge to move from reading to understanding was indeed shaped a great deal by the latter, without Abelard explicitly referring to Origen in his theological treatises merely for tactical considerations. However, when we look at what Abelard actually knew from Origen, we come back to the restricted focus on exegetical writings: from Abelard's exegetical and monastic-spiritual works, we can see that he had really read Origen's exegetical works, like his commentary on Romans and his homilies on Genesis, that is, Rufinus'

39 On this, see L. Perrone, *Origenismus*, in: ⁴RGG 6 (2003), 664f.; G. Lettieri, *Origenismo (in Occidente, secc. VII–XVIII)*, in: A. Monaci Castagno (ed.), *Origine. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Rome 2000, 308–321 (309f.).

40 See e.g., Abelard, *Theologia Scholarium* 2.4 referring to Hier., Ep. 61.1f.

41 See Georges, 2016, 433f.; R. Peppermüller, *Einleitung*, in: id. (ed.), *Abaelard – Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos. Römerbriefkommentar. Lateinisch Deutsch*, vol. 1, FC 26,1, Freiburg 2000, 7–59.

42 On Abelard's life and condemnations, see M.T. Clanchy, *Abelard: a medieval life*, Oxford 1997.

translations.⁴³ Conversely, we glean no evidence for Abelard having really read Origen's theological masterpiece, that is, his *De principiis / Peri archon*. When Abelard refers to this work in his *Theologia* 2.11 and in the prologue to his *Sic et Non*, it is through the lens of Jerome, and with Jerome's words he qualifies Origen as a heretic, without entering into the text of *Peri archon* – actually, in *Theologia scholarium* 2.11, he erroneously calls this writing *Peri arches*. This leaves us with the impression that while Abelard basically had a critical view of Jerome's distinction, this distinction nevertheless shaped the selection of works from Origen he read and his knowledge of Origen's thought. And, moving back to the question of in what way Origen really was a theological role model for Abelard, this suggests that imagination played an important role. As we can see from Abelard's quotes from Origen's homilies 12 and 13 on Genesis, he could know Origen's urge to understand the Scriptures and for rational perception. This urge closely matched his own theological method and seems to have inclined Abelard to make him – at least in the monastic and exegetical context – a great authority as the “greatest of the Christian philosophers”. However, beyond the quotes from letter 8, when Abelard refers to Origen, showing real knowledge of his writings, it seems that he exclusively focuses on exegetical questions. Thus, it is difficult to say what Abelard really knew from Origen's thought, and one can be inclined to think that much of Abelard's theological role-model Origen is made from imagination – of course, caused by Origen's focus on “understanding” that could also be found in his exegetical works, and aided by the picture Eusebius of Caesarea made of Origen in h.e. 6, which Abelard knew.⁴⁴ Actually, Eusebius had depicted Origen as a great Christian philosopher.⁴⁵

Conclusion

So how about *profectus* in Abelard and Origen? It has been argued here that in the final passage of letter 8, when Abelard talks of “advancing by understanding” (*intelligendo proficiens*) – meaning understanding the Scriptures – the formulation is strongly influenced by Origen, namely his homily on Genesis 13. Abelard actually seems to have had great sympathy for Origen's focus on understanding (*intellectus*) and rational perception (*rationalis sensus*). However, the term *profectus* is not a key one for Abelard; and when he refers to Origen as a role model for his theological methodology

43 On Abelard's reading of Origen's Commentary on Romans, see Georges, 2016, 433f., on the former's reading of the latter's homilies see above, p. 100.

44 See Abelard, Ep. 1.34 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 52).

45 See e.g., Eus., h.e. 6.18.

of moving from reading to understanding the Scriptures, it gets hard to say where he is really influenced by him and where he imagines it. Beyond the quotes from letter 8, we do not have firm evidence. Of course, this may also be caused by Abelard's tactical, two-fold use of Origen. Yet if we look at the sources to which Abelard refers for his methodology more generally, there are others who stand out more as potential influencers, namely Latin writers like Jerome, whom Abelard likes to quote throughout his work, and especially in his letter exchange with Heloisa.⁴⁶ When we are talking of Jerome, we certainly have to consider his own strong dependence on Origen, and there may be an important impact of Origen on Abelard through Latin authorities like Jerome. However, this influence is hidden and refracted, and it would be difficult to substantiate. The first authority for Abelard is – of course, after the Bible – certainly Augustine. There is no doubt that for Abelard and his contemporaries Augustine is this first authority in theology and in questions of method.⁴⁷ He is the one Abelard quoted most throughout his works, and Abelard referred to him especially for his focus on reason (*ratio*) and understanding (*intellectus*). This can be seen, for example, in the prefaces to *Theologia scholarium* and to *Sic et Non* where Augustine is the authority, which is no surprise, as with *De doctrina Christiana* he had written a whole work explaining how to move from reading to understanding.⁴⁸ Interestingly, however, Augustine is not mentioned in the final passage of letter 8. Perhaps this is caused by Abelard's wish in this letter to depict Origen, the great philosopher, as the model for his method. Yet if we look closely at Abelard's conception of "advancing by understanding" in the letter, I think we can finally grasp a certain difference between Origen and Abelard which makes Abelard stand closer to Augustine, and which shall be highlighted in order to bring this paper to a conclusion. For Abelard, *profectus* seems to be quite a linear move from "reading" the Scriptures (*legere*) to "understanding" them (*intelligere*), and it seems that this linear move rather resembles what we find in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*. On the contrary,

46 See e.g. Abelard, Ep. 8.123 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 508).

47 On Augustin as authority in 12th-century writers and in Abelard see T. Georges, *Ethik in der Zeit der Frühscholastik. Zwerge auf den Schultern des Riesen Augustin*, in: A. Müller (ed.), *Der christliche Neubau der Sittlichkeit. Ethik in der Kirchengeschichte*, Publikationen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 53, Leipzig 2018, 39–53.

48 For the impact of *De doctrina Christiana* on Abelard's method, see especially the preface to Abelard, *Sic et Non* (B.B. Boyer / R. McKeon (eds.), *Peter Abailard. Sic et Non. A Critical Edition*, Chicago 1976, 89–104.; Translation by P. Throop (trans.), *Yes and No: the complete English translation of Peter Abelard's Sic et Non*, Charlotte 2008, 11–25).

in Origen's quotes from homilies 12 and 13 on Genesis, the focus does not appear to be so much on the linear move. Of course, there is a *profectus* in understanding the Scriptures, but the dichotomy of *legere* and *intelligere* is not crucial. In Origen, "advancing by understanding" rather means going deeper in circles, entering more and more into the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. In the passages Abelard quotes from homily 13, Origen / Rufinus demand: "But let us never cease from digging wells of living water."⁴⁹ – "Even if the Philistines obstruct us [...], let us carry on digging wells."⁵⁰ To those who do not cease from this struggle, Origen / Rufinus say: "you progress in spiritual perceptions (*proficitis in spiritalibus sensibus*)."⁵¹

This idea of progress shows a slightly different accent from Abelard's. Thus, in order to sum up the question of Origen's impact on Abelard talking of *intelligendo proficiens*, one could use Abelard's famous title: *Sic et Non*.

49 *Nos uero numquam cessemus puteos aque uiue fodiendo*. Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 514f.).

50 *Etiamsi obsistunt Philistini [...], nos tamen perseueremus cum ipso puteos fodiendo*. Abelard, Ep. 8.126 (Luscombe (ed.), 2013, 514f.).

51 Or., hom. 13.4 in Gen. (Fürst / Marksches (eds.) / Habermehl (trans.), 2011, 244). The translation is taken from Heine (trans.), 1982, 192.

Massimiliano Lenzi

Reason, Free Will, and Predestination: Origen in Aquinas' Theological Thought*

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show that Aquinas develops a theology of predestined grace, by challenging the Origenian metaphysical and eschatological application of the principle of distributive justice. According to Thomas, the general reason why some are saved and others damned is to be related, just as in the case of creation, to divine goodness, which demands a multiformity of grades in order to be adequately represented by creatures.

Keywords: Predestination, Grace, Mediaeval theology, Distributive justice

Looking at the reception of the Patristic tradition in medieval thought, Origen stands out as a well-known author as well as a problematic figure, particularly for Thomas Aquinas. One cannot be surprised to find, in Aquinas' works, a large number of quotations from the Alexandrian writer (there are more than one thousand occurrences of the term "Origen" in its different grammatical inflections); on the other hand, the disparity of judgement that emerges about them is also not surprising.¹ The image of Origen arising from those quotations is that of an undisputed teacher of exegesis and spirituality, but also that of a dangerous theologian, whose protological, Christological and eschatological mistakes are above all a consequence of his "abuse" (*corruptio vel abusus*) of philosophy.²

* I wish to thank Frosty Loechel, Maurizio Mottolese and Catherine Roberts for deeply revising my English and offering several helpful suggestions.

1 See G. Bendinelli, *Tommaso d'Aquino lettore di Origene: un'introduzione*, in: *Adamantius* 15 (2009), 103–120 (103). I borrow here some of his wording. Bendinelli proposes some examples of this disparity in judgment, distinguishing the reception of Origen as a "heresiarch" (105–112) from that as an "exegete" (112–120).

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 2.3 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 50, Roma-Paris 1992). Aquinas refers to Origen's adherence to Platonism and, more generally, to "the views of the ancient philosophers", which would have led Origen to develop the doctrines of subordinationism (see id., *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 3,4, as well id., *Summa theologiae* 1.32,1, ad 1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 4, Rome 1888)), pre-existence of the soul (see id., *Summa contra*

According to Aquinas, the connaturality of faith and reason, which are both divine gifts, rules out the possibility of a conflict between philosophy and revelation: the condition being, that the practice of philosophy would depend on straight reason (we shall see below that such straightness, as a specific feature of natural integrity, must be thought of as a determination of divine grace).³

Indeed – this will be my crucial claim – Aquinas believes that Origen has neglected precisely the primacy of grace, bringing forth in this way a systematic and extreme rationalisation of the Christian message.⁴ This emerges, first of all, from Aquinas’ criticism against the Platonizing doctrine of the pre-existence of the *vóες* – a basic pillar of the Origenian theological system, which preserves the free self-determination of intellectual beings. Aquinas not only rejects this doctrine from a dogmatic point of view, he also criticises its theoretical implications and its conceptual assumptions. In his opinion, the Origenian doctrine reveals a deep misunderstanding of the gratuitous and projectual character of creation, and above all of the specific diversification of creatures, which can not be reduced to a “penal” reason.⁵ Most importantly the Origenian doctrine disregards the equally undue and projectual character of redemption, which Aquinas seems to consider (in line

Gentiles 2.83 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu edita Leonis XIII P. M. cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 13, Rome 1918)), and corporeity of all creatures (see id., *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* 5, ad 1 (J. Cos (ed.), *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 24/2, Rome 1992), and id., *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 6,6, ad 2 (P. Bazzi et alii (ed.), *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2, Turin ¹⁰1965)).

- 3 About grace as a condition of the natural perfection of reason, see my *Fede e grazia. Tommaso d’Aquino e il naturale esercizio della ragione*, in: *Filosofia e teologia* 32 (2018), 223–230. In Aquinas’ concordism, it is impossible that the right reason might be contrary to faith, simply because it is impossible to prove the opposite of truth (see Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 2,3). In order to not contradict faith, all that philosophy has to do is to conform to its own rational nature. Therefore, the primacy of theology – the duty of which, according to Aquinas, is to judge the conclusions of reason and to condemn as false those contrary to revelation (*Summa theologiae* 1.1,6, ad 2) – paradoxically turns out to be a guarantee of the “autonomy” of philosophy.
- 4 Aquinas captures here an undoubtedly authentic aspect of the systematic and speculative method of Origen’s thought. See G. Lettieri, *Dies una. L’allegoria di «coelum et terra in Principio» ricapitolazione del sistema mistico-speculativo di Origene*, in: *Adamantius* 23 (2017), 36–76 (37–43).
- 5 See here and after Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.118,3 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 5, Rome 1889).

with Augustine) as an authentic and predestined moral re-creation from the nothingness of sin.⁶

Roughly put, one may say that in Aquinas' perspective the abuse of reason has brought Origen to an erroneous rationalisation of divine omnipotence. Such a claim might appear surprising and paradoxical, given that the Aristotelian Aquinas is usually considered a promoter of philosophical sciences and autonomy of reason, as well as the interpreter of an authentic emancipation of human being and nature from divine causal absolutism – a kind of absolutism that is traditionally related to Augustinism. But I believe that matters should be seen differently. In Aquinas' thought, concerning the autonomy of reason, Aristotle plays a functional role but in a substantially theological context. With regard to human emancipation, Aquinas undoubtedly endows human will with an irreducible causal efficacy, but the subordinated and conditioned feature of that will remains equally undisputable. Human efficacy, just as the causal efficacy of any creature, is the efficacy of the secondary cause, subjected as such to the infallibility and immutability of divine government. Hence, any conclusion about the individual's capacity of self-determination, in order to be critically inferred, should consider to what extent that capacity fits in with the irresistible and fatal character of the divine purpose.

In the following pages, therefore, I wish to show how indeed the Aristotle of Aquinas, by means of a systematic and never neutral exegetical appropriation, turns out to be completely suitable to a theology of the predestined grace – a theology that is substantially Augustinian and, consequently, anti-Origenian.

1. Let me start with a few remarks about the Platonizing doctrine of the pre-existence of the *vóες* and their diversification on the basis of merit. My intention here will be to show that Aquinas challenges exactly the rational principle that, in his opinion, Origen invokes, equally improperly, regarding the issue of predestination.

In chapter forty-four of the second book of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas writes that Origen, in his *Peri Archon*,

6 I have dealt with creation and redemption in Augustine's and Aquinas' thought respectively in *Il nulla nelle Confessioni di Agostino tra creazione e conversione*, in: M. Lenzi / A. Maierù (eds.), *Discussioni sul nulla tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Florence 2009, 21–35 and in *In nihilum decidere. "Negatività" della creatura e nichilismo del peccato in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: *Consecutio Rerum. Rivista critica della Postmodernità* 1 (2017), 65–87, available on-line (www.consecutio.org); reprint in: M. Aiello / L. Micaloni / G. Rughetti (eds.), *Declinazioni del nulla. Non essere e negazione tra ontologia e politica*, Roma 2017, 67–89.

wished to oppose the objections and errors of the early heretics who endeavoured to prove that the heterogeneous character of good and evil in things has its origin in contrary agents. Now, there are, as Origen saw, great differences (*multam distantiam*) in natural as well as human things which seemingly are not preceded by any merits (*nulla merita praecessisse videntur*); some bodies are luminous, some dark, some men are born of pagans, others of Christians, etc. And having observed this fact, Origen was impelled to assert that all diversity found in things resulted from a diversity of merits, in accordance with the justice of God (*omnem diversitatem in rebus inventam ex diversitate meritorum, secundum Dei iustitiam, processisse*). For he says that God, of His goodness alone, first made all creatures equal (*aequales*), and all of them spiritual and rational; and these by their free choice (*per liberum arbitrium*) were moved in various ways, some adhering to God more, and some less, some withdrawing from Him more, and some less; and as a result of this, diverse grades in spiritual substances were established by the divine justice (*diversi gradus in substantiis spiritualibus ex divina iustitia sunt subsecuti*), so that some were angels of diverse orders, some human souls in various conditions, some demons in their differing states.⁷

Whether Aquinas would here depend on Origen directly (as I suppose) or not, there is no doubt that he captures, in this rigorous albeit compendious exposition, some authentic elements of the *Peri Archon*. According to Origen, indeed, the pre-existence of souls is the assumption itself that, against the Gnostics, allows the equity of God to be safeguarded, by tracing back the diversity of creatures to their earlier free choice rather than to an unmotivated and thus unequal diversity of nature. Given the biblical and Pauline presupposition that on God's part there is no injustice (Rom 9:14) nor partiality (Rom 2:11), Origen assumes that in the beginning God created perfectly equal beings, since there was no reason to differentiate the distribution of the conditions, and that subsequently He "dispenses everything in accordance with the merit and progress of each (*omnia pro meritis singulorum profectibusque dispensat*)".⁸ But this is precisely the point that Aquinas

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.44 (J.F. Anderson (transl.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Book two: Creation*, New York 1956). See also id., *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3,16; 3,18; id., *De substantiis separatis* 12 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. XL/D-E, Rome 1968); id., *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2; 1.65,2; id., *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* 5,4 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 23, Roma-Paris 1982), and id., *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 9,3, § 767 (R. Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. I, Turin 1953).

8 So Or., princ. 1.8,4 (J. Behr (ed. and transl.), *Origen, On First Principles*, OECT, 2 vols., Oxford 2017). Yet, Aquinas seems to summarise here princ 2.9,5–7 (but see also princ. 1.7,4).

calls into question: the view that the criterion of justice that determines the diversity of creatures would be a principle of due distribution. Against this idea, Aquinas concludes:

Now, Origen seems not to have taken into consideration the fact that when we give something, not in payment of a debt, but as a free gift, it is not contrary to justice if we give unequal things, without having weighed the difference of merits; although payment is due to those who merit. But, as we have shown above, God brought things into being, not because He was in any way obliged to do so, but out of pure generosity. Therefore, the diversity of creatures does not presuppose a diversity of merits. And again, since the good of the whole is better than the good of each part, the best maker is not he who diminishes the good of the whole in order to increase the goodness of some of the parts; a builder does not give the same relative value to the foundation that he gives to the roof, lest he ruin the house. Therefore, God, the maker of all things, would not make the whole universe the best of its kind, if He made all the parts equal, because many grades of goodness would then be lacking in the universe, and thus it would be imperfect.⁹

Briefly, Aquinas seems to argue here that, since creation presupposes absolutely nothing (except its very reason, i.e. divine goodness), there is nothing, apart from His own goodness, to which God owes something. Consequently, it is not because of a debt of justice that God made the universe. As Augustine had claimed, God brought things into being by pure generosity, in order that His goodness might be manifested through creation.¹⁰ And when something

9 *Videtur autem Origenes non perpensis quod, cum aliquid non ex debito sed liberaliter damus, non est contra iustitiam si inaequalia damus, nulla diversitate meritorum pensata, cum retributio merentibus debeatur. Deus autem, ut supra ostensum est, ex nullo debito, sed ex mera liberalitate res in esse produxit. Unde diversitas creaturarum diversitatem meritorum non praesupponit. Item, cum bonum totius sit melius quam bonum partium singularium, non est optimi factoris diminuere bonum totius ut aliquarum partium augeat bonitatem: non enim aedificator fundamento tribuit eam bonitatem quam tribuit tecto, ne domum faciat ruinosam. Factor igitur omnium, Deus, non faceret totum universum in suo genere optimum, si faceret omnes partes aequales, quia multi gradus bonitatis in universo deessent, et sic esset imperfectum* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.44; transl. Anderson).

10 *Hanc autem positionem [scil. the Origen's opinion, according to which the diversity of creatures was preceded by and depends upon the diversity of merit and demerit] Augustinus reprobatur. Causam enim creaturarum condendarum, tam spiritualium quam corporalium, constat nihil aliud esse quam Dei bonitatem, in quantum creaturae suae, sua bonitate creatae, bonitatem increatae secundum suum modum repraesentant* (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3,18), referring to August., civ. 11.23 (B. Dombart / A. Kalb (eds.), *Augustinus, De civitate Dei*, books 11–22, CCSL 48, Turnhout 1955). Cf. analogously Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2.

is given out of pure liberality, “there is no injustice in dealing unequally with equal persons”, since the gift is undue and it depends on the giver, not on the receiver.¹¹ On the other hand, if God creates the world in order to manifest His goodness, some degree of multiplicity and inequality appears to be inherent. Divine goodness could not be displayed in the universe with the same uniformity and simplicity featuring God.¹² It has to be shown through many different forms and grades, all arranged “for the perfection of the whole (*propter perfectionem totius*)”.¹³ Hence, the difference in status among the creatures in this world depends on God’s wisdom and on His plan of creation – what makes God like a very skilful architect, who subordinates matter to form, adapting every single part to the completeness of the whole. The point I wish to make here, then, is that the same anti-Origenian position that Aquinas asserts at the ontological and cosmological level (about creation), works also at the soteriological level (about predestination), where it takes on a further and consistent anti-Pelagian connotation – which would deserve special attention.

2. In the question twenty-three of the first part of the *Summa*, asking “whether the foreknowledge of merits is the cause of predestination (*utrum*

11 These words seem to hint at the Aristotelian concept of analogy as principle of equal distribution. See Arist., EN 5.3, 1131a18–26 (L. Bywater (ed.), *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, Oxford ²¹1991), about which Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* 5.4 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 47/2, Rome 1969): when the principle of liberality prevails, the giving does not appear as a payment or a reward (see id., *Sententia libri Ethicorum* 8.6), but rather as an undue and free act. Cf. id., *Quaestiones disputate de potentia* 3,16, ad 19: *Non [...] est contra iustitiam quod inaequalia aequalibus dentur nisi quando alicui redditur debitum; quod in prima rerum creatione non potest dici. Quod enim ex propria liberalitate datur, potest dari plus vel minus secundum arbitrium dantis et secundum quod eius sapientia requiritur.*

12 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,1: *Unde dicendum est quod distinctio rerum et multitudo est ex intentione primi agentis, quod est Deus. Produxit enim res in esse propter suam bonitatem communicandam creaturis et per eas repraesentandam. Et quia per unam creaturam sufficienter repraesentari non potest, produxit multas creaturas et diversas [...]: nam bonitas quae in Deo est simpliciter et uniformiter, in creaturis est multipliciter et divisam.*

13 *In constitutione rerum non est inaequalitas partium per quamcumque inaequalitatem praecedentem vel meritorum vel etiam dispositionis materiae; sed propter perfectionem totius. Ut patet etiam in operibus artis: non enim propter hoc differt tectum a fundamento, quia habet diversa materiam; sed ut sit domus perfecta ex diversis partibus, quaerit artifex diversam materiam, et faceret eam si posset* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2, ad 3).

praescientia meritorum sit causa praedestinationis)”, Aquinas – who, as we will see rejects this hypothesis in the wake of Augustine – preliminarily formulates an argument in favour, which is clearly based on the aforementioned Origenian principle – *ratio Origenis*¹⁴ – of distributive justice.

Given that – Aquinas relates – “there is no injustice in God” (Rom 9:14), that “it would seem unjust that unequal things be given to equals”, and that “all men are equal as regards both nature and original sin, and inequality in them arises from the merits or demerits of their actions”, the conclusion can be reached that “God does not prepare unequal things for men by predestinating and reprobating, unless through the foreknowledge of their merits and demerits”.¹⁵ It has to be maintained that such a humanistic idea, according to which predestination – with particular reference to Rom 8:28–30 and 9:10–18 – consists in a foreknowledge of the free self-determination of the creature (or, knowledge of the merits earned by the souls in their previous life), is really Origenian in character and considered as such by Aquinas. It is therefore in a consistent and legitimised way that Aquinas formulates this argument here by implicitly employing an Origenian reasoning.¹⁶

14 So Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3.16, ad 19. Cf. analogously id., *Summa theologiae*, 1.47,2, ad 3: *ratio [...] quae movit Origenem*.

15 *Praeterea, non est iniquitas apud Deum, ut dicitur Rom 9, 14. Iniquum autem esse videtur, ut aequalibus inaequalia dentur. Omnes autem homines sunt aequales et secundum naturam et secundum peccatum originale: attenditur autem in eis inaequalitas secundum merita vel demerita priorum actuum. Non igitur inaequalia praeparat Deus hominibus, praedestinando et reprobando, nisi propter differentium meritorum praescientiam* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ar. 3; transl.: *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1, London 1911). See also id., *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ar. 2 (P. Mandonnet (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, t. I, Parisiis 1929), e id., *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 6,2, ar. 8 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 22/1.2, Rome 1970).

16 On the predestination as foreknowledge of future merits (i.e., the merits of the post-Adamic man) in Origen’s thought, see Or., comRom 1.5; 7.6 (C.P. Hammond Bammel (ed.), *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes. Kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins*, Vetus Latina 16; 33–34, Freiburg 1990–1998); id., phil. 25.1–2 (É. Junod, (ed.), *Origène, Philocalie 21–27. Sur le libre arbitre*, SC 226, Paris 1976), and id., homNum 3.2,2 (L. Doutreleau (ed.), *Origène, Homelies sur les Nombres I*, SC 415, Paris 1996), about which cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* 6,2, ar. 7, and M. Belcastro, *La predestinazione nel Commento alla Lettera ai Romani di Origene. Trasformazione e normalizzazione di un paradosso*, in: Adamantius 21 (2015), 211–243. About the idea that God separates the creatures (with reference

In his answer Aquinas appeals, first of all, to the creation of the world, since the general reason why some are saved and others damned is to be related, just as in the case of creation, to divine goodness, which demands a multiformity of grades in order to be adequately expressed and represented by creatures. Thomas' major claim is that God does not save everyone, even though He could do that, for the sake of an adequate manifestation of his goodness. If the "moral order" – considered here correspondent to the "metaphysical" one – consisted entirely of the saved, i.e. those who have benefited from God's mercy, it would be imperfect.¹⁷ Such order, in effect, would not adequately represent the divine goodness, which has to be expressed also in the form of justice, through the just condemnation of sinners. This is the reason why – Aquinas insists, resorting to quotations from Augustine and Paul – God elects some and damns others, although the fact that He saves this one and reproves that one "has no reason, except the divine will".

Let us directly examine Aquinas' text, which deserves to be quoted in full for its impressive radical coherence.

The reason for the predestination of some, and reprobation of others, must be sought for in the goodness of God. Thus He is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. It is necessary that the divine goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in His creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to the simplicity of God. Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required different grades of being; some of which hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should never happen, as was said above [scil. q. 22, a. 2]. Let us now consider the whole of the human race, as we consider the whole universe. God wills to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those whom He predestines, by means of His mercy, in sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of His justice, in punishing them. This is

to 2 Tim 2:20–21) "not from the beginning, according to his foreknowledge", but as a consequence of the previous acts of the souls, see instead Or., princ. 3.1,21–22 (transl. Behr), about which Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.161 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 14, Rome 1926), and id., *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, and A. Monaci Castagno, *L'idea della preesistenza delle anime e l'esegesi di Rm 9, 9–21*, in: H. Crouzel / A. Quacquarelli (eds.), *Origeniana secunda*, Roma 1980, 69–78, according to which Origen shifted his thought from the pre-existence of the souls to the divine foreknowledge. See also M. Harz, *La préexistence des âmes dans l'oeuvre d'Origène*, in: L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana quarta*, Innsbruck 1987, 238–258 (251–252).

17 See also P. Porro, *Thomas Aquinas. A Historical and Philosophical Profile*, Washington 2015, 390, from which the quotations are taken.

the reason why God elects some and rejects others. To this the Apostle refers, saying: *What if God, willing to show His wrath* (that is, the vengeance of His justice), *and to make His power known, endured* (that is, permitted) *with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction; that He might show the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He hath prepared unto glory* (Rom ix. 22, 23). He also says: *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver; but also of wood and of earth; and some, indeed, unto honor, but some unto dishonor* (2 Tim ii. 20). Why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason; except the Divine Will. Whence Augustine [On John 26:2], says: “Why He draws one, and another He does not draw, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to fall into error”.¹⁸

This way of looking at the eschatological order implies that, just as in the case of any teleological explanation, the final condition has to be understood from the point of view of the final cause. This is to say that we understand why elects and rejects have the characteristics they have by grasping their contribution to the realisation of the divine plan, i.e. the representation of

18 *Ad tertium dicendum quod ex ipsa bonitate divina ratio sumi potest praedestinationis aliquorum, et reprobationis aliorum. Sic enim Deus dicitur omnia propter suam bonitatem fecisse, ut in rebus divina bonitas repraesentetur. Necesse est autem quod divina bonitas, quae in se est una et simplex, multiformiter repraesentetur in rebus; propter hoc quod res creatae ad simplicitatem divinam attingere non possunt. Et inde est quod ad completionem universi requiruntur diversi gradus rerum, quarum quaedam altum, et quaedam infimum locum teneant in universo. Et ut multiformitas graduum conservetur in rebus, Deus permittit aliqua mala fieri, ne multa bona impediatur, ut supra dictum est. Sic igitur consideremus totum genus humanum, sicut totam rerum universitatem. Voluit igitur Deus in hominibus, quantum ad aliquos, quos praedestinat, suam repraesentare bonitatem per modum misericordiae, parcendo; et quantum ad aliquos, quos reprobat, per modum iustitiae, puniendo. Et haec est ratio quare Deus quosdam eligit, et quosdam reprobat. Et hanc causam assignat apostolus, ad Rom. 9 [22–23], dicens: volens Deus ostendere iram (idest vindictam iustitiae), et notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit (idest permisit) in multa patientia, vasa irae apta in interitum, ut ostenderet divitias gloriae suae in vasa misericordiae, quae praeparavit in gloriam. Et 2 Tim. 2 [20] dicit: in magna autem domo non solum sunt vasa aurea et argentea, sed etiam lignea et fictilia; et quaedam quidem in honorem, quaedam in contumeliam. Sed quare hos elegit in gloriam, et illos reprobat, non habet rationem nisi divinam voluntatem. Unde Augustinus dicit, super Ioannem [XXVI, 2]: ‘quare hunc trahat, et illum non trahat, noli velle diiudicare, si non vis errare’ (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ad 3; translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). Differently id. *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ad 2, where, in spite of reaffirming that *gratia datur gratis et non redditur meritis*, he treats the different ways employed by human beings in order to receive grace as those dispositions that are able to explain predestination with regard to its effect.*

divine goodness. If this representation must be displayed, then the order has to be such and such. Briefly, it is hypothetically necessary. Indeed, the achievement of the purpose is never unconditional as such, but it is obtained by adapting the means to the end. According to Aquinas, nonetheless, an inscrutable element of arbitrariness has to be added, insofar as nothing does really determine the whole process, except God's own will. Aquinas himself makes this clear in the subsequent lines. First, he extends the analogy with the order of creation, comparing the indifference of the sinner to the uniformity of the primary matter, which has been arranged and distinguished by God into different forms in order to achieve the perfection of the universe. Secondly, he develops a further analogy with the artificer, comparing the indifference of the sinner to the uniformity of building materials, such as stones, explaining that it is only for technical reasons that the architect assigns different functions to each of them:

Also in the things of nature, a reason can be assigned, since primary matter is altogether uniform, why one part of it was fashioned by God from the beginning under the form of fire, another under the form of earth, that there might be a diversity of species in things of nature. Why this particular part of matter is under this particular form, and that under another, depends upon the simple Will of God; as from the simple will of the artificer it depends that this stone is in this part of the wall, and that in another; although the plan requires that some stones should be in this place, and some in that place. Neither on this account can there be said to be injustice in God, if He prepares unequal lots for not unequal things. This would be altogether contrary to the notion of justice, if the effect of predestination was granted as a debt, and not gratuitously. In things which are given gratuitously, a person can give more or less, just as he pleases (provided he deprives nobody of his due), without any infringement of justice. This is what the master of the house said: *Take what is thine, and go thy way. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will?* (Matt 20:14, 15).¹⁹

19 *Sicut etiam in rebus naturalibus potest assignari ratio, cum prima materia tota sit in se uniformis, quare una pars eius est sub forma ignis, et alia sub forma terrae, a Deo in principio condita, ut scilicet sit diversitas specierum in rebus naturalibus. Sed quare haec pars materiae est sub ista forma, et illa sub alia, dependet ex simplici divina voluntate. Sicut ex simplici voluntate artificis dependet, quod ille lapis est in ista parte parietis, et ille in alia, quamvis ratio artis habeat quod aliqui sint in hac, et aliqui sint in illa. Neque tamen propter hoc est iniquitas apud Deum, si inaequalia non inaequalibus praeparat. Hoc enim esset contra iustitiae rationem, si praedestinationis effectus ex debito redderetur, et non daretur ex gratia. In his enim quae ex gratia dantur, potest aliquis pro libito suo dare cui vult, plus vel minus, dummodo nulli subtrahat debitum, absque praeiudicio iustitiae. Et hoc est quod dicit paterfamilias, Matth. 20 [14–15]: tolle quod tuum est, et vade. An non licet mihi quod volo facere?* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ad 3; transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). The same example

Briefly, the fact that one is saved and another lost depends – just as in the case of the original distinction of beings – on the principle of the proper manifestation of divine goodness, namely, that every difference among creatures is required not per se, but only on account of the perfection of the whole.²⁰ Hence, it is better, and as such pre-ordained by God, that someone is condemned rather than all are saved, so that the good of justice is manifested and appreciated. For the same reason, God permits certain evils or defects (for example, the slaying of animals, or tyrannical persecution), in order that the pertinent goods may not be hindered (the life of the lion, or the patience of martyrs).²¹ However, the fact that specifically this one would be saved and that one would not, depends on the unfathomable will of God, with no implication of any form of injustice or partiality. We know indeed that when something is given out without being due – as occurs in the case of the gift of grace, which depends exclusively on God’s liberality and mercy –, no partiality (*personarum acceptio*) takes place. For, as Aquinas writes elsewhere once more invoking Matt 20:14–15, “anyone may, without injustice, give of his own as much as he will, and to whom he will”²² –

of the stones, and their different placement according to art, again recurs in id., *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* 6,5, § 938 (R. Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, Turin 1972), and in id., *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 9,4, § 788. As Henry of Ghent (cf. *Quodlibeta* 8,5 (J. Badius (ed.), *Henrici de Gandavo Quodlibeta*, Paris 1518, 309rK)) seems to suggest (see also Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1.41, 19 (*Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia studio et cura Commissionis Scotisticae ad fidem codicum edita*, VI, *Liber primus. Distinctiones* 26–48, Civitas Vaticana 1963)), Aquinas could have in mind here Arist., ph. 2.6, 197b9–11 (D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotelis Physica*, Oxford 1992), on Protarchus’ dictum, according to which the stones of which altars are made, are more fortunate than those that are trodden under foot. Cf. furthermore Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.161, where the analogy is with the potter (*et sicut ex simplici voluntate procedit artificis ut ex eadem materia, similiter disposita, quaedam vasa format ad nobiles usus et quaedam ad ignobiles*), and contains an overt anti-Origenian purpose (*per hoc autem excluditur error Origenis, qui dicebat hos ad Deum converti et non alios, propter aliqua opera quae animae eorum fecerant antequam corporibus unirentur*).

20 See analogously Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,7.

21 *Si enim omnia mala impedirentur, multa bona deessent universo: non enim esset vita leonis, si non esset occisio animalium; nec esset patientia martyrum, si non esset persecutio tyrannorum* (*Summa theologiae* 1.22,2, ad 2).

22 *Alia est datio ad liberalitatem pertinens, qua scilicet gratis datur alicui quod ei non debetur. Et talis est collatio munerum gratiae, per quae peccatores assumuntur a Deo. Et in hac donatione non habet locum personarum acceptio, quia quilibet potest absque iniustitia de suo dare quantum vult et cui vult, secundum illud*

which is properly, in its evangelical foundation, an Augustinian claim.²³

3. As has emerged, within his anti-Origenian polemic, Aquinas establishes a deep correspondence between creation and redemption, two events that

Matth. 20 [14–15]: “an non licet mihi quod volo facere? Tolle quod tuum est, et vade” (Summa theologiae 2–2.63,1, ad 3 (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia, t. IX, Rome 1897); transl.: The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 10, London / New York 1918).

- 23 Cf. Aug., persev. 8,17 (M.A. Lesousky (ed. and transl.), *The De dono perseverantiae of Saint Augustine*, Washington 1956). About the consistent Augustinianism manifested here by Aquinas, see also P. Porro, «Rien de personnel». *Notes sur la question de l’acceptio personarum dans la théologie scholastique*, in: *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 94 (2010), 481–509 (507), and id., *Divine Predestination, Human Merit and Moral Responsibility. The reception of Augustine’s Doctrine of Irresistible Grace in Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus*, in: P. D’Hoine / G. Van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven 2014, 553–570 (569–570). In this regard, Porro suggests an interesting comparison with Henry of Ghent, according to whom God cannot intentionally will the sin, but He just punishes those who sin, and this is the reason why the analogy between moral and metaphysical order has to be rejected (cf. *Quodlibeta* 8,5, 309vM-310rM). In the same direction, see also Guillelmus de Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum* 41 (G.I. Etzkorn / F.E. Kelley (eds.), *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera theologica*, 4, St Bonaventure, New York 2000, 601) and notably Petrus Aureolus, *In primum librum Sententiarum* 41,1, Rome 1596, 939–940: *Secundo vero deficit in eo quod ait non esse aliquam causam in speciali, quare iste praedestinatus sit et ille reprobatus; sed hoc esse solum ex simplici voluntate divina et pro libito eius: omnis enim qui pro libito voluntatis aliquem affligit et punit et in peccatum labi permittit ad hoc solum ut puniat et affligat crudelis est et iniustus; delectatur enim per se in poenis [...]. Praeterea: licet [...] possit artifex disponere pro libito voluntatis absque nota crudelitatis & iniustitia, utpote aedificator potest lapides ponere istum inferius & illum superius [...] absque nota iniuriae [...] et similiter figulus ex eadem massa potest facere vas in honorem & vas in contumeliam absque hoc, quod isti iniurietur; et similiter Deus absque iniuria potest ponere unam partem materiae sub forma ignis & aliam sub formam terrae; nihilominus in habentibus experientiam boni & mali, honoris & contumeliae, illud fieri non potest absque iniuria; quia debitum est naturae ut fiat sub factione quae apta nata est sibi inesse: et ideo non est absque iniuria facere hominem in sempiterna tristitia & miseria, absque eius demerito pro solo libito facientis [...]. Praeterea: licet in gratuitis possit tribuere plus vel minus cui vult distributor absque ullo praeiudicio iustitiae, non tamen verum est quod possit cui vult poenam infligere absque iniuria et sic intelligitur verbum patrisfamilias [...]; ergo non potest esse absque iniuria, quod fiat reprobatio absque causa pro solo libito voluntatis.*

are utterly free and unconditional from the viewpoint of the ontological and moral nothingness of the creature, but are provided of an intrinsic finality which justifies the recurrent analogy with art. In this regard, it should be noted that the image of God as craftsman – and therefore the image of a God that is not only Creator (*creator*), but also Maker (*factor*) –²⁴ is not an accessory or merely metaphorical, but represents a structural theoretical pivot, which intersects the biblical theme of the “potter”, and at once actively appropriates an Aristotelian teleological view of nature, resorting to the analogy with art and technology in a continuous manner.²⁵ The result is that Aquinas, by extending the Pauline theological perspective through the Aristotelian teleology, feels himself theoretically and exegetically legitimised to consider the creature as an instrument of divine purpose, and to attribute to God, as craftsman, the task to use it in accordance with His own purpose.

I shall return below to the “anti-Origenian” motif of the Creator employing the human being as a tool. Before that, however, in order to evaluate such instrumental condition of the creature correctly, avoiding any attempt of neutralisation,²⁶ it is worth pointing out that in the *Commentary on the*

24 *Inde est quod fides catholica Deum omnipotentem non solum creatorem sed etiam ‘factorem’ nominat, nam facere proprie est artificis qui per voluntatem operatur* (Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* I.96 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 42, Roma 1979). It seems to me extremely significant, then, that in at least one case Aquinas defines the Aristotelian God as “maker” too: *Est autem attendendum quod Aristoteles hic ponit Deum esse factorem caelestium corporum et non solum causam per modum finis, ut quidam dixerunt* (id., *In libros Aristotelis De caelo et mundo expositio* I.8 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 3, Rome 1886)). Cf. M.F. Johnson, *Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?*, in: *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 129–155.

25 See w. Wieland, *Die aristotelische Physik*, Göttingen ³1992, 254–277.

26 I refer to B. Shanley, *Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas*, in: *American Catholic Philological Quarterly* 72 (1998), 99–122 (106–108), who quotes Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de veritate* 24,1, ad 5, as an argument for restricting the category of instrumental causation. Yet, here and elsewhere (cf. id., *Summa theologiae* 1–2.68.3, ad 2 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 6, Rome 1891), cited *infra*, note 33, and *ibid.* 2–2.23,2), Aquinas does not properly exclude that the human being, as a creature, would be an instrument of God, under the full and unconditional control of His providential design. He rather excludes that this condition would be similar to that of a tool which has no faculty of action. On this topic, see also S.A. Long, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Divine Causality, and the Mystery of Predestination*, in: S.A. Long / E. W. Nutt / T.J. White (eds.), *Thomism*

Sentences, Aquinas displays the same technical scheme, with its strong teleological commitment, in a very different manner: the material suited to buildings here appears given by nature, and the task of the builder would only be that of choosing the stones according to their natural predispositions.²⁷ This is, I believe, a synergical interpretation – not by chance shared by Origen.²⁸ It is fitting to a synergistic model of predestination, whereby, although God gives grace only out of His goodness, He nonetheless predestines those receiving it, on the ground of His foreknowledge about their autonomous and meritorious preparation to receive it.²⁹

It seems then to me extremely significant that in the *Summa theologiae* – in the light of an evident theological shift, although without an explicit retraction –, Aquinas judges this early position as basically Pelagian (or, one might say, Semi-Pelagian³⁰), joining it to the Origenian doctrine of the previous

and Predestination: Principles and Disputations, Ave Maria, Florida 2016, 51–76 (53–62).

- 27 See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.47,1,3: *Verbi gratia, aedificator in constitutione domus habet duos motus voluntatis. Unum quo vult formam domus inducere in materiam sine hoc quod aliquid consideret determinate de partibus domus. Alium motum habet quo, considerato quod lapis iste est aptus ad fundamentum, vult ipsum in fundamento collocare* (cf. also *ibid.* 46,1,1, ad 4). Analogously, as regards the natural model of the prime matter: *Diversitas autem recipientium attenditur, secundum quod aliquid est magis aptum et paratum ad recipiendum. Sicut autem videmus in formis naturalibus, quod per dispositiones accidentales, sicut calorem et frigus et huiusmodi, materia efficitur magis vel minus disposita ad suscipiendum formam; ita etiam in perfectionibus animae ex ipsis operibus animae anima efficitur habilior vel minus habilis ad consequendum perfectionem suam* (*ibid.* 17.1,3).
- 28 Compare Or., princ. 3.1,24: [...] *cum Deus fingit vasa, alia quidem ad honorem, alia vero ad contumeliam, putandum est quod honoris vel contumeliae causas tamquam materiam quandam nostras vel voluntates vel proposita vel merita habet, ex quibus singulos nostrum vel ad honorem vel ad contumeliam fingat, dum motus ipsae animae et propositum mentis de se ipso suggerat illi, quem non latet cor et cogitatio animi, utrum ad honorem fingi vas eius, an ad contumeliam debeat* (and analogously *id.*, comRom 7.15,5). According to Origen, just like the young Aquinas, the freely self-determined human wills are similar to diversely prepared matters, from which God draws correspondingly some vessels *unto honour* and others *unto dishonour* (see also R. Penna, *Interpretazione origeniana ed esegesi odierna di Rm 9, 6–29*, in: L. Perrone (ed.), *Il cuore indurito del Faraone. Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Genova 1992, 119–140 [133–139]).
- 29 *Illi enim Deus proponit gratiam infundere quem praescit se ad gratiam preparaturum* (Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ad 1).
- 30 See also J.P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action. 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Notre Dame 1995, 38, note 84; 187, note 87, and Porro, 2014, 560. On the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of the *initium fidei* as human “merit”

merits of souls.³¹ The mistake now imputed to that opinion is that it takes human free desire – being the *initium fidei*, or any other kind of preparation

and condition of grace, compare D. Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen. The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the so-called Semipelagians*, Leuven / Paris / Dudley (Ma) 2003.

- 31 *Fuerunt igitur quidam, qui dixerunt quod effectus praedestinationis praeordinatur alicui propter merita praeexistencia in alia vita. Et haec fuit positio Origenis, qui posuit animas humanas ab initio creatas, et secundum diversitatem suorum operum, diversos status eas sortiri in hoc mundo corporibus unitas [...]. Fuerunt ergo alii, qui dixerunt quod merita praeexistencia in hac vita sunt ratio et causa effectus praedestinationis. Posuerunt enim Pelagiani quod initium beneficiendi sit ex nobis, consummatio autem a Deo. Et sic, ex hoc contingit quod alicui datur praedestinationis effectus, et non alteri, quia unus initium dedit se praeparando, et non alius* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5). On the historical relationship between Origenism and Pelagianism, see: G. Bostock, *The Influence of Origen on Pelagius and Western Monasticism*, in: W. A. Bienert / U. Kühneweg (eds.), *Origeniana septima*, Leuven 1999, 381–396. According to Aquinas, Pelagius was not only the theorist of human self-sufficiency (compare for example *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.17,1,1, ar. 8; ad 8, and *ibid.* 26,1,4), but also that of the more subtle synergy between human free preparation and gift of grace, previously shared by Aquinas: cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.149; 152; *id.*, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, 4,3 (R.-A. Gauthier (ed.), *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 25/1–2, Rome 1996); *id.*, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.114,5, ad 1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. VII, Rome 1892); *ibid.* 2–2.6,1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. VIII, Rome 1895); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 3,3, § 302; 7,3, § 579; 9,2, § 758; 9,3, § 771; *id.*, *Super secundam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, 3, lect. 1, § 86 (Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. I); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Ephesios lectura* 1,1, § 12 (Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. II, Turin 1953); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Philipenses lectura* 1,1, § 12; 2,3, § 76 (Cai (ed.), vol. II); *id.*, *Super secundam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura* 2,4, § 86 (Cai (ed.), vol. II); *id.*, *Expositio in Matthaeum* 6,6 (A. Guarenti (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, vol. I, Turin 1953). The discovery of Semi-Pelagianism is traced back to the reading of the *De predestinatione sanctorum* by H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1941, 92–122, followed by H. Pesch / A. Peters, *Einführung in die Lehre von Gnade und Rechtfertigung*, Darmstadt 1981, 64–68 and, with some adjustment, by Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action*, 266–276. See also M. Paluch, *Saint Augustine et saint Thomas. Le De praedestinatione sanctorum dans l'œuvre de Thomas d'Aquin*, in: *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 87 (2003), 641–647. I would, however, underline here the deep conceptual consistence of Aquinas' perspective, matured in a theoretical context that was no less Aristotelian than Augustinian (cf. M. Lenzi, *Tra Aristotele e Agostino. Forma, materia e predestinazione in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: M. Lenzi / C.A. Musatti / L. Valente (eds.), *Medioevo e filosofia. Per Alfonso Maierù*, Rome 2013, 151–172).

for grace – as the cause (of the things willed) rather than the effect of predestination. So doing – this is the point that Aquinas wishes to make here – the free will of the creature comes to be separated from the unique condition of possibility of its action, i.e. the potency of the First Cause, by virtue of which any secondary cause can act (and correctly act):

there is no distinction – Aquinas writes – between what flows from free will, and what is of predestination; as there is not distinction between what flows from a secondary cause and a first cause. For providence of God produces effects through the operation of secondary causes, as was above shown [scil. 22,3]. Whence, that which flows from free will is also of predestination [...], even the preparation for grace. For neither does this happen otherwise than by divine help, according to the prophet Jeremias [5:21]: *Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted.*³²

In the process of justification, too, the creature seems to play an instrumental and material role. To be ordered to the final end, i.e. to the goodness of the divine purpose of salvation, means for the human being to be moved and informed by God, in accordance with His intention to manifest His own mercy.³³ And just as the instrument performs his function by virtue of

32 *Non est autem distinctum quod est ex libero arbitrio et ex praedestinatione; sicut nec est distinctum quod est ex causa secunda et causa prima, divina enim providentia producit effectus per operationes causarum secundarum, ut supra dictum est. Unde et id quod est per liberum arbitrium est ex praedestinatione [...], etiam ipsa praeparatio ad gratiam, neque enim hoc fit nisi per auxilium divinum, secundum illud Thren. ultimi: converte nos, domine, ad te, et convertemur* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5; transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). Compare also id, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.70 and especially id., *Ad Romanos lectura* 8,6, § 703: *sub praedestinatione cadit omne beneficium salutare, quod est homini ab aeterno divinitus praeparatum [...]. Unde ponere quod aliquod meritum ex parte nostra praesupponatur, cuius praescientia sit ratio praedestinationis, nihil est aliud quam gratiam ponere dari ex meritis nostris, et quod principium bonorum operum est ex nobis et consummatio est ex Deo.*

33 Still in a polemic context against Origen, see Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* 15.3, §§ 2022–2024: *Fuerunt tamen aliqui qui dicerent, quod merita nostra praecedentia sunt causa illius electionis: et hic fuit error Origenis [...]. Sed contra hoc est, quod dominus dicit: non vos me elegistis. Alii autem dicunt quod verum est quod merita in actu existentia non sunt causa praedestinationis, sed praesistentia in praescientia Dei; dicentes quod quia Deus scivit aliquos bonos futuros et bene usuros gratia, ideo proposuit eis gratiam se daturum. Sed si hoc esset, sequeretur quod ideo elegit nos, quia praescivit nos ipsum electuros. Et sic electio nostra praevia esset electioni divinae, quod est contra sententiam domini [...]; sed electio divina est causa influentiae maioris boni in uno quam in alio [...]. Ideo autem Deus uni magis quam alteri bonum influit, ut reluceat ordo in rebus: sicut apparet in rebus materialibus, quod materia prima quantum est de*

the agent, so it is by virtue of God – who establishes the aims and rules of the action – that the human being accomplishes all her acts. The latter are indeed pre-ordered to redemption, that is to say, they are hypothetically necessary. In sum, Aquinas does not deny human agency, but rather human autonomy, excluding that the human being would be the primary cause of her action and, as such, unconditioned author of her own initiative. My assumption is that this view – according to which the human being acts only inasmuch as she is acted upon, and is acted upon in order that he act³⁴ – is purely Augustinian, although it is expressed in the language and through the conceptual structures of medieval Aristotelianism, with its own metaphorical strategies.

4. Indeed, in order to understand the reason for and significance of such an instrumental role, it is necessary to assume the creatural constitution of the human being, in accordance with the underlying metaphysical pattern shaping Aquinas' thought. Although this is not the place to adequately investigate that matter, we may notice that for Aquinas the origin of the creature from nothing does not represent – as some scholars misleadingly argue – an extrinsic and ultimately indifferent way to bring the world into existence. In other words, the creation from nothing is far from a mere deist hypothesis about nature, where the latter appears to be autonomous and self-sustaining. Rather, the making of the world *ex nihilo* constitutes the principle itself – in the dual meaning of “beginning” and “cause” – of an intrinsic and finalised dependence, and – consequently – a fundamental factor of intelligibility, which explains why the world is how it is, what is its nature, its functioning and its destiny.³⁵

When Thomas claims that the human creature, considered in itself (*sibi autem relicta in se considerata*), is simply “nothing” (*nichil est*),³⁶ pure lack of being, therefore senseless and powerless, he means that this “negativity” represents the creature as regards its perseeity, i.e. from the viewpoint of

se, est uniformiter disposita ad omnes formas. Ipsae etiam res antequam sint, non sunt dispositae ad hoc vel illud esse; sed ut servetur ordo in eis, diversas formas et diversum esse sortiuntur a Deo. Et similiter in creatura rationali quidam eliguntur ad gloriam, quidam reprobantur.

34 *Ratio illa procedit de instrumento cuius non est agere sed solum agi. Tale autem instrumentum non est homo; sed sic agitur a Spiritu sancto, quod etiam agit, in quantum est liberi arbitrii* (id, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.68,3, ad 2).

35 I work here on some themes developed in Lenzi, *In nihilum decidere*, 2017.

36 Thomas Aquinas, *De aeternitate mundi*, (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 43, Rome 1976, 88).

properly understood autonomy and independence. “All things would fall into nothingness (*omnia in nihilum deciderent*)”, Thomas writes, “were they not upheld by the hand of the Almighty (*nisi ea manus omnipotentis contineret*)”.³⁷ Made in its groundlessness to be embraced and sustained by divine government, any creature finds in the power of God its natural and constitutive place. This explains, among other things, why the first human being was created in grace, and why nature, albeit distinct from grace, cannot be separated from the latter if not with laceration.³⁸ Given such a peculiar condition of union without confusion, as a remarkable article by Jean-Pierre Torrell showed, it is only by grace that nature, as creature, is preserved in its complete and perfect integrity, namely in its full functionality.³⁹

The relationship that, as we have observed before, exists between God as primary cause and the human being as secondary or instrumental cause, expresses exactly this condition of causal implication and containment. This occurs through a creative theologisation of the flux metaphysics found in the *De causis*, where the action of the secondary cause is always rooted in and overdetermined by the power of the primary cause. Therefore, Aquinas constantly states that God “is the cause enabling all operating agents to operate”, adding that “if divine influence were to cease, every operation would cease”.⁴⁰

By applying the Proclian causal hierarchy to the teleological structure featuring the natural and artificial processes described by Aristotle, Aquinas makes the secondary causes of Neoplatonic emanationism akin to the instrumental causes of Aristotelian finalism. The result is that of a strict cosmological and “providential determinism”, according to which – as Thomas writes in compliance with the medieval adage *opus naturae est opus intelligentiae* – “the intention of the primary cause aims down to the last effect

37 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*. 5,1, sc 3 (transl.: *On the power of God by Saint Thomas Aquinas*, literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers, vol. 2, London 1933), quoting Gregorius Magnus, mor. 16.37 (M. Adriaen (ed.), *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*. Libri XI-XXII, CCSL 143A, Turnholti 1979). But see also Aug., Gen litt 4.12 (I. Zycha (ed.), *S. Aureli Augustini De Genesi ad litteram*, CSEL 28, Prague 1894)

38 Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.95,1.

39 See J.-P. Torrell, *Nature et grâce chez Thomas d'Aquin*, in: *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001), 167–202.

40 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.67 (V.J. Bourke (transl.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Book three: Providence*, New York 1956). Aquinas expresses the same perspective, as he argues that “in all agent causes arranged in an orderly way the subsequent causes must act through the power of the first cause” (*ibid.*).

through all intermediate causes”.⁴¹ In fact, when one does not understand that the instrumental constitution of the creature has an eminently theological and providential value, he shall fail to comprehend the sense itself of the divine causality. Most importantly, however, he shall not understand how Thomas, explaining predestination, could adopt on a philosophical level all those biblical *auctoritates* – like Prov 21:1 (*The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; whithersoever He will, He shall turn it*) or Phil 2:13 (*It is God Who worketh in us, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will*) –, which incontrovertibly testify the unconditioned availability of human desires, fully inspired and used by God. This is indeed a very significant point, because it is precisely about the correct interpretation and understanding of these Scriptural verses that Aquinas returns to in his argument with Origen, with much theoretical and critical coherence:

Some people – Thomas writes –, as a matter of fact, not understanding how God could cause a movement of the will in us without prejudice to freedom of will, have tried to explain these texts in a wrong way. That is, they would say that God causes willing and accomplishing within us in the sense that He causes in us the power of willing, but not in such a way that He makes us will this or that. Thus does Origen, in his *Principles*, explain free choice, defending it against the texts above.⁴²

41 *Intentio primae causae respicit usque ad ultimum effectum per omnes causas medias* (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de causis expositio* 1,1 (H.D. Saffrey (ed.), Fribourg 1954)), that should be read in concert with id., *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 3.1 (R.W. Mulligan (transl.), *Truth by St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1, Questions 1–9, Chicago 1952): “We see also that a thing acts because of an end (*propter finem*) in two ways. The agent himself may determine his end – and this is true of all intellectual agents – or the end of the agent may be determined by another principal agent (*ab alio principali agente*). For example, the flight of an arrow is toward a definite end, but this end is determined by the archer. Similarly, an operation of a nature (*operatio naturae*) which is for a definite end (*ad determinatum finem*) presupposes an intellect that has pre-established the end of the nature and ordered it to that end (*praesupponit intellectum praestituentem finem naturae et ordinantem ad finem illum naturam*). For this reason, every work of nature is said to be a work of intelligence (*ratione cuius omne opus naturae dicitur esse opus intelligentiae*)”. I owe the expression “providential determinism” (“determinismo provvidenziale”) to P. Porro, *Lex necessitatis vel contingentiae. Necessità, contingenza e provvidenza nell’universo di Tommaso d’Aquino*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 96 (2012), 401–450 (430).

42 *Quidam vero non intelligentes qualiter motum voluntatis Deus in nobis causare possit absque preiudicio libertatis voluntatis, coacti sunt has auctoritates male exponere: ut scilicet dicerent quod Deus causat in nobis velle et perficere, in quantum causat nobis virtutem volendi, non autem sic quod faciat nos velle hoc vel illud, sicut Origenes exponit in III Periarchon, liberum arbitrium defendens contra auctoritates praedictas* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.89; transl. Bourke). The reference is to Or., princ., 3.1,20: “To this we must answer

Origen appears indeed to share the opinion according to which if will and action really depend on God then “it is not we who have done the more excellent deeds, but we seemed to do so, while it was God who bestowed them”.⁴³ Instead, according to Aquinas, even if our activity is determined by God, we are the ones who have undoubtedly acted by our power, yet as a creature can do, namely as a secondary cause, which acts by virtue of the power of the first cause, just as a tool acts by virtue of the power of the craftsman.⁴⁴

The idea that even human will would be a tool in God’s hands, and that God could change its inclination as He pleases,⁴⁵ fits in well with Aquinas’ theory of providence. He is convinced that, insofar as God is the cause of being as being, also the accidents of being – “among which are found *necessity* and *contingency*” – are subject to divine providence. The power of God is not only that of producing, in accordance with His own intentions, certain effects rather than others, but also that of establishing the modality – either necessary or contingent – of their realisation.⁴⁶ Thus, as He wants

that the statement of the Apostle [scil. Phil 2:13] does not say that to will evil things is of God or that to will good things is of God, nor that to do good things or evil things is of God, but he speaks generally, that to will and to do are of God” (transl. Behr).

43 οὐχ ἡμεῖς τὰ διαφέροντα πεποιήκαμεν, ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐδόξαμεν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς ταῦτα ἐδωρήσατο (Or., phil., 21.19; transl. Behr). See also id., princ. 3.1,20.

44 *Illud autem in cuius virtute agens agit, est causa non solum virtutis, sed etiam actus. Quod in artifice apparet, in cuius virtute agit instrumentum, etiam quod ab hoc artifice propriam formam non accepit, sed solum ab ipso applicatur ad actum. Deus igitur est causa nobis non solum voluntatis sed etiam volendi* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.89).

45 See for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.9,6, ad 3: *Ad tertium dicendum quod Deus movet voluntatem hominis sicut universalis motor ad universale obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle. Sed homo per rationem determinat se ad volendum hoc vel illud, quod est vere bonum vel apparens bonum. Sed tamen interdum specialiter Deus movet aliquos ad aliquid determinate volendum, quod est bonum: sicut in his quos movet per gratiam.*

46 *Sicut autem dictum est, ens in quantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum: unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnia accidentia entis in quantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens. Ad divinam igitur providentiam pertinet non solum quod faciat hoc ens, sed quod det ei contingentiam vel necessitatem. Secundum enim quod unicuique dare voluit contingentiam vel necessitatem, praeparavit ei causas medias, ex quibus de necessitate sequatur, vel contingenter. Invenitur igitur uniuscuiusque effectus secundum quod est sub ordine divinae providentiae necessitatem habere. Ex quo contingit quod haec conditionalis est vera: si aliquid est a Deo provisum, hoc erit* (Thomas Aquinas, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis commentaria*, 6.3, § 1220 (M.-R. Cathala (ed.), Turin

that the human being would be saved freely, God prepares, in order for this to be done, a contingent cause such as human will. But this does not mean that the predestined could, as such, not be saved. Any effect that would be under the infallible control of divine providence, although determined by contingent proximate causes, is ineluctably necessary; nevertheless, it happens – as Aquinas emphasises – in the hypothetical manner of conditional necessity:

The fact that the one who has been predestined, will be saved without fail, depends on the certainty of predestination; yet, the issue here is not an absolute necessity, but a conditional one, since – necessarily – if that one has been predestined, he will be saved; but this is not absolutely necessary.⁴⁷

In fact, one may well be perplexed facing this conclusion.⁴⁸ *Prima facie*, it is not clear what allows one to exclude that the good will of the predestined, without being absolutely necessary, would be causally determined and therefore necessitated by divine action. Aquinas nevertheless, excludes it. And as far as I can see, he comes to this stance on the basis of the absolute and unconditional character of the divine power, which drives intimately and appropriately, being the “intimate” cause of any creatural force.⁴⁹ It follows then that God can move human will in full conformity with its nature, that is to say, with the same natural spontaneity by which it moves itself, having created its power from nothing.⁵⁰

1935); transl. J.P. Rowan, *St. Thomas Aquinas Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Chicago 1961). On this topic, in addition to the already mentioned Porro, *Lex necessitatis vel contingentiae*, see also my *Si aliquid est a Deo provisum. Aristotele, il caso e il futuro contingente in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: M. Leone / L. Valente (eds.), *Libertà e determinismo. Riflessioni medievali*, Roma 2017, 197–233 (218–233).

47 *Ad primum ergo dicendum quod hic praedestinatus omnino salvatur ex certitudine divinae praedestinationis: non tamen est ibi necessitas absoluta, sed conditionalis; quia si talis est praedestinatus, necessario salvatur: non autem est necessarium simpliciter* (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet* 11.3, ad 1).

48 Cf. also Petrus Aureolus, *In primum librum Sententiarum* 40,4, 934: *Sed nec iste modus evadit, quia cum replicatio ista & conditio immutabilis sit, frustratorium est conari in oppositum consequentis*.

49 Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.105,5 (transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 5, London 1922): “And because in all things God Himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things (*magis intimum in rebus*); it follows that in all things God works intimately (*in omnibus intime operetur*). For this reason in Holy Scripture the operations of nature are attributed to God as operating in nature (*quasi operanti in natura*)”.

50 For example, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.106,2 (transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 5): “The operation of the will is a certain inclination of the willer to the thing willed. And He alone can change this

To summarise, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, framed within a universal teleological scheme, allows one to account for and support a strong anti-Origenian and anti-Pelagian interpretation of all those biblical *auctoritates* that, as we have seen, put human desires in the hands of God. Such an interpretation, making the agentiality of the human being subjected to the divine purpose of salvation and the unconditional power of creation, assumes that God is able to cause good will without forcing it – that means, according to Thomas and his theoretical but somewhat anodyne imagery, that God moves it spontaneously, or without prejudice to its freedom of will.

In this perspective, the human being can be regarded as free not only and not so much – as Origen leaned to stating polemically⁵¹ – because he considers himself free (for he is unaware of being an actor and performer of a predetermined process), but rather because he is involved in an intrinsically causal relationship, where the creature cannot be nor act out of the divine power sustaining it. Here, there is no place for freedom if the latter is taken as an absolutely autonomous activity. Outside God there is not freedom, just because there is no condition of possibility. Outside God there is only “nothingness”, and whatever form of freedom regarded as “une totale indépendance libertaire vis-à-vis de Dieu”⁵² – i.e. vis-à-vis the only condition of sense and existence for creatures – would necessarily imply a tragic and impossible nihilistic act of annulment and degradation. Hence, only God appears to be the measure and condition of freedom, and authentic human freedom – namely, the possibility to act in accordance with the integrity of rational nature – appears to be caused, restored and contained by divine grace. After all, even according to Origen – let us think of the doctrine of the final apocatastasis, i.e. the unavoidable and infallible progress towards good –, the autonomy of the creature is certainly not absolute, nor to the detriment of God’s providence.⁵³ Excluding that God could move good will for the fear

inclination, Who bestowed on the creature the power to will (*virtutem volendi*): just as that agent alone can change (*potest mutare*) the natural inclination, which can give the power to which follows that natural inclination. Now God alone gave to the creature the power to will (*solus autem Deus est qui potentiam volendi tribuit creaturae*), because He alone is the author of the intellectual nature (*quia ipse solus est auctor intellectualis naturae*)”. See however also *ibid.* 105,4, ad 1; 111,2; 1–2.9,6 and id., *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.88.

51 Compare above, note 43.

52 S. A. Long, *Providence, liberté et loi naturelle*, in: *Revue thomiste* 102 (2002), 355–406 (362).

53 With regard to the doctrine of the final apocatastasis, Gaetano Lettieri has spoken of a “paradossale prevalere nel sistema origeniano di un determinismo della grazia a scapito della capacità di autonomia (quindi di perdizione finale) della libertà, ma in senso del tutto opposto” with respect to the irresistibility of the Augustinian

of undesirable deterministic effects, would mean ruling out the possibility of considering human freedom in the only way that is theologically consistent: the paradoxical way of a “given freedom”, an undue and free release of the capacity to will the good. Insofar as Thomas claims that this redemption occurs through an intrinsic movement of the will, accomplishing its intimate and natural desire of conversion, the metaphysical consistency of a theory of freedom eminently theological and Christian, cannot be denied.⁵⁴

grace (G. Lettieri, *Il nodo cristiano. Dono e libertà dal Nuovo Testamento all’VIII secolo*, Rome 2009). See analogously id., *Apocatastasi logica o apocalisse della carne? Origene e Agostino paradigmi divergenti d’identificazione storico-sociale cristiana*, in: E. Canone (ed.), *Anima-corpo alla luce dell’Etica. Antichi e moderni*, Florence 2015, 133–146, and compare the historical remark by V. Grossi, *La presenza di Origene nell’ultimo Agostino (426–430)*, in: R. J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana quinta*, Leuven 1992, 558–564 (561).

54 See also O. H. Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin. Grenze und Größe mittelalterlicher Theologie. Eine Einführung*, Mainz 1989², 177–178.

Pasquale Terracciano

Blurred Lines: Origen the Kabbalist

Abstract: The essay explores a side of Origen's Renaissance *mnemohistory*. Starting from Pico della Mirandola's account of the Kabbalah, in which Origen assumes a privileged role, to the end of Sixteenth century, when sometimes he would himself be considered among the Kabbalists, the article shows how this paradigm would affect the history of Renaissance philosophy.

Keywords: Christian Kabbala, Allegory, Esoteric teaching, *Prisca theologia*

In a pivotal page of the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola has written:

I come now to those things that I deduced from the ancient mysteries of the Hebrews and that I cite as confirmation of the sacrosanct and Catholic faith. So that these things not be considered, by those who are ignorant of such matters, imaginary trifles or the fables of storytellers. I wish to explain to all men what they are and what they are alike; where they come from; by whom and by how many enlightened authors they are confirmed; and how enigmatic, how divine, how necessary they are for those of our own faith for the safeguard of our religion against the importunate calumnies of the Jews. Not only the famous doctors of the Hebrews, but also from among men of our opinion Esdras, Hilary and Origen write that Moses on the mount received from God not only the Law, which he left to posterity written down in five books, but also a true and more occult explanation of the Law.¹

Through this passage, Pico states the existence of an esoteric and perfect knowledge divulged to Moses; in the following lines he asserts that this revealed doctrine is the mysterious Kabbalah. For corroborating the Christian conformity of his theory, he referred to a biblical author, Esdras, and two theologians, Origen of Alexandria and Hilary. This statement can also be found in the preface of Pico's *Apologia*, (into which Pico merged a large part of the *Oratio*) written after the condemnation of several theses contained in his *Conclusiones*;² moreover, the account of the double revelation is

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- 1 G. Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man [Oratio de hominis dignitate]*, English translation by F. Borghesi / M. Papio / M. Riva, Cambridge 2012, 253–255.
 - 2 G. Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia*, ed. P. E. Fornaciari, Florence 2010. As it is well known, in December 1486, the 23-year-old Pico published 900 theses (*Conclusiones*) to be disputed in Rome. Pico's disputation never came about, and his *Conclusiones* faced the first Inquisitorial action in the history of printing (see S. Farmer, *Syncretism in the west: Pico's 900 theses*, Temple 1998, 533; R. Hirsch,

extensively contained in the defence of the thesis according to which “there is no revealed science better than Magic or Kabbalah to certify the divinity of Christ.” In the *Quaestio quinta de magia et cabala* of the *Apologia*, Pico indeed clarifies the mythical origin of the Kabbalah as the hidden doctrine that God gave to Moses and then orally transmitted until Ezra decided to write it down in seventy books; this secret teaching also corresponds to the analogical method of reading the Scripture.³

Origen of Alexandria assumes a privileged role in his account. The Church Father confirms the existence of an esoteric tradition in Christianity, starting with Jesus himself.⁴ Origen has explained that when Paul talks of “sentences of God” (*eloquia Dei*), he was referring to this secret revelation at the Sinai;⁵ furthermore he has witnessed the oral diffusion of this doctrine in the Sanhaedrin;⁶ he is aware, as the Kabbalists, of the hermeneutical richness of numerology;⁷ he is the only Christian theologian who has explicitly quoted Jewish masters in his books, and he is also the authority for understanding why the Jews themselves don’t follow the Kabbalah.⁸ Moreover, the section on language of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* was employed by Pico for turning Plato’s *Cratylus* into a theurgist dimension, following a similar line of reasoning of Marsilio Ficino, whose lesson was crucial.⁹ Indeed, in apparent

Printing, Selling and Reading, 1450–1550, Wiesbaden 1967, 89). From those 900 theses thirteen propositions were extracted, deemed unacceptable or dangerously close to heresy: the defence of these theses was gathered into the *Apologia*.

3 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 178.

4 Pico della Mirandola, 2012, 259. The passage of Origen is Or. Cels. 3.21. The thesis has been held also by his master Clement of Alexandria. See G. Stroumsa, *Hidden wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Leiden/Boston 2005, 113.

5 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 180.

6 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 182.

7 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 172.

8 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 188–190.

9 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 177: *Similiter de nominibus quod habeant aliquam activitatem naturalem etiam notum est omnibus. Quam quidem activitatem naturalem non habent ut significativa sunt ad placitum, sed ut sint in se quaedam res naturales. Ideo dixi nomina illa habere virtutem in Magia naturali non ut significativa sunt, nisi forte essent aliqua quibus significatio esset naturalis, sicut Stoici dicunt de omnibus nominibus, quibus ut adversantur peripatetici, ita Plato in Cratilo assentitur de his quae sunt recte imposita. Origenes autem de hebraicis hoc sentit, et ideo dicit quod quaedam nomina hebraica in sacris litteris... fuerunt sic reservata et non mutata in aliam linguam, in qua non retinuissent suam naturalem significationem et consequenter virtutem.* See Or. Cels. 1.24–25. Cfr. M. Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary [In Philebum]*, ed. and trans. by M.J.B. Allen, Temple 1975, 141 and Ficino, *Argumentum in*

concordance with *Cratylus* – which debated the question of whether the meaning of words was derived from human agreement or if it was intrinsic in the genesis of the words – Origen testifies to the unique natural “power” (*vis*) of certain Hebrew words which do not denote created things, but are directly related to the divine mysteries: these formulas could not be translated without losing their natural meaning and their “power”.

The depth and the limit of Pichian Origenism have been widely explored from the second half of the twentieth century,¹⁰ also because the longest and most erudite section in Pico’s *Apologia* regards the thesis according to which it is “more rational to believe that Origen is saved, than to believe he is damned”.¹¹ Pico’s fervour has suggested that the issue of the personal salvation of the Church Father could shed light on several other parts of the *Apologia*, and that the defence of Origen could ultimately become a

Cratylum, in Id., *Opera*, Basel 1579, II, 1309. For the philological problems and the inner philosophical reasons that underlie Ficino’s choice as well as for an interpretation of the crucial role that the reference assumes in Ficino and Pico, see F. Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pierleone da Spoleto. Tra filosofia dell’amore e tradizione cabalista*, Florence 2001, 39 (n. 133), and G. Bartolucci, *Vera Religio. Marsilio Ficino e la tradizione ebraica*, Milano 2017, pp.79–93. See also V. Perrone Compagni, *Abracadabra: le parole nella magia (Ficino, Pico, Agrippa)*, in: *Rivista di Estetica* 19 (1/2002), 105–130 (120–128) and S. Touissant, *Ficin, Pic de la Mirandole, Reuchlin et le pouvoir des noms: à propos de Néoplatonisme et de Cabale chrétienne*, in: W. Schimdtt-Biggermann (ed.), *Kristliche Cabbala*, Stuttgart 2003, 67–79.

10 For a general overview of the interpretation of the *Apologia* and the *Oratio* connected with Origenism see W. G. Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of his age. Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*, Genève 1981. E. Wind, *The revival of Origen*, in: D. Miner (ed.), *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, Princeton 1954, 412–424; then in E. Wind, *The eloquence of the Symbol*, Oxford 1992; L. Giusso, *Origene e il Rinascimento*, Rome 1957; H. Crouzel, *Pic de la Mirandole et Origène*, in: *BLE* 66 (1965), 174–194 and 272–288; Id., *Une controverse sur Origène à la Renaissance: Jean Pic de la Mirandole e Pierre Garcia*, Paris 1977; M. Schär, *Das Nachleben des Origenes im Zeitalter des Humanismus*, Basel / Stuttgart 1979; D. Nodes, *Origen of Alexandria among the Renaissance Humanists and Their Twentieth Century Historians*, in: D. Kries / C. Brown Tkacz (eds.) *Nova Doctrina Vetusque: Essays on Early Christianity in Honor of Frederic W. Schlatter, S. J.*, New York 1999, 51–64; P. Terracciano, *Omnia in figura. L'impronta di Origene tra '400 e '500*, Rome 2012; A. Fürst / C. Hengstermann (Hg.), *Origenes humanista, mit Pico della Mirandas Traktat, De salute Origenis disputatio*, Münster 2015; P. Terracciano, *The Origen of Pico’s Kabbalah: Esoteric Wisdom and the Dignity of Man*, in: *JHI* 79/3 (2018), 343–361.

11 Farmer, 1998, 435.

defence of Pico. The debate was directed toward Origen's possible influence in Pico's theory of eternal punishments, to his critical attitude concerning the dogma in the ecclesiastic authority, and, above all, to his ascendancy in Pico's doctrine of the dignity of man.¹² Surprisingly, the role of Origen in the Pichian shaping of the Christian Kabbalah has been poorly analysed, in spite of the fact that, in the fatal years 1486–1487, the only direct references to Origen – excluding the mentions in the *De salute Origenis disputatio* – are all concerned with Kabbalistic issues.¹³ Despite a renowned tradition which has inquired after the possibility that Origen was the secret inspiration of Pico's anthropology, it can instead be reasonably argued that the Mirandulane was primarily attracted by Origen as the preferred advocate of the long chain of hidden wisdom which Pico was on the point of revealing in 1486, and that it is only through this point that he affected Pico's doctrines.¹⁴

The image of the Church Father as master of secret wisdom – already present in Antiquity in a scattered way – had a profound legacy in the sixteenth century and is one of the ways in which Origen was received. He was, obviously, also read as the exegete of the free will and the theologian of infinite mercy; but the *esoteric* aspect is nonetheless relevant. In the following pages, by inquiring into the characteristics of this heritage, a fragmentary, collateral aim can be pursued regarding the legacy of the Mirandulane. The history of the reception of Pico's works is, in fact, far from complete.¹⁵ In the last decade a few studies have been devoted to this topic: in particular,

12 E. Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, vita e dottrina*, Florence 1937, 141; E. Cassirer, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. A Study in the History of the Renaissance Ideas*, in: JHI 3 (1942), 330; Giusso, 1957; E. P. Mahoney, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Origen on Humans, Choice and Hierarchy*, in: *Vivens Homo* 5/2 (1994), 359–376; G. Busi / R. Egbi, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Mito, Magia, Kabbalah*, Milan 2014, XXXII. For a critique on the Origenian influence on the debate on the eternal punishment developed in the second section of the *Apologia* see the sources published by G. Mariani, *Giovanni Pico e Roberto da Lecce. Annotazioni su una ritrovata fonte dell'Apologia e l'origenismo quattrocentesco*, in: *Schifanoia* XLVI–XLVII (2014) 137–148.

13 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 24–26; for *Heptaplus* and in *Comento* see Id. *De hominis dignitate. Heptaplus. De Ente et uno et scripti vari*, a cura di E. Garin, Florence 1942; 172–174 (*Heptaplus*); 580 (*Comento*).

14 Terracciano, 2018.

15 E. Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Comitato per le celebrazioni centenarie in onore di Giovanni Pico*, Parma (1963), 55; O. Kristeller, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and its Sources*, now in Id. *Studies in Renaissance, Thought and Letters III*, Roma 1993, 227–304; S. Campanini, *Il commento alle Conclusiones Cabalisticæ nel Cinquecento*, in: F. Lelli (ed.) *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, Florence 2010, 167–230 (170).

the surprising vitality of the *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ* throughout the successive century has been brought to light.¹⁶ The same must be supposed for the *Quaestio quinta de magia et cabala* contained in the *Apologia*, for which we do not have a similar study. The debate Pico began on the true Kabbalah carried on through a list of commentators, of advocates and opponents.

2. The use of Origen by Pico is deeply rooted in his global project of rethinking ancient traditions in order to elaborate a new image of man and cosmos. Cutting the elements from this project might cause them to change their function. The primary features of the portrait of Origen that Pico constructs are two: the expositor of the natural connection between special names and objects (correlated to the interpretation of the *Cratylus*), and the witness of the diffusion of the Kabbalah. They became part of the common assemblage used in the debate on magic and esoteric arts. It is well known to Renaissance scholars, however, that under the uniform reproduction of blocks of texts – basically a series of unvaried plagiarisms that flood from book to book – the quotations often refer to different, and sometimes opposite, doctrines. In this process, although the two features are interwoven and often remained linked in tradition for a certain span of time, they will have a partially different fate. Indeed, the meaning of the support of Origen to Pico's Kabbalah, pulled out from visible and invisible wires to Pico's entire project, will gradually change and have its own future life; the first element, instead, will be altered in lesser extension, even if it is destined to a long fortune too, partially yet known to scholarship.¹⁷ Origen's belief in the miraculous power of certain names had a wide echo indeed. The argument, derived from Ficino, was used a few years later by Polidoro Vergili in his *De Inventoribus* (1499), and by Paolo Ricci, Galatino, Reuchlin (who employs exactly the same words of Ficino's *Cratylum*),¹⁸ Zorzi, Agrippa,¹⁹

16 Campanini, *Il commento*, 2010.

17 A. Coudert, *Some theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century*: *Studia Leibnitiana* 7, *Magia Naturalis un die Enttehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften*, Wiesbaden 1978; B. Vickers, *Analogy versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580–1680*, in: Id. (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge 1984; J. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Vol. 1: Ficino to Descartes*, Madison 1995; M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino on Significatio*, in: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), 30–43.

18 J. Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, W.-W. Ehlers / L. Mundt / H.-G. Roloff / P. Schäfer (eds.), Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 1996, 198.

19 Reuchlin 1996, 430–434 in Lib. 3, Cap. 9 *De divinis nominibus eorundemque potentia et virtute*; 430. *Unde Origenes praecipit ea in suispsis characteribus incorrupte conservanda et Zoroastes etiam vetat barbara et antiqua verba mutari; nam*

Giulio Camillo and many others. The legacy of this reading of the *Cratylum* would require a specific essay to explore properly; however, it is useful to keep in mind that it often flowed in parallel with the Kabbalistic exposition, on which I will concentrate in the following pages.

The account of the secret revelation received by Moses, as could be expected, poured into the debate on Christian Kabbalism, often relying on Pico's own words. This didn't happen immediately. The cost of the fecund originality of Pico laid in some ingenuity and in several contradictions. Among those who would take up the Pichian report, those more prepared in Jewish studies would cut and edit his account. Johannes Reuchlin, proud of his Kabbalistic library and, perhaps, sceptical of the authenticity of the supposed ancient books bought by Pico and of his list of Kabbalists,²⁰ passed over the chain of Christian sources proposed by Pico and insisted on a wider enumeration of Jewish sources and Kabbalists.²¹ The first controversialists skipped – to the best of my knowledge – the Pauline interpretation proposed through Origen. Paolo Ricci reflected on the relationship between allegorism, and Kabbalah derived from Moses, but did not comment on the role of Ezra and Origen.²² Galatino, who also reflected upon the relationship between the allegorical sense and Kabbalistic interpretation, said nothing on the role of the Greek Father in his report of the genesis of the Kabbalah.²³

(ut inquit Plato in Cratilo) omnia divina verba, sive nomina, vel a diis primum vel ab antiquitate, cuius initium haud facile scitur, vel a barbaris prodita sunt; Iamblichus quoque similiter praecipit ea non esse ex sua lingua in aliam transferenda: 'Non enim eandem – inquit – mentem servant nomina in aliam linguam interpretata.

- 20 J. Reuchlin, *De Arte cabalistica libri tres*, W.-W. Ehlers / F. Felgentrau (eds.), Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 2010, 114–116. For his kabbalistic library see J. Reuchlin, *L'arte cabbalistica (De arte cabalistica)*, G. Busi / S. Campanini (eds.), LI-LXX, Venice 1995.
- 21 A characteristic of *De Arte Cabalistica* is the absence of a Christian interlocutor in the debate: this element could maybe explain the choice of Reuchlin, deeply committed to showing his astonishing knowledge of Jewish sources. It could be worth adding that, although his project agrees with the idea that the final aim of the Kabbalah is in showing the truth of the Christianity, Reuchlin works also towards a recovery of Pythagorean wisdom as a forgotten part of the Kabbalah. According to him, furthermore, the revelation of the hidden law went back from Adam and not from Moses, so he was less interested than Pico – and probably found more dangerous – in putting Christian exegetes in this history of the dissemination of the Kabbalah.
- 22 P. Israelite (Ricius), *In cabalistarum seu allegorizantium eruditionem Isagoge*, Augsburg 1510, f. 4. 7v.
- 23 P. Galatino, *Opus de Arcanis Catholicae veritate*, Basel 1550 (first edition Ortona a Mare 1518), 20 f. He reports, anyway, the issue of the uniqueness of the language,

Meanwhile, the Kabbalah-allegorical interpretation left visible traces in the editorial history of Origen's texts. In the 1513 Venetian edition of *De Principiis*, the editor, Constantius Hyerothaus, declared that Dionysius the Areopagite had enhanced a method of interpretation which was called Kabbalah by the Jews and consisted of allegorical and anagogical reading, "on which Origen had many times written".²⁴ The fact that these words appeared in Venice cannot be a coincidence. In effect, the crucial turn that gave precedence to Pico's version of the revelation to Moses and to the role of Origen in this must be dated to those years in the Serenissima, represented by the work of the Venetian Friar Francesco Zorzi.²⁵ In his monumental volumes, *De Harmonia Mundi* (1519–25) and *In Sacram Scripturam Problemata* – which enjoyed a broad European reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth century – the presence of Origen is explicit and pervasive,

according to the aforementioned witness of the *Contra Celsum*; *ibidem*, 92–93, following Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, 1996, 198.

24 *Sublimis Origenis Opus Peri archon: seu De principiis: correctum & ordinatum: ac undequaue cautis erroribus: & in abstrusis sensibus interpretatum. Addito tractatu De natura materie ad inuenta Origenis: & Methodo in disciplinam eiusdem: a Constantio Hyerotheo: [...] Item Apologia Pamphili martyris & Ruffini Aquilegie presbyteri pro Origene*, Venice 1514: *De quibus beatissimus quoque meminit Dionysius in his quae scripsit de ecclesiastica Hierarchia. Ex his prodiit illud interpretandi genus (quod Cabale sensus est apud Hebraeos: magia ex natura apud barbaros et graecos) quum litterae sententia, per allegoriae et anagogiae intelligentiam ducitur, de quare eleganter hic noster Origenes plurima.*

25 For a general bibliography P. Giovanni Degli Agostini, *Notizie istorico-critiche intorno alla vita e le opere degli scrittori veneziani*, 2 vols., Venice 1754, 332–363; U. Vicentin, *F. Zorzi Teologo Cabalista O. F. M.*, in: *Le Venezie francescane* 31 (1954), 121–162; 174–226; C. Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione. Studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento*, Napoli 1974, 189–292; Id., *Francesco Giorgio Veneto e Marsilio Ficino*, in: G.C. Garfagnini (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, Florence 1986. For his role in the history of the Christian Cabala, see J. L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, New York 1944; F. Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris 1964; C. Wirszubski, *Francesco Giorgio's Commentario on Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic Theses*: JWCI 37 (1974), 145–156; F. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London 1979, 29–36; G. Busi, *Francesco Zorzi. A methodological dreamer*, in: J. Dan (ed.) *The Christian Cabala*, Cambridge 1997, 97–125; S. Campanini, *Le fonti ebraiche del De Harmonia Mundi di Francesco Zorzi*, in: *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 38 (1999), 29–74; S. Campanini, *Francesco Zorzi: armonia del mondo e filosofia simbolica*, in: A. Angelini / P. Caye (eds.), *Il pensiero simbolico nella prima età moderna*, Florence 2007, 239; Id., *Saggio introduttivo to F. Zorzi, L'Armonia del Mondo*, Milan 2010.

to the extent that the role of the Church Father is the key to understanding his syncretistic Pantheon.

The richness of Zorzi's knowledge of patristic and Jewish sources is integrated into a coherent Neoplatonic system, combined with Pythagoric and Vitruvian fascinations. Zorzi held a strong conviction that the Kabbalah could prove the truth of Christianity. His own predilection for Origen derives from his role as cultural broker of the different ancient wisdoms. Specifically, following the path of Giovanni Pico's interpretation, he considered Origen the Christian exegete most familiar with the secret philosophical doctrines of the Jews. According to Zorzi, Origen and Plato had themselves followed secret Jewish teachings. Furthermore, he stated that Origen in his *Peri Arcon* testified that Enoch was the first who wrote on the secret doctrines of the Kabbalah.²⁶

In *De Harmonia Mundi*, in reviewing the list of Jewish masters "that tune up the chorus of the divine truths", Zorzi detailed the order of those who had received the interpretation of the Kabbalah after Ezra. He reproduced there, with few omissions, the same Reuchlian list expressed in *De Arte Cabbalistica* that included only Jewish rabbis.²⁷ Zorzi extended the reception to St. Paul, St. John, Dyonisus, and Origen as commentators of these doctrines, grafting the erudite and detailed accounts of Reuchlin onto Pico's framework. Concerning the Alexandrian, Zorzi adds that:

Origen, either because he tried to hide the precepts revealed by God, to avoid sinning, according to the rules of the prophet, or because, having sworn to his master Ammonio, did not dare to reveal what was boiling in his mind, apparently remains on the surface in order to allude the hidden core to the initiates. Nevertheless, on the ground of a few sentences expressed in the *Contra Celsum*, someone argues that he has moved away from that school, and has come to enjoy the mysterious fruits, simply following the platonic doctrines. However (if I'm not mistaken), his doctrine, as well the doctrine of Plato, in many places closely recalls the Hebrew theology.²⁸

26 Zorzi, 2010, 194: *Cabalistae autem, qui a vero oraculo acceperunt (nam cabala ore receptio dicitur) vel ab doctis ab huiusmodi didicerunt, secretiora legis sensa prosequentes, de multis qui scripserunt, ii sunt, primus Hanoc, de quo meminit Thadeus in epistola, et Origenes in Periarchon.*

27 Zorzi, 2010, 196 f., compare with Reuchlin, 2010, p. 108 f.: the most significant omission regards the notice that Jesus of Nazareth, different from the Christian Jesus, was a disciple of Yehoshua, son of Perahiah.

28 Zorzi, 2010, 196–198: *Ezra primus (ut fertur) haec monumenta sacratissima commisit septuaginta voluminibus, quae prius ore tantummodo docebantur... Ex his autem, qui verum Messiam secuti sunt, Paulus noster, et Iohannes magna illa sensa ubique persequentes caeteris altius scripsere. Sed ex his, qui commentaria aedidere (ut videre videor) nullus secretiora illa sacramenta olfecit nisi Dyonisus et Origenes, sed hic, aut quia studebat cum Propheta abscondere eloquia Dei*

This passage from Zorzi is decisive: he explicitly suggests that Origen not only knows of the existence of the secret wisdom but also understands its “hidden core”, and that his doctrines resemble those of the Hebrews. For this reason, Zorzi regards Origen as a significant exponent of ancient esotericism.²⁹ He draws a line that, through Origen’s education under the teaching of Ammonius Sacca, connects the exegesis of the Church Father to the Jewish tradition. Origen thus would have learned from Ammonius, “or better from Hebrew rabbis”, the fourfold interpretation of Scripture:³⁰ he then refined the method, becoming the greatest master in this kind of exegesis. The need to move beyond the letter of the Holy texts arises from the common consciousness of the role of hidden doctrines in the structural esotericism of the divine mysteries. According to Zorzi, both Origen and the Kabbalists worked towards an “exegesis of a shadow” because they were both aware of the existence of curtains that veil the wisdom. The point has for him a double implication: it is a fundamental testimony to the truth of the Kabbalah, and a confirmation of the preeminent role of Origen among Christian theologians. This consideration does not come without effect. On the contrary, in Zorzi’s pages one frequently sees the duplex action (if not an actual overlap) of Hebrew hermeneutics and Origenian exegesis.

Along these lines, from the preface of *De Harmonia Mundi*, Origen is the guide who directs Zorzi’s hermeneutics, focused on grasping the meaning of the numerical proportions that permeate the world. He appears as the most significant example in the Christian tradition of the legitimacy of an allegorical interpretation of the text. The need to hunt for the deep sense contained in the composition and in the forms of the alphabetical character – a typical Kabbalistic preoccupation – is confirmed through the argument of the inevitable loss of *vis* in the translation of special names (by means of the aforementioned reference to the *Cratylus / Contra Celsum*). If the Kabbalah

sibi credita, ne peccaret, aut quia iuratos a praeceptore Ammonio non est ausus palam producere ea, quae bulliebant in mentem, ideo per corticem semper levius decurrit, ea tamen lege, ut secretiorem medullam innuat expertis, quamvis ex quibusdam verbis dictis contra Celsum nonnulli asserant ipsum ab huiusmodi schola declinasse, et tantummodo Platonica dogmata secutum penetrasse ad illa secretiora pabula. Sed (ni fallor) in multis eius doctrina, sicut et Platonica, redolet hebraicam Theologiam. The underlines correspond to the intervention of the censorship, [G.M. Guanzelli], *Indicis librorum prohibitorum et expurgandorum*, Rome 1607, which orders to cancel these lines.

29 Zorzi, 2010, 198. This passage was also censored.

30 Zorzi, 2010, 350: *Quo modo interpretandi saepius utitur omnium interpretum sacrarum literarum apud nostros facile princeps Origenes, prout ab Ammonio, immo a sapientibus Haebreis acceperat.*

could be considered his blueprint in these issues, Origen provided Zorzi with a justification for advancing some daring readings.³¹

Zorzi often follows Ficino and Pico step by step. However, concerning the genesis of the Kabbalah, by merging Pico's account with the information received from Reuchlin,³² Zorzi was fundamental in creating the patchwork destined to be influential in the following centuries. Zorzi's books were quite successful: *De Harmonia Mundi*, in particular, was published in Paris in 1546 and 1564, and then translated into French by Lefèvre de la Boderie in 1578. Furthermore, the role of Zorzi was not restricted to the editorial destiny of his main books. First, Zorzi also worked towards a close and systematic commentary of the *Conclusiones*, which survived tortuously in an exegetical tradition inside the Franciscan Observance, through the enlarged and revisioned version by Arcangelo of Borgonovo. In the version by Arcangelo of Borgonovo, Origen is, as expected, set to guarantee the transmission of the knowledge of the sublime things, protected by the veil of allegory, which is nothing more than the Kabbalah.³³ But in the Franciscan Order there were also understandable hostilities regarding this kabbalistic shadow over Christianity: one of the most important Franciscan preachers,

31 One of the examples is Zorzi, 2010, 1686: *Quae (ut Origenes ait) non sunt intelligenda secundum carnem, sicuti Ebioniti toto (aut aiunt) coelo aberrantes senserunt, qui re et nomine pauperrimi sunt, sed secundum spiritum, vel in sensu morali, de quo diximus, vel in sensu allegorico, ut nunc latius explicabimus; ibid. 760, after a disquisition on the symbolic value of the tetragrammaton: Si autem a sensu anagogico ad sensum moralem Origenem sequentes transcendere voluerimus arbores sunt virtutes plantae et infusae nobis a coelesti agricola a quo omne datum optimum et omne domum perfectum and hereinafter: Ad superiorem autem sensum redeundo, in quem alibi idem Origenes consentit, omnis arbor est omne genus personarum, sive rex fit, aut servus, civis, aut rusticus, artifex, aut et mulier.*

32 *Supra* n.27. In addition to the list of the Esdra's followers, it is possible to grasp the Reuchlin's influence, among the other topics, in the exposition of difference between Talmudists and Kabbalists, see Zorzi, 2010, 194 and Reuchlin, 2010, 122.

33 Arcangelo of Borgonovo, *Apologia*, Bologna 1564, 318, 330. For the most recent account on the history of the manuscripts of Arcangelo of Borgonovo, his dependence from Zorzi and his diffusion in the Observance see S. Campanini, *Il commento alle Conclusiones Cabalisticæ nel Cinquecento*, in: F. Lelli (ed.), *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, Florence 2010, 183–210. Arcangelo of Borgonovo assembled part of this material also in his vernacular Kabbalistic book, Arcangelo di Borgonovo, *In Decharatione sopra il nome di Giesu secondo gli Hebrei, Cabalisti, Greci, Caldei, Persi et Latini, intitolato Specchio di Salute*, Ferrara 1557, where he reports the issue of the ineffability of the name of Jesus before the proclamation of the Gospel according Origen (151), and moreover the topic of the power of the divine names as key to understanding the Kabbalah (1), following *Contra Celsum*.

Bernardino Ochino (who in 1542 would escape among the Protestants) delivered a homily “On the true Kabbalah” (*Della vera cabala*) in Venice in 1539, probably addressed against Zorzi’s *Problemata*.³⁴ Ochino reviewed the account of the reception from Ezra, clarifying that the true Kabbalah is the Pentateuch and the real knowledge of the hidden mysteries is the simple faith in Christ.³⁵

Second, because his works were subjected to a long inquisitorial process of expurgation in the second half of the century, the Catholic censors were indirectly pushed to face the connection between Origen and esotericism and kabbalism. Beginning with the first interventions, the hostilities of the censors were in fact directed against the syncretism of Zorzi, the special blend of Platonic and Kabbalistic doctrines that made the charge of correcting his texts “harder than cleaning stables”.³⁶ The final expurgation, published by Guanzelli, in 1606, tried to polish – with varying results – the connections between Christian doctrine, Platonism, and Jewish mysteries, advocating the complete eradication of Pico’s version on the origin of the Kabbalah.³⁷ As a consequence, the censor also attempted to brush the esoteric stains from the figure of Origen. Guanzelli erased the asserted resemblance between the doctrines of Origen and Plato with that of Jewish theology, and purged the entire passage about the education of Origen under Ammonius, the esoteric practice of those teachings, and especially the presence of truth in the Kabbalah.³⁸ It is interesting to note that, parallel

34 Terracciano, 2010, 291–297 (297)

35 *Sermones Bernardini Ochini Senensis*, [n.p. (Ochino)], Geneva 1543, *Sermone xiiii, Della vera Cabala*.

36 As an internal document of the Congregation for the Defence of Faith has denounced in 1583: see C. Vasoli, *Nuovi documenti sulla condanna all’Indice e la censura delle opere di Francesco Giorgio Veneto*, in: C. Stango (ed.) *Censura ecclesiastica e cultura politica in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, Florence 2001, 55–78 (76).

37 See the examples at n. 28. 29. 38. The expurgation of Zorzi’s work has been studied by A. Rotondò, *La censura ecclesiastica e la cultura: Storia d’Italia 5***. *I documenti*, Torino 1973, 1397–1456 (1428); Id., *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’Indice dei libri proibiti (1527–1638)*, in: *Rinascimento* (1963) 145–211; Id., *Cultura umanistica e difficoltà di censori. Censura ecclesiastica e discussioni cinquecentesche sul platonismo*, in: J. Guidi (ed.), *La pouvoir et la plume. Incitation, contrôle et répression dans l’Italie du XVI siècle*, Paris 1982, 15–50 (22–23); E. Rebellato, *Il miraggio dell’espurgazione. L’Indice di Guanzelli del 1607*, in: *Società e Storia*, CXXII 2008, 715–742; S. Ricci, *Inquisitori, censori, filosofi sullo scenario della Controriforma*, Roma 2008.

38 [Guanzelli] *Indicis*, 1607, 512; on Zorzi, 2010, 196–198: *Sed ex his, qui commentaria aedidere (ut videre videor) nullus secretiora illa sacramenta olfecit nisi Dyonisus et Origenes. Sed hic, aut quia studebat cum Propheta abscondere eloquia*

to this process, at least one author engaged in restoring the orthodox body of Christianity had begun to highlight Origen's commitment to opposing the esoteric way of writing: this is the case of Giovan Battista Crispo in his *De caute Platone legendo* (who probably followed the French editor of the new *Opera Omnia* of Origen).³⁹

Returning to the reception of Zorzi's work, however, its influence might also be measured by the simple fact that the most authoritative book on magic in the sixteenth century, the *De Occulta Philosophia* of Cornelius Agrippa, was reviewed by the author after an attentive scanning of the *De Harmonia Mundi*.⁴⁰

3. In the third book of his *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533), in order to justify the idea that Christian truth could be better served in silence, Agrippa related a list of *prisci philosophi*, who had secretly revealed the deepest doctrines. The list included Origen, as a disciple of the secret teachings of Ammonius, and Jesus, who had divulged some truths only to his intimate followers.⁴¹ The presence of Origen in the enumeration of the masters of esoteric wisdom seems to have been secured during this time. In *De Occulta philosophia*, Agrippa further faced the position of Origen, "not inferior to the most magnificent philosophers", on the issue of the miraculous power of names,⁴² but he did not make any reference to Origen as a witness to the genetic process of the Kabbalah, something he certainly knew. The esoteric

Dei sibi credita, ne peccaret: aut quia iuratos a praeceptore Ammonio non est ausus palam producere ea, quae bulliebant in mentem. Ideo per corticem semper levius decurrit, ea tamen lege, ut secretiorem medullam innuat expertis: quamvis ex quibusdam verbis dictis contra Celsum nonnulli afferant ipsum ab huiusmodi schola declinasse, et tantummodo Platonica dogmata secutum penetrasse ad illa secretiora pabula. Sed (ni fallor) in multis eius doctrina /sicut et Platonical/ redolet hebraicam Theologiam. The underscore corresponds to the intervention of the censor.

39 Namely G. Genebrard in *Origenis Adamantii...Opera*, Paris 1574; G. B. Crispo, *De Ethnicis philosophis caute legendis disputationum*, Rome 1594, 1.

40 V. Perrone Compagni, *Una fonte di Cornelio Agrippa: il "De harmonia mundi" di Francesco Giorgio Veneto*, in: *Annali dell'Istituto di Filosofia [Università di Firenze] IV* (1982), 45-74.

41 P. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Leiden 2007, 171.

42 H.C. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De Occulta philosophia*, ed. by V. Perrone Compagni, Lib. I, LXXIV (*De proportione, correspondentia, reduction literarum ad signa coelestia et planetas secundum varias linguas cum tabella hoc indicante*) 242; Lib III, Cap. XI (*De divinis nominibus eorundemque potentia et virtute*), 430-434; in both places Agrippa subterraneously dialogues with Ficino, Pico and Zorzi.

revelation as presented to Moses, and affirmed by Paulus, Origen, Hylarius, and Ezra, is indeed completely outlined in *De Triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*, with the details present in Pico and Zorzi.⁴³ It is furthermore reiterated in *De vanitate* in a drier form (without the mention of Origen). As is well-known, *De vanitate* is an attack on all the forms of human knowledge, including the unorthodox ones, among them magic and the Kabbalah. I will not dwell here on the interpretation of the meaning of *De vanitate* with respect to Agrippa's other texts: however, as expected – with respect to the aim of the book – the account of the genesis of the Kabbalah is harshly contested.⁴⁴ The Kabbalah is in fact divided into two parts: the so-called *Bresith* i.e. a cosmology, “which exposes with philosophical reasons the mysteries of the law and of the Bible” (ch. 47), and the part called *Mercantia*, which is “almost a certain symbolic theology of the most sublime contemplation of divine and angelic virtues, and of sacred names, and signs; in which the letters, numbers, shapes, things, the names of the characters lines, points and accents, all are significant of the deepest things and profound mysteries.”⁴⁵ The first one is the wisdom attainable through the anagogical sense, while the second is the technical kabbalistic method.⁴⁵

If Agrippa in truth agrees with the possibility of esoteric teaching, he nonetheless attests to having found in those Jewish texts nothing but a certain superstition. The passage dialogues with Pico's account of the *Apology*, showing its possible incongruities:

Nevertheless, I am sure that God reveals to Moses and other prophets many things that were covered under the skin of the words of the law; mysteries that can not be communicated to the ignorant common people. So, I know that this art of the Kabbalah - of which the Hebrews are so proud and with great difficulty I have

43 V. Perrone Compagni, *Ermetismo e cristianesimo in Agrippa. Il De triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*, Florence 2005, IV. 122–123.

44 H.C. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio inveciva*, Antwerp, 1530; the Italian vulgarisation is C. Agrippa, *Della vanità delle scienze tradotto per M. Ludovico Dominichi*, Venice 1549.

45 Agrippa, 1549, 63–64. He referred to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* (Work of the Beginning, i.e. the physics) and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Work of the Chariot, the metaphysics). The distinction came to Pico from Maimonides and Abraham Abulafia: see C. Black, *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Leiden 2006, and B. Copenhaver, *Number, Shape and Meaning in Pico's Christian Cabala*, in: A. Grafton / N. Siraisi (eds.), *Natural Particulars: Nature and Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge 1999, 35–36. In distinguishing the two kinds of Kabbalah, in the exposition of the *Apology*, Pico used the Hebrew name only for the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (however, he has referred to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* in his *Conclusiones*). So, it could be argued that the page of Agrippa also crosses Reichlin, 2010, 70.

investigated – is nothing but then a pure superstition, and a part theurgic magic. And if, as they boast the Jews, this art would come from God and it would be fruitful to the perfection of life, to the health of the man, to the worship of God, to understand the truth; but, for sure, the divine spirit - which, abandoned the synagogue came to teach us all truth – it would not have hidden to the Church until these times, because the Church really knew all the divine things. And the divine devotion, the baptism, and the other sacraments of health are revealed and perfect in every language. Each language has the same and equal virtue, and still has equal piety: nor there is another name in heaven, or in the earth, in which we have to save ourselves, and we will operate then the name of Jesus, in which it has summarized, and it will contain all things.⁴⁶

In order to attack the divine genesis of the esoteric Kabbalah, Agrippa questioned the supremacy of the Hebrew language, showing acute awareness of the interdependence of the two elements in Pico's line of reasoning. The promptness of the rhetorical transition – in a sentence, from the relationship between synagogue and Church to the nature of language in the sacrament – must be explained through the question of the magical power present in all the vocabularies, which involves the refusal of the philo-Hebrew position expressed in the crucial page of the *Contra Celsum*. There is no specificity of the Kabbalah as the expression of a sacred language because every language is valid for reaching God.

Reflecting on the status of the Kabbalah had, however, become common in texts approaching magic and witchcraft. In the index of the antiparacelsian book of Erastus, the *Disputationum de medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi*, issued in four parts from 1571 and 1573, Origen is expressly referred to as “Cabalae studiosus”. In demonstrating that Paracelsus had dabbled in demonic magic in his reference to the Kabbalah, Erastus notes the existence of two kinds of this science: the first one permissible but limited to investigating abstruse enigmas in the Scripture – of which Origen was the most compromised interpreter - and the second demonic and necromantic. In no way could Paracelsus' speculation be considered an anagogical interpretation of the Scripture, and as such it had to be condemned.⁴⁷ In the last chapter of his books, he further clarifies his position on the Kabbalah. Erastus is resolute in confuting “Pico's version” of the genesis of the Kabbalah, by denouncing the absence of evidence and the nonexistence of Esdra's books: furthermore, he is engaged in dismantling each one of his sources, including Origen. With an ironic undertone, he states that “to Origen great injury is not done”,

46 Agrippa, 1549, 63–64.

47 T. Lieber (Erastus), *Disputationum de medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi*, Basel 1573, 18: *abstrusos Scripturae sensus investiganti et enigmate eiusdem expli-canti: in qua nimius fuit Origenes*.

because his interpretation of Romans is not misunderstood, but rather is useless for the kabbalistic account.⁴⁸ Erastus sternly concludes that if the Cabala is nothing but a *theologia mystica* and an anagogical interpretation, the texts of this theology are nonetheless lacking unless the New Testament is considered the real Kabbalah, as a spiritual explanation of the old Law. If it is anything else, it must be considered a diabolic creation, and if Paracelsus followed it, he must have found his way to the Tartarean region, and not the Heavens.

4. When Friar Sixtus of Siena wrote the section on Ezra in the tome of his *Bibliotheca Sancta* devoted to the books of the Old Testament, he centered it on Pico's version of the genesis of the Kabbalah.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he considered it more profoundly in the third tome of the *Bibliotheca*, where he dealt with the different methods of explaining the Scripture. After the fourfold reading, he dedicated a section to a less usual tripartite technique, which insisted on explanations defined as *Elementaris, Physica and Prophetica*. The interpretation focused "on the elements" is divided in *Resolutoria* and *Componentem* (or arithmetical): the first deepens the significance of single letters, while the second inquires as to the position of the elements and the composition of a new order. Sixtus reports that according to the Jews this is a part of the Kabbalah, their most secret allegorical wisdom derived from the Mosaic revelation.⁵⁰ He admits his lack of expertise in the Jewish discipline, but adds that also the Ancient Greeks were *peritissimi* in this method: not only "Plato in Cratylum, where he has debated on a not dissimilar science on the true sense (*etymologia*) of the words", but also Esopus, Orpheus, and Linus amongst the others.⁵¹

48 Erastus, 1573: the confutation of the Kabbalah is at 275–282; of Origen at 281–282: *Origenis non fit summa iniura, si non fallor. Etenim verba Apost. ad Roman 3, Credita eis sint eloquia Dei, exponens, scribit, hoc modo. Considerandum est, quod non dixit literas, sed eloquia Dei ipsis credita fuisse. Et his concludunt. Origenis censuisse Iudaeis praeter legem scriptam, aliam datam fuisse: quod recte intellectum libenter concedimus. At Cabalam recta et Scripturae consentanea interpretatio nihil iuvabit.*

49 Sixtus Senensis, *Bibliotheca Sancta*, Köln 1576 (first edition, Venice 1566), 71. At the end he clarified the usual distinction between a licit and necromantic Kabbalah, adding that, however, according to the Inquisition all the books related with the Kabbalah have to be considered damned.

50 Sixtus Senensis, 1576, 150: *Hoc est eius Secretioris, et Anagogicae, vel Allegoricae sapientiae, quam partem eorum a maioribus per manus traditam paulo post tempore Mosis acceperunt.*

51 *Ibid.*, 150–151. As example of the method, he follows Pico's exposition of the letter of the word *Bereshit*, as exposed in *Heptaplus*.

If Sixtus – who dedicated several pages of examination of the doctrines of Zorzi – derived his report, as is probable, from the Venetian Franciscan or directly from Pico is not important. What is worth noting is that the *Bibliotheca Sancta* – a companion of supreme Catholic orthodoxy, per the intention of the author – was one of the most consulted sources by the authors committed to defending Tridentine spirituality, among them Possevino and Crispo; but it also affected, for example, the *Piazza Universale* of the polygraph Tommaso Garzoni, published in 1586, which would meet with great success.

Garzoni wrote an entire paragraph on the Kabbalists,⁵² partly summarising the Pichian tractate in the *Apology*, partly translating into vernacular the content of the second book of Sixtus of Siena, and partly using *De vanitate* of Agrippa (through the vernacular translation of Domenichi, which constitutes a source that innervates all the pages of Garzoni).⁵³ Throughout his ample discussion, he is primarily concerned with demonstrating that the Kabbalah is not commendable at all. In another of Garzoni's books, the *Serraglio de gli stupori del mondo*, published posthumously in 1613, he returned to the Kabbalah and the role of Origen with more extensive attention. Furthermore, with the aid of Aristotle, he challenged the aforementioned interpretation of the *Cratylus*, which provided an opening for the despicable belief in magic.⁵⁴ Garzoni reveals here all his sources on the Jewish doctrines: Pico, Garcia, Alessandro Farra,⁵⁵ Celio Rodigino (Ludovico Ricchieri),⁵⁶ and Arcangelo da Borgonovo.

The *Serraglio* was published posthumously in 1604. It ought to be called, per the author's original intent, the *Palagio of the Incanti*, but its name was changed when a Venetian nobleman, Strozzi Cicogna, edited a book of the same name in the meantime: *Palagio degli incanti e delle gran maraviglie de gli spiriti e di tutta la natura*. For a long time, Cicogna was charged with having plagiarized Garzoni. In reality, he did no such thing, though he certainly knew Garzoni's books. However, the coincidence in the intersection of the two books is surprisingly relevant to this discussion. Cicogna in fact entitled the paragraph of his *Palagio*, in which he discussed Pico's version,

52 T. Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, eds. P. Cherchi / B. Collina, Turin 1966, 424–455.

53 O. Niccoli, *Garzoni Tommaso*, in: DBI 52 (1999), accessed at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tomaso-garzoni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

54 Garzoni, 1966, 507 f.; on the language, 513.

55 A. Farra, *Settenario*, Casal Maggiore 1571, 161 f. Farra assembled doctrines contained in the *Heptaplus* and in the letter of Giulio Camillo to Giulia Martinenga.

56 C. L. Rodigino, *Lectionum antiquarum libri 30*, Basel 1550 (first edition 1542), I. 10. 350–351 (a first draft, with 16 books, has been published in 1516).

“On the strange opinion of the Kabbalists and Origen, on the duration and restoration of this Palace, where it is shown what is the Kabbalah.”⁵⁷ After recalling the history of the reception of Moses, he adds that Origen and the Kabbalists have maintained the same idea of the creation and destruction of the worlds that follow precise cycles. God does indeed continuously create infinite worlds and decide to destroy them at his prerogative: divine activity shapes cycles of 7000 years (for the earthly words) and 49,000 (for the celestial ones) and then arranges a Great Jubilee, which allows the unity of all the blessed and the rest of matter for one thousand years. He states that the angels are not mentioned in the cycle, because they are considered still alive from the first creation. According to Cicogna, this doctrine explains why Solomon believed that matter preexists formless before the creation, which is the deeper meaning of his oracular words: *nihil sub sole novum*.⁵⁸

The author himself remains baffled by these strange and dangerous ideas (*strana opinione*). After all, Venice’s jail had played host just a few years earlier to a famous prisoner, who, in the wake of Salomon, had affirmed the cyclical revolution and the infinity of the worlds: Giordano Bruno. The *Palagio* is a cluster of other sources that brings us to wonder, from where did these doctrines arise, if Origen had never proposed this detailed cyclical arithmetic?

5. From the second half of the century the routes through the established patchwork of the Christian Kabbalah became more intertwined and the knot more effectively tangled. The long comradeship between Origen and the Kabbalists could easily provoke confusion. Several doctrines present contents with dangerous similarity: the pre-existence of the soul and the transmigration, the ideas on angels and demons, and the doctrine of the infinite worlds are all elements which suggest that a unique doctrine was supported by the Church Father and the Kabbalists. Yet in 1548, for instance, Marco Montalbano della Fratta, in his *Discorsi de principii della nobiltà e del governo che ha da tenere il nobile et il principe nel reggere se medesimo* debated “the opinion of some theologians that the evil angels must be saved.” He concludes that “the Kabbalist believes that some Demons must be saved, a thing that Origen has clearly conceived.”⁵⁹ In the edition of *Epitome of the*

57 S. Cicogna, *Palagio de gli incanti*, Venice 1607, 124 f: “Della strana opinione de’ Cabalisti, et d’Origene circa la duratione, et ristabilizione di questo Palagio, ove si mostra che cosa sia la Cabala.”

58 Cicogna, 1607, 126–127.

59 Marco della Fratta et Montalbano, *Discorsi de principii della nobiltà e del governo che ha da tenere il nobile et il principe nel reggere se medesimo*, Venezia 1551, 91 “eglino per questo giudicano i Cabalisti, che alcuni Demoni debbano esser salvi,

Qur'an the orientalist Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, in order to denounce Islamic errors, traced a line that connects Muhamed and Origen as scholars of the Kabbalistic doctrines, regarding their complex chronology of the Last Judgment.⁶⁰ The timing of the end of the worlds, in spite of the similar reference on the cycles of 7000 years, recalls what Cicogna will affirm, but it is not identical.

The solution is in France. It was the attentive reader of Origen, Jean Bodin, who wrote in his *Démonomanie* (1580) the passage in which, debating the divine creation of form and matter, he affirms that according to Origen and the people who believe like him:

God has continually created a succession of countless worlds, and when He wished He destroyed them: that is, the elemental world every seven thousand years, and the celestial world every forty-nine thousand years, uniting all the blessed spirits in Himself, and letting matter remain confused and formless for a thousand years. Then He renews by His power all things in their first condition and beauty. Because of this they say that no mention is made of the creation of Angels at the creation of the World, in order to show that they had to remain immortal after the corruption of the preceding worlds, which the Prince of Mirandola considered certain in his positions on the Kabbala. This is what the Hebrews maintain in their secret philosophy, as does Origen. This opinion, although is not accepted by some theologians, because it seems that one is entering too far into the profound secret of God, nonetheless cuts short the impiety of those who [...] say that it is a very strange thing that God after a hundred thousand years, indeed after an endless eternity, had decided three or four thousand years ago to make this world, which must soon perish [...]. This accords with the saying of Salomon, in which he imagines matter formless before the creation of this world, and also when he stated that there is nothing new under the sun. If, however, there had been countless worlds in succession which must not be preserved, still one must admit that the first matter was created by God.⁶¹

il che chiarissimamente Origene ha sentito”. The first edition is in 1548. I would like to thank Lucio Biasiori for his indication.

- 60 J.A. Widmanstetter, *Mahometis Abdallae filii theologia dialogo explicata*, Nuremberg 1543: *Annotatio XIII: Cabalistas, a quibus doctrinae suae ineptias acceperat Mahometes, scribunt extreme dii Iudici die, septem inferiores numerationes at triadem supremam redituras, quarum singulae denum milium annorum adpellatione continerentur. Quod si ex his duas medias tollas, reliquae erunt quinque numerationes, de quibus Iudaei perperam hereticos edocuerant. Ex harum perversa doctrina, multa hausit Origenes, quae postea a patribus damnata fuere.*
- 61 J. Bodin, *On the the Demon-Mania of Witches [De la démonomanie des sorciers]*, English translation by R.A. Scott, Toronto 1995, v. I, ch. 5, 73–74. According to the editors “Bodin’s remark reflects a common misunderstanding of Origen’s belief in “Apocatastasis””, 73 (n.123).

The allusions to the Origenian doctrine of the infinity of the world, also connected to his agreement with the mysteries of the Hebrews, are as frequent in Bodin's texts as they are in the *Universae Naturae Theatrum* (1596)⁶² or in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* (published posthumously in 1857).⁶³ Bodin is without any doubt the source for Cicogna, who used exactly the same world of the *Démonomanie* translated into the vernacular by Ercole Cato (published in Venice, at the press of Manutius, in 1587).⁶⁴ Cicogna placed Bodin's opinion in the middle of the by then well-established account of Pico's Kabbalah. His "editing" was probably induced by Bodin's reference to the Pichian doctrine on angels and worlds contained in the *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, that Cicogna fastens – not without reasons – to the entire survey of the Kabbalah in the *Apology*,⁶⁵ adding another piece to this tradition.

Nevertheless, only a part of the puzzle is disclosed. The messianic time plan of divine activity is indeed not Origenian,⁶⁶ nor is it present in Pico in these terms (despite the enigmatic reference to the forty-nine "gates of understanding" and the fact that its *Heptaplus* is structured around the symbolism of seven and forty-nine).⁶⁷ The doctrine of the regeneration of the world every 7000 years, following the account of the creation, is in fact Talmudic. The annotation in the Italian version of the *Démonomanie* as well those contained in the *Universae Naturae Theatrum* shed light on Bodin's source: the third book of *Dialoghi D'amore*,⁶⁸ (1535), in which Leone Ebreo

62 I have consulted J. Bodin, *Universae Naturae Theatrum*, Paris 1605, I. 21 and, in particular 36. On the book see A. Blair, *The Theater of Nature. Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science*, Princeton 1997.

63 J. Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime [Colloquium Heptaplomeres]*, ed. M. Leathers Kuntz, University Park 2008, 109; the same doctrine of the seven thousand years will be referred both to Origen and the secret wisdom of the Jews.

64 J. Bodin, *La demonomania degli stregoni [De la démonomanie des sorciers]*, translated by E. Cato, Rome 2006, 66.

65 For the doctrine on the angels recalled by Bodin, cfr. Pico, *Heptaplus*, 1942, 8.3 and *Conclusiones* in Farmer, 1998, *Conclusiones* 29.2; 30.28.

66 Origen however sometimes mentioned the symbolism of the number 7, as in Or. Hom. Gen. 2.6, which is also mentioned in Zorzi, 2010, 646.

67 Furthermore, Pico reports that amongst the "decreta veteris hebraicae disciplina" it is revealed that the six days of the creation are to be understood as the six thousand years of the world Pico, *Heptaplus*, 1942, 348 f.; however, he explicitly refused the possibility of deducing the time of the end of the world, 352.

68 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. D. Giovannozzi, Rome 2008, III. 1: M. Granada, *Sobre algunos aspectos de la concordia entre prisca theologia y cristianismo en Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico y Leon Hebreo*, in: Daimòn. Revista de filosofia 6 (1993), 41–60 (53).

unpacked this Jewish doctrine, derived from Nachmanides, presenting it as Kabbalistic and considering it not very distant from the same Platonic tradition.⁶⁹ According to the “figurative” interpretation, in the Pentateuch the number of days must correspond to the number of years, and the celestial year to a millennium. Thus, the words of Lev. 25,⁷⁰ should be interpreted considering the rest of the seventh “day” – namely after 7000 years – an era called *scemit*⁷ (*schmittot*: remission): after seven *scemita* (49,000 years) there will be a great *Iobel* (*yovel*, *Iubileum*), which will be the perfect quiet, the return and restoration of all things, which will be followed by a renewal of the world. The fact that astrological theories concerning the revolution of the heavens concord with the chronologies of the theologians leads Leone to propose the common origin of these doctrines in the reception of the divine message through Adam and Moses. He furthermore adds that these theologians read the beginning of Genesis as “before that God creates and separates from the Chaos the Heavens and the Earth” (instead of “in the beginning God creates the Heavens and the Earth”); so, they had believed in a state before the Creation of primordial waters and primordial darkness, where the Chaos / matter was *in potentia* and confused.⁷¹

Bodin’s text is grounded in this cosmogony. The reappraisal of the *Dialoghi D’amore* was indeed made in the context of a reflection on the creation, facing the belief in the eternity of matter, existent before the intervention of divine activity. The doctrine of the successive worlds – erroneous, but toward which Bodin has a benevolent attitude in this context – could be indeed useful against the objection of those who impiously believe in a period of inactivity of God: according to Bodin, the belief in continuous successive worlds does not deny, in fact, the divine creation of the first matter. What is to be noted is that Leone doesn’t mention Origen. Despite the fact that Bodin’s attitude toward reading theological doctrines in Jewish terms is notorious – and was denounced soon enough by the censor Marcantonio Maffa at the end of the sixteenth century –⁷² the attribution of those doctrines to Origen is undeniably noteworthy. The introduction could possibly be explained by the relevant paragraphs on these issues present in *De*

69 Leone Ebreo, 2008, 238: “Mi piace vederti fare Platone Mosaico e del numero dei Cabalisti”. Leone Ebreo was the son of the famous Kabbalist Isaac Abrabanel.

70 Lev. 25:3–11.

71 Leone Ebreo, 2008, 236–237; As it seems, Leone interweaves his explanation with Pico’s interpretation around natural and supernatural water, contained in the *Heptaplus*.

72 M. Valente, *Bodin in Italia. La Démonomanie des sorciers e le vicende della sua traduzione*, Florence 1999, 42–43.

Principiis, and it was evidently affected by the knowledge of the precedent pattern of Pico and Zorzi and, possibly, by the words of Widmanstetter.

The text of Bodin would be influential: after Strozzi Cicogna, it was taken up again by Valderrama in his *Teatro de las religiones* (1612), and then it returned to the forefront in France, in 1617, through the translation of De la Richarderie as *Histoire générale du monde et de la nature, ou Traictez théologiques de la fabrique, composition, et conduite générale de l'univers divisée en trois livres*. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the traces of Origen's presence as a Kabbalistic disciple were disseminated in several other books. Four years after the *Démonomanie*, the Franciscan Jean Benedecti used this notice in his *Somme des péchés et le remède d'iceux comprenant tous les cas de conscience*, a know-how book for confessors.⁷³ He advised against following Origen in his angelology, because he had placed the creation of the angels before that of the world: he was in fact a scholar of Pythagoras, Plato, and the Kabbalists. Scipion du Pleix would then entitle an entire section of his *Métaphysique ou science surnaturelle* (1620) "Erreur des Cabalistes et d'Origen", challenging their doctrine of the transmigration of souls.⁷⁴

It was maybe due to these images of Origen that Giordano Bruno made particular use of the doctrines of the Church Father. Actually, Bruno was familiar with Origen from his Neapolitan years in a monastery and was engaged in a continuous and deep confrontation with his exegetical solutions.⁷⁵ However, the doctrine that he referred to him in several of his pages seems influenced by this tradition. In his *Heroic Frenzies* of 1585, introducing the doctrine that states that every thousand years everything is turned upside down, including the souls, Bruno indeed affirms:

Among philosophers, I have only seen Plotinus declare expressly, like all the great theologians, that such a revolution is not for everyone, nor everlasting, but for one

73 J. Benedicti, *Somme des péchés et le remède d'iceux comprenant tous les cas de conscience*, Paris 1595, 7: "Origène, ou d'autres en son nom, qui ayas estudié a l'escole des Cabalistes, de Pythagore et de Platon, ont escrit les ames avoir esté créés avec les anges devant le monde".

74 S. du Pleix, *Métaphysique ou science surnaturelle*, Lyon 1620 (I ed. Paris 1617), 243. Also Jean de Croy presented a similar argument in his book devoted to the intersections between the patristic and the mysterious doctrine of the ancient theologies, the *Specimen conjecturarum et observationum in quaedam loca Origenis, Iraenaei, Tertulliani, et Epiphani, in quo varia scripturae sacrae Chaldeorum, Phoenicum, Pythagoreorum et Rabbiorum theologiae et philosophiae arcana indicantur et aperuntur* (s.l.) 1632.

75 P. Terracciano, *Origene*, in: M. Ciliberto (ed.) *Giordano Bruno. Parole, concetti, immagini*, Pisa 2014, 1385–1390.

time only. And among the theologians, only Origen, like all the great philosophers, has dared to say, following the Sadducees and many others censured sects, that the revolution is vicissitudinous and eternal.

The Nolan underscores the necessity that the last doctrine remains esoteric, and insists on its relation with Salomon's verset *nihil sub sole novi*.⁷⁶ Furthermore, writing about transmigration or on the infinity of worlds, he states a strong relation between Origen and the Jewish tradition (though apparently embodied by the Sadducees and not by the Kabbalistic).⁷⁷ The witness of Bruno testifies once again the strength of the nexus between Origen and the Hebrews in the second half of the sixteenth century; moreover, it could suggest his possible reading of the *Démonomanie*. Bruno's interpretation of Origen as the theologian of the eternal cyclicity is indeed in contrast with the traditional issue attributed to Origen, the *apocatastasis*, which is a final moment of rest. Despite the attitude of Bruno to overturn his sources, it has been noted that this doctrine is compatible with the ideas taken up by Bodin in those years. In the *Démonomanie*, Bruno could have detected Origen as an exponent of continual cycles of creation and destructions of the things; connected with (his beloved) Salomon's verset and tied with the Jewish tradition; settled in the philosophical debate on the issue of the infinity of the worlds; read on the edge of the contra-position of theologians and philosophers.

The verification of this hypothesis would have to be conducted through a systematic comparison of the two books, something that is not possible here. For our purposes, however, these last rings of the chain show the consolidation, at the end of the sixteenth century, of the *topos* of a kabbalistic Origen, diffused for apologetic, controversistic or philosophical motives; a *topos* that will continue for centuries in the European esoteric circles.⁷⁸

76 Eccl/Qoh 1:9; G. Bruno, *On the heroic frenzies [De gli Eroici furori]* trans. by I. Rowland, Toronto 2013, 27.

77 For instance, G. Bruno, *De Triplice Minimo*, 1591, in: F. Fiorentino [F. Tocco / H. Vitelli / V. Imbriani / C. M. Tallarigo] (eds.), *Bruni J. Nolani Opera latine conscripta, publicis sumptibus edita*, Naples [-Florence], 3 vols. in 8 tomes, 1879–1891, I, 1–2, 153. Bruno used the word “Saduchini”. Very probably it is not a reference to the Sadducees (whose typical idea is not the transmigration of souls, but its opposite: mortality and the absence of any kind of afterlife), but the vernacularisation of the Hebrew words *zaddiqim* (“the righteous ones”). It could be adding, however, that the principal apparition of the Sadducees in the Gospel is in Mc 12, 18–27, where they debated with Jesus on the levirate: the Kabbalistic interpretation of the levirate is exactly the basis for the doctrine of metempsychosis (the *gilgul*). I would like to thank Brian Ogren and Giacomo Corazzol for their suggestions.

78 See D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussion of Eternal Torment*, Chicago 1964; A. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century. The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)*, Leiden 1999.

Maria Fallica

Charity and Progress: Erasmus in the Origenian Tradition

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to explore the category of progress in Erasmus' thought, thus highlighting his reception of Origen. The paper investigates Erasmus' understanding of moral progress, exegetical progress, and the progress of the rational mind in key texts of his production. Particular attention is given to the anti-Lutheran aspect of this theology of progress.

Keywords: Luther, Catholic Church, Charity, Justification, Ecclesiology

Erasmus of Rotterdam was a man of moderation: it was his professed ideal, theologically declined and strategically emphasised against his opponents, first of all Luther. This image, carefully cultivated, comes to mind when confronted with his reception of Origen, famously loved *auctor* whose influence on Erasmus has been conclusively proved by André Godin's masterpiece, *Érasme lecteur d'Origène*.¹ Moderation is certainly at work in his complex reappraisal of Origen; Erasmus retains almost nothing of the Alexandrian's most daring speculations on the protological and eschatological level, and the allegorical "excesses" of Origen's hermeneutics are often condemned. However, this explicitly moderate approach should not obscure the *radical* Origenian inheritance in the thought of the Dutch humanist, in terms of a liberal, progressive culture, capable of educating mankind and representing the true, Christian philosophy in the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, this paper looks in the direction of a comprehensive reading of Erasmus' thought² under the category of progress, which will provide a broadened understanding of Origen's influence on Erasmus, given the premise of this volume, namely the crucial nature of the category of progress in Origen.

1 A. Godin, *Érasme lecteur d'Origène*, Geneva 1982.

2 Thus, my reading will refer to the entirety of his production, in the conviction that, although anything but a systematic philosopher, Erasmus held firm some basic theological tenets, which he *adapted* to the cultural, political, and religious circumstances of his age, not without *faux pas* and misunderstandings. On Erasmus' biography and its effects on his thought, see J. D. Tracy, *Erasmus, the Growth of a Mind*, Geneva 1972; R. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: Making of a Humanist, 1467–1500*, Edinburgh 1993; M. Barral-Baron, *L'enfer d'Érasme*, Geneva 2014.

1. *Raise Yourself: Progress from the Letter to the Spirit*

It is possible to read a major part of Erasmus' thought in line with the fifth canon³ of his *Enchiridion*, the handbook of the Christian knight, which introduces us to his Platonic (Origenian) reading of the Pauline dualism between the letter and the spirit:

My brother, do not progress slowly by dint of reluctant effort, but by moderate exercise arrive at quick and vigorous adulthood in Christ. Embrace zealously this rule, not to be willing to crawl along the ground with unclean animals, but supported on those wings whose growth Plato thinks are induced in our minds by the heat of love and shoot out anew, raise yourself as on the steps of Jacob's ladder from the body to the spirit, from the visible to the invisible, from the letter to the mystery, from sensible things to intelligible things, from composite things to simple things.⁴

The rule indicates the exegetical movement, which goes from the letter to the spirit, in true Origenian fashion,⁵ as well as the movement of the heart of the true Christian, who, as the title of the *Enchiridion* suggests, is an athlete in Christ: the gymnastic part of the philosophy of Christ is strongly stressed throughout the entire production of Erasmus.⁶ If, as Albert Rabil has said, the concept that learning will make one a better person is the key to Erasmus' program of scholarship and reform,⁷ the heart of this learning is the true understanding of the Scriptures. In reading Scripture, the only goal is to be changed, seduced, moved to tears and then be transformed by the text itself, which is food for the soul, and it will transform the soul day by day, taking away vices and adding piety. Therefore, exegesis is to proceed from the flesh of Scripture to its mystical spirit; according to the Pauline metaphor, very dear to both Origen and Erasmus, the believer must progress from milk to solid food (1 Cor 3:2).

3 For instance, this is the interpretation of A. Auer, *Die vollkommene Frömmigkeit des Christen: nach dem Enchiridion militis Christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam*, Düsseldorf 1954, 81; see also Godin, 1982, 43 f.

4 Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, in id., *Spiritualia (Enchiridion / De contemptu mundi / De vidua)*, CWE 66 tr. C. Fantazzi, Toronto 1988, 84. A very interesting chapter of Jacob Vance's book, J. Vance, *Humanism, Mysticism, and Evangelism in Erasmus of Rotterdam, Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet, and Marguerite De Navarre*, Leiden 2014, 20–49, reads in terms of secrecy the dualism letter/spirit in Erasmus, indicating the Origenian root of this mechanism and pointing out texts from the *Ratio*, the *Enchiridion* and the *Sileni Alcibiadis*.

5 See Godin, 1982, 253 f.

6 The theme of spiritual warfare, commonplace in devotional texts, can nonetheless be traced back to Origen; cf. Godin, 1982, 33 f.

7 A. Rabil, *Desiderius Erasmus*, in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy II Humanism Beyond Italy*, Philadelphia 1988, 222.

This progress is *vehementer velle*,⁸ to will and to meditate, namely, to exercise this will. As the disciples in Acts went into the upper room, the *cenaculum*, after the ascension of Jesus, removing from the lower part of the house, the believer must be far removed from sordid cares and “prepare himself as a dwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁹ *Stare vero in via Domini, retrogredi est*,¹⁰ admonishes Erasmus in his *De puritate tabernaculi*, the last of Erasmus’ written works, and perseverance is the key to proceeding in the *via pietatis*.

This path to salvation also encompasses the sustainment of the sacraments confessed by the Church, which Erasmus held, even though his sacramental theology was often accused of being dangerously close to “Swiss” leanings.¹¹ Erasmus stresses the importance of the inner, willful participation of the soul, again going from the simple letter to the spirit. Baptism is not enough, if it is not accompanied by the constant exercise of embracing Christ in the depths of the heart and acting in a Christian spirit:

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- 8 D. Erasmus, *Enarratio In Primum Psalmum*, ed. A. Godin, in: C. Béné / S. Dresden / A. Godin (eds.), *Enarrationes In Psalmos Pars Prior*, ASD V-2, Amsterdam 1985, 19–80 (52).
- 9 The editor of the English translation quotes Rabanus and Hugh for this exegesis, but it is worth mentioning Or., Cels. 8, 22 (the perfect Christian, like the apostles of Jesus who “went up to the upper room” [Acts 1:13–14], spends time in supplication and prayer to become worthy of some measure of the tongue of fire from God); cf. Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Acts*, CWE 50, tr. R. D. Sider, Toronto 1995, 10 and 165 n. 77.
- 10 D. Erasmus, *Enarratio Psalmi XIV qui est de puritate tabernaculi sive ecclesiae Christianae*, ed. A. Godin, in C. Béné / S. Dresden / A. Godin (eds.), 1985, 300.
- 11 Not without some good reasons: see Erasmus’ ambiguous judgement of Johannes Oecolampadius’ doctrine of the Eucharist: “learned, well written and thorough”. He added that “I would also judge it pious, if anything could be so described which is at variance with the general opinion of the Church, from which I consider it perilous to dissent” (cf. Desiderius Erasmus, *Ep. 1636*, in *Letters 1535–1657*, CWE 11, tr. A. Dalzell, Toronto 1994, 343–344). Oecolampadius’ theology was heavily dependent on Patristic and Origenian motives; see L. Lies, *Origenes’ Eucharistielehre im Streit der Konfessionen: die Auslegungsgeschichte seit der Reformation*, Innsbruck 1985. In particular, Erasmus’ Latin translation of Origen’s *Fragmentum commentariorum Origenis in evangelium secundum Matthaemum* (Basel 1527) was contested and caused accusations of heterodoxy for Erasmus’ doctrine of the Eucharist; defending his translation, made “in good faith”, from a man that “no one reads today as a dogmatist”, Erasmus even suggested that “perhaps even now the church has not clearly defined how the body is present in the Eucharist beneath the accidents or beneath the actual bread” (cf. *Ep. 2263*, in *Letters 2204–2356*, CWE 16, tr. A. Dalzell, Toronto 2015, 167); cf. Godin, 1982, 574–592.

For obtaining the prize of salvation we do not suppose it is enough to have been admitted through baptism into the household of Christ, to have been delivered by his kindness from the tyranny of sins and restored to freedom – unless we henceforth keep ourselves free from any association with base desires.¹²

The vigorous stance of the athlete, running the course, can stand next to the violence which will conquer the reign, extorting divine mercy: the weapon for conquering is penance, the continuous cry of the soul. The figure of the penitent, so crucial for a Roman Catholic Church which was answering Luther's attack on the indulgences and the entire penitential system, is paradoxically enforced in its powerful weakness, able to "extort" mercy from God's hands.¹³

2. The Economy of Progress and the Preeminence of Charity: The Anti-Lutheran Erasmus

The mention of Luther introduces one of the most eloquent adversaries of an Origenian and liberal theology of progress,¹⁴ with whom the differences exploded in the debate of 1524. The crucial presupposition of Erasmus' proactive and dynamic vision is the full force of human free will, which, as Luther famously recognised, was the most substantial point upon which to attack. As the synergistic model of the Διατριβή says, Adam was created with an intact reason and will, able to persevere in innocence. The original sin obscured the *logos*, and the human capacity to judge, and the human will

12 Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase on 1 Corinthians*, tr. E.A. Phillips Jr, in *Paraphrases on the Epistles to the Corinthians, The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, CWE 43, ed. R.D. Sider, Toronto 2009, 128.

13 Desiderius Erasmus, *De immensa misericordia Dei*, ASD V-7, ed. C.S.M. Rademaker, Leiden 2013, 90; cf. G. Lettieri, *Machiavelli interprete antiluterano di Erasmo. L'Esortazione alla penitenza (1525) epitome del De immensa Dei Misericordia (1524)*, in: *Giornale critico di storia delle idee* 2 (2017), 27–103.

14 On Luther and Origen, see M. Schulze, *Martin Luther and the Church Fathers*, in: I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, vol. 2, Leiden 1997, 573–626 (616–620); J. F. Dechow, *Origen's Shadow over the Erasmus/Luther Debate*, in: G. Dorival / A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana sexta: Origène et la Bible/Origen and the Bible: Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum Chantilly, 30 août-3 septembre 1993*, Louvain 1995, 739–757; G. Pani, "In toto Origene non est verbum unum de Christo": *Lutero e Origene*, in: *Adamantius* 15 (2009) 135–149; P. Walter, *Inquisitor, non dogmatistes. Die Rolle des Origenes in der Auseinandersetzung des Erasmus von Rotterdam mit Martin Luther*, in: A. Fürst / C. Hengstermann, *Autonomie und Menschenwürde: Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*, Münster 2012, 169–183.

was made unable to do good, but it was not abolished. This means the permanence of the natural law in human nature, as is testified to by the capacity of the Greek philosophers to discover God's omnipotence and to determine moral precepts coherent with those of the Gospel. Erasmus' texts against Luther reiterate the point again and again: in *On the freedom of the will* the believer is urged to "strive with all our might, have recourse to the remedy of penitence, and entreat by all means the mercy of the Lord, without which no human will or endeavor is effective".¹⁵ The possibility for the ancient philosophers to attain moral goodness, in its anti-Augustinian stance, is a landmark component of this theology of freedom. Thus, in a passage of the *Hyperaspistes*, Erasmus claims that

A person who understands much through human reason and believes certain truths about God, who has drunk in a love of wisdom from the books of philosophers, who has striven for a habit of virtue according to his own small measure, is somewhat more capable than a crude soldier who has lived in a profound state of ignorance and the grossest vice and who never gave a thought to God. And so does a person have what he has not received? Not at all. But it does not follow that since he did not receive it as a gift but as a legacy, therefore he did not receive it.¹⁶

Against what he calls the "Stoic notions"¹⁷ of Luther regarding the totally sinful nature of good actions performed without grace, Erasmus will continue to defend "gradations of faith and of charity which have not yet attained effective faith, which is only given by God",¹⁸ and the existence of "a certain kind of charity towards God through his [the human] natural power",¹⁹ "some will to goodness, however minuscule" which "springs from nature".²⁰ Pagan philosophy is the best example of this, allowing us to dismiss Luther's idea, which, in Erasmus' words, is that "the tolerance of Socrates is no less grievous an offense in the sight of God than the cruelty of Nero".

The striving of the ages towards goodness has a value that can constitute a legacy for all generations: Erasmus' program of reform is based on the possibility of moral gradations,²¹ and, therefore, of progress.

15 M. Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, eds. E. G. Rupp / P. Saville Watson, Louisville 1969, 114.

16 D. Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes Book 2*, tr. C.H. Miller, CWE 77, ed. C. Trinkaus, Toronto 2000, 742.

17 Erasmus, 2000, 737.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Erasmus, 2000, 744.

20 Erasmus, 2000, 743.

21 See on this an interesting paragraph in M. Caldwell, *Skepticism and Belief in Early Modern England: The Reformation of Moral Value*, New York 2017, 53–55.

The fuel of this race is described in terms of charity, the cardinal virtue which was the manifesto of the late mediaeval Italian curial and confraternal culture,²² and which was the “Italian way to Paul”. This would be a reading of the Epistles in which the Paul of the Corinthians was prominent, instead of what would be the Romans-oriented Paul of the Reformations: the primacy of charity vs. the primacy of faith.²³

Accordingly, Erasmus’ *philosophia Christiana* can be read in terms of a humanistic version of the Pauline race in the ninth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians. Erasmus lauds Paul’s commitment to the race, his willingness to subdue his body and make it obedient to the spirit, speeding up towards the prize, as a real boxer fit to fight. But for the humanist what is truly remarkable in Paul is his ability to temper himself and his eager race to the weakness of others.²⁴ Indeed, in dealing with the Corinthians, Erasmus comments admiringly:

He [Paul] is such a squid, such a chameleon [...] with such freedom does he himself twist and turn like a man who threads the windings of a maze and appearing to us in a fresh guise every time. How humble and ingratiating he sometimes is, as he beseeches them by the mercy of Christ [...] elsewhere he abases himself and calls himself an offscouring, misbegotten and unworthy [...] in one place he acts the part of an intelligent and sober man; in another he dons the mask of one who is foolish and beside himself [...] Always Christ’s business is his main concern; always he thinks of the well-being of his flock, like a true physician leaving no remedy untried which may restore his patients to perfect health.²⁵

Charity is the regulative measure of Paul’s race, the carpenter’s rule²⁶ of Christian life. If charity is this regulative force, the mode of its application is accommodation: a distinctive, albeit traditional, theological-rhetorical disposition of Erasmus, which embraces the Greek *συγκατάβασις* (condescension) and *συμπεριφορά* (accommodation), technical terms broadly employed in early Christian interpretations of Paul’s attitude in becoming “all things

22 See A. Prospero, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Torino 1996, 17; I follow here the interpretation of Erasmus’ anti-Lutheran attitude, especially in the *Concio De immensa Dei misericordia*, and its Roman context, proposed by Lettieri, 2017, 32–44.

23 Prospero, 1996, 21.

24 Erasmus, 2009, 16–17.

25 Erasmus, 1982, 249 (it is the epistle to Erard de La Marck, ep. 916 Allen, 5 February 1519).

26 “If we have Christian charity like a carpenter’s rule, everything will easily be set straight by that”: Erasmus, 1982, 79 (this is the preface to the 1518 edition of the *Enchiridion*, and consist of a letter to Paul Volz, ep. 858 Allen, 14 August 1518).

to all people” (1 Cor 9:19–23),²⁷ used especially by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and John Chrysostom. This attitude is explicitly praised elsewhere to criticise “that kind of downrightness, edgy and harsh and unsmiling, among inexperienced people that require everyone to live solely in their own way, and whatever pleases others they condemn.”²⁸ Harshness and lack of charity are shown by the incapability of accommodating themselves to others; here is another clear example of Erasmus’ gradual morality.

Paul’s attitude, his enacting ability, the willingness to change role as a good actor, but above all his charitable nature are all an imitation of a model, the highest possible. In Erasmus’ *Explanation of Psalm 85*, published in Basel in 1528, there is a beautiful exegesis of David as Christ, “the perfect example of a poor man”,²⁹ who prays in the Psalm to the Father for the salvation of the church and the spreading of the Father’s glory. God answers the cry of God’s people to have mercy in Christ, with different kinds of mercy:

He has mercy when he alleviates suffering and grants relief so that our weakness can endure it [...] He has mercy when he bestows grace, when he strengthens, and when he saves [...] He has mercy when he allows his people to fall into error and commit serious offences [...] Nor is the Lord’s mercy of one kind only, for his mercies are manifold, available to all who cry out to him. One kind of mercy sets free, another anticipates; one accompanies, another follows; one protects, another consoles; one beats in order to correct, another bestows in order to enrich. Need I say more? As his wisdom is beyond measure, so is his mercy.³⁰

It is impossible not to think here about Origen’s concept of the *epinoiai* of Christ,³¹ from which, in Erasmus’ reading, the highest is mercy, the true expression of the Lord’s charity. The connection with Origen on this point is clear in Erasmus’ mind, as we can see in his annotation on Romans 12:1, when he mentions Origen’s preference for the plural for the word mercy: Christ’s love is multifaceted, plural.³² This love can *make a bird out*

27 M. Mitchell, *Pauline Accommodation and “Condescension”* (συγκατάβασις): 1 Cor 9:19–23 and the History of Influence, in: T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, Westminster 2001, 197–214.

28 Desiderius Erasmus, *Adages III to IV 100*, CWE 31, tr. M. Mann Phillips, Toronto 1982, 134.

29 Desiderius Erasmus, *An Explanation of Psalm 85*, tr. C. White, in id., *Explanations of the Psalms*, CWE 64, ed. D. Baker-Smith, Toronto 2003, 28.

30 Erasmus, 2003, 48.

31 Cf. Or., princ. 1.2; Or., Joh. 1.125–292 f.

32 Cf. D. Erasmus, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum. Pars tertia*, ASD VI-7, ed. P.F. Hovingh, Leiden 2012, 286: *per misericordiam*. Διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν, *id est, per miserationes*. *Consentientibus in lectione Chrysostomo ac Theophylacto*. *Annotavit numeri rationem et Origenes, putans in eo esse emphasisim immensae Dei misericordiae*.

of a donkey, Erasmus promises. Christ's love, willing to embrace everyone, puts wings on the soul, accelerating the race.³³ But everyone who desires to fly up to the Lord has to put off the old man from his youth, the start of the spiritual age: "for piety, too, has a period of infancy, of adolescence, of youth, and of manhood, but it has no old age – for old age is the mark of sinners."³⁴ It is interesting to note a parallel passage in the prefatory letter of the *Enchiridion*, which, after having paralleled piety to a human being, with stages of infancy, growth and adult strength, invites "every man according to the measure that is given him [...] to strive upwards towards Christ."³⁵ Ages are paralleled with the four elements, each with its given place: "but fire, which has the highest station, gradually sweeps all things into itself and transforms them so far as it may to its own nature. Water it evaporates and turns into air, and air it rarefies and transforms into itself".³⁶

Erasmus preaches an "obliging and kind" Lord, who by granting charity makes his commandments easy to bear and is fair and humane in his judgment of our deeds. He recognises our inadequacies and forgives our weakness if we have been unable to raise up our hearts to him as far as we should; He gives assistance to our slender resources and pardons us for our indifference, giving support and relief while human beings make progress; He is not only kind and humane but also πολυέλεος, in other words, very merciful.³⁷

"The kindness of divinity accommodating itself to our weakness" is evident in His willingness to "not reveal himself to us entirely at once but lead us gradually and through distinct stages to such a lofty philosophy",³⁸ as Erasmus' *Ecclesiastes* explains the gradualism in revelation, from the law of nature to the gospel. A God *misericors* and *miserator* tolerated the blindness of the Jews for many centuries, and afterwards the more pitiful and odious relapses of Christians, even after baptism, with a patience that cannot be worn down.³⁹

God's tolerance is imitated by the Fathers, in their acceptance of superstitious rituals: an interesting passage from *Modus orandi Deum* suggests to "put up with" contemporary popular customs, until "the opportunity to correct it without causing civil uproar should present itself."⁴⁰

33 Erasmus, 2003, 55.

34 Erasmus, 2003, 56.

35 Erasmus, 1988, 16.

36 Erasmus, 1988, 16.

37 Erasmus, 2003, 57.

38 Desiderius Erasmus, *The Evangelical Preacher*, tr. J.L.P. Butrica, in id., *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, CWE 68, ed. F. McGinness, Toronto 2015, 1084.

39 Erasmus, 2003, 95.

40 Desiderius Erasmus, *On Praying to God*, tr. J.N. Grant, in id., *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, CWE 70, ed. J.W. O'Malley, Toronto 1998, 198.

God's path through history, then, proceeds in a very long line of gradual revelation, but contradictions and errors on the part of His people are plainly visible, as Erasmus states dolefully in the comment on Ps. 85:

No age is without its Herods, who massacre infants, none which does not have its Annas and Caiaphas, its own Scribes and Pharisees; this is the case even during the church's most peaceful periods, not only in this most turbulent century when the nets are so torn by differences of opinion and character that they can hardly be mended even by those who are in the apostolic succession – although we read in the Gospels that the disciples did manage it.⁴¹

The answer is clear in Christ's prayer: He "prays for progress, that the church might stand firm in faith and love and might ever progress towards better things. He has redeemed and cleansed his bride, but without God's protection no one is able to stand firm in what is good, unless God's grace directs and guides those who have been called. He prays, therefore, for Peter, in other words, for the church, to prevent its faith growing weak."⁴²

Erasmus' appeal to the necessity of remaining within the Church became at the same time more urgent, as the years passed and the wound of the divide in Western Christianity became more deep-seated: this is evident in many texts from the years 1527–1529. But this necessity to stay within the embrace of the Church, the spiritual one, but visibly expressed by Peter and the sacraments of baptism and penance, goes far back in time. Indeed, already in the preface of the *Enchiridion* of 1518 as well as in the *Ratio*, Erasmus explained the cooling of the fire of charity and the true role of Christ in rekindling this fire: "let Christ remain what he is, the centre, with several circles running round him. Do not move that central mark from its place".⁴³ Around Christ, the center, there are three circles: the first is the one of those nearest to Christ; priests, bishops, cardinals, popes, who "should embrace the intense purity of the centre and pass on as much as they can to those next to them". The second circle is that of the lay princes who defend the public peace; the third circle is the common people, to whom indulgence must be given, attempting to make them follow the center. From one circle to another, there are various degrees of tolerance; the church permits certain rituals and even superstitions, which allow for the weakness of youth until they acquire sufficient strength.⁴⁴ To live in history is to compromise, preserving long-held religious habits to accommodate with *old suits*, in the attempt to lead to spiritual freedom. Progress is not (only) a line, but also

41 Erasmus, 2003, 90.

42 Erasmus, 2003, 72.

43 Erasmus to Paul Volz, ep. 858 Allen, 14 August 1518.

44 Cf. Erasmus, 1985, 118; id., 1997, 96.

runs in circles, coming near the center. As Georges Chantraine has pointed out, in the ecclesiology of circles presented in the *Ratio*, Erasmus reinterprets the hierarchic system of the Pseudo-Dionysius, dynamised through the centripetal force of Christ and the centrifugal force of the earthly passions.⁴⁵

With the proviso of the maintenance of the theological and anthropological presuppositions crucial to Erasmus' thought (freedom of the will and charity as guidelines), all human structures stand in a circle governed by love for one's fellow man. This means reasoning in terms of *consensus* and perseverance under Peter's guidance. In the meantime, the best praise that can be given to a speculative theologian is his attitude to silence, his reticence to define, his exhortation to unity and love.⁴⁶

3. The Progress of the Mind: The Radical Erasmus

The profile of Erasmus' theology presented so far risks appearing to be the portrait of a very domesticated theologian, spiritual heir to the great philological tradition of Origen and Jerome, fully at ease in the embrace of the Roman Catholic seat. This reading, without the brusqueness of this summary, has been authoritatively proposed in Erasmus scholarship,⁴⁷ in opposition to an important alternative reading of his figure, that of a liberal, *progressive* thinker, who was an important ring in the chain of a process of secularisation of Christianity.⁴⁸ Moreover, the inheritance of his thought in the so-called Radical Reformation, which has been widely studied in the last

45 Cf. G. Chantraine, « *Mystère* » et « *Philosophie du Christ* » selon Érasme: *Étude de la lettre à P. Volz et de la «Ratio verae theologiae»*, Namour 1971, 124. Chantraine sees an evolution from the *Enchiridion* to the *Ratio*, from a vertical ascent of the individual to the collective, dynamic, Christocentric movement of the Church.

46 I allude here to the *Preface* to the edition of Hilary (1523), in which Erasmus spends many words in praising the silences of Hilary, much more than the words devoted to the actual doctrines explained in the *De Trinitate* of the Latin Father.

47 See for instance one of the most fervent defenses of Erasmus' Roman Catholic stance, the recent edition of T.P. Scheck, *Erasmus's Life of Origen: A New Annotated Translation of the Prefaces to Erasmus of Rotterdam's Edition of Origen's Writings 1536*, Washington 2016; Scheck, following Henri de Lubac's judgement, calls Erasmus "a greatly misunderstood figure in the history of Catholic theology" (Scheck, 2016, XV), recalling the very disparaging note on the *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1917 by Joseph Sauer, or the harsh appraisal of Joseph Lortz.

48 In the second volume of his invaluable study on the image of Erasmus' personality and thought through the centuries, Bruce Mansfield traces back the "liberal view" to the period 1750–1920, when liberal optimism itself considered Erasmus a valuable frontrunner: "Its essence was: Erasmus stood for a more open religion, for more critical scholarship, for a more tolerant society" (B. Mansfield, *Man on His Own: Interpretations of Erasmus, c. 1750–1920*, Toronto 1992, 373).

decades, has rightfully questioned the global interpretation of Erasmus himself.⁴⁹ The value of contemporary scholarship in dealing with these conflicting interpretations of Erasmus is, first of all, the full recognition of Erasmus' stature as theologian and, in the second place, the appreciation of the complexity of his personal position.

I think that the category of progress, in the terms that I have sketched here, helps us understand the complex theological, ecclesiological, and political positions of a man who received the offer of a cardinal's hat from Paul III and inspired the anti-Trinitarian thinkers, who was protected and paid by the Popes and attacked by Catholic universities, who could be revered in life and damned shortly after his death.

The progress in circles towards an all-consuming fire span throughout history and human constructions, revealing their nature as human, imperfect compromises. I find very revealing the delineation of an historical, progressive determination of dogmas even from the synoptic Gospels to John,⁵⁰ a text toward which Erasmus does not conceal his distance.⁵¹

I would like to offer an example of this "progressive" theology, choosing a very sensitive question such as Erasmus' position on divorce, as debated in his letter to one of his opponents, the Dominican inquisitor of Cologne, Jacob of Hoogstraten, who had criticised the edition and translation of the New Testament. Erasmus admitted that he had recorded his "pity for people who are loosely held together by an unhappy marriage, and yet would have no hope of refraining from fornication if they were released from it".⁵² The preference for a wide path towards salvation⁵³ means for Erasmus – who

49 See at least C. Gilly, *Erasmus, la reforma radical y los heterodoxos radicales españoles*, Castellò de la Plana 2005; P.G. Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus' Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe*, Toronto 2009; G. Dodds, *Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmian Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England*, Toronto 2009.

50 John's Gospel, Erasmus states clearly, for instance in the *Preface* to his *Paraphrase*, was due to the spreading of groups of heretics; if it were not for them, the other Gospels would have been sufficient for Christian life (cf. Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium Ioannis Apostoli*, LB 7, Lyon 1706, 490–497).

51 I have specifically dealt with this theme in M. Fallica, *La potenza della parola. Erasmo e l'incipit del prologo di Giovanni*, in: L. Geri (ed.), *Erasmo inquieto*, Rome 2022, forthcoming.

52 *Ep.* 1006 Allen, Erasmus to Jacob of Hoogstraten, 11 August 1519, in D. Erasmus, *Letters 993 to 1121*, tr. R.A.B. Mynors, CWE 7, Toronto 1987, 49.

53 Sometimes there is a cautious but visible sympathy for the Origenian apokatastasis; see the already mentioned *Concio de immensa misericordia Dei*, where Erasmus alludes, without mentioning the name of the author, to the theory of the salvation of all creation: *nec defuere qui tantum tribuerent misericordiae diuinae, ut impios etiam daemones ac damnatos homines crederent aliquando post*

hastens to specify that “I am no innovator; I refer the whole question to the church’s discretion” – the wish of a charitable man who can “pity those who are set for perdition”. Erasmus continues defining a protrusive value of the attitude of charity: “Christian charity often wishes for something that is not possible, and it is often a pious act to wish for something you cannot bring about.” He accuses his adversary of trying to

prolong the discussion to great lengths, adducing every possible argument to prove that after a divorce remarriage is unlawful, as though I were unaware of the opinions of the early Fathers or the decrees of the church on this subject.⁵⁴

However, and here the idea of progress comes into play, Erasmus affirms that “the spirit of Christ may not have revealed the whole truth to the church all at once. And while the church cannot make Christ’s decrees of no effect, she can none the less interpret them as may best tend to the salvation of men, relaxing here and drawing tighter there, as time and circumstance may require.” The evocation of a full disclosure of Christ’s truth is not connected to a free gift of the Spirit but to the *interpretation*, made by the Church, in accordance with the principle of accommodation. The belief in progress in the understanding of what Christ has revealed makes possible the hermeneutical action of the exegete and the Church. “The Gospel is not superseded; it is adapted by those to whom its application is entrusted so as to secure the salvation of all men. Nor is a thing superseded when it is better understood.”⁵⁵ And if Erasmus wishes to leave the right to decide to the Church, the rhetorical question posed to the Inquisitor is very telling:

If you say that it is unlawful to take things which are generally accepted and question them, what are we to make of the saintly Doctors who are not afraid to submit for discussion whether the Eucharist is a sacrament, whether simple fornication is a sin?⁵⁶

It is clear that Erasmus claims the right to do what the saintly Doctors did, thanks to the natural gift of understanding which allows the creature to discern truth and progress in it. Christ speaks now better than before in the text

longas seculorum periodos recipiendos in gratiam (D.Erasmus, *De immensa Dei misericordia Concio*, ASD V-7, ed. C.S.M. Rademaker, Leiden 2013, 54). Erasmus continues asserting that, despite the preeminence of its author, this theory has been deemed heretical, and he is citing it as a witness to what extent the most erudite exegetes lauded God’s mercy. Erasmus’ appreciative tone is very clear; see on this P. Terracciano, *Omnia in figura. L’ombra di Origene tra ‘400 e ‘500*, Rome 2012, 156–157.

54 Erasmus, 1987, 50.

55 Erasmus, 1987, 50.

56 Erasmus, 1987, 52.

of the New Testament, as is said in Erasmus' *Paraclesis* – a very telling word chosen for the preface of the *Novum Instrumentum*. Through this title, which clearly alludes to the outpouring of the Spirit, Erasmus wants to hint, in the words of James Kearney, that “the promise of the Father is fulfilled not in Pentecost but in the written text of Scripture”,⁵⁷ now fully restored by Erasmus himself. In this sense, Erasmus can really be considered a proponent of the immanence of the possibility of love and true understanding in the human being, challenging dogmatic structures and borders. Naturally, the center and goal of human experience remains Christ, the fire, who will “sweep all things into itself and transform them so far as it may to its own nature”,⁵⁸ putting an end to all the human efforts and speculations. The Son, who is the beginning, the progress, the consummation,⁵⁹ will transform the faithful in many Christs. The flesh of the Lord, which at some time became an impediment to the faith of the disciples, will no longer be an obstacle.

This weak God, fully revealing Himself only in the kenosis of love, will make the creature more and more like Himself. It will be the *repuerescencia*, as Erasmus' beautiful coinage suggests: to be like infants, or maybe like spirits. Because, “God tolerates the life of the flesh for a while, if it is gradually dissolved into the spirit, but he does not tolerate it forever.”⁶⁰

This weakness and frailness of the divine voice who will not break the bruised reed, who does not impose his grace but persuades and caresses, who prefers to be read in the page of a book, who stays in the heart of the believer, will provoke scandal and admiration in Erasmus' readers. Some of the most innovative voices in the panorama of the Reformation, such as the Socinians or the Anti-Trinitarians, will follow some of his more daring hints, and his lesson will not be forgotten in the Catholic Reformation: but the careful and complex building of his thought, with all his rebalancing and forward thrusts, will be difficult to imitate.

57 J. Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England*, Philadelphia 2009, 67.

58 Erasmus, 1988, 16.

59 D. Erasmus, *An Explanation of The Apostles' Creed*, tr. L.A. Perraud, in id., *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, CWE 70, 246.

60 D. Erasmus, *A Commentary on the Second Psalm*, “Why Did the Nations Rage?”, tr. M. Heath, in: D. Baker-Smith (ed.) *Expositions of the Psalms*, CWE 63, Toronto 1997, 96.

Stefania Salvadori

The Idea of Progression between Humanism and Reformation: The Case of Sebastian Castellio

Abstract: Although the Reformation was mainly rooted in the Augustinian tradition, Origen's teaching still found echos within the protestant and reformed church. In the sixteenth century, Sebastian Castellio rejected in his dispute with the church of Geneva the doctrine of predestination and outlined a theology of salvation inspired by Erasmus, which was based on an ethical dynamism guided by the natural reason. The present contribution aims to show how Castellio, without quoting Origen directly, still developed a theology of progress and relativised so the Lutheran concepts of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*.

Keywords: Biblical hermeneutics, Free will, Predestination, Grace

Within the Protestant world, Origen's reception was influenced, if not determined, by Erasmus and his dispute with Luther on free will.¹ Luther's severe judgment – which he had formulated during his time at the Wartburg and then repeated until his judgment in the *Tischreden* in 1532, “Origenem hab ich schon in bann gethan”² – left no room for further discussion. However, this did not mean that Origen completely disappeared from the intra-Protestant debate. Leading figures such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius, or Capito did not hesitate to refer to Origen in their works of biblical exegesis, testifying that the varied nature of the Reformation cannot be reduced to the Saxon, or Luther's, model.³ An important group of theologians, who conceived of themselves as an integral and even leading part of the Reformation, did not renounce the humanistic tradition. Instead, they experimented with new forms of conciliation between the two souls of the European sixteenth

1 See the contribution by Maria Fallica in this volume. See also Walter, 2012, 169–183; Schär, 1979, 273–280.

2 See WATr 1, 106 Nr. 252: “Hieronymus potest legi propter historias, nam de fide et doctrina verae religionis ne verbum quidem habet. Origenem hab ich schon in bann gethan. Chrisostomos gillt bey mir auch nichts, ist nur ein wesscher. Basilius taug gar nichts, der ist gar ein munch; ich wolt nit ein heller umb yhn geben.”

3 See Schär, 1979, 245–273; I. Backus, *Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer and the Church Fathers*, in: I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, Leiden 1996, 627–660.

century, that is, between the Lutheran ultra-Augustinianism and the pro-Origen Erasmian model. It is unsurprising that the major proponents of these attempts at mediation acted both in the Catholic world and in the more anti-confessional, spiritualistic groups of the Reformation. Origen's reception emerged not only in the exegetical works of "orthodox" Reformers, who were particularly indebted to Erasmus, but also in the writings of free thinkers, who are often subsumed under the label of the "heterodox groups".⁴

Among these "heterodox groups" Sebastian Castellio marked the theological discussion in the second half of the sixteenth century and, indirectly, Origen's reception in the Protestant world. His name is still connected to – and to some extent confined within – the history of the doctrine of modern tolerance,⁵ but Castellio's work offered a theological option whereby Luther's call to *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* was combined with Erasmus's ethical teachings. Indeed, Castellio's theological system expressed and reinterpreted the agenda of the pamphlet *De libero arbitrio*, but he framed his work as a restoration of the original message of Luther, in opposition to his new opponents: John Calvin and Theodore Beza.⁶

This contribution aims to articulate three essential passages of Castellio's theological work. In these passages, central assumptions of reformed doctrine were both accepted and distorted to adapt to the principle of progression as a pivotal element of his soteriological teaching. The first passage comes from his translations of the Bible and the *Defensio suarum translationum Bibliorum*. He redefines the *sola scriptura* principle as a consequence of a dualistic conception of the Scriptures (*spiritus/litera*) which results in his proclamation of the autonomy of the translator and reader dealing with the sacred texts. The second passage comes from the *Dialogi quatuor*. He describes the relativisation of the *sola fide* principle as one of the poles of soteriology, which is configured primarily in ethical (not doctrinal) terms as an experience of freedom and consequently responsibility. The third passage is from the *De Arte Dubitandi*, which was published posthumously. He describes the concept of progress as immanent in the soteriological

4 The distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, especially in the first half of the sixteenth century, can hardly be applied as a clear historiographical category.

5 Among the traditional analyses of Castellio, see F. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre (1515–1563). Études sur les origines du protestantisme libéral français*, Paris 1892, Reprint: Genève 2009; H.R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563. Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter*, Göttingen 1997; B. Mahlmann-Bauer (ed.), *Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563). Dissenz und Toleranz*, Göttingen 2018.

6 For an historical introduction see U. Plath, *Calvin und Basel in den Jahren 1552–1556*, Basel / Stuttgart 1974.

movement that corresponds to a predestination to grace (instead of predestination to damnation) and is led by reason.

1. *Sola Scriptura*; but which *Scriptura*?

It is unclear whether, and to what extent, Castellio personally read and assimilated Origen's theology. The few direct quotations or references Castellio uses in his writing are clearly mediated by other authors. For example, in his *De haereticis*, Origen is quoted in passages reproduced from Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeytbuch und Geschyhtbibel* (1531).⁷ When Castellio quoted from Origen's exegetical works, he did not discuss the works in detail but referred to them as an important church authority in connection with other authors dear to him, especially Erasmus. It is probably due to the mediation of the great humanist, whose texts Castellio assimilates widely and deeply, that themes and echoes of the Origenian tradition emerge not only in Castellio's exegetical works, but also in the very fundamentals of his theological system.⁸ This is confirmed by Theodore de Beza, who summarised Castellio's (as well as Erasmus's and Ochino's) theology of grace as a Pelagianism directly stemming from Origen.⁹

Whether or not Beza's judgment was radicalised by his animosity against Castellio, their dispute over the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures in the middle of the sixteenth century reenacted Erasmus and Luther's dispute over free will in 1524/25, so reviving Origen's reception in the Protestant Church. Castellio quoted the Adamantine several times in general terms, but it was from Erasmus that he mediated Origen's teaching, especially on the discussion of the true essence of the sacred text as a coexistence and opposition of letter and spirit. Castellio's doctrine of tolerance is itself a consequence of this hermeneutical premise, which he developed in his exegetical works, including his *adnotationes* to his Latin *Biblia* of 1551,¹⁰ and the translation

7 S. Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi, et omnino quomodo sint cum eis agendum, Luteri et Brentii aliquorumque multorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae. Liber hoc tam turbolento tempore pernecessarius, et cum omnibus, tum potissimum principibus et magistratibus utilissimus, ad discendum, quondam sit eorum in re tam controversa, tacque periculosa, officium*, Magdeburg [Basel] 1554, 96 and 98 and 104. For an historical introduction see also H.R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Franck and Sebastian Castellio. Ein Diskussionbeitrag*, in: J.-D. Müller (ed.), *Sebastian Franck (1499–1542)*, Wiesbaden 1993, 293–303.

8 See for example K. Schindler, *Castellio reading Erasmus*, in: Mahlmann-Bauer (ed.), 2018, 203–225.

9 See T. Beza, *Correspondance*, Paris 1962, vol. 2 (1556–1558), 190.

10 S. Castellio, *Biblia. Una cum eiusdem annotationibus*, Basel, Johan Parcus / Oporinus, 1551.

of the same into French in 1555,¹¹ and especially in his defense of these biblical translations against Beza in the *Defensio suarum translationum Bibliorum* (1562).¹²

In his *Defensio*, Castellio looked at Scripture as the privileged source for understanding the divine message; the principle of *Sola Scriptura* was therefore formally confirmed. However, Castellio drew an unexpected conclusion from this principle: if Scripture discloses God's truth, it must be accessible to all Christians in order to guide them through the darkness of ignorance and error towards the eternal and final salvation.¹³ This salvation corresponds with what Castellio described as the complete revelation of justice and divine love. Nevertheless, Castellio was aware that Scripture is in reality not clear and evident; it contains mysteries which cannot be understood, ambiguous passages, and even manifest errors and inconsistencies. True Christians may even consider Scripture insufficient to ensure salvation, while false prophets may use it to justify all kinds of intolerance.¹⁴ Castellio therefore did not hesitate to disclose the true nature of Scripture as a Janus Bifrons, that is, an oracle that simultaneously saves and condemns, depending on how the believer reads and interprets its passages.

According to Castellio, the Bible is not the Word of God in its exclusive, eternal sense. Instead, the Bible is one of the many manifestations of the Word of God, expressed in this specific case through human language. One should therefore distinguish between the eternal, divine, and meta-historical Word (the *spiritus*), and its materialisation in a historical, human, and imperfect word (the *litera*).¹⁵ To describe the true nature of the Bible, Castellio repeatedly quoted the Pauline verse "the letter kills, the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). In the introduction to the *Bible française*, he developed this verse by referring to a tradition which came to Erasmus from Paul via Origen: as the body is the seat of the soul, so the letter is the seat of the Spirit.¹⁶

11 S. Castellio, *La Bible nouvellement tradlatée avec la suite de l'histoire depuis les tems d'Esdras jusqu'aux Maccabées, e depuis les Maccabées jusqu'à Christ: item avec des Annotacions sur les passages difficiles*, Basel: Herwagen, 1555.

12 S. Castellio, *Defensio suarum translationum Bibliorum, et maxime Novi Foederis*, Basel 1562. An overview of Castellio's hermeneutics can be found in H. Liebing, *Die Schriftauslegung Sebastian Castellios*, in: H. Liebing, *Humanismus-Reformation-Konfession. Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by W. Bienert / W. Hage, Marburg 1986, 29–124.

13 Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 141.

14 Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 144.

15 Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 144 f.

16 See the introduction *Le moyen pour entendre la Sainte écriture*, in Castellio, *La Bible 1555*, 3: «Ainsi que l'homme est fait du corps e de l'ame, tellement que le cors est le logis de l'ame: ainsi les saintes écrittures sont faites de la lettre e de

Letter and Spirit are therefore two separate areas where one must correctly read the former in order to access the latter. Starting from these common premises, Castellio identified two options. First, one could stop at the external words without grasping the divine meaning, like animals do with human language or wicked people do with the Spirit. Second, one could approach the Letter by considering its ambivalent nature: it is a human product with historical limits and specific linguistic forms that expresses a meta-linguistic, divine content.¹⁷

This irremediable gap between Letter and Spirit defines the translator's work. A translator is called from time to time to adapt the sacred text to different historical contexts and different readers, in the same way as a tailor makes a custom-made suit (the *litera*) without changing the body of his purchaser (the *spirit*).¹⁸ More generally, this gap urges all Christian readers to distinguish different degrees of clarity and evidence in Scripture. To deal with this Janus Bifrons and extract God's saving message, one must be able to distinguish between four elements of Scripture. First, the clear and indisputable contents which even *publicani et meretrices* can grasp,¹⁹ that is the first principles (God exists, God governs the world, God is righteous, and Christ's ethical example).²⁰ Second, the mysteries that postlapsarian human reason cannot grasp, and consequently should be simply believed and worshipped without further investigation. Third, clear errors or inconsistencies in the translation or transmission of the sacred text that must be freely

l'esprit, tellement que la lettre est comme une boîte, gosse, ou coquille de l'esprit. Et comme les bêtés peuvent bien voir le cors d'un homme, e ouïr sa voix, mais elles ne peuvent voir son ame, ni entendre son parler, sinon quelque peu de mots, voire a grand peine: [...] ainsi les méchants peuvent bien voir la lettre, e ouïr les mots de saintes écritures, que c'est qui y est raconté, commandé ou défendu: mais quant a l'esprit de la lettre, e où c'est que veut aller ferir la pensée de Dieu, les méchants n'y entendent rien, a cause qu'il n'ont pas l'esprit de Dieu qui parle: tout ainsi que les bêtes non pas l'esprit de l'homme qui parle, pour pouvoir entendre ses parolles. Car comme il n'y a que de l'esprit de l'homme qui sache les affaires de l'homme: ainsi les affaires de Dieu nul ne le sait, sinon l'esprit de Dieu, e ceux que l'esprit de Dieu enseigne. Or est-ce qu'il n'enseigne que les enseignables, c'est-à-dire ceux qui par fois viennent a Christ nôtre justice, e sont humbles, e prêts a laisser le jugement de la chair, e leur volonté même, pour faire la volonté de Dieu.»

17 See the dedicatory epistle *A trespreux e tresvictorieux prince Henri de Valois*, in Castellio, *La Bible* 1555, 2. See also Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 143–144 and 227–229.

18 See the dedicatory epistle to Edward VI King of England in Castellio, *Biblia* 1551. See also Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 19.

19 See Castellio, *De haereticis* 1554, 5.

20 Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 161. See also Castellio, *La Bible* 1555, 4.

amended. Fourth, doubtful passages for which no person can express a clear judgment, but every person can form an interpretation.²¹

Such a partial obscurity of Scripture does not represent a simple imperfection, nor does it reveal the inability of postlapsarian nature to grasp the divine message. On the contrary, according to Castellio, the obscurity corresponds to the divine will and consequently Christian soteriology, which urges believers to use all their natural faculties to extract from the sacred text God's truth and thereby gain full beatitude.

2. Free Will beyond *sola scriptura*

Because of its (partial) obscurity, Scripture cannot represent the unique norm for Christian life. Since its obscurity corresponds to God's will, it cannot be bypassed simply by turning to a full and sudden understanding by faith, as Beza claimed.²² According to Castellio, in order to understand Scripture as God wishes, there is no need for a sudden complete regeneration of human postlapsarian nature *per fidem*. This is because the understanding of Scripture corresponds to a progressive justification, that is, a gradual process of transmutation *per scientiam*. The circular dynamic established by Luther between internal and external *claritas scripturae*²³ is consequently broken and relocated in Castellio's theological system in the line of spiritual progress, of a primarily ethical rather than doctrinal improvement.

Having rejected the absolute clarity of Scripture revealed by faith and postulated the freedom of both translators and common readers to interpret Scripture, Castellio thought it necessary to determine principles external to Scripture, in order to distinguish acceptable from unfounded interpretations. The distinction was necessary to avoid radical relativism and, consequently,

21 See the introductory text *Advertissement touchant cête translacion*, Castellio, *La Bible* 1555, 5 f. and Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 49.

22 See for an historical overview on the discussion between Castellio and Beza S. Salvadori, *Socrate contre Aristote. Sébastien Castellion et la discussion sur les modèles rhétoriques*, in: M. C. Gomez-Géraud (ed.), *Sébastien Castellion: des Ecritures à l'écriture*, Paris, 2013, 371–392 and S. Salvadori, *Il martire e l'eretico. La discussione fra Castellione e Calvino sulla possibilità di errare*, in: L. Ronchi de Michelis / L. Vogel (eds.): *Giovanni Calvino e il calvinismo: La migrazione di uomini, idee, libri, Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, Roma, 2/ 2010, 53–65.

23 See for example W. Mostert, *Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres. Bemerkungen zu Luthers Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift*, in P. Bühler / G. Ebeling (eds.), *Glaube und Hermeneutik. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Tübingen, 1998, 9–41. For an overview see also the contribution by Albrecht Beutel in: A. Beutel (ed.), *Luther Handbuch*, Tübingen ³2017, 408–418.

the chaos of personal opinions. Castellio found his principles in Christianity's certain and indisputable tenets: to obtain eternal life it is necessary and sufficient to believe that God alone is the source of all good and all justice, and it is necessary to follow Jesus' ethical teaching.²⁴ Christ, the "second Adam",²⁵ opened the way to human justification not only through his sacrifice, but also through the concrete example of his life.²⁶

These principles are the *simplicitas* of the true Christian doctrine of which general knowledge is sufficient to direct daily human existence by distancing believers from sin and urging them to heal all evil through the practice of the Christian virtues. According to Castellio, to distinguish the divine message's essence from inscrutable mysteries, obscure passages, and manifest errors, one must assess the concrete effects in individual lives. Only true Christian doctrine can regenerate and convert souls, illuminate minds with God's truth, and establish love and compassion in the world. Castellio often used the analogy of a doctor: just as a capable doctor is one who cures disease without too many explanations, as opposed to one who lets his patients die despite claiming to be an expert, so too is a good doctrine a real instrument of salvation and healing of spiritual diseases, not a set of precepts and ineffective dogmas.²⁷

Castellio was aware of the possible contradictions. If the main purpose of true Christian doctrine is to heal the postlapsarian nature and restore human beings to their original righteousness, the question to be answered is why God allowed it to be mixed up with human opinions or sentences. More precisely, Castellio asked why these obstacles exist in Scripture if it is the privileged expression of divine truth, and what role they play within the human soteriological experience. Castellio's answer was that scriptural obscurity provides a testing ground for human free will, where natural faculties are called to fulfill the potential God has created and ordered in them, instead of remaining inactive and consequently unproductive. By fulfilling their potential, people with greater merit can win the final prize, that is, perfect knowledge and a blessed life. In this way, Castellio not only justified

24 S. Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi*, ed. by E. Feist, Leiden 1981, 19–22.

25 See for example S. Castellio, *Traicté des heretiques, a savoir si on les doit persecuter; et comment on se doit conduire avec eux, selon d'avis, opinion et sentence, de plusieurs autheurs, tant anciens que modernes*, Rouen [alias Lyon, Pierre Freneau], 1554, 8.

26 See S. Castellio, *Dialogi IIII [...]. Eiusdem opuscula quedam dignissima quorum inscriptiones vera pagella ostendet*, Arisdorf [Basel,], 1578, 27 f.

27 See Castellio, *Dialogi* 1578, 246–263; see also Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 101 f.

scriptural obscurity, which was considered by his adversaries to be pure blasphemy, but also transformed it into a greater and undoubted demonstration of infinite divine mercy.

Scriptural obscurity reveals the wisdom of the Creator to all who examine it teleologically. One may ask why God did not want to provide food to each bird in its nest. According to Castellio, the answer is that He had endowed birds with wings to obtain food elsewhere, and at the same time, “noluit igitur alas, opus suae sapientiae, esse otiosas”.²⁸ One might also ask why God hid gold and other useful metals in the depths of the earth such that their extraction was difficult, instead of placing them directly on the ground. In the same way, the answer is that God has provided human beings with the instruments – hands and intellect – to work hard and satisfy their own needs.²⁹ This principle is to be extended to the difficulties of the soul: scriptural obscurities correspond with God’s will, according to which true believers must grasp the eternal truth with their own intellect and put the truth into practice by behaving virtuously daily, so as to gain salvation. In opposition to the Reformed doctrine of imputed righteousness, Castellio constantly repeated that Christians are saved “sine merito” (because Jesus’ sacrifice for the forgiveness of all sins is given by grace), but not “sine opera” (because the complete transformation of the postlapsarian nature is achieved by a personal and free practice of justice).³⁰

Free interpretation, free will, and intellectual and moral effort are therefore unavoidable preconditions of the human soteriological process. The process cannot be solved by a mere appeal to faith or the imputation of righteousness, but is always matched by the good free will of true believers to place themselves in the school of Jesus Christ and transform their soul. The progressive dynamic of Castellio’s soteriology is clearly summarised in his *De Arte Dubitandi*, where he describes Christian life with the example of a wild tree (the postlapsarian sinful nature) slowly (through daily discipline) turning into a fruit tree (the restored nature) if a new shoot (Christ’s ethical example, freely recognised and imitated) is grafted onto it.³¹ This progressive dynamic also coincides with the doctrine of predestination to grace.

3. Progression and Predestination to Grace

Having shown that scriptural obscurity provides a testing ground for human free will where natural faculties are called to fulfill the potential God has

28 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 58 f.

29 Ivi.

30 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 59 f.

31 See for example Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 145 f.

created and ordered in them, Castellio finally describes in his last work, *De Arte Dubitandi*, the essence of these faculties, namely the natural senses and reason. The latter in particular is the essential gnoseological instrument in distinguishing *prima principia* from *mysteria*, and manifest errors from possible interpretations of single passages in the Bible.

Castellio defines reason as a *filia Dei* which existed before the Scriptures and the ceremonies, and its existence will have no end. Even God cannot destroy it because reason is his everlasting speech, his everlasting truth, which was manifested in Christ, which ruled the Creation from the very beginning, and which enables all human beings to pass judgment on right and wrong, and to distinguish truth from error within Scripture.³² Also, the human conscience originates from reason and is a sort of native divine intelligence, an *imago Dei* in all human beings.³³ Therefore, Castellio's description conflates rationalism and spiritualism in order to place within reason a natural manifestation of divine truth in the interior life of men. That means, however, that all human beings have at their disposal a secure device – reason – for isolating the divine truth (*spiritus*) from its historical expression (*verba*). Once recognised, divine truth will guide their lives in a sure way, will allow them to practice justice and, thus, to reach salvation. To sum up, natural reason as a manifestation of divine truth in the human soul ensures to all humankind a predestination to grace.

Castellio consequently describes how reason works to distinguish truth from error, i.e. by adapting human gnoseological faculties to the different passages in the Bible, depending on whether they must be believed or they can be understood, ignored, or doubted.³⁴ Reason indeed recognises the different degrees of authority and clarity in Scripture by virtue of Scripture's resemblance to its own essence, which is once again God's everlasting *veritas*. That is why reason also determines the dynamic between faith and comprehension, central to the soteriological process for Christians.

32 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 66: *Nam ratio est ipsa, ut ita loquar, dei filia, quae et ante literas et cerimonias omnes atque adeo ante orbem conditum fuit et post literas et cerimonias omnes atque adeo post mutatum novatumque hunc mundi statum semper futura est neque magis quam ipsemet deus aboleri potest. Ratio, inquam, est aeternus quidam sermo dei longe tum literis tum ceremonis et antiquior et certior, secundum quam deus suos et ante cerimonias et literas docuit et post easdem ita docebit, ut sint vere divinitus docti.*

33 Ivi, *Loquitur enim hic Paulus de sua cuiusque coscientia, quae est quaedam naturalis scientia cognitioque sui cuiusque vel recte vel pravi facti a ratione proficiscens.* See also Castellio, *Defensio* 1562, 62–65.

34 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 49.

According to Castellio, faith represents the beginning of a process of learning and purification, through which each single Christian should draw divine truth from the sacred text and on this basis devote himself to ethical practice following Christ's model of justice. Conversely, knowledge only takes shape progressively through concrete ethical experience, and reaches its fullness only at the end of the soteriological process. By positioning faith and knowledge respectively at the beginning and at the end of the process of interior regeneration, Castellio aims to rule out the possibility of a sudden and radical transmutation of the postlapsarian nature which would exclude all idea of progress. That is why he rejects both the idea of a *fides* which is at the same time a full *cognitio Dei* given by grace to the few predestined to salvation (which was the position of the Reformed Genevan Church, according to Castellio)³⁵ and the idea of a blind faith in whatever one might dream (which would result in complete chaos). Indeed Castellio describes faith as a conscious – and therefore not blind – trust in God and in his son, Christ, who are already recognised as almighty and righteous in the *prima principia*. From this point of view, faith is always intermingled with knowledge, and both of them undergo a combined process.³⁶

The dynamics of salvation have to be described in terms of chronological succession and progressive improvement which guides true believers from a simple faith (in the clear essence of Christian teaching and Jesus' ethical example) through a virtuous practice of these basic meanings (which enables true believers to really experience and therefore fully understand the eternal truth), up to a full knowledge of God's wisdom (as an experienced healing doctrine, which does not match with dogmas and theoretical contents, but rather embodies the godly wisdom in ruling the Creation). In this progressive soteriological process, faith degrades from its initial maximum to a final minimum, since a truth, once experienced, is no longer believed, but rather known.³⁷ Meanwhile knowledge progressively expands, since the

35 On the equation of justification and saving *cognitio Dei* in Reformed and Protestant orthodoxy, see A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Cambridge 2005. On faith and knowledge in Castellio's works see S. Salvadori, *Fides (non) est actio intellectus. Castellio's and Ochino's Views of the Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, in: Mahlmann-Bauer (ed.), 2018, 151–172.

36 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 92–94.

37 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 52: *Est igitur credere dictis seu veris seu falsis fidem habere. Saepe enim non minus creditur falsis quam veris, id quod de sciendo dici non potest, quippe falsa quae sunt, sciri non possunt, at credi possunt. Denique fides Christiana virtus est, id quod nemo inficiabitur. At scientia quomodo virtus est, non video nec eam in sacris literis ut virtutem laudari comperio, nisi forte scientiae verbum alicubi pro affectu ponatur, de qua hic non agimus. Et, ut*

transmutation of *fides* into *scientia* by means of experienced truth includes new regions of meaning, until the believer reaches a full *cognitio Dei* which corresponds to a perfect *beatitudo*.³⁸

In the symmetrical relationship between faith and knowledge, Castellio also places doubt and ignorance as natural (and therefore right and necessary) human instruments to approach the divine truth. Doubt and ignorance are indeed closely linked to the progressive dynamic between *fides* and *scientia*, since they offer a temporary solution for those scriptural contents that faith must not include (i.e. *adiaphora* that can be ignored since they are not essential to salvation) and that knowledge cannot yet incorporate (i.e. the *mysteria*, for example the Trinity, whose impossible rational interpretation generates only false doctrine and intolerance).³⁹ Both doubt and ignorance, however, will find a complete solution at the end of the soteriological process, being set aside to privilege the practice of justice, or clarified in a new and complete revelation.

Castellio's teaching reformulated the dispute on free will between Luther and Erasmus in a new historical context. Like Erasmus with Luther, Castellio accused Reformed Orthodoxy of making the soteriological process static and believers passive, and therefore irresponsible: If Scripture is immediately clear only to those who by faith have been justified by God and therefore released from sin, their process of regeneration will be reduced to the mere imputation of grace as a radical, yet fictive fracture between condemnation and grace without respect to human personal efforts. On this basis, Castellio says, no one would feel compelled to do good. On the other hand, the unelected would be condemned to get stuck eternally in hopeless evil. Once again, on this basis, no one would be encouraged to do good. According to Castellio, the doctrine of predestination, by denying free will and moral responsibility, results in predestination to damnation. It contrasts, therefore, with the same divine will of universal salvation that Jesus announced as a reward for personal moral efforts. And yet Castellio had not

paucis absolvam, ubi scientia incipit, ibi fides desinit, ut, qui ante dixit "Credo", idem iam dicat "Scio".

38 Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi* 1981, 95.

39 According to Castellio, all struggles emerge from the incorrect attitude shown towards the sacred text. As believers and particularly theologians do not want to confess their ignorance or doubts, they often show a shameless self-confidence. Arguing to know and to judge everything and everyone, they thus engender intolerance and persecutions because they are forced to use violence in order to impose their opinion, which is grounded on rhetoric instead of on manifest realities (see here, 192 n. 22). They cannot, however, conceal their malice since their intolerance clearly opposes Christ's example of justice and mildness.

simply taken up Erasmus' teaching. He rather radicalised the humanistic discussion on Scripture and developed a new dynamic, progressive, and universal model of salvation, a complex soteriological device whose direction is entrusted to human reason. According to Castellio, progress, evolution, and teleologically-oriented dynamism are therefore the *propria* not only of Christian doctrine and life, but of God's creation itself. Precisely his attempt to combine Humanism and the Reformation in a new theological solution would make a slow but clear reception of Origen's thought possible in the radical movements within the Protestant world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Elisa Bellucci

Wait for Better Times: Eschatological Expectations in Philipp Jacob Spener, Johann Wilhelm Petersen and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Abstract: The millenarian expectation was a widespread phenomenon in the seventeenth century, one that encouraged several people to take an active role in order to improve social, political and religious conditions. This contribution shows the reshaping and the consequences of this eschatological paradigm through the example of three authors: P.J. Spener, J.W. Petersen and G.W. Leibniz.

Keywords: Millenarism, Pietism, Eschatology, Apokatastasis, Leibniz

The millenarian waiting for Christ's promised reign was an increasing phenomenon throughout the seventeenth century. After such a position was rejected in the three main statements of faith of Lutheranism, Calvinism and Anglicanism, it flourished anew especially in Protestant territories.¹ In England, in the Netherlands and in Germany heterodox or radical groups supported – with some differences – the idea of the imminent coming of Christ's reign. This waiting was usually linked to the idea of the defeat of the Antichrist, of the beginning of better times, of the clear appearance of Truth all over the world, and, finally, of the gathering of all believers in the true spiritual church.² Whereas, on the one hand, such a position perpetrates

1 Chiliasm – or millenarianism – is the position which supports the idea that Christ's one-thousand-year reign is a future event before the end of the world and before the Last Judgment. This position was condemned in article 17 of the *Confessio Augustana*, in the article 41 of the *42 Articles* of the Anglican church and in article 26 of the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, see R. Bauckham, *Chiliasmus*, in: TRE (1981), 723–745.

2 An all-encompassing overview on millenarian positions between sixteenth and seventeenth century in Protestant territories is missing; to get an idea on the diffusion of this phenomenon and on the different positions see G. Seebaß, *Apokalyptik/ Apokalypsen*, in: TRE (1978), 189–289 (280–284); Bauckham, *Chiliasmus*, in: TRE (1981), 737–741. The revival of this position has its roots in the Italian abbot Joachim of Fiore and on his idea of a future third epoch of the Spirit, see R.E. Lerner, *Joachim von Fiore*, in: TRE (1988), 84–88; on the diffusion of his ideas in the following centuries see J. Delumeau, *Angst im Abendland. Die Geschichte kollektiver Ängste im Europa des 14. bis 18. Jahrhunderts*, M. Hübner/

a paradigm common to several protestant environments, i.e. the feeling of being at the end of times and that the world is living in its last stage, on the other hand – as Johannes Wallmann has remarked – the perspective of an upcoming long glorious epoch before the end of the times means a break with the historical view which, following the Augustinian tradition, considers the present period as the last one before God's Last Judgment.³ Both those who awaited the end of times and those who believed in the upcoming reign of Christ were unified by the hope for an imminent salvation thanks to Christ's return, as Hartmut Lehmann has remarked.⁴ Nevertheless, the hope for a better condition before the Judgement Day opened new anthropological perspectives: the accent was no more only on human fallen nature, whose only possibility of redemption was God's mercy, now the active role of men was also considered an important factor in preparing for God's reign.⁵

This study focuses on three figures who contributed to spreading and shaping the millenarian expectation in German territories between the end of seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. Philipp Jacob Spener, considered one of the first prominent figures of the pietistic movement, supports the idea of future better times for the church already in his text considered programmatic *Pia Desideria* (1675).⁶ The position of the theologian remains unchanged for several years, until the religious

G. Konder/ M. Roters-Buruck (transl.), Hamburg 1985, 309–357. For contributions on single authors or groups see PuN 14 (1988); J. Wallmann, *Reich Gottes und Chiliasmus in der luterischen Orthodoxie*, in: J. Wallmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit im Zeitalter des Barock*, Tübingen 1995, 105–123; H. Lehmann, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus. Gottesgnadentum und Kriegsnot*, Stuttgart 1980, 123–134; K. von Greyerz, *Wissenschaft, Endzeiterwartung und Alchemie in England des 17. Jahrhunderts*, in: A.C. Trepp / H. Lehmann (eds.), *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis. Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2001, 205–218; C. Hill, *Antichrist in seventeenth-century England*, London/ New York 21990; H. Hotson, *Paradise Postponed. Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism*, Dordrecht 2000; M.D. Goldish / R.H. Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, 4 vols., Dordrecht 2001.

3 See J. Wallmann, *Der Pietismus*, Göttingen 1990, 49.

4 See Lehmann, 1980, 124.

5 On Luther's eschatological and anthropological positions see J.E. Strohl, *Luther's Eschatology*, in: R. Kolb / I. Dingel / U. Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, Oxford 2014, 353–362; N. Slenczka, *Luther's Anthropology*, in: Kolb / Dingel / Batka (eds.), 2014, 212–232.

6 Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705) is considered one of the founders of German Pietism, a movement which arose in the Lutheran church but that was shaped also by contact with several other authors or traditions outside the pure Lutheran confession. For an introduction to Pietism see M. Brecht, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 4 vols, Göttingen 1993–2004; D. Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism*,

authorities of the city of Hamburg urged him to clarify his standpoint on different issues, among them also the chiliastic one, that, as said, was condemned in *Confessio Augustana* 17.⁷ This request was urged also because of some agitations which were arising around one of Spener's long-term friend: the theologian Johann Wilhelm Petersen. The theological positions of this last were signed by the meeting with Spener – as well as other authors who gathered around him – in Frankfurt in the 1670s. In this environment Petersen met also Johanna Eleonora von und zu Merlau, whom he married in 1680.⁸ The couple became one of the prominent supporters of the millenarian expectation in Germany at the end of the century. Although the defense of chiliastic ideas cost Johann Wilhelm his place as superintendent of Lüneburg, this event did not prevent the theologian and his wife from supporting the Millennium. Their already ample production was enriched since 1698 by several other treatises on the apokatastasis doctrine, i.e. the idea of universal salvation and return of all creatures to God.

Both the Petersens and Spener attracted Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's attention, whose eschatological position was also strongly shaped by, among

Baltimore 2013; R. Osculati, *Verò Cristianesimo. Teologia e società moderna nel pietismo luterano*, Bari 1990.

- 7 On this article see I. Dingel, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, Vollständige Neuedition, Göttingen 2014, 113. This article rejects the idea of a future earthly reign of Christ condemning explicitly Jews and Anabaptists.
- 8 On Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727) and Johanna Eleonora von und zu Merlau (1644–1624) see M. Matthias, *Johann Wilhelm und Johanna Eleonora Petersen. Eine Biographie bis zur Amtsenthebung Petersen im Jahre 1692*, Göttingen 1993; R. Albrecht, *Johanna Eleonora Petersen. Theologische Schriftstellerin des frühen Pietismus*, Göttingen 2005; S. Luft, *Leben und Schreiben für den Pietismus. Der Kampf des pietistischen Ehepaares Johanna Eleonora und Johann Wilhelm Petersen gegen die lutherische Orthodoxie*, Herzberg 1994. Moreover, see the biographies of the two authors: *Lebens-Beschreibung Johannis Wilhelmi Petersen, Der Heiligen Schrift Doctoris, vormahls Professoris zu Rostock, nachgehends Predigers in Hanover an St. Egidii Kirche, darnach des Bischoffs in Lübeck Superintendentis und Hoff-Predigers endlich Superintendentis in Lüneburg*, auf Kosten eines wohlbekantens Freundes, 1719; B. Becker-Cantarino, *The Life of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen, Written by Herself*, Chicago 2005. For the beginning of Pietism in Frankfurt and the network of authors which shaped not only this movement but also the Petersens' position see J. Wallmann, *Philipp Jacob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus*, Tübingen 1986; A. Deppermann, *Johann Jacob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus*, Tübingen 2002. After their marriage the couple started working and writing on the same topics. It seems that the leading force was Johanna Eleonora, but most of the treatises were written by Johann Wilhelm. I especially take in consideration the texts of the latter, but the contents addressed are the same, and for this reason I often use both authors as a subject.

other authors, the two Pietistic theologians.⁹ The German philosopher was interested both in the chiliastic discussion and in Petersen's standpoint on universal salvation. It was Leibniz himself that encouraged Petersen to write one of his last texts on apokatastasis, *Urania*.

In the following pages I will briefly delineate the main features of each position to show similarities and differences and to delineate the reshaping of this eschatological paradigm.

1. Philipp Jacob Spener: *Hoffnung kunfftiger besserer Zeiten*

The role that Pietism played in encouraging believers to engage themselves and to cooperate in the making of a better condition of the church cannot be underestimated. Such a positive stance on the future is, of course, neither a novelty of Pietism, nor a proper distinctive mark of this movement. However, Pietism had at least the merit to receive this impulse and to spread it in different ways.¹⁰

In the *Pia Desideria* (published in 1675) Philipp Jacob Spener denounces the corrupted situation not only of the Catholic but also of the Lutheran church of his days, a corruption which the theologian links especially to scholastic theology, since this leads to nothing else than arid discussions.¹¹ The *Pia Desideria* does not stop, however, at a mere complaint; God promised a better condition of the church on the Earth. Such a condition is described

9 For a general introduction on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) see M.R. Antognazza, *Leibniz. An Intellectual Biography*, New York 2009.

10 The beginning of the eschatology in Pietism and in Spener and the sources of this position are discussed in Wallmann, 21986, 324–353. The personal engagement of believers in cooperating and in the making of God's reign is exemplified also by missionary impulses which came from different pietistic communities, starting from Halle, see K. Rennstich, *Mission – Geschichte der protestantischen Mission in Deutschland*, in: U. Gäbler (ed.), *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2000, 308–320; H. Wellenreuther, *Pietismus und Mission. Vom 17. bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: H. Lehmann, *Geschichte des Pietismus. Glaubenswelt und Lebenswelt*, Göttingen 2004, 168–194.

11 See B. Köster (ed.), *Philipp Jacob Spener. Pia Desideria. Deutsch-lateinische Studienausgabe*, Gießen 2005. Already Luther had depicted the Catholic Church as Babel, identifying it with the Antichrist. According to Spener, not only the Catholic Church, but also the Lutheran church is partly corrupted, and the main cause of this corruption is the scholastic theology which cannot grasp God's living word. On the figure of the Antichrist in Spener's eschatology, see H. Krauter-Dierolf, *Die Eschatologie Philipp Jacob Speners*, Tübingen 2005, 54–61. The idea that not only the Catholic but also the own church was partly corrupted and was, therefore, seen as a part of the Antichrist is shared by several millenarian authors also in other confessions, particularly in the English church, see Hill, 1990.

by the theologian through the expressions “better condition”, “more blessed and more glorious condition”, “other and better condition”, and it is linked, on the one hand, to the conversion of Jews and to the fall of Rome, on the other hand, to an increase of piety and to an improvement of the church itself.¹² To support this idea, Spener mentions Scripture and the fathers of the church, yet without giving any precise indication about biblical passages nor quoting ancient authors directly.¹³ His position can be summarised in the expression “hope for a better condition of the church”. However, the theologian neither mentions the Millennium nor explains what this better condition really means.¹⁴

The *Pia Desideria* remained for some time the only text in which Spener publicly expressed his view on future better times. In the following years this topic was faced in several private letters, that, however, do not show any significant change or further explanation. The theologian is, instead, always clear in distancing his view from any kind of chiliastic position.

Such a standpoint remains the same until 1690, when new discussions around the chiliastic issue began in the cities of Hamburg, Lüneburg and Celle. The main spark which ignited these debates was a certain position publicly expressed by the theologian and Spener’s friend Johann Wilhelm Petersen. The latter – at that time superintendent of the city of Lüneburg – was preaching the first resurrection of the martyrs and the beginning of Christ’s reign. The debate fired up when the Petersen couple housed the young Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg, a noblewoman who had been experiencing internal locution with Christ since her childhood. The

12 I give for each passage the Latin and the German version preceded by the number of the page: Köster, 2005, 89: „Si scripturam S. Inspiciamus, dubitandum non est, quod Deus Ecclesiae in terris conditionem adhuc meliorem pollicitus sit“ / 88: „daß GOTT noch einigen bessern zustand seiner Kirchen hier auff Erden versprochen habe“; 91: „totam veram Ecclesiam multo beatorum & gloriosorum conditione, quam nunc gaudet, restitutum iri“ / 90: „daß nicht die gesamte wahre kirche werde in einen viel seligern und herrlichern stande gesetzt werde“; 97: „Ecclesia nostra emendaretur“ / 96: „damit es doch mit unser kirchen in andern und bessern stande gebracht werde möchte“. On the conversion of Jews and the fall of Rome see *ibi*, 90–93. On the effects of this improvement on personal piety and on the church itself see *ibi*, 89: „amor Ecclesiae impellere nos debent, ut defectus emendemus, piorum desideria impleamus, & errantibus portam agnoscendae veritatis aperiamus ampliores“ / 88: „Unterdessen soll uns sowol Gottes Ehr als liebe der Kirchen/ solche zu bessern/ frommer hertzen verlangen zu erfüllen/ und den irrenden die pforte zu der erkantnuß der warheit weiter zu eröffnen“.

13 Köster, 2005, 88–89.

14 On the eschatological position of Spener and, particularly, on the meaning of the expression “hope for future better times” see Krauter-Dierolf, 2005.

Petersens protected her defending the truthfulness of her visions and using these as a further sign and proof for the Millennium.¹⁵ Spener's standpoint can be better understood in relationship with that of the Petersens'. The Petersens' chiliastic expectation was developed in around twenty texts, most of them authored by Johann Wilhelm Petersen and written in response to other theologians. The position of the couple, however, does not undergo any substantial change through the texts; rather, it is better clarified.¹⁶ The typifying features of their chiliastic view are already present in the first treatise on this topic: *Schriftmässige Erklärung und Beweis Der Tausend Jahre*.¹⁷ The Petersens' millenarian position is defined as pre-millenarian, which means that Christ will appear at the beginning of the Millennium; on the contrary, those positions according to which Christ will be manifested only at the end of the millenarian reign are defined as post-millenarian, as Spener's standpoint is. The first one is a more radical position, since it entails the beginning of a new Earth and a new time, whereas the second indicates a betterment of this world. According to the Petersens, the beginning of the Millennium is signaled by the first resurrection of the elected, i.e. of true believers or born-again (*Wiedergeborene*), who will reign with Christ from heaven – Christ will not come back physically on the Earth. The Petersens identify, therefore, a double reign or a double church: the heavenly church governed by Christ and the resurrected, and the earthly church

15 On Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg and her relationship with the Petersens see M. Matthias, 1993, 254–301. Some of Rosamunde's dialogues with Christ are reported in a treatise in which J.W. Petersen defends her: *Send-Schreiben An einige Theologos und Gottes-Gelehrte/ Betreffend die Frage Ob Gott nach der Auffahrt Christi nicht mehr heutiges Tages durch göttliche Erscheinung den Menschenkindern sich offenbahren wolle und sich dessen gantz begeben habe? / Sampt einer erzehlten Specie Facti Von einem Adelichen Fräulein/ was ihr vom siebenden Jahr ihres Alters biß hieher von Gott gegeben ist*, s.l. 1691.

16 On the chiliastic position of the Petersens see W. Nordmann, *Die Eschatologie des Ehepaars Petersen*, in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Kirchengeschichte der Provinz Sachsen und Freistaates Anhalt* 26 (1930), 83–106 and 27 (1931), 1–19. For the beginning of the discussion see Matthias, 1993 which analyses the discussion only until 1692. A list of Petersen's texts on chiliasm can be found at the end of J.W. Petersen, *Nubes Testium Veritatis De Regno Christi Glorioso, In Septima Tuba Futuro Testantium. Libri Tres*, Zunnerus, Francofurti ad Moenum 1696, § 46, 178–180, which mentions the treatises written until 1696. In my dissertation I am preparing a chapter which analyses the discussion around chiliasm in more detail and which takes all texts into consideration.

17 J.W. Petersen, *Schriftmässige Erklärung und Beweis Der Tausend Jahre/ und der daran hangenden ersten Auferstehung/ Aus der Offenbahrung S. Johannis am 20. Cap.*, written in the year 1690 but published *auf kosten einiger Freunde* in 1692.

ruled by the converted Jewish people. The earthly church will be, anyway, led by the heavenly church. The conversion of the Jews is a point shared by the Petersens and Spener. On the contrary, Spener refused to admit the first resurrection and the division of heavenly and earthly church. Whereas, on the one side, Spener disagrees with his friend Petersen on the two points mentioned above, on the other side, starting from the 1690s – i.e. from the beginning of the discussions in Hamburg – he defends the Petersens' chiliastic view, and, in general, any chiliastic view which is not against *Confessio Augustana* 17, yet without defining his own chiliastic position. Spener's first assertions on chiliastic positions are quite circumspect. In the first text of the discussion, *Erfordertes Bedencken*, Spener refers to Jerome's position and states that: *Licet hanc sententiam non sequamur, tamen damnare non possumus, quia multi Ecclesiasticorum virorum et Martyrum eam tenuerunt, et unusquisque sensu suo abundet, et Domini cuncta iudicio reseruentur*.¹⁸ The following year, 1691, in *Die Freyheit der Glaübigen* he explains that the chiliastic issue does not belong to the fundamental articles of faith, and does not touch these articles, neither directly nor indirectly, for this reason, whoever supports this harmless opinion cannot be rejected from the Christian brotherhood.¹⁹ At the same time, he defends this position in relationship to orthodoxy. As already explained, the main problem in supporting chiliastic ideas was their condemnation in article 17 of the *Confessio Augustana*. According to Spener, the discussion around the millennium and its rejection in the *Confessio* originated in a misunderstanding with the word *chiliasmus*. It is necessary to distinguish between a *chiliasmus crassus*, i.e. the wait for a second coming of Christ on the Earth, and a *chiliasmus subtilis* and *subtilissimus*, according to which the better condition of the church or the coming of the reign does not imply Christ's physical second coming. In the

18 D. Philipp Jacob Speners/ Chursächsischen Ober-Hoff-Predigers und Kirchen-Raths/ etc. *Erfordertes Theologisches Bedencken/ über den Von Einigen des E. Hamburgischen Ministerijj publicirten Neuen Religions-Eid*, Ploen 1690. In the same chapter Spener explains that Millennialism does not belong to the fundamentals of faith, otherwise all the fathers from the old church and the whole community who with them supported such a position should be rejected from the Christian brotherhood. He then quotes some authors who supported the millenarian expectations: Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, Polycrate, Nepote, Melito, Victorinus, Hilarius Pictaviensis, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Coracione, Lactantius, Severus Sulpicius, Apollinaris.

19 *Die Freyheit der Glaübigen, von dem Ansehen der Menschen in Glaubens-Sachen / In gründlicher beantwortung der so genannnten Abgenöthigten Schutz-Schrifft/ Welche im Namen Des Evangelischen hamburgischen Ministerii Von Herrn D. Johann Friederich Meyern/ außgefertiget worden/ Gerettet von Philipp Jacob Spenern/ D., Franckfurt am Mäyn/ Zunners 1691, 5.24–25; 74.*

view of Spener, Rev 20 indicates a one-thousand-year long condition of the church during which Satan will be imprisoned and will not seduce heathens on the Earth until the end of this epoch, whereas believers will reign with Christ.²⁰ Following this definition, he can then explain that the CA refuses only the first kind of chiliasm, i.e. the *chiliasmus crassus*, by condemning the Jews and the Anabaptists position, but all other kinds of Millennium, where Christ's second coming on the Earth is not believed, are not condemned.²¹ Spener's standpoint develops during the discussion, taking on the defense of millenarianism in an increasingly clear way. His point of view remains, however, ambiguous: on the one hand he clearly explains why chiliasm is not against CA 17, he defends the position of his friend Johann Wilhelm, and he bases his view on Rev 20, while on the other hand he avoids labeling his position as "chiliastic", and distances himself from some of Petersen's tenets.

This ambiguous stance, which advocates chiliasm and at the same time stands back from it, depends upon Spener's biblical hermeneutic, based on two important premises: progress in revelation and reading of Scripture through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In *Freyheit der Gläubigen* he states that faith is neither based on the Apostles' words nor on the authority of people who belong to the church, it is rather based directly on God's revelation through his words given in Scripture, words which are "sealed" in men's heart by the Holy Spirit.²² A reading of Scripture without Holy Spirit is just dead literal knowledge.²³ This issue is directly linked to the second point: progress in revelation. In another text, *Behauptung der Hoffnung*

20 Spener, 1691, 5.3,64.

21 Spener, 1691, 5.4,65.

22 Spener, 1691, 1.5–8: „Die freyheit der Christen von der dienstbarkeit der menschen hat zum grund/ daß eines jeglichen Christen glaube unmittelbar beruhe auff der offenbahrung Gottes in seinem wort/ so er vor das wahre wort Gottes erkennet/ und solche warheit in seinem hertzen durch den Geist Gottes versiegelt ist. Also wie unsers wesen grund ist das licht der vernunft/ so ist der grund deß glaubens die göttliche offenbahrung/ und das *principium*, *Deus dixit*, Gott hats gesagt: Welches wir in der schrift finden/ und nachmal der Geist bezeugt/ daß Geist warheit ist.“

23 Spener, 1691, 5.20: „Wie aber II. nicht aller glaube/ der die wahre lehre hat/ deßwegen der wahre glaube ist/ sondern wol auch nur ein historischer glaube (dabey allein eine büchstäbliche erkenntnuß ohne licht und leben des Geistes ist) seyn kan“. Spener had already dealt with this problem some years before. Particularly his text *Die allgemeine Gottesgelehrtheit* (1680) is significant on this regard, see K. Aland / B. Köster, *Die Werke Philipp Jacob Speners. Studienausgabe*. Band I, Teil 2, Giessen/ Basel 2000, 1–353 (12): „Der erste pietistische Streit ist gar kein Streit zwischen Pietismus und Orthodoxie. Er ist, wenn man schärfer zusieht, gleich jenen Streitigkeiten zwischen Labadie und Wolzogen ein Kampf, in dem der Pietismus seinen eigentlichen Gegner anvisiert: den Rationalismus“.

künfftiger Besserer Zeiten (1693), Spener defends the Millenarian position against the evangelical passage from Luke 18:8: “when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”. To this passage Spener counters with a verse from Dan 12:4: “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”.²⁴ Spener comments on this verse, claiming that God increasingly gives his light to souls and lets them understand his promises progressively.²⁵ He adds also that the nearer the last times approach the more God gives men his light.²⁶

2. The Couple Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora Petersen: From Millenarianism to Universal Salvation

These same premises – Spirit as hermeneutical principle and progress in revelation – are shared by the theologians Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora Petersen to support first their position on the Millennium and then on apokatastasis. In their respective autobiographies both authors explain how God progressively revealed different truths to them. Johann Wilhlem Petersen writes:

Jetzo aber will ich nur dem geliebten Leser kund thun, wie Gott der Herr nach seiner Liebes-Weißheit nach und nach, von Zeit zu Zeit ein Geheimniß nach dem andern, als von dem noch künfftigen Fall Babels, von der Juden Bekehrung in der letzten Zeit, von dem Zustande der Seelen nach dem Tode, von dem Reiche Jesu Christi in der siebenden Posaunen, von der Wiederbringung aller Dinge, und von

24 P.J. Spener, *Behauptung Der Hoffnung künfftiger Besserer Zeiten/ In Rettung Des ins gemein gegen dieselbe unrecht angeführten Spruchs Luc. XIIII, v. 8. Doch wann des menschen Sohn kommen wird/ meynest du/ daß Er auch werde glauben finden auff Erden?*, Frankfurt 1693.

25 Spener, 1693, 5: “So dann nicht zu zweiffeln ist/ daß der Herr sein licht immer in mehrere seelen geben/ und ihnen seine weissagungen/ die lang unverstanden geblieben waren/ deutlicher zu gewissen verstand offenbahren wird: Wie es dorten geheissen/ Dan 12,4”. See also 347: „Lasset uns Gott hertzlich anrufen/ daß er uns die augen und hertzen mehr und mehr öffnen wolle/ daß wir von allen diesen dingen die uns noch bevorstehen/ so viel doch lernen verstehen/ und in seinem licht einsehen/ als er uns nöthig zu seyn findet. Es stehet die verheissung/ Dan. 12,4. Daß viele werden darüber kömmen/ und das es vorher jeden verborgen gewesen/ und das meiste wie ein versigelt buch geblieben war/ viel verstand darinnen finden“. Same statement in a letter *An Johann Christoph Holtzhausen in Frankfurt a.M* (10.10.1687), see J. Wallmann (ed.), *Philipp Jacob Spener. Briefe aus der Dresdner Zeit 1686–1691*, Band 1, Tübingen 2003, 639–647 (647): „Nun, der Herr öffne uns allen mehr und mehr die augen in seinem wort, dessen reichthum immer weiter und tieffer einzusehen, zu seinem so viel mehrern preiß“.

26 Spener, 1693, 348: „Ich will auch nicht zweiffeln/ je näher die zeit ist/ je mehr werde der Herr licht geben/ daß einige solche zeit genaue finden werden“.

dem Geheimniß der Erstgebohrnen aller Creaturen, und von dem Geheimniß des Vaters, und des Shons, und des heiligen Geistes aus seinem Wort mir entdeckt habe.²⁷

In her autobiography, Johanna Eleonora describes the same discoveries, with the difference that she also links these discoveries to divine dreams and revelations.²⁸ However, godly revelations through dreams are never the ultimate reason to accept certain truths. She explains: “I do not consider my dreams and visions as grounds of divine truth but as true instruction with which God the Lord has guided my investigations in holy scripture”.²⁹ Petersen’s eschatological expectation is built primarily on Scripture, especially on Rev 20, but not only. Scripture, in turn, is interpreted through the action of the Holy Spirit, which discloses God’s wisdom concealed in it. In *Glaubens-Gespräche mit Gott* Johanna Eleonora explains that true faith starts with reading God’s word, whose reading must always be mediated by the illumination of God’s Spirit, without which there is just a literal knowledge of Scripture based on “fleischliche Vernunft” (carnal reason).³⁰ Also a passage from Johann Wilhelm Petersen’s *Die Warheit des Herrlichen Reiches Jesu Christi* (1692) explains that a person not illuminated by God’s spirit can understand the literal meaning of Scripture, but only a “geistliche Mensch” (spiritual man) can understand “geistliche Dinge” (spiritual things); the Scripture contains a deeper meaning than the literal one.³¹ In *Specie facti*,

27 Petersen, 1719, 343.

28 See Becker-Cantarino, 2005, §§ 35–38, 89–98.

29 Becker-Cantarino, 2005, § 36, 92.

30 *Glaubens-Gespräche Mit Gott: In Drey unterschiedene Theile abgefasset/ Also daß Der I. Theil/ Das Werck des Glaubens in der Krafft/ Der II. Theil/ Das Zeugniß/ die Macht und Herrlichkeit des Glaubens/ Der III. Theil/ Das Ende des Glaubens/ welches ist der Seelen Seligkeit/ vorstellet / In dieser letzten Glaublosen Zeit zur Auffmunterung und Erweckung des Glaubens aufgesetzt Von Johanna Eleonora Petersen/ Gebohrne von und zu Merlau, 1691, 174: „Da sind wir alle unter dem Unglauben beschlossn/ weil wir alle üngläubig sind/ so lange wir natürliche Menschen bleiben; wenn wir aber geistlich werden/ so werden wir gläubig/ und werden vom Unglauben erlöset als Gefreyete des Herren/ der sich über uns erbarmet/ und von solchem Unglauben abgehollfen hat“; 199: „Wenn da die Seele mit Ja antowrtet will [scil. to the question do you believe in the son of God?]/ so fällt ihr dein Geist in die Rede/ und spricht zu ihr durch Erinnerung der Worte“; 210: „Ja mein heyland/ dein Geist ist es/ der den Glauben in uns würcket/ und dein Geist ist es auch/ der uns treibet dem Glauben nachzujagen“.*

31 J.W. Petersen, *Die Warheit Des Herrlichen Reiches Jesu Christi: Welches In der siebenden Posaune noch zu erwarten ist. Geschrieben zu Magdeburg im Jahr nach der Geburth Christi 1692*, (s.l.) 1692, 4: „Aber nun es eine ausgemachte Sache ist/ daß der naturliche Mensch nichts begreiffet/ was der Geistes Gottes ist/ sondern nur allein der geistliche Mensch geistliche Dinge begreifen könne/ so folget auch/

the text in defense of Asseburg's visions, the theologian explains that many promises are concealed in God's word, promises that he discloses when the times of their accomplishment is about to happen.³²

The same spiritual hermeneutic is also at the base of the apokatastasis doctrine, or universal salvation, a doctrine which the Petersens embraced thanks to the reading of Jane Lead's treatises and on which they wrote several texts starting from 1698.³³ The second treatise on this topic, *Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*, authored by Johann Wilhelm but published anonymously under the pseudonym "member of the German Philadelphian Society", constitutes a sort of anthology of authors and texts that along the centuries supported the doctrine of universal salvation.³⁴ In addition to

daß ein viel Grösserer und Geheimeres in der heiligen Schrifft verborgen liegen müsse/ als die äusseren Worte von den meisten pflegen eingesehen zu werden [...] Es hat dieses der berühmte höllandische Professor Coccejus, welchen wir gewiß in exegesi Sacra viel schuldig seyn“.

- 32 See J.W.Petersen, 1691, § 35: „sondern daß vielmehr in seinem Worte verheissungen da liegen/ daß er/ ehe da komme der grosse und erschreckliche Tag des heren/ seine Schrifft gelehrt zum himmelreich gelehret/ seine Weisen und Propheten zur Warnung der Welt/ und zum Trost seiner Gläubigen senden wolle“. See also Petersen, *Die Wahrheit*, 1692, 1.2: „es ist wohl möglich/ daß Gott der Herr etwas auff eine gewisse Zeit solte verschlossen und versiegelt haben/ welches er nimmer mehr eröffnen wolle? Vielmehr ist es sein bündiger und fester Schluß/ daß alle Dinge/ die biß auf eine gewisse Zeit nach Gottes heiligen Rath und Willen haben müssen verschlossen bleiben/ alsdenn nothwendig klar und offenbahrt werden müssen/ wenn nun die eingeschrenckte Zeiten vorbey geflossen sind. Also muß einmahl nach eben solcher Verheissung Gottes das/ was in einem Geheimniß verborgen war/ nothwendig an des Tages Licht kommen/ daß die erwachtete Zeiten das jenige sehen/ welches die Vorhergehenden noch nicht haben sehen mögen“.
- 33 For the meaning of this doctrine see H. Rosenau, *Allversöhung*, in: RGG (1998), 322–323. The Petersens developed this doctrine reading some treatises of the English theosophist Jane Lead, that contained the doctrine of universal redemption. Also in this case, the ultimate reason to accept this truth was not a mere conviction but God's revelation through the reading of Scripture mediated by Holy Spirit. For an introduction to this doctrine see Albrecht, 2005, 271–300.
- 34 J.W. Petersen, *Mysterion Apokatastaseōs Pantōn, Das ist: Das Geheimniß Der Wiederbringung aller Dinge, Darinnen In einer Unterredung zwischen Philaletham und Agathophilum gelehrt wird, Wie das Böse und die Sünde ... solle aufgehoben und vernichtet; Hergegen die Creaturen Gottes ... durch Jesum Christum, Den Wiederbringer aller Dinge, ... errettet werden ... / Offenbahret durch Einen Zeugen Gottes und seiner Wahrheit*, 1700. The pseudonym refers to the English Philadelphian Society, whose leading force was Jane Lead herself. This was a Christian society unbound from any particular confession; among their main tenets there were also the chiliastic expectation and the doctrine of universal salvation. See A. Hessayon, (ed.), *Jane Lead and her transnational legacy*, London 2016.

the above mentioned Jane Lead, Origen, the Kabbalistic tradition – especially Christian Kabbalah – and even Luther are also quoted.³⁵ How can the Petersens conciliate Luther's standpoint with that of Origen? The two theologians not only hold two different positions, but Origen's position was also rejected expressly by Luther.³⁶ In answering this question, we can notice how the Petersens make use of the Spirit as a hermeneutical principle, and to which consequences the idea of progress in revelation leads.

The Petersens report a letter by Luther to Hans von Rechenberg, where the theologian of Wittenberg answers the question of whether it is possible that someone who dies without faith can be saved. Luther's answer refuses, at first, Origen's position, since, according to the Alexandrian, God will undoubtedly save everyone, the devil included; a position that, according to Luther, cannot be asserted with certainty. Instead, the theologian of Wittenberg remarks that without faith nobody can be saved. He seems, then, to reconsider his position and admits: "who would doubt that He [scil. God] can do that [scil. to save everyone]? But, that He will actually do that is impossible to prove."³⁷ Starting from this assertion, the Petersens claim that Luther could not grasp the truth of universal salvation thoroughly because the situation of the church was not completely fallen yet and times were not ripe enough to understand how big and how deep God's mercy and love are.³⁸ What was admitted by Luther as a remote possibility becomes for the Petersens a certainty clearly revealed by the Spirit through the reading of Scripture. The idea of a progressive revelation allows the Petersens to bring together and to harmonise two authors – Origen and Luther – that

35 On the sources used by Petersen in this treatise to speak about apokatastasis see E. Bellucci, *Origenian, English and Kabbalistic Influences in Johann Wilhelm Petersen's Apokatastasis Doctrine. The case of Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*, in: A. Fürst (ed.), *Origen's Philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times. Debates about Free Will and Apokatastasis in 17th-Century England and Europe*, Münster 2019, 181–195.

36 For Luther's rejection of Origen and the perpetration of this position in other reformed authors see Terraciano, 2012, 140–144; T.P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification. The legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*, Notre Dame 2008, ch. 6.

37 Petersen, 1700, Vorbericht, 30–31. For the letter see WA 10.2, 322–326: *Ein Sendbrief über die Frage, ob auch jemand, ohne Glauben verstorben, selig werden möge* (1522.). Translation mine. This letter is quoted also in Johanna Eleonora's *Das ewige Evangelium Der Allgemeinen Wiederbringung Aller Creaturen*, 1698, the first text in which the couple supports the doctrine of universal redemption. *Das ewige Evangelium* is thoroughly reported also inside J.W. Petersen's *Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*, from which I quote.

38 Petersen, 1700, I, 66.1, 37.

supported two totally different standpoints. The direct consequence of this position is that it is always possible to question the established orthodoxy, as several orthodox theologians had reproached to the Petersens' eschatology.³⁹ Orthodoxy is overcome by Spirit, the concealed pilot of history, and theologians are passive instruments through which this progressively reveals itself:

a so deep wisdom is concealed in Scripture, that it is better to be silent and not to seek to grasp it through reason, [...] but to arrest ourselves to the Spirit of revelation, to wait with a silent heart, in this way what was obscure to us, will become clear.⁴⁰

39 One of the main charges directed at the Petersens was that of fanaticism. Particularly the superintendent of Lübeck August Pfeiffer wrote in his *Antichiliasmus, oder Erzehlung und Prüfung des betrieglichen Traums Derer so genannten Chliasten Von der noch zukünftigen Tausend-jährigen güldenen Zeit/ oder sichtbahren Reiche Christi auff Erden vor dem jüngsten Tage: Darinnen Nicht allein dieses Schwarms eigentliche Beschaffenheit/ ... ausführlich beschrieben/ ... Sondern auch der Chliasten Einwüffel/ ... beantwortet werden*, Lübeck 1691 that to support millenarianism is against the hermeneutical principle of *analogia fidei*, according to which all parts of Scripture should harmonise with each other and it is not possible to establish a new article of faith based on obscure and controversial passages, as is the Revelation of John. On the contrary, the position of those authors who support millennialism is based on dreams and imagination and is against faith. For this reason, Pfeiffer defines those authors who support chiliasm as "Schwärmer", which means fanatic, enthusiasts. On Pfeiffer's standpoint and the reaction of the Petersens see Luft, 1994, 170–197. Another charge which goes in the same direction was that of the dean of the faculty of theology in Rostock Johann Fecht, who, with regard to the doctrine of universal redemption, defined the Petersens "new prophets" or "new evangelists"; see *Disputatio Theologica Inauguralis, libellum recentissimum, sub rubrica Das ewige Evangelium der allgemeinen Wiederbringung aller Creaturen / examinans, quam jussu maxime Reverendi ordinis Theologici, in illustri Universitate Rostochiensis, Praeside Dr. Johanne Fechtio*, Rostock 1699.

40 J.W. Petersen, *Mysterion Apokatastaseōs Pantōn, Oder Das Geheimniß Der Wiederbringung aller Dinge, Durch Jesum Christum. Tomus Secundus: Worinnen auf verschiedene Schrifften, und Einwüffel gründlich und bescheidenlich geantwortet, und, was etwa im erstem Tomo undentlich seyn möge, erläutert wird*, Pamphilia 1703, II, IV, 11: „Es ist eine solche Tiefe der Weißheit in h. Schrifft verborgen/ darum ist gut/ daß wir stille seyn und nicht mit der Vernufft darin zufahren/ nich diß oder das darauß zu folgern suchen/ sondern um den Geist der Offenbahrung anhalten/ und darauff mit stille, hertzen warten/ so wird uns klar gemacht werde/ was uns sonsten dunckel war/ und werden fest gemacht/ darinnen wir zuvor gewancket/ der Herr ist true/ der wird es thun“ (my translation).

3. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *Spe meliorum*

The discussions on the Millennium and on universal salvation also caught Leibniz's attention, whose opinion can be reconstructed from his correspondence with several authors.⁴¹ Leibniz expresses a quite favorable position both on the Millennium and on apokatastasis, although the theologian does not spare criticism on several points.

Leibniz got to know Petersen's position thanks to the duchess Sophie of Hannover, who wrote to him about the revelations of the young visionary Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg. However, Petersen's is not the only position discussed by Leibniz; other millenarians, such as Antoinette Bourignon, Pierre Jurieu and Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, are also involved in Leibniz's discussion on the Millennium.⁴² Despite the similar positions held by these authors, Leibniz expresses different opinions towards them. The position of the philosopher of Leipzig recalls, on the one hand, that of Spener, whose opinion he knew and shared, on the other hand it also presents similarities with orthodox theologians' criticism of chiliasm.

In agreement with Spener, Leibniz does not condemn the wait for the one-thousand-year reign of Christ, stating that the *Revelation* of John seems to support such a position and that the *Confessio Augustana* condemns only those Millenarians who cause public disorders: "Et je ne voudrois pas non plus qu'on tourmantât ceux qu'on appelle Chiliastes ou Millenaries, pour une opinion à la quelle l'Apocalypse paroist si favorable. La Confession d'Augsbourg semble n'estre contre les Millenaries Turbateurs du repos public. Mais l'erreur de ceux qui attendant en patience le Royaume de Jesu Christ paroist tres innocente".⁴³ In line with this statement, he rejects Bourignon's

41 On Leibniz's position about the millenarian position see also M.R. Antognazza / H. Hotson, *Alsted and Leibniz. On God, the Magistrate and the Millennium*, Wiesbaden 1999, 125–214; A.P. Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, Dordrecht 1995.

42 Leibniz's position towards these authors is analyzed in Antognazza / Hotson, 1999, 158–192.

43 *Leibniz an Herzogin Sophie* (Hannover, 13. (23.) Oct. 1691), in: G. Scheel / K. Müller/ G. Gerber (eds.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, n. 31, Berlin 1992, 33–37 (36–37). For Leibniz's position on Spener see: *Leibniz an Herzog Rudolf August* (Hannover, 29. Dec. 1691) (8. Jan. 1692)), in: Scheel / Müller/ Gerber 1992, 72–75 (75): „Es hat sonst H. Spenerus auf begehren der Churfürstin zu Brandenburg Durchl einen außführl. Brief an höchstgedachte Churfürstin geschrieben, über die 3 puncta, 1) jungfrau Rosimunda, 2) den Chiliasmus des Superintendenten Petersen, und 3) den Pietismus zu Leipzig“; see also *Leibniz an Landgraf Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels* (Hannover, Anfang Main 1692), in Scheel / Müller/ Gerber 1992, n. 156, 323–326 (324): “On distinguera tousjours entre Mr. Spener, et des gens

millenarian view, since it is based on a pessimistic vision of the world and on the idea that only Christ's coming can renovate a human being's heart. According to Leibniz, this position creates sects instead of helping cooperation: "Il me semble que je reconnois que fue Mons. Labadie, feu Mad.lle Bourignon, et William Penn avec ses confreres, ont eu ce defeaut, d'estre secteraies ou condemnatifs".⁴⁴ On the contrary, he appreciated the position of the German Kabbalist Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, who believed that human initiative had an important role to play in preparing for the millennium.⁴⁵ On the other side, following the position of several orthodox theologians, he criticises the epistemological premises of millenarians, who, as in the case of Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg, build their views on imagination, an imagination which is reinforced in several cases by histories of miracles, which help developing phantasy.⁴⁶ Therefore, in line with orthodox theologians, Leibniz seems to consider the millenarian position a fanatic position, as this statement on Antoinette Bourignon suggests: "Je tiens qu'elle a beaucoup de zele, mais je ne sçay si elle a assés de lumieres et assés de charité".⁴⁷

Leibniz never involved himself directly on discussions on the orthodoxy of millenarianism. The issue which interested him was the epistemological base upon which millenarians grounded their position. The philosopher's standpoint is summarised in his remarks on the journey of William Penn, where he quotes not only the Quaker theologian, but also several other authors that had a position similar to him and who Leibniz defines "nouvelle predicateurs", such as Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, Knorr von Rosenroth,

pieux, sages, et sçavans comme Luy, et entre quelque malaviséz qui abusent de ces Principes, et qui donnent dans les visions, ou dans le Chiliasme grossier"; *Leibniz an Heinrich Avemann* (Hannover, 29. Dec. 1691 (8. Jan. 1692), in: Scheel / K. Müller/ Gerber 1992, n. 276, 502: "Spenerus multo circumspectius in literis quas ad Serenissimam Electricem Brandeburgicam impulsu matris interrogantem dedit, judicium suum interponere nondum audet, defectu Notitiae, et ut mihi videtur potius ad vim imaginationis inclinat, quae mea quoque sententia est"; *Leibniz an Job. Freidrich Leibniz* (Wolfenbüttel Hälfte September 1692), in: G. Scheel / K. Müller/ G. Gerber (eds.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, vol. 8, n. 386, Berlin 1992, n. 386, 614: *Seckendorfum ego mirifice colo, Spenerum maximi facio, ambobus amicis utor, vellemque consilia eorum in Republica et Ecclesia plurimum possent.*

44 *Leibniz to Andreas Morell*, 10 (20) Dec. 1696, quoted in Antognazza / Hotson, 1999, 188. For Leibniz's position on Antoinette Bourignon see *ibid.*, 167–170.

45 See Antognazza / Hotson, 1999, 189.

46 For the position of orthodox theologians see e.g. the standpoint of August Pfeiffer quoted above, footnote n. 39.

47 Quoted in Antognazza / Hotson, 1999, 167.

Henry More, Pierre Poiret, Weigelians, Bohemists, Quietists, and Labadists. Commenting on their way of preaching based on the interior illumination of God's Spirit, Leibniz states:

Je ne sçay pas aussi, si ces personnes possèdent véritablement dans leur entendement, cette lumière qu'ils s'attribuent. La lumière n'est autre chose que la connoissance des grandes vérités, mais on n'en remarque point icy. [...] Pourveu qu'on tache aussi d'acquérir cette lumière véritable, sans laquelle je ne crois pas qu'on puisse avoir le véritable amour de Dieu, puisque on ne sçauroit aimer sans connoître, et sans remarquer les beautés de ce qu'on aime.⁴⁸

True knowledge of God and true charity are based on the presence of eternal truths in mind, and, in turn, these can be recognised through certain evidence: "La véritable marque de l'esprit et de la grâce de Dieu est d'éclairer et de rendre meilleur"⁴⁹.

However, Leibniz's stance in front of these authors is not only polemic; on the contrary, he finds the character of such people useful to awaken spirits and to turn them towards reason:

je le trouve [scil. the telling of William Penn's journey] fort utile pour connoître les différens caracteres de la nature humaine, et j'approuve même qu'il y ait des personnes qui prennent des biais extraordinaires pour tirer les autres de leur assoupissement c'est pour cela qu'il leur faut pardonner certaines pratiques affectées et qui paroissent bizarres. Le monde est abandonné à la bagatelle, on ne pense point à ce qui fait la véritable félicité.⁵⁰

He explains then that passions are a good way to detach men from vanities of the world, to awake their reason, and to lead it to the contemplation of eternal truths: "les seuls raisons ne suffisent point pour les faire rentrer en eux-mêmes, il faut quelque chose qui touche les passions et qui ravissent les âmes, comme fait la musique et la poésie [...] et généralement en tous ceux dont l'imagination est vive, dominante, et contagieuse, comme me paroît estre aussi celle de ces nouveaux prédicateurs."⁵¹ Imaginations and passions are not true knowledge; they are, however, a way to move human beings to the knowledge of eternal truths and, in this way, to the knowledge of God. This kind of knowledge, in turn, pushes men to conform themselves to God's order and to achieve happiness progressively:

48 See G.W. Leibniz, *Extrait d'un journal du voyage que William Penn a fait*, in: F. Beiderbeck et al. (eds.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Politische Schriften*, vol. 6, Berlin 2008, n. 51, 339–360 (359).

49 See G.W. Leibniz, *Remarques sur le journal du voyage que William Penn a fait*; in: Beiderbeck, 2008, n. 52, 360–365 (365).

50 Leibniz, *Extrait*, 358.

51 Leibniz, *Extrait*, 359.

Il est visible que l'amour de Dieu et de l'ordre divin qui en resulte, fera que nous tacherons aussi à nous conformer à cet ordre et à ce qui est le meilleur. Cela fait que les sages ne sont point mécontents de ce qui est passé, sachant bien qu'il ne peut manquer d'estre le meilleur. [...] Car tout le veritable bonheur ne consiste uniquement que dans un progrès perpetuel de joyes provenant de l'amour coeleste.⁵²

Leibniz's interest in the chiliastic issue does not stop here. The philosopher comes back to this problem some years later in connection with the publication of Johann Wilhelm Petersen's texts on apokatastasis. The name of Johann Wilhelm Petersen appears in the correspondence of the Lutheran theologian of Helmstedt Johann Fabricius, where the latter indicates to Leibniz some authors who had written on the middle condition of the soul, among them also the Petersens.⁵³ Anyway, Fabricius' correspondence is not the only one where the Petersen's name appears. The millenarian theologian is quoted in several other letters authored by Leibniz in these years, e.g. those to the English theologian Thomas Burnet. As in the case of the Millennium, Leibniz seems to appreciate Petersen's work *Mysterion apoakatasteos panton* and, at the same time, to stand back: "ce livre est fait avec beaucoup d'erudition et de jugement; l'auteur apporte tous les passages des anciens et de modernes favorables à cette doctrine, et il soutient son sentiment contre des savans adversaires avec beaucoup de moderation et de zele. Je l'ay parcourou avec plaisir. Et quoyque je n'aye garde de la suivre, je ne laisse pas de reconnoistre son merite".⁵⁴ And also: *Petersianos Versus magna cum voluptate legi: explorata mihi erat eruditio Viri. [...] Mihi semper omnia eius scripta mirifice placuere, etiam ubi non plane de veritate sententiae sum persuasus*.⁵⁵ Despite his doubts about Petersen's ideas, Leibniz considered his text interesting, and suggested to him that he write a poem in Virgilian verses where he should describe the development of the cosmos from the creation of the world up until universal salvation:

52 Leibniz, *Extrait*, 364.

53 *Johann Fabricius an Leibniz*, (Helmstedt, [Mitte] Februar 1700), in: Scheel / Müller / Gerber 2005, n. 224, 406–409.

54 *Leibniz an Thomas Burnett of Kemney*, (Hannover, 27 Februar 1702), in: M.-L. Babin / G.van den Heuvel / R. Widmaier (eds.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, vol. 20, Berlin 2006, n. 467, 808–818.

55 *Viri Illustris Godefridi Gvil. Leibnitii Epistolae Ad Diversos, Theologici, Ivridici, Medici, Philosophici, Mathematici, Historici Et Philologici Argvmenti / E Msc. Avctoris Cum Annotationibus Svis Primum Divulgavit Christian. Kortholtus, A. M. Ordinis Philosophici In Academia Lipsiensi Assessor, Et Collegii Minoris Principvm Collegiatvs*, Leipzig 1734, Epistola LXXXIII (ad Io. Fabricius, Hannover, 14 Oct. 1706), 116–117.

Saepe mecum cogitavi, a nemine melius, quam ab ipso Carmen Uranium vel potius titulo Uraniados condi posse, quod iusto opera, ad Virgilianam mensuram, civitatem Dei et vitam aeternam celebraret. Incipiendum esset a Cosmogonia et Paradiso, quae librum primum vel secundum complecterentur. Tertius, quartus, quintus, si ita videretur, darent lapsum Adami et redemptionem generis humani per Christum, et Historiam Ecclesiae perstringerent. Inde poetae ego certe facile permitterem libro sexto descriptionem regni millenarii, et septimo irruentem cum Gogo Magogoque, eursumque tandem divini oris spiritu, Antichristum. Tum octavo haberemus diem iudicii, poenasque damnatorum; nono autem, decimo et undecimo felicitatem Beatorum magnitudinemque et pulchritudinem Civitatis Dei et felicium habitationis discursationesque per immense universi spatium ad lustranda mirifica opera Dei; accederet et descriptio ipsius Regiae coelestis. Duodecimus concluderet omnia per apokatastasin panton, malis ipsis emendatis et ad felicitatem Deumque reductis, Deo iam omnia in omnibus sine exceptione agente.⁵⁶

Should one conclude that Leibniz changed his position and became a supporter of the Millennium and of universal salvation – as some scholars argue?⁵⁷ Whereas in his correspondence Leibniz always shows an ambiguous standpoint, his position on this topic appears totally clear in some texts. In *System of theology*, written most likely between 1682 and 1689, Leibniz denies the possibility of an eternal salvation: “nor is there any necessity to recur to the merciful theory devised by Origen, who, affixing his own capricious interpretation to that mysterious passage of Paul, in which it is said that *all Israel should be saved*, extend the divine mercy eventually to every creature.”⁵⁸ Although this text was written before the discussions on chiliasm and on apokatasasis – so that one could argue that Leibniz’s idea changed meanwhile – the same standpoint is re-asserted in *Theodicy*, published in 1710 – the same years in which he corresponded with Fabricius. Dealing with the problem of why God permits evil, here Leibniz also takes into consideration the possibility of universal salvation. The philosopher explains that some people are reviving Origen’s opinion, among them Johann

56 *Leibnitii Epistolae Ad Diversos*, 1734, Epistola CVI (ad Io. Fabricius, Brunswigae 3 Sept. 1711), 148–149. Leibniz followed the composition of the text and corrected it several times, however without ever seeing it completed, the poem was indeed published in 1720. For the development of this issue see Antognazza/Hotson, 1699, 192–199.

57 Allison Coudert strongly supports this position, see Coudert, 1995. Coudert’s position is refuted by Antognazza and Hotson, whose conclusions I share but whose position does not take into consideration some important texts where Leibniz takes a clear position on apokatastasis and Origen, see Antognazza / Hotson, 1999, 197–199.

58 G.W. Leibniz, *A System of Theology*, transl. and ed. C.W. Russell, London 1850, 161.

Wilhelm Petersen, who, in his *Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*, created an astronomical system with Kabbalistic connotations:

There is a man of wit who, pushing my principle of harmony even to arbitrary suppositions that I in no wise approve, has created for himself a theology well-nigh astronomical. [...] The vision seemed to me pleasing, and worthy of a follower of Origen: but we have no need of such hypothesis or fictions, where Wit plays a greater part than Revelation, and which even Reason cannot turn to account. For it does not appear that there is one principal place in the known universe deserving in preference to the rest to be the seat of the eldest of created beings; and the sun of our system at least is not it.⁵⁹

Leibniz's interest – and also enthusiasm – for the apokatastasis doctrine finds the same explanation as in the case of the Millennium: the metaphorical language of poetry has the effect of arousing passions and encouraging men hoping for better things, as Leibniz had already stated when commenting on William Penn's journey and as he concludes in the letter to Johann Fabricius on Petersen's poem *Urania: et poetae indulgerentur, quae difficilius ferrentur in dogmatista. Tale opus immortalem praestaret auctorem et mirifici usus esse posset ad animos hominum movendos spe meliorum, et verioris pietatis igniculos suscitandos*.⁶⁰ What cannot be accepted from the point of view of orthodox doctrine can be expressed by the metaphorical language of poetry. Awakening human beings' passions and encouraging men to act, poets become, in this way, new prophets of an undefined better future and unending progress.

4. Conclusions

Through these three authors, we have followed the development of a paradigm: the hope and wait for better times. In comparison to the Lutheran eschatological view according to which the world was living its last stage and God was about to come to reward believers and to punish sinners, this paradigm discloses a more positive and optimistic perspective both on the world and on human beings. Indeed, such an idea had not only a theoretical but also a practical character. Spener encouraged believers to improve the Lutheran church, the Petersens to get confessional reunion, and Leibniz to the improvement of human beings and, as a consequence, of the world.

Whereas these three authors share a common paradigm, the epistemological premises and the perspectives which they open presents some differences.

59 G.W. Leibniz, *Tentaminum Theodicaeae, de bonitate Dei, libertate homines, et origine mali*, §§ 17–18.

60 *Leibnitii Epistolae Ad Diversos*, 1734, Epistola CVI (ad Io. Fabricius, Brunswigae 3 Sept. 1711), 148–149.

Spener grounds his “hope for better times of the church” on Scripture, but, at the same time, he distances his position from any chiliastic standpoint. Although recognising this truth is not necessary in terms of salvation, he advocates freedom of thought for single believers or communities on this point, based on the idea that God progressively reveals his mysteries and that every believer can grasp the true sense of Scripture thanks to a reading illuminated by God’s Spirit.

In the wake of Spener, the Petersens also states that believing in the promised one-thousand-year reign is not necessary in terms of salvation. On the other hand, taking Spener a step further, they use the spiritual hermeneutic to claim that God always discloses more of the meaning of his word and that the action of the Spirit overcomes pure orthodoxy. The same hermeneutical stance is at the base also of the apokatastasis doctrine, which is nothing else than a deeper understanding of God’s word thanks to Spirit’s illumination. Specifically, it is the discovery that God is essentially love and that his primary quality is mercy and not justice. The couple becomes, in this way, supporter of the Origenian idea of universal redemption, an idea which comes, nevertheless, only secondarily from Origen. The Petersens started taking it into consideration by reading the theosophist Jane Lead. In addition to the English writer, the Kabbalistic tradition with the figure of Adam Cadmon linked to the cosmic Christ influenced the couple and helped them to embrace apokatastasis.⁶¹

The Kabbalistic tradition was also well known to Leibniz, thanks to the contacts with Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont and Anne Conway. As Allison Coudert states, it was most likely the relationship with van Helmont that made Leibniz so receptive towards Petersen and his work.⁶² After all, it is not without meaning that, in writing a review on Petersen’s *Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*, Leibniz links this work with that of the English philosopher Anne Conway and with that of the German Kabbalist van Helmont.⁶³

61 On the role of Adam Cadmon in the Petersens’ apokatastasis doctrine and the correlated cosmic Christ borrowed from the Kabbalistic tradition see W. Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis. Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, Dordrecht 2004, 359–368; Bellucci, 2019.

62 See Coudert, 1995, 116. See this study for the influence of the Kabbalah on Leibniz. Particularly, it was the Kabbalistic concept of *tikkun* which made Leibniz so receptive to the idea of universal salvation. In the Lurianic Kabbalah the *tikkun* is associated to the *tohu* and they represent two spiritual stages, respectively the process of exile or collapse from the unity which is on God (*tohu*) and the process of redemption or rectification with God (*tikkun*).

63 See G.E. Guhrauer (ed.), *Leibnitz’s Deutsche Schriften*, zweiter Band, Berlin 1840, 342–347.

Whereas Leibniz rejects the Kabbalistic tradition together with chiliasm and apokatastasis because of their epistemological premises, comparing them to Quakerism, i.e. to a kind of thought based only on imagination, on the other side, he recovers this tradition from a practical point of view.⁶⁴ It is a “preparatory” and helpful support to awake reason through passions and imagination, and to encourage men to improvement and progress. Leibniz’s idea of improvement is untied from any scriptural foundation, but not from a metaphysical system centered on the idea of God as creator of “the best of all possible worlds”, as well as on a moral view where human beings are encouraged to achieve the common good and the worship of God.⁶⁵

64 See *Remarques sur le journal du voyage que William Penn a fait*, in: *Politische Schriften*, Sechster Band, n. 52, 362: “Mais icy tout ce qui est de William Penn, me paroist écrit avec beaucoup d’artifice et de reserve, en termes recherchés et mysterieux, qui sentent un peu trop la cabale et le dessein de regenter; sans qu’on y trouve assés de quoy profiter par quelque doctrine utile”.

65 Also Douglas Shantz has remarked the ethical character of Leibniz’s stance, see D. Shantz, *Conversion and Revival in the Last Days. Hopes for Progress and Renewal in Radical Pietism and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, in: F. van Lieburg/ D. Lindmark (eds.), *Pietism, Revivalism and Modernity. 1650–1680*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2008, 42–62.

Joshua Roe

Hamann and the Parody of Progress

Abstract: This paper develops a challenge to an “Enlightenment” idea of progress based on the work of Johann Georg Hamann. Hamann uses language to express the complexity of life and reveal the simplifying assumptions of his contemporaries (e.g. Kant and the followers of Leibniz and Wolff). The use of parody by Hamann offers a rebuke to reductive accounts of progress and reason without rejecting progress or reason entirely.

Keywords: Hamann, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Christian Tobias Damm, Herder, Parody, Enlightenment

Introduction

“It is as if discovering that it is possible to live with four fingers we have decided to cut off the fifth one.” This quote, attributed to Anatoly Lunacharsky, about the poor quality of engineering training in the Soviet Union epitomises the ideology of modernisation employed by Stalin in the 1960s.¹ This Stalinist ideology assumed that through technology, communism could achieve a better society and dispose of the need for religion, tradition etc. In a similar vein, Hamann envisages the hubris of the visions of progress in eighteenth century Prussia in a similar vein. Today, in part due to influence of Habermas, the idea of progress in eighteenth century Prussia is primarily associated with Immanuel Kant.² Habermas associates the Kantian values of progress with the Western tradition, but postcolonial scholarship has shown that the association between progress and Kant has, at best, ignored the wider global development of progress, or at worst propagated the inherent superiority of “the West” or “European races”.³

1 A. Curtis, *The Engineers’ Plot: A Fable from the Age of Science*, in: *Pandora’s Box*, BBC, 1992.

2 J. Habermas / J. Derrida, *February 15, or What Binds Europeans Together. A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe*, in: *Constellations* 10 (2003), 291–297.

3 For an example of the ignorance of global ideas of enlightenment and their irreducibility to Kant etc. see S. Conrad, *Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique*, in *The American Historical Review* 117 (2012), 999–1027. For the stronger case of the negative impact of this discourse see D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000.

This article will challenge the association between Kant and progress from a different direction, in which the relationship between Hamann and progress testifies to the absence of consensus on progress and Enlightenment in eighteenth century Prussia.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88) was sceptical of the credence his contemporaries placed in reason and progress and responded by parodying their attitudes. The adoption of parody in response to progress embodies his belief that a captivating style is as important as the content of the argument, and is not incidental to his argument. In adopting this approach, Hamann's style resonates with Shaftesbury and Kierkegaard. It is difficult to determine the exact way in which Shaftesbury's own style influenced Hamann due to his tumultuous life and intellectual development, even though Hamann translated Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* between 1753 and 1755.⁴ Nevertheless, Hamann and Shaftesbury shared the belief that good style was as important to philosophy as content. Hence, Hamann's parodies of progress challenge his contemporaries' attitudes in terms of both the form and content of philosophy.

Hamann's main claim is that the world is too complex to be comprehended by narrow uses of reason. The most systematic account Hamann gives of this idea is in his *Metacritique*, which is a response to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Hamann identifies three fallacies with Kant's use of reason that he names the three purisms of language, tradition and experience. These represent aspects of the same basic problem of reducing the world to a rational abstract understanding. Nevertheless, language is the foremost aspect that Hamann addresses, and the reduction of language is the same accusation that Hamann makes against Damm and Herder. Their misconceptions of progress have their roots in their misunderstandings of language. In language, Hamann highlights the complexity of the world that is always intertwined with history and sensation.

The targets of Hamann's challenge to progress are not easy to determine. They could be broadly defined as "rationalists", but such a generalisation risks masking the extent of differences among the uses of rationalist philosophy. The group most widely known as proponents of rationalism in the eighteenth century were the students and disciples of the so-called Leibniz-Wolff philosophy. The basic tenet of this school was that everything followed the principles of sufficient reason and non-contradiction. However, these principles were not uniformly used, and instead an array of different

4 For a more detailed discussion of the reception of Shaftesbury in Hamann see L. Amir, *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*, Albany 2014.

interpretations emerged from those who openly opposed the Leibnizian-Wolffian school to religion, such as Thomasius, to those who sought greater congruence between religion and rationalism, such as Buddeus or Brucker. Hamann's challenges to rationalist ideas reflect this diversity in the array of different people he addresses.

Origen plays a significant role in the discussions of progress at this time, but there is wide variation on how Origen was received. Origen was cast as both aligned with progress and responsible for the regression of philosophy. This variance is reflective of the variance in the idea of progress itself, which should likewise not be restricted to its most famous proponents, like Leibniz and Wolff, because the breadth of their influence is more due to others who adapted their ideas into broader cultural usage. Hamann's appeals to Origen encapsulate this variance. Indeed, the use of parody in his references to Origen draws attention to the idiosyncrasies within the idea of progress. Hamann uses these idiosyncrasies to show that the ideas and attitudes of progress were not as universal or as rational as they purported to be.

1. The Biography of Hamann

Born in Königsberg in 1730, Hamann's early life would follow that of Kant, who was his senior by six years. They went to the same school and were taught by the same teacher, Martin Knutzen (1713–1751). Knutzen taught philosophy and promoted the principles of Wolffian rational philosophy, even though he was also in the shadow of Pietism and was educated under a prominent Pietist, Friedrich Albert Schulz.⁵ Accordingly, Knutzen tried to combine these two influences, as Watkins surmises: "Against the background of Leibniz and Wolff, what is particularly significant is not that Knutzen argues for a position that is opposed to Leibniz's and Wolff's views, but rather that he does so on the basis of Leibnizian-Wolffian principles."⁶

Unlike Kant, Hamann did not pursue philosophical study, instead choosing to study law, but left university without completing his studies, instead taking up the position of *Hofmeister* (house-master) under Johann Christoph Berens (1729–1792). In late 1756 Hamann set off for London, and in late spring 1757 he began the task set by Berens of trade negotiations with the

5 In his brief history of philosophy, Knutzen does mention Origen, but only as one of the Christians, who like other Roman and Greek philosophers, followed the ideas of their predecessors. M. Knutzen, *Elementa Philosophiae Rationalis Seu Logicae Cumgeneralis Tum Specialioris Mathematica Methodo in Usum Auditorum Suorum Demonstrata*, Königsberg / Leipzig 1747, 31.

6 E. Watkins, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials*, New York 2009, 55–56.

Russian Embassy. However, in light of the Seven Years' War (1756–63), in which Prussia was at war with Russia, these negotiations were probably futile, and Hamann was not warmly received by the Russian ambassador. Hamann did not take the failure well; he squandered all his money, ran up a debt indulging on food, alcohol and sex, and fell into a depression. Eventually he ended up living in a Garret. As Hamann recounts it, in his despair he turned to the Bible, and upon reading Exodus he found an allegory for his trials and tribulations in his life and especially in London. It was only at his nadir could he recognise the true love and grace of God. His reliance on reason to direct his life had distracted him from seeing God in creation, and at this point he committed himself to be a servant of God. Hamann's change of beliefs put him on a course of conflict with his then employer, Berens, who was suspicious of Hamann's proclivity to believe in the will of God based on his conversion rather than follow reason (and thereupon religion). Nevertheless, neither Berens nor Kant rescinded their friendship, but tried to disabuse Hamann of what was, according to them, his enthusiasm.⁷

However, this account of his conversion does not tell the whole story, since it focuses mainly on his individual experience, as if he was a lone agent trying to understand the world. The irony is that this kind of individualism reflects the "purism" that he would later accuse Kant of engaging in by denying history, language and experience. For example, the *Biblical Reflections* that he wrote during his time in London draws on the work of James Hervey, who is especially noteworthy due to the link Hervey draws between the Bible as scripture and the Bible as a book of nature.⁸ Furthermore, when Hamann was in London he also had extensive contact with the German-speaking Moravian community in London.⁹ The contradiction within Hamann's conversion reveals more about his connection to rational philosophy that he would have liked to admit. By presenting his conversion as his own individual reading of the Bible, he is echoing the ideal of rational philosophy that sought to uncover truth through individual reflection. Indeed, the idea of purifying language, tradition, and sensation required for individual reflection of reason easily transposes to revelation.

If this makes Hamann as equally guilty of purification, parody provides some mitigation, because the purpose of parody is to draw attention away

7 J. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann*, Oxford 2012, 29–32.

8 A. Regier, *Exorbitant Enlightenment: Blake, Hamann, and Anglo-German Constellations*, Oxford 2018, 133–134.

9 Regier, 2018, 152.

from the author as an authority and focus on the claims of a text, irrespective of whether the author is equally culpable of the same accusations. This presupposes the imperfection of the author as the possessor of truth, which is evident in the embellished description of Hamann's own conversion. Perhaps Hamann's own attempt to decentre himself represents an admission he was as complicit to the worldview of the Enlightenment that he had tried to critique. The evidence for this is in the last work that Hamann intended to publish, *Disrobing and Transfiguration: A Flying Letter to Nobody, the Well Known* (1786): "Take no thought to add a cubit either to me or to my stature... So that the world is not pillaged to dress up and transfigure a corrupt sinner with the nimbus of a 'holy man'".¹⁰ Hamann does not shy away from drawing analogies between Biblical imagery and his contemporary intellectual world, as he compares the destroyed city of Jerusalem to Wolffians.¹¹ Given Hamann's inclination to draw such parallels, his identification of being a corrupt sinner may refer not merely to the traditional understanding of sin but also to the "sins" of rational philosophy.

2. Progress in Eighteenth Century Prussia

Who were the proponents of progress? The idea of progress in Prussia, at least prior to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), was most closely associated with the joint philosophical school of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Leibniz and Wolff were often grouped together as advancing the "Leibnizian-Wolffian school" of philosophy, which was a term also adopted by Hamann. Nevertheless, there are important differences between the philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff which complicate the picture, as Dyck states: "Wolff's rational psychology borrows hardly anything from Descartes and much less than might be expected from Leibniz."¹² The Leibnizian-Wolffian school should be further qualified, with respect to Hamann, because he addresses a wide range of people who offer their own adaptation of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school of philosophy. Indeed, the array of people who Hamann addresses highlights the difficulty in asserting a progressive philosophy, because the society is more diverse than its most prominent figures.

In addition to the Leibnizian-Wolffian school of philosophy, Hamann's life also coincided with that of Immanuel Kant, in terms of both geography and chronology. Consequently, Hamann becomes one of the earliest critics

10 J. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. K. Haynes, Cambridge 2007, 238–239.

11 Hamann, 2007, 232–233.

12 C. Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology*, Oxford 2014, 4.

of Kant's critical philosophy, although it should also be recognised that Hamann's engagement with Kant represents a later part of Hamann's life. His critique of *Aufklärung*, or rather the ideas that would become associated with the *Aufklärung* during Hamann's life, was developed prior to his famous *Metacritique* aimed against Kantian philosophy. Nevertheless, Kant was one of the foremost advocates of progress during this period. The initial publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) received little attention. The prominence of this work only arose when Karl Leonhard Reinhold began to publish a series of letters in the journal *Merkur* in 1786, lauding the achievements of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in resolving the dispute between religion and faith and reason. Indeed, it was Reinhold's intervention that initiated the explicit connection between religion and Kant's critical project. This association culminated in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) that advocated the idea of a rational religion.¹³

The association between progress and rational religion, as found in Kant and Reinhold, meant the subordination of revelation to reason. This means rejecting "positive religions", which constitute historical forms of religion.¹⁴ The problem with revelation is that it is only available to particular people, since revelation is restricted to a particular time and place. In contrast, reason is accessible to everyone, which means only reason is legitimate to provide a universal foundation for religion and the moral progress that religion provides. In other words, tradition and revelation are obstacles to the progression of society because they are only accessible for particular people and are not comprehensible by everyone.

The plurality of voices around the idea of progress complicates the role of Origen. If Leibniz were regarded as the main proponent of progress, then the influence of Origen is relatively clear and decisive. In his *Theodicy* (1710), Leibniz invokes Origen to support his claim that religion is not opposed to reason, which was part of a wider discussion between Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736), both of whom also appealed to Origen. In the first essay of the *Theodicy*, "Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason" Leibniz gives his account of the rationality of God and creation in opposition to Pierre Bayle. In particular, Leibniz objects to Bayle's rejection of the ability of human reason to know God. Instead, humans are left to faith without justification in order to accept

13 K.J. Marx, *The Usefulness of the Kantian Philosophy: How Karl Leonhard Reinhold's Commitment to Enlightenment Influenced His Reception of Kant*, Berlin / Boston 2011, 30–34.

14 I. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, eds. A. W. Wood / G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge 1998, 113–115.

religion. In opposition to Bayle, Leibniz argues that reason is in fact capable of knowing God or the “sole principle in all things”. Reason allows human beings to know this God independent of any revelation, but this conception of reason is not strictly universal. Leibniz explains his understanding of reason by appealing to Origen and in particular Origen’s arguments against Celsus. According to Leibniz, Origen showed Celsus that Christianity was in fact rational and did not entail the rejection of reason.¹⁵ Leibniz also adds that Origen accordingly did not see the justification of faith as appropriate for most Christians because they are incapable of such reflection. Only a few people are capable of understanding the good through reason. Leibniz, identifying with Origen, claims that reason is the true and best way to understand the “good”. Revelation is acceptable, but is only a substitute for people who are unable to use reason effectively.¹⁶

However, given the close association of Wolff with Leibniz and the wider impact of this school, it is necessary to consider the array of interpretations of Origen, rather than solely that of Leibniz. In the early eighteenth century, two figures dominated the history of philosophy: Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) and Johann Franz Buddeus (1667–1739). Thomasius in general defended a rational theology, which he saw as opposed to Lutheran orthodoxy.¹⁷ However, this did not mean that Thomasius was polemical to pietism, indeed he was a friend with August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), the founder of the orphanage in Halle. Nevertheless, he was opposed to some aspects of Pietism, namely the emphasis on feeling (also known as “fanaticism”) and their rejection of Wolff.¹⁸ His contribution to the history of philosophy was to develop the “eclectic” approach to philosophy, which meant collecting the best elements from different philosophers to create a new philosophy (or alternatively syncretism referred to the negative side of this practice in which a philosophy could only derivatively combine others’ thought).¹⁹ Perhaps surprisingly, given his defence of Christian philosophy, Thomasius does not receive Origen positively. For example, in his *Introduction to Philosophy of the Court* (1688), which outlines legal principles in light of the history of philosophy, he downplays the significance of Origen. For Thomasius, Origen was deceived by Plato and produced his own

15 G. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, ed. A. Farrer, Chicago 1985, 102.

16 G. Leibniz, 1985, 134.

17 L. Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors*, Cambridge 1969, 135.

18 G. Santinello / G. Piaia (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy: Volume II: From Cartesian Age to Brucker*, Dordrecht 2010, 315.

19 Santinello / Piaia (eds.), 2010, 303.

peculiar heresy, even though others consider him to follow the wisdom of Pythagorus and Zeno, Thomasius is himself dismissive of this tradition.²⁰ In contrast, Buddeus seems to oppose rational philosophy to Pietism, although he never fully committed to Pietism and his criticism of rational philosophy was used polemically to condemn Wolff as an atheist in spite of Buddeus' own appreciation of rational philosophy.²¹ Buddeus' approach to the history of philosophy was set in terms of different schools of philosophy. He broadly opposed Greek philosophy to Kabbalah as he saw it as unable to grasp the revealed truth of scripture. Nevertheless, Plato (and subsequently Plotinus) recognised many truths.²² Buddeus' overriding concern was with the Kabbalah, which he opposed to Valentinianism as a corruption of the original truth. Likewise, Buddeus' appeals to Origen fall in line with his overall approach of opposing Kabbalah to Valentinian Gnosticism. He credits Origen with expounding the Kabbalah and refuting Valentinus.²³ In both Thomasius and Buddeus, Origen is one figure among many, at least with respect to any idea of progress. This is mainly due to the overarching framework in which they approach the history of philosophy. Origen is addressed insofar as he fits within a particular school and his merits and faults are set in line with the schools of thought in which he is placed. The work of Thomasius and Buddeus would be influential for later developments in the history of philosophy, pre-eminently in the work of Brucker.

The sphere of influence of Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770), a historian of philosophy from Halle, dominated the view of Origen in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Brucker presented the history of philosophy as a history of different philosophical systems. Origen was grouped within the “Alexandrian” school but Brucker considered him to be mostly derivative, or in his terminology “syncretic”. In contrast, Brucker was favourable towards the system of Leibniz and Wolff as the most advanced system of philosophy. Brucker's attitude towards the history of philosophy reflects his own background of Pietism, both in Halle and under the tutelage of Buddeus in Jena, and the pervasive Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. Consequently, Brucker developed a combined view of Pietism and rationalist philosophy, which results in his view that Origen, and to a lesser extent the Church Fathers in general, were too Platonic and not Christian enough. The significance of Brucker lay in the breadth of his influence: “The success of Brucker's

20 C. Thomasius, *Introductio Ad Philosophiam Aulicam, Sive Lineae Primae Libri de Prudentia Cogitandi*, Leipzig 1688, 28.

21 Santinello / Piaia (eds.), 2010, 343–344.

22 Santinello / Piaia (eds.), 2010, 356–357.

23 Cf. J. Buddeus, *Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Ebraeorum*, Halle 1702, 37. 437–443.

works on the general history of philosophy was extended in the second half of the eighteenth century by a series of textbooks produced for the universities, higher and lower secondary schools, and technical schools.”²⁴

3. Hamann’s Critique of Kant’s Critique

Hamann’s remarks on progress do not easily form a systematic thought on an idea of progress but neither does he adopt a Luddite position. Instead, his critical marks on progress always concern a particular use of progress. He frequently bases his response on the idiosyncratic way in which progress is interpreted. Nevertheless, his corpus includes some systematic elements. His *Metakritik über den Purismus der Vernunft* (1784) aimed at Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* appears to be an exception to his use of parody and indirect communication. This essay sets out three problems with Kant’s use of pure reason. This reason is not pure with respect to history, experience and language. It is not historically pure because reason has a history, which means that reason is dependent on tradition rather than developed anew with each generation. Reason is not pure with respect to experience because sensation always accompanies reason. Similarly, language shapes our use of reason, complete with the ambiguities of language that make language something that is not completely under human control. Hamann introduces these three purisms of reason in that respective order but their weighting follows the inverse direction.²⁵ In fact, Hamann does not separate these three purisms of reason rather they represent three aspects of the central problem of abstracting reason from the real world.

Language is the most important exemplar in which the purism of reason betrays its error. Where Kant ascribed the source of errors in metaphysics to ambiguities, Hamann finds this essential to the practice of metaphysics. The problem that leads Kant astray is that he tries to detach language from its empirical richness. According to Hamann, Kant reduces Metaphors “to nothing but hieroglyphs and ideal relations”.²⁶ The use of the term hieroglyphs invokes more than mere impenetrability.

In the eighteenth century, hieroglyphs were almost a cultural trope that represented an understanding of ancient Egyptian religion, which in the hieroglyphs contained the mysterious truths of the universe. This was popularised by the novel *Life of Sethos, Taken from Private Memoirs of the Ancient Egyptians* by Jean Terrasson (1670–1750), who purported that

24 G. Piaia / G. Santinello, (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy. Vol. III. The Second Enlightenment and the Kantian Age*, Dordrecht 2015, 475.

25 Hamann, 2007, 207–208.

26 Hamann, 2007, 210.

he had accessed letters of the ancient Egyptians as a historical source for Egyptian religion. However, while this may have helped it sell more copies, his depiction of Egyptian religion could not match the actual evidence of Egyptian religion available at that time.²⁷ This work had a wide influence, from the Pietists to the Illuminati, and propagated the idea that the importance of Egyptian religion lay in its individualisation. For the Pietists this referred to the process of self-understanding and progression in the stages towards the kingdom of God, whereas for the lodges of the freemasons and illuminati it supported individual moral progress, which took the form of a monthly report on moral progress.²⁸

The role of hieroglyphs for Hamann concerns their role in the development of writing, in which Hamann could have been following Johann Georg Wachter's stages of curiological (a term coined by Clement of Alexandria to refer to a form of writing in which objects referred to pictures rather than symbols), hieroglyphic and characteristic.²⁹ However, because of the popularity of this idea during this period it is difficult to determine the exact source. Nevertheless, the ascription of hieroglyphs carries further significance because he refers positively to Origen for his poetry and use of allegory in relation to the hieroglyphic.³⁰ The development of language from the curiological and hieroglyphic affirms the empirical root of language because curiographs and hieroglyphs clearly refer to an empirical object rather than any abstract notion of concepts or reason. Furthermore, the association of these early forms of writing with history, such as the Egyptians, or later with Clement or Origen of Alexandria also reveals how historical development plays an important role.

4. Origen between Allegory and Literalism

Hamann's engagement with Origen reflects his understanding of the relationship between language and reason. In *Aesthetica in Nuce* (1762) Hamann engages with both Origen and progress. The primary target of the essay is Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), who argued against mystical interpretations of scripture but also makes a more general reflection of the relationship between aesthetics and rationalism.³¹ He invokes the idea of progress in relation to the state of the human soul: "Make use of this sleep, and build

27 J. Assmann, *Religio Duplex: How the Enlightenment Reinvented Egyptian Religion*, Cambridge 2014, 80–81.

28 Assmann, 2014, 79–83.

29 T. German, *Hamann on Language and Religion*, Oxford 1981, 36.

30 J. Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke III*, ed. J. Nadler, Vienna 1999, 125.

31 Betz, 2012, 114.

from this Endymion's rib the latest edition of the human soul, which the bard of midnight songs beheld in his morning dream."³² Haynes notes that this is a reference to Edward Young (1683–1765) and his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).³³ Young suggests the “latest editions of the human mind” may not be the best possible.³⁴ He offers this as a challenge to his own contemporary defenders of progress, who assume that the current human condition is the most advanced. Young does not deny progress, in fact, he affirms that the sciences make important advances, but he questions whether the current state is praiseworthy for being the most developed.³⁵ Like Hamann, Young appeals to the more emotional and sensory aspects of life as opposed to the connection of mechanistic reason to progress.³⁶ The allusion to progress in Young by Hamann challenges a narrow view of progress and attempts to raise awareness of the aesthetic dimensions of human life, which would be a requisite of the progress of reason.

In the same essay, Hamann invokes the figure of Origen to parody the way rationalist philosophers overextend their use of reason: “Have you a wiser understanding of the letter of reason than the allegorical chamberlain of the Alexandrian Church had of the letter of the Scriptures when he castrated himself for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven?”³⁷ The accusation is that rational philosophy is used to detriment of facets of life. The figure of Origen is significant in this respect because the notion of rhapsody, which is both in the subtitle and style of Hamann's essay, alluded to an interpretative approach that situated itself in the tradition of Alexandrian Platonism.³⁸ Betz assumes that Hamann is invoking Origen in purely a negative sense in this passage. However, this misunderstands the nature of Hamann's parody, which relies upon ambiguity, as well as Hamann's more nuanced understanding of Origen. The ascription of Origen as the *allegorising* Chamberlain reveals this second dimension in Hamann's thought. Elsewhere, he credits

32 Hamann, 2007, 68.

33 E. Young, *The Poetical Works of Edward Young*, London 1741, 273. There is evidence of Origen reception in Young when in one of his early poems he refers to Origen by name and the idea that even the devil may be saved. The significance of this citation, however, should not be overstated. Firstly, it is directed against John Tilotson, who was regarded as endorsing apokatastasis, and secondly, it appears over forty years prior to his *Conjectures*.

34 E. Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition: In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*, London 1759, 74.

35 Young, 1759, 74–75.

36 W. Ripley, ‘An Age More Curious, Than Devout’ *The Counter-Enlightenment Edward Young*, in: *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 49 (2016), 507–529 (508).

37 Hamann, 2007, 81.

38 German, 1981, 27–28.

Origen with his use of poetry, allegory and hieroglyphs.³⁹ In agreement with his understanding of hieroglyphs outlined above, the emphasis on poetry and allegory for Hamann represents the sensory aspects of life that cannot be reduced to the abstract speculations of reason. Hence, when he refers to Origen as the allegorising Chamberlin he is invoking his positive character. The literalist interpretation of Origen required for the apocryphal story of auto-castration contradicts Hamann's praise of allegory. This suggests that Hamann does not give the story much credence but is using it as a rhetorical device. By referring to the apocryphal story of auto-castration Hamann suggests that even the most extreme offenders of literalism still recognise of the complexity of life contain in the allegorical: "The prince of this aeon takes his favorites from among the greatest offenders against themselves."⁴⁰ The implicit assumption is that even if the most extreme picture of Origen cannot, because he still maintained the value of allegory and poetry, expunge the aspects of life that seem superfluous to reason, then the rationalist philosophers of Hamann's age are even less capable of fulfilling this task.

The centrality of language is continuous in Hamann's thought, from *Aesthetica in Nuce* through to the *Metacritique* and the emphasis he places on allegory, poetry and hieroglyphs shows how his understanding of language builds on the empirical and historical dimensions of reason. Kant's omissions of history, sensation and ambiguity allowed him to claim that his use of reason was universal and was not restricted to dogmatic religious rule. Instead, Hamann's charge against the purism of reason is that reason depends on factors, namely language, history and sensation, which lie outside of pure reason.

5. The Progress of Language and Reason

The overriding concern with language, and Hamann's opposition to attempts to purify language, is evident in similar challenges against ideas of progress. A decade prior to the *Metacritique*, he wrote the essay *A New Apology of the Letter h* (1773). This essay is a comment on a debate at that time over German spelling reform, most notably the proposal to remove the silent letter h in German words such as *thun* or *Ihre*. The target of the essay is Christian Tobias Damm (1699–1778), who was a classical philologist and follower of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school of rationality.⁴¹ Hamann refers to him condescendingly as an "extraordinary religious teacher" (he had been the prorector of the *Köllnische Gymnasium* in Berlin) and having studied

39 Hamann, 1999, 125.

40 Hamann, 2007, 81.

41 Betz, 2012, 109.

at a “rather doubtful university” (Halle).⁴² Damm was in favour of spelling reform because spelling should more closely reflect spoken language by removing letters that were no longer pronounced. The approach of Hamann is to set Damm’s proposals against demands of the principle of sufficient reason. There are two main reasons why Damm’s argument may be justified: firstly, on the basis that it was not pronounced, and secondly that the *h* was accidentally inserted. Against the first point, Hamann retorts that Damm’s proposal is itself insufficient because he does not propose to remove other unpronounceable features in written language like double letters. Damm’s claim is further undermined by his continued use of the silent *h* in his writing, which for Hamann is evidence that even Damm does not take his own proposal seriously.⁴³ In another manner of rejecting the superfluity of the silent *h*, Hamann highlights the etymological significance of the letter, which would make *für* [for] and *führ* [follow] indistinguishable.⁴⁴ Together these problems lead Hamann to conclude that Damm has been overindulgent about the progress of universal reason, which has led him to believe that expanding the use of the principle of sufficient reason could resolve all the ills of society. Indeed, it is as if the lack of this principle is a corrupting force: “With the luxury of letters the soul of the child further receives its very first impressions of harmful superfluity and of opulence in the fashions of artificial diligence and wit, at which universal, sound, and practical human reason, religion, and orthography, alas!”⁴⁵ The point is that spelling reform is only a small part of life so that even if it were brought into line with the principle of sufficient reason there would still be numerous other aspects of life that remain superfluous to the principle of sufficient reason.

In light of Hamann’s dismissal of Damm and the hubris of universal reason, it might seem that he was entirely opposed to reason and any notion of progress based upon it. However, Hamann does not reject progress as such, but attempts to uncover the complexity of progress, rather than its superficial assertion. Language is one of the primary places in which the complexity of life becomes evident. The evidence for the nuance of Hamann’s position on progress is evident through his engagement with Herder.

42 Hamann, 2007, 147–149.

43 Hamann, 2007, 150.

44 Hamann, 2007, 151.

45 Hamann, 2007, 153.

6. Hamann and Herder on the Origin of Language

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1802) was another resident of Königsberg and studied under Kant in 1762.⁴⁶ Herder also became acquainted with Hamann in 1764. He was considered a prodigy of Kant but publically broke with Kant, and his view on progress, in 1784 when Herder published *Ideas on a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*.⁴⁷ However, prior to this essay, Herder's ideas concerning progress also show some disagreement with Kant, which is evident from an intellectual exchange between Herder and Hamann. In 1771, the Berlin Academy set the question of its annual essay competition in philosophy to ask whether language has a natural or supernatural origin. Herder submitted an essay and won the competition. Herder's answer to the question the Berlin Academy posed was that language had a natural origin in human beings, although this does not deny divine influence insofar as every aspect of creation has its origin with the divine. Hamann saw the Berlin Academy as serving the interests of Frederick the Great and Herder's act of submitting an essay was an implicit approval of Frederick's authority. This political grievance, alongside philosophical differences, led Hamann to publish several responses to Herder's essay, most notably including *The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose Cross* (1772) and *Philological Ideas and Doubts* (1772).

Herder's essay, entitled *Treatise of the Origin of Language* is divided into three sections, which together form a synthesis. The first section addresses the initial appearance of language and the complexity and variation found in animals and the "oldest Eastern languages." The second concerns the rational relation to language that indicates the more developed form of human language. The third section focuses on the process of language and the effects of such processes on the development of language. In the first section, Herder opposes Condillac, who argued that language has a natural origin through repetition, to Rousseau, whose notion of *élan* assumed the origin of language as inexplicable.⁴⁸ Instead, Herder claims that the complexity in the sounds and tones of "early languages" shows that language formation is non-representational.⁴⁹ Such variation emanates from the physicality of language, for example in its relation to breath, which is part of animal rather than divine nature. Furthermore, the plurality of sounds, because of their ambiguity, cannot be attributed to divine perfection.⁵⁰ In the second section,

46 M. Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge 2001, 129.

47 Kuehn, 2001, 292.

48 J. Herder, *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. M. Forster, Cambridge 2002, 76.

49 Herder, 2002, 79.

50 Herder, 2002, 71–72.

Herder claims that human language is fundamentally different from animal language and reason because human sensation is free to be more than mere representation. For example, a child does not learn a language passively by merely watching their parents, but also invents their own language by speaking it for itself.⁵¹ This active nature of language development, and its effect of creating rationality, which can give meaning to representations, separates human language from animal language, whilst simultaneously asserting that language and reason have a natural rather than supernatural origin. Nevertheless, Herder assumes that reason is plural because of its association with language and insists that language is inseparable from reason. The third section reinforces the plurality of reason and language. Like the first section, Herder begins with the sounds of animals and especially the names given to these sounds: such as the bleating of the sheep, the dog barking or the ancient mystery of what the fox says.⁵² Humans then shape these sensory experiences into verbs. Hence, language is based in sensation before it becomes representation. The basis in sensation produces variation because early forms of language closely resemble the cacophony of different sounds. This aspect of language is common to both animals and humans but once the ability to abstract from sensation is developed the distinction between humans and animals has emerged. Progress in language happens through the transition from immediate sensation to representation. Human progress is essentially individual and an ongoing process throughout one's life: "We are always growing out of a childhood, however old we may be, are ever in motion, restless, unsatisfied".⁵³ Humans inevitably pursue the herd or society so that progress is never exclusively in an individual subject but also shapes a wider social relation. Individuality remains, however, so that progression in language will not lead to one language, society or herd.⁵⁴ There will always remain a plurality of languages because of the individual focus of progress. Therefore, Herder has a clear preference for progress in language (notably with a Western bias) but the kind of progress that he envisages is different from Kant's later idea of rational religion, because Herder recognises the positive value of particularity in language that does not lead to a universal value. Instead, Herder's progress moves according to particular trajectories that are not universally accessible to all human beings.

Herder's preference for sensation and multiplicity, along with his rejection of both Condillac's naturalism and Rousseau's supernaturalism, leads

51 Herder, 2002, 92.

52 Herder, 2002, 98.

53 Herder, 2002, 131.

54 Herder, 2002, 147.

Betz to conclude that Herder's view of language is largely in agreement with Hamann.⁵⁵ However, Herder still insisted that language is comprehensible as a natural phenomenon. Hence, Hamann objected that Herder's response was still too naturalistic because language could be understood consistently purely naturalism even though it also had a supernatural cause. Instead, Hamann took the view that everything came from God and language could only be understood from God: "because in accordance with the highest philosophical probability the creator of these artificial instruments desired and was obliged to implant the use of them too, the origin of human language is therefore certainly divine."⁵⁶ In a footnote to this passage from *The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose Cross*, Hamann uses Tertullian and Lactantius to support his position but he does not follow the stereotype of the opposition between Tertullian and Origen because elsewhere he attributes a similar idea to Origen with his use of allegory.

The question of natural or supernatural origin has implications for progress insofar as Hamann claims that Herder repeats Condillac's error in a different mode: "However, if a higher being or an angel is going to take effect through our tongues, any such effect, as with the talking animals in Aesop's fables, must be expressed in analogy with human nature, and in this respect the origin of language nor, even less the progress of language can seem or be anything but human."⁵⁷ The assertion of the natural basis of language and the progress of language is really an illusion and makes the same mistake of Condillac by associating the result of language with its origin. Hamann infers that Herder's belief in the progress of language is misguided because he assumes it to have a human origin. Implicitly progress in language is not, according to Hamann, a credit of human reason, but is grasped indirectly like an analogy.

Hamann also ridicules Herder's understanding of progress in *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. Herder outlined three natural laws, one of which stated: "The human being is a freely thinking, active being, whose forces operate forth progressively. Therefore, let him be a creature of language!"⁵⁸ For Hamann, this law produces the absurdity that the first word is sufficient for a language to be created because of the necessity of progression. He extends this criticism to Herder's appeal to reflection the essential disposition of the human being and the progressive nature of language and the human soul.⁵⁹ Here, Hamann uses a similar method as in the *The Last*

55 Betz, 2012, 141–142.

56 Hamann, 2007, 100.

57 Hamann, 2007, 100.

58 Herder, 2002, 127.

59 Hamann, 2007, 127.

Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose Cross, when he writes: “I therefore take only part of his legislation of the origin of a continually progressing human language and a continuing progressing human soul which is thoroughly misjudged, misunderstood, and obscured.”⁶⁰ Using the voice of Herder himself, Hamann parodies the way that Herder rejected the naturalistic explanations of others while still adopting their principles as natural laws. This challenge to Herder shows that Hamann does not support the mere rejection of universalism but is also concerned with discerning different kinds of plurality. In fact, Hamann’s point of contention is that Herder’s pluralism is disingenuous since he actually maintains universal principles.

7. Conclusion

The complexity and ambiguities essential to language undermine any assertion of progress based upon a narrow understanding of reason. Hamann admonishes the ideas of progress amongst his contemporaries on these grounds. However, he does not thereby reject any notion of progress. Progress should instead affirm and build upon the complexities and ambiguities that constitute life. The development of progress does not cancel out or redeem the errors of human society, which is what the defenders of progress like Wolff, Leibniz, Kant and their followers tried to do by trying to remove the complexities and ambiguities that are present in language, history and the senses.

The complexities highlighted by Hamann also reflect in the plurality of different conceptions of reason and progress employed by “rationalists”. These divergences emanate from the different amalgamations of schools found during this time. This also reflects the variety of interpretations of Origen employed by these figures. For example, Thomasius, Buddeus and Brucker all have one foot in both Pietism and Wolffian philosophy but they each try to reconcile these differences in subtly different ways, which lead to different presentations of the relation of reason to history.

Rather than trying to synthesise the array of “enlightenment” attitudes, Hamann engages with the idiosyncrasies of “enlightenment” culture by examining their internal contradictions and addressing a broad range of attitudes. This is clear from his critical responses to both Damm and Herder. Hamann deals with each account on its own terms and highlights the internal contradictions within each as he identifies problems in Damm’s attempt to underscore the purity of the principle of sufficient reason and Herder’s reconciliation of nature and ambiguities in language. Consequently, it is

60 Hamann, 2007, 128.

misleading to claim, as Isiah Berlin does, that Hamann is an irrationalist or opponent of Enlightenment.⁶¹ Hamann's criticism of Herder is the inverse of his criticism of Kant or Damm insofar as he claims they do not achieve what they claim. In this way the accusation of purism cuts both ways; it offers a challenge to assertions of both universals and particulars. Nevertheless, they all endorse progress and, as such, Hamann's concern is not progress itself but the contradictions that are within the respective presentations of progress, both with respect to universalising ideas of progress, such as in Kant and Damm, and the non-universalising idea of progress offered by Herder. Instead, Hamann infers the validity of progress and reason on the condition that they reflect the complexity of life that is evident in language, history and sensation.

The same logic could apply to our beliefs about progress today. For example, to the paradox of a liberalism that grants rights of free speech etc. to anyone, so long as they agree with liberal ideals. Alternatively, in an Origenian context, it would be like a doctrine of apokatastasis that believes in the salvation of everyone, or rather, everyone except Augustinians, who are still going to hell! Parody does not challenge the values themselves but rather how they are applied, which is also the effect of Hamann's criticism of Enlightenment. An example given by Merold Westphal illustrates this point: Imagine I find a wallet on the ground, it has the owner's number and address so that I can easily return it to its owner, but then I remember the golden rule. "Do unto others as you would have done unto yourself" and I think to myself, if I lost my wallet I would like to be taught a lesson so I keep the wallet. The problem in this case is not whether the golden rule is a good principle but how it is applied.⁶² In the same way, Hamann's parody of progress highlights irrational motivations that lie within uses of reason. Appealing to the value of rationality is not a universal remedy and may even obfuscate the real issue by using reason to silence the real problem.

61 I. Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment. Vico, Hamann, Herder*, London 2000.
62 M. Westphal, *Religious Uses of Atheism. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud*, Huemoz 2000.

Andrea Annese

Origene e la tradizione alessandrina in Antonio Rosmini

Abstract: This essay aims at providing data about the role of Origen and the Alexandrian tradition in Antonio Rosmini's thought. Origen is one of Rosmini's *auctoritates* in several significant issues, such as the election of bishops and the (non-ordained) "priesthood of all believers." But Rosmini also rejects some of Origen's views, e.g. in his exegesis of *John's* Prologue. The last part of this study deals with the "Alexandrian" heritage in Rosmini's (and J.H. Newman's) thoughts on the doctrinal, dogmatic, hermeneutical, and ecclesiological *progress*.

Keywords: Antonio Rosmini, Origen, Alexandrian tradition, John Henry Newman, Exegesis

Nonostante l'ispirazione patristica sia stata fondamentale per la strutturazione del pensiero di Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), ad oggi la bibliografia specifica è ancora tutt'altro che abbondante.¹ Pochissimi lavori hanno davvero approfondito la ricezione rosminiana di determinate fonti patristiche (o hanno condotto una mappatura delle evidenze), indagine che rappresenta un passo ulteriore rispetto all'intavolare semplici confronti o accostamenti. Obiettivo di questo saggio è fornire e commentare alcuni dati sulla presenza di Origene e della tradizione alessandrina nel percorso speculativo di Rosmini.

1 Cfr. in particolare A. Quacquarelli, *La lezione patristica di Antonio Rosmini. I presupposti del suo pensiero*, Roma 1980; Id., *Le radici patristiche della teologia di Antonio Rosmini*, Bari 1991; M. Bettetini / A. Peratoner, *Linee per uno studio sull'uso delle fonti patristiche nelle opere di Rosmini*, in: *Rivista Rosminiana* 91 (1997), 483–519; A.J. Dewhurst, *Antonio Rosmini and the Fathers of the Church*, Guildford 2005. Vi è attenzione al tema negli studi di G. Lorizio, ad es. *Eschaton e storia nel pensiero di Antonio Rosmini. Genesi e analisi della Teodicea in prospettiva teologica*, Roma / Brescia 1988, 206–210, sulla *Teodicea*, e Id., *Antonio Rosmini Serbati 1797–1855. Un profilo storico-teologico* (seconda ediz. riveduta), Roma 2005, *passim*. Sul tema specifico della ricezione rosminiana di Agostino (giustapposto a Tommaso d'Aquino) nell'elaborazione della teoria delle tre forme dell'essere, mi permetto di rinviare ad A. Annese, *Il pensiero estetico di Rosmini. Prospettive teologiche*, Roma 2014, 385–430. Alcuni spunti anche in P. Sguazzardo, *Sant'Agostino e la teologia trinitaria del XX secolo. Ricerca storico-ermeneutica e prospettive speculative*, Roma 2006, 539–547.

È però opportuna una breve premessa per chiarire la rilevanza di un'indagine di questo tipo focalizzata su Rosmini, chiedendosi quali elementi essa possa fornire riguardo il tema dell'eredità di Origene o dell'origenismo. Non si tratta soltanto di investigare il caso specifico dell'opera del Roveretano. Il rapporto di Rosmini con la patristica (ma anche con la scolastica) riveste interesse per il suo significato storico: il progetto rosminiano è quello di un'ambiziosa sintesi speculativa (una nuova *summa* o "enciclopedia")² tra ragione filosofica e *kerygma* – sintesi in cui il recupero dei "Padri" ha un ruolo decisivo – in un contesto storico-culturale come quello post-illuminista, ormai ben più secolarizzato rispetto a quello delle fonti che Rosmini intende riattualizzare, e dove emergono nuove dottrine e forze, anche socio-politiche (da quelle più moderatamente "progressiste" a socialismo e comunismo, direttamente affrontati da Rosmini nei suoi scritti). Dal punto di vista teologico le reazioni a questo contesto andavano dal razionalismo teologico liberale, ai *Risvegli*, alle chiusure di marca intransigente. Le Chiese risposero, complessivamente, con una sempre maggiore strutturazione identitaria, dogmatica, gerarchica: nella Chiesa cattolica, almeno dalla Rivoluzione francese in poi la tendenza maggioritaria era stata di chiusura nei confronti della "modernità" (spesso polemicamente associata alle rivoluzioni) e di ogni liberalismo e "riformismo", da Pio VI (un esempio, il breve *Quod aliquantum* del 1791) alla *Mirari vos* di Gregorio XVI al *Sillabo* di Pio IX (1864), fino alle condanne dello stesso Rosmini tra 1849 e 1887. Rosmini tentò invece un confronto dialettico con le sfide della "modernità": il suo recupero dei Padri e della "tradizione" non è di tipo conservatore o nostalgico,³ ma entra in dialogo con determinati elementi "moderni", "liberali", "riformisti",⁴

2 Cfr. K.-H. Menke, *Vernunft und Offenbarung nach Antonio Rosmini. Der apologetische Plan einer christlichen Enzyklopädie*, Innsbruck / Wien / München 1980, trad. it. *Ragione e rivelazione in Rosmini. Il progetto apologetico di un'enciclopedia cristiana*, Brescia 1997; P.P. Ottonello, *L'enciclopedia di Rosmini*, Venezia 2009 (seconda ediz. accresciuta).

3 Cfr. ad es. D. Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione*, Torino 1993, 136–137; G. Miccoli, *Chiesa e società in Italia fra Ottocento e Novecento: il mito della cristianità*, in: Id., *Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione. Studi sul rapporto chiesa-società nell'età contemporanea*, Casale Monferrato 1985, 21–92 (53). Si vedano questi due saggi, più in generale, per il contesto storico-culturale che si sta richiamando qui. Rosmini si distaccò presto dall'influsso dei pensatori controrivoluzionari e "intransigenti", che aveva apprezzato in gioventù.

4 Sul riformismo di Rosmini nel contesto dell'atteggiamento della Chiesa del tempo cfr. anzitutto L. Malusa, *Critiche e condanne sulle posizioni del "riformismo" di Antonio Rosmini*, in: G. Picenardi (ed.), *Rosmini e Newman padri conciliari. Tradizionalismo, riformismo, pluralismo nel Concilio Vaticano II*, Stresa 2014, 123–157.

con le ineludibili questioni del proprio tempo – in ciò è stato accostato ai suoi contemporanei John Henry Newman e Johann Adam Möhler⁵ (peraltro, secondo Antonio Quacquarelli, i tre erano legati proprio dalla figura di Origene, anche se non solo da essa).⁶ L'opera di Rosmini si configura come una nuova *apologetica cristiana*,⁷ nel senso – come negli “apologisti” del II secolo – di un tentativo di dimostrazione della “legittimità” razionale e culturale della religione (cristiana), e ciò proprio in dialettica con il tempo presente. Si sbaglierebbe nel fare di Rosmini un campione del riformismo radicale, disconoscendone gli elementi conservatori, ma si sbaglierebbe anche nel vedere solo questi ultimi, depotenziando gli aspetti più innovativi e critici, persino esplosivi, del suo pensiero (una lettura né apologetica né banalizzante delle *Cinque Piaghe*, in tal senso, risulterebbe illuminante). La formula che meglio sintetizza la sua prospettiva è forse quella enunciata da Maria Adelaide Raschini, «*rinnovamento a partire dalla tradizione.*»⁸

1. Iniziando dunque a stringere il fuoco e a censire le evidenze, il primo dato da considerare testimonia il significativo interesse di Rosmini per la tradizione alessandrina: egli progettò di scrivere un'opera specificamente dedicata a questo tema, che però non venne mai portata a compimento. Di tale progetto, oltre alle lettere in cui Rosmini ne parla,⁹ resta traccia in un manoscritto (ASIC A,2,51/B, ff. 141–148) – di datazione ignota –¹⁰ che doveva

5 Quacquarelli, 1991, V-VI: «Möhler, Rosmini e Newman, indipendentemente l'uno dall'altro, approfondiscono la Patristica per aprire un discorso con il pensiero dell'Ottocento». Su Möhler e Rosmini cfr. anche Id., 1980, 10.

6 Quacquarelli, 1991, VI: «Origene lega Rosmini, Newman e Möhler. La vasta filosofia origeniana aveva entusiasmato Newman [...]. Per Möhler Origene aveva dimostrato che se la Chiesa si fosse basata sui principi mutevoli dell'ermeneutica non sarebbe mai esistita, perché avrebbe dovuto continuamente cambiare la sua fede. Secondo Rosmini, Origene segna un progresso nelle ricerche della conoscenza di Dio, per l'attenzione posta nello studio della Bibbia e per il grande rispetto che aveva di essa. Per la tesi del sacerdozio dei fedeli, Origene non era una delle autorità più notevoli?». Cfr. 92, e più in generale tutto il saggio alle pp. 79–94.

7 Cfr. Menke, 1997; Lorizio, 2005, 88.

8 M.A. Raschini, *Dialettica e poiesi nel pensiero di Rosmini*, Venezia 1996, 175.

9 Cfr. A. Rosmini, *Epistolario Completo* [d'ora in poi *EpC*], 13 voll., Casale Monferato 1887–1894, n. 3177, vol. 6, 268–269, a don Andrea Fenner a Milano, Stresa 18 aprile 1837: «Scriverei con gran piacere la lettera sulla Scuola Alessandrina, ma n'ho deposto il pensiero perché non ho tempo, e perché non ho qui le opere di Giordani che mi bisognerebbero: lasciamo andare». Solo pochi mesi prima aveva scritto al pittore Giuseppe Craffonara: «Sappia poi che io non ho abbandonato punto il pensiero della Scuola Alessandrina» (n. 3007, vol. 6, 74, Torino 6 dicembre 1836).

10 Si possono tentare delle congetture in base alle fonti citate qui da Rosmini: le più recenti sono la *Biografia universale antica e moderna* di L.-G. Michaud, uscita in

forse fungere da materiale preparatorio, intitolato proprio *Scuola Alessandrina*.¹¹ Esso consiste di materiale di taglio prosopografico o biografico: si tratta, sostanzialmente, di informazioni biografiche su quarantacinque personaggi (poco si dice sulle dottrine), dall'evangelista Marco – secondo la tradizione, fondatore della Scuola alessandrina – fino a Proterio, patriarca di Alessandria nel V secolo (ma l'ordine cronologico non è sempre rispettato: ad esempio, nel corso dello scritto viene citato Ciro di Faside, 7° secolo). Vi si menzionano sia autori “ortodossi” che ritenuti “eterodossi”, come gli gnostici Carpocrate e Basilide o il marcionita Apelle; vi figurano anche personaggi non cristiani ma comunque legati ad Alessandria, come Ipazia. Tra i nomi prevedibilmente presenti vi sono Panteno, Clemente, Origene, Dionigi, Gregorio Taumaturgo, Atanasio, Cirillo. Da alcune brevi notazioni è possibile risalire ad almeno alcune delle fonti utilizzate da Rosmini: il materiale è tratto in gran parte da storie ecclesiastiche come quelle di Antoine Henri de Bérault-Bercastel, Friedrich Leopold von Stolberg e Giuseppe Agostino Orsi,¹² nonché dal *Compendio della Storia degli Eresiarchi* di Giacomo Simidei (Napoli 1737), che va da Simon Mago al giansenismo. Per quanto riguarda ciò che Rosmini riporta di Origene – l'autore cui è dedicato più spazio (63 righe) in queste note manoscritte – basti qui rilevare che il Roveretano insiste sulla vita frugale di Origene e sul suo ruolo di testimone della fede durante le persecuzioni, nonché ovviamente sui suoi talenti speculativi e filologici: in particolare, ne riporta «l'ardore straordinario per lo studio della Sacra Scrittura» e il fatto che l'Alessandrino fu il primo a commentarla

trad. it. a Venezia (in 65 voll.) negli anni 1822–1831, e la *Storia della religione di Gesù Cristo* di F.L. von Stolberg, trad. it. Roma 1817–1828, in 6 voll. (ma in teoria Rosmini potrebbe aver usato le edizioni originali, leggermente anteriori). Per il *terminus ante quem* si può invece prendere a riferimento la lettera in cui dice di non poter più scrivere l'opera sulla Scuola alessandrina, che è del 1837 (v. nota precedente). Il ms. potrebbe allora collocarsi, con una stima prudente, tra il 1817 e il 1837, forse tra i tardi anni Venti e i primi anni Trenta dell'Ottocento.

11 Un breve cenno ad esso in Quacquarelli, 1980, 51, nota 16. Ho qui occasione di ringraziare il p. Eduino Menestrina del Collegio Rosmini di Stresa e il p. Alfonso Ceschi del Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani di Stresa, grazie ai quali potei ottenere, qualche anno fa, una fotocopione del manoscritto.

12 A.H. de Bérault-Bercastel, *Histoire de l'Église*, 24 voll., Paris 1778–1790, trad. it. *Storia del cristianesimo*, 36 voll., Venezia 1793–1805 e altre ediz. successive (Rosmini possedeva quella del 1828–1831); F.L. von Stolberg, *Geschichte der Religion Jesu Christi*, 15 voll., Hamburg 1806–1818, trad. it. *Storia della religione di Gesù Cristo, del conte Federigo Leopoldo di Stolberg [...]*, 6 voll., Roma 1817–1828; G.A. Orsi, *Della istoria ecclesiastica*, 21 voll., Roma 1747–1762 (Rosmini ne possedeva diverse edizioni, di cui in forma completa quella in 42 voll., con il titolo *Storia ecclesiastica*, Venezia 1822–1826).

per intero. Non viene fatta parola delle condanne dell'origenismo, anche se più avanti si parla della controversia con Demetrio (paragrafo n. 41 del manoscritto).

Rosmini conobbe gli scritti di Origene molto presto (in linea con la sua abituale precocità come lettore): la prima traccia certa risale agli anni 1812–1813, quando, nel *Dialogo fra Cieco e Lucillo*, egli fa riferimento (generico) alle «Omellerie su passi biblici» di Origene, lodandolo come esegeta.¹³ In un'opera di poco successiva, *Il giorno di solitudine* (1815), si menzionano nuovamente le *Omellerie* origeniane, cui si aggiunge stavolta il *Contra Celsum*. Negli anni seguenti i riferimenti cresceranno, sia per quantità che per livello di approfondimento dei testi. Rosmini possedeva diverse edizioni (latine) delle opere di Origene, ad esempio la Merlin di inizio Cinquecento e un'edizione del 1743 basata su quella del de La Rue.¹⁴

Alle menzioni elogiative appena riportate se ne affiancano altre, dal tono forse ancor più lusinghiero. In *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa* Origene è definito «grande formatore di Vescovi e di Martiri» (n. 31, nota 13),¹⁵ oppure «il grande Origene» (*ibid.* e n. 28, nota 9) o «questo grand'uomo» (n. 45, nota 48); nelle *Lettere sopra le Elezioni Vescovili a Clero e Popolo* Rosmini lo chiama «lume splendidissimo» della «tradizione della Chiesa Alessandrina.»¹⁶ Diversi interpreti hanno affermato che la stima di Rosmini per Origene ha anche il significato della riscoperta di un autore che all'epoca

13 Cfr. G. Radice, *Annali di Antonio Rosmini Serbati. Volume primo (1797–1816)*, Milano 1967, 105 (si vedano anche i voll. successivi degli *Annali*, che registrano le opere lette e/o consultate da Rosmini fino al 1838).

14 Rosmini possedeva la ristampa del 1519 (custodita a Stresa) dell'edizione Merlin (1512), in tre voll. (quattro tomi): *Operum Origenis Adamantii tomi duo priores [...]; Tertium tomus [...]; Quartus tomus [...]*, Parisii 1519. L'edizione settecentesca (a Rovereto) è *Origenis opera omnia et quae ejus nomine circumferuntur: latine versa et ex variis editionibus & codicibus [...] collecta [...] ex recentissima editione Parisiensi domni Caroli Delarue [...]*, 3 voll., Venetiis 1743 (essa mancava quindi del quarto vol. dell'edizione de La Rue, quello aggiunto nel 1759, che conteneva il *Commento a Giovanni*). Rosmini possedeva poi una trad. francese del *Contra Celsum: Traité d'Origène contre Celse*, Amsterdam 1700, anch'essa custodita a Rovereto, così come la seguente edizione delle opere di Clemente: *Clementis Alexandrini Opera quae extant*, Venetiis 1757.

15 Utilizzo la seguente edizione: A. Rosmini, *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa. Testo ricostruito nella forma ultima voluta dall'Autore con saggio introduttivo e note di Nunzio Galantino*, Cinisello Balsamo 1997.

16 Ivi, 368. Rosmini pubblicò le tre *Lettere* tra il 1848 e il 1849, sia in edizioni a sé che (due di esse) in alcune edizioni delle *Cinque Piaghe*, e prevedeva di stamparne una nuova versione in Appendice all'edizione riveduta di quest'ultima opera. Le

non era particolarmente valorizzato, almeno in certi ambienti, a causa dell'aura di condanna plurisecolare che lo circondava.¹⁷

Vi sono però anche diverse occasioni in cui Rosmini muove ad Origene dei rilievi. Nella *Psicologia* scrive che Origene «sembra che dia all'uomo due anime nell'opera *De' principî* 3.4, e dice che quando la Scrittura nomina la *carne*, si dee intendere l'*anima della carne*. Egli è certo che si dee intendere il *principio sensitivo*; ma questa è un'attività, non un'anima distinta nell'uomo.»¹⁸ Più precisamente, però, in quel luogo del *De principiis* Origene espone diverse teorie, lasciando al lettore il giudizio. In un passo della *Teodicea* (n. 601, nota 92)¹⁹ Rosmini pone Origene tra coloro che non concepiscono l'esistenza di «spiriti puri», sostanze spirituali prive di corpo o veste corporea (anche eterea): il riferimento è a princ. 1.6,4 (ma anche lì Origene lascia aperta la questione).²⁰ Rosmini qui dipende dalla *Summa theologiae* di Tommaso d'Aquino (1.51,1, sugli *angeli*), citata esplicitamente: fa riferimento anche agli altri autori menzionati da Tommaso, ossia Agostino, Gregorio Magno, Giovanni Damasceno, Bernardo, cui aggiunge Leibniz e Charles Bonnet. Ma è soprattutto nel suo incompiuto e postumo commento al Prologo del vangelo giovanneo, *L'introduzione del Vangelo secondo Giovanni commentata* (la cui stesura iniziò nel 1839, venne interrotta, quindi ripresa tra gennaio e luglio 1849 e poi definitivamente interrotta) che Rosmini riserva a Origene le critiche più significative. In quest'opera Origene viene menzionato circa quindici volte, e in alcune di esse il riferimento è mediato da Tommaso d'Aquino (in particolare da *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*). In realtà, dal punto di vista quantitativo i riferimenti rosminiani

cito pertanto dall'edizione di Galantino menzionata nella nota precedente (cfr. ivi, 102 e 109 per queste informazioni sulle *Lettere*).

17 Bettetini / Peratoner, 1997, 494; Quacquarelli, 1991, 20. 71.

18 A. Rosmini, *Psicologia*, a cura di V. Sala, 4 voll., Roma 1988–1989, n. 717, nota 29.

19 A. Rosmini, *Teodicea*, a cura di U. Muratore, Roma 1977, 355.

20 Si potrebbe anche ragionare sull'apparentemente contraddittoria affermazione che appare poco oltre nel testo origeniano, princ. 1.7,1 (eds. H. Crouzel / M. Simonetti, t. 1, SC 252), sulle anime/nature razionali come incorporee. Oltre a rilevare la diversità di contesti e di questioni cui Origene si rapporta (che contribuisce a spiegare le “discrepanze”, non semplicemente ascrivibili agli interventi rufiniani), e la modalità congetturale con cui Origene si pone qui, si può anche chiarire questo punto tramite l'argomento che, per l'Origene, l'anima è *in sé* immateriale, ma *de facto* è sempre accompagnata dal corpo (e da diversi “tipi” di corpo): cfr. il commento di Manlio Simonetti in Origene, *I principî*, a cura di M. Simonetti, Torino 2010 (1968), *ad loc.* e 64–69.

a Origene sono qui in maggioranza positivi,²¹ ma i punti di dissenso sono, qualitativamente, di particolare densità. Ad esempio, nelle parole «Nel principio era il Verbo», scrive Rosmini,²² la parola *principio* non va intesa come «Dio/Padre» – opinione che egli riporta essere stata espressa da Clemente Alessandrino, Origene (Jo. «l. I, c. I» nella citazione rosminiana),²³ Cirillo Alessandrino, Gregorio di Nissa, Agostino (*De Trinitate* 6.2,3) –, altrimenti si sarebbe usato un altro tempo verbale;²⁴ inoltre, la relazione del Verbo con il Padre viene espressa subito dopo («e il Verbo era presso Dio»). *L'incipit* di *Giovanni*, per Rosmini, significa che «il Verbo era *avanti* che fosse il mondo», prima di tutte le cose, prima del tempo, nell'eternità. Contro Origene, Rosmini intende dunque *arché* in senso cronologico, non ipostatico. Più avanti Rosmini rifiuta l'interpretazione origeniana della frase «E il Verbo era Dio [καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος]» (*Gv* 1,1), per quanto riguarda l'assenza dell'articolo davanti a *theos*: Rosmini non cita direttamente brani di Origene, ma scrive che «si reputa» che qui l'Alessandrino sia caduto in errore, «narrandosi ch'egli n'abbia riferito il Verbo essere per essenza Verbo, non per essenza Dio».²⁵ Qui Rosmini gli oppone l'autorità di Giovanni Crisostomo e Teofilatto di Ocrida, facendo inoltre riferimento agli ariani (come sostenitori della medesima «erronea» dottrina): l'omissione dell'articolo

21 Cfr. A. Rosmini, *L'introduzione del Vangelo secondo Giovanni commentata*, a cura di S.F. Tadini, Roma 2009, 64, 87, 129, 132, 134, 144 (riferimento ambiguo), 146 (qui la lode è mediata da Tommaso), 172, 178 (altra lode mediata da Tommaso), 201 (Tommaso cita Origene, apparentemente approvando). Particolarmente interessante il riferimento a p. 172, dove Rosmini afferma che Origene (come altri) legge giustamente «in principio» di *Gn* 1,1 come «nel Verbo», cfr. Or., hom. in Gen. 1.1, che il Roveretano cita qui in latino dall'edizione del 1519; cfr. *Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung. 1. Teil*, ed. W.A. Baehrens, GCS 29, Leipzig 1920.

22 Rosmini, *L'introduzione*, 2009, 64.

23 Ma Or., Jo. 1.102 (ed. C. Blanc, t. 1, SC 120, Paris 1966). Che «principio» sia il Padre, è qui espresso in forma non apodittica – più avanti, Origene (sulla base di *Pr* 8,22) chiarisce che il principio è la Sapienza (il Figlio come Sapienza), 1.111. 1.289–292.

24 Per Rosmini la forma verbale *era* (ἦν) «esprime il presente del passato», indica una «relazione di tempo, che non avrebbesi espressa se colla parola *principio* si avesse voluto indicare il Padre»: si sarebbe detto «il Verbo è nel Padre», mentre con l'imperfetto ἦν sembrerebbe che il Verbo «avesse cessato di essere nel Padre» (Rosmini, *L'introduzione*, 2009, 65–66); ovvero, se il «principio» fosse il Padre, aver usato l'imperfetto implicherebbe dire che il Verbo prima era nel Padre, per poi a un certo punto non esserlo più.

25 Rosmini, *L'introduzione*, 2009, 143, nota 92.

indicherebbe un' inferiorità di natura del Verbo rispetto al Padre.²⁶ Altra occasione di dissenso è una ben nota questione filologica: la punteggiatura dei vv. 3–4, che manca nei manoscritti più antichi ed è disomogenea in quelli successivi. Si è letto δ γέγονεν (*quod factum est*) come legato a ciò che lo precede («senza di lui niente è stato fatto di tutto ciò che esiste. In lui era la vita»), oppure come l'inizio della frase successiva (δ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, *quod factum est in ipso vita erat*, «Ciò che è stato fatto in lui era la vita»). Rosmini si schiera in favore della prima opzione (impostasi a partire dal IV secolo), che vuole il punto *dopo* δ γέγονεν: si oppone dunque a Origene (fautore dell'altra lettura), da lui definito qui «precursore» degli «errori» di eunomiani e macedoniani.²⁷ Poco oltre Rosmini esplicita questo riferimento, scrivendo che questi versetti, se correttamente intesi, confutano sia le opinioni degli ariani sul Verbo, sia «l'errore di Origene» e poi dei macedoniani sullo Spirito Santo come «fatto dal Verbo»: lo Spirito, spiega Rosmini, non è considerabile tra le cose che *sono state fatte* (lì si intendono solo le cose *create*).²⁸ Il quarto e ultimo riferimento “critico” riguarda ancora la concezione

26 La spiegazione di Rosmini è che qui *Giovanni* «non pone l'articolo alla voce Dio perché è costruito come predicato, e quando si costruisce come predicato non si usa di anteporre l'articolo» (ivi, 143); inoltre, ciò può contribuire a evitare la confusione tra le due Persone (144).

27 Ivi, 151, nota 2. Sulla punteggiatura di questi vv. cfr. R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teil*, Freiburg ³1972, trad. it. *Il vangelo di Giovanni. Parte prima*, Brescia 1973, 301–303, secondo cui vi sono buone ragioni esegetiche in favore della lezione con il punto *dopo* δ γέγονεν; cfr. anche B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London / New York 1971, 195–196, anch'egli a favore di questa opzione, in base a considerazioni sullo stile e la dottrina giovannei. Così leggono anche le principali traduzioni italiane. La 28ª edizione del *Novum Testamentum Graece* Nestle-Aland (NA28) pone però il punto *prima*: πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. δ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. In sintesi, almeno fino alla prima metà del IV secolo era grandemente maggioritaria l'interpunzione che fa iniziare una nuova frase con δ γέγονεν, sia nei manoscritti che negli autori cristiani (dagli gnostici a Clemente, Ireneo, Origene ed altri). Quando però, nel IV secolo, essa fu utilizzata in senso ariano e macedoniano (per sostenere la creaturalità dello Spirito), come “reazione ortodossa” prese piede l'altra versione, per rimuovere la potenzialità di un'ermeneutica “eretica” del passo giovanneo; la “nuova” versione si impose anche nella liturgia. Tra le più antiche occorrenze di tale interpunzione sono stati segnalati Epifanio, anc. 74 (così Simonetti, che la definiva «aberrante»! Cfr. E. Prinzivalli / M. Simonetti, *La teologia degli antichi cristiani (secoli I-V)*, Brescia ³2015, 166) e, ancor prima, Adamanzio (prima metà del IV sec.), dial. 4.15 (ed. W.H. van de Sande Bakhuyzen, GCS 4, Leipzig 1901, 172), cfr. Schnackenburg, 1973, 302.

28 Rosmini, *L'introduzione*, 2009, 152. Per l'opinione di Origene cfr. Jo. 2.73. 2.76.

subordinazionista della Trinità: sempre sul tema della creazione, Rosmini ribadisce (contro gli ariani) che il Verbo non ha virtù minore del Padre, non è a lui inferiore, «né» – qui Rosmini cita ancora Tommaso d'Aquino (*Super Io.*, cap. 1, l. 2) – «è ministro o strumento del Padre come delirò Origene» (*ut deliravit Origenes* nel latino di Tommaso).²⁹

2. È opportuno ora approfondire i riferimenti a Origene presenti nelle *Cinque Piaghe*: si tratta di una delle opere rosminiane in cui l'Alessandrino è più citato.³⁰ Non è possibile ripercorrere qui in dettaglio le vicende dell'opera, che come è noto è una delle più importanti e discusse di Rosmini: iniziata nel 1832–1833, interrotta in attesa di tempi più favorevoli rispetto a quelli della *Mirari vos* di Gregorio XVI, ripresa con l'elezione di Pio IX (il cui inizio di pontificato appariva “riformista”), completata e pubblicata anonima nel 1848, essa fu messa all'Indice l'anno successivo e poi “riabilitata” solo dopo il Concilio Vaticano II.³¹ Come si evince dal titolo, la Chiesa “piagata” è accostata al Cristo crocifisso, con terminologia ripresa da Innocenzo IV (discorso di apertura del Concilio di Lione, 1245) e da un brano di Ludovico Antonio Muratori su Paolo III e il *Consilium de emendanda Ecclesia* (1537).³² Le “piaghe” descritte da Rosmini sono: (1) la

29 Ivi, 181. Di questi quattro riferimenti critici, solo nel primo caso Rosmini rinvia direttamente a un testo di Origene (Jo. 1.1, riferimento peraltro impreciso, come si è visto). Per quanto riguarda i passi in cui lo cita approvandone le tesi, solo quelli alle pp. 64, 129, 132, 172 contengono riferimenti diretti, tutti al *Commento a Giovanni* (libri I e II) tranne l'ultimo (prima omelia sulla *Genesi*). Si tratta comunque di rinvii ai testi, senza citazioni, tranne nell'ultimo caso (unica citazione *verbatim* da Origene, in trad. latina, in questo testo rosminiano). Il fatto che il *Commento a Giovanni* non fosse presente nelle edizioni origeniane possedute da Rosmini (quella del 1743, come detto, era precedente al volume dell'edizione de La Rue che includeva il *Commento*) può far pensare a una conoscenza solo indiretta di quell'opera, da parte del Roveretano, anche se egli potrebbe averla consultata in altro modo. Le *Homiliae in Genesim* erano invece in entrambe le edizioni a sua disposizione.

30 Per una preziosa indagine statistica sui riferimenti patristici in Rosmini (che non comprende però tutte le opere rosminiane) cfr. Bettetini / Peratoner, 1997.

31 Per approfondire cfr. M. Marcocchi / F. De Giorgi (eds.), *Il 'Gran Disegno' di Rosmini. Origine, fortuna e profezia delle «Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa»*, Milano 1999.

32 Cfr. Lorizio, 2005, 334: l'impostazione «in chiave di stauologia del corpo mistico» è stata «suggerita al Roveretano dalla lettura del discorso con cui Innocenzo IV aprì il 23 giugno 1245 il Concilio di Lione, “somiigliando la Chiesa a Cristo in croce” e dimostrando “com'ella, a suo tempo, fosse di [ma: “da”] cinque acerbissime piaghe addolorata” [la citazione è tratta da Rosmini, *Risposta ad Agostino Theiner*, proemio]. Di notevole importanza ci sembra inoltre il foglietto, rinvenuto dal Traniello in una delle copie del libro rosminiano, contenente un brano

divisione tra clero e popolo dei fedeli durante le funzioni religiose, causata dalla mancata comprensione, da parte del popolo, della liturgia (anche per l'ignoranza del latino); (2) l'insufficiente formazione del clero, qui accusato di privilegiare ormai la vuota ripetizione di formule invece di unire conoscenze teoriche e prassi evangelica; (3) la disunione dei vescovi (anche nei confronti del papa), causata dal loro crescente attaccamento al potere e all'ambizione; (4) la nomina dei vescovi affidata al potere civile; (5) la «servitù dei beni ecclesiastici», ossia l'ingerenza del potere secolare nella gestione dei beni ecclesiastici e la progressiva diffusione, all'interno della Chiesa, dell'amore per le ricchezze e i beni temporali. Per contrastare tutto ciò, Rosmini auspica un rinnovamento interno alla Chiesa, incentrato su alcune categorie chiave, in particolare *unità*, *libertà* e *povertà*. L'insistenza rosminiana sull'unità è fondata su una concezione forte del sacerdozio di *tutti* i fedeli, ossia sull'idea di una partecipazione consapevole e attiva alla liturgia anche da parte dei laici. *Libertà* significa che la Chiesa dev'essere libera dalle ingerenze del potere civile. La Chiesa inoltre deve tornare ad essere *povera*, deve svincolarsi dall'amore dei beni e delle cariche terrene. È, quest'ultimo punto, il fulcro di tutto il testo rosminiano: nelle argomentazioni del Roveretano, è stata la perdita dell'originaria povertà della Chiesa la causa prima della corruzione, e il processo degenerativo sarebbe iniziato in particolare quando i vescovi si sono occupati di questioni temporali inerenti al potere civile (secondo Rosmini il periodo chiave è l'alto Medioevo, più precisamente il VI secolo). Rosmini auspica un recupero dello spirito della Chiesa dei primi cinque secoli, un ritorno alla Scrittura e ai Padri.

L'intero testo è intessuto di riferimenti patristici, sia espliciti che impliciti: in filigrana ad alcune affermazioni e all'impostazione stessa dell'opera si riconoscerà l'ecclesiologia agostiniana del *corpus permixtum*.³³ Rispetto

del Muratori sul *Consilium de emendanda Ecclesia*, redatto nel 1537 da una commissione di cardinali, istituita l'anno prima da Paolo III, a cui «stava così a cuore la riforma della Chiesa, che [...] senza aspettare il Concilio, applicò egli a curarne le piaghe»; cfr. F. Traniello, *Società religiosa e società civile in Rosmini*, Bologna 1966, 211; L.A. Muratori, *Annali d'Italia*, Milano 1838 (1744–49), vol. 4, 374A: il papa «seriamente s'applicò egli stesso a curarne [i.e. della Chiesa] le piaghe». In una lettera del 1853, lo stesso Rosmini fornisce altri riferimenti alla formula delle «piaghe» (*EpC*, n. 7350, vol. 12, 16–17, a don P. Bertetti a Roma, Stresa 9 febbraio 1853). Il *Consilium* è citato da Rosmini in *Cinque Piaghe*, n. 4. 33 Rosmini afferma ad esempio che «la Chiesa è una società composta di uomini, e, fino che sono in via, di uomini soggetti alle imperfezioni e miserie della umanità» (n. 58). Sulla concezione agostiniana della Chiesa come *corpus permixtum* di giusti

ad altri scritti rosminiani, comunque, nelle *Cinque Piaghe* i Padri vengono citati particolarmente come esempi di vita o di prassi, ancor più che come *auctoritates* a conferma di ragionamenti teologici o filosofici. In questa sede è d'obbligo concentrarsi su Clemente di Alessandria e (soprattutto) Origene. Il primo viene citato esclusivamente nel capitolo II, sulla «insufficiente educazione del clero»: qui Rosmini esalta la prassi formativa dei primi secoli – descritta, in opposizione a quella ottocentesca, come non meramente nozionistica e mnemonica, ma vivificante –, in particolare citando proprio la «scuola d'Alessandria», «dove furono maestri sempre degli uomini straordinarii per dottrina e santità» (n. 29, nota 11; cfr. n. 35).³⁴ Brani di Clemente (dagli *Stromata* e dal *Pedagogo*) vengono evocati in riferimento al metodo di Panteno, all'importanza della Scrittura come testo di istruzione, alla *disciplina arcani*: le «verità più sublimi», non adatte a tutti, venivano trasmesse solo a voce e solo a coloro che ne erano degni (n. 42, nota 41; n. 43). Anche Origene viene citato qui sul tema della *paideia*, nonché su povertà e libertà del clero (n. 31, nota 13, con lunga citazione da hom. in Gen. 16.5, cfr. GCS 29, 142–143). Sulla *paideia* Rosmini, basandosi sulle testimonianze di Girolamo e Gregorio Taumaturgo, ricorda che Origene – in un percorso *progressivo* – partiva dalla correzione dei costumi, quindi passava alle «scienze profane» (la filosofia e tutte le discipline della *enkyklios paideia*), e solo dopo gli studi preliminari introduceva nelle «dottrine di Dio» attinte dalle Scritture (n. 44, nota 47). Altro elemento che Rosmini intende sottolineare è che Origene non si serviva di compendi, ma leggeva e commentava con l'allievo direttamente i testi filosofici (*ibid.*).

Nelle *Cinque Piaghe*, però, la questione in cui l'*auctoritas* di Origene gioca il ruolo più importante è probabilmente quella della presenza del popolo nell'elezione dei vescovi (elezione dei vescovi «a clero e popolo»). L'elezione dei vescovi (che per Rosmini, coerentemente con l'insistenza sulla libertà della Chiesa, non deve essere soggetta al potere civile) è l'argomento cui viene dedicato lo spazio maggiore in quest'opera del Roveretano, nonché ovviamente nelle citate *Lettere sopra le Elezioni Vescovili* in appendice. Su un punto così cruciale, prevedibilmente, gli autori chiamati a supporto sono diversi: ad Origene Rosmini affianca altri testimoni (da Cipriano ad Atanasio), convinto di essere in continuità con un amplissimo *consensus patrum*, nonché con canoni e decreti successivi, un insieme di fonti dalle

e peccatori, buoni e malvagi, cfr. *De doctrina christiana* 3.32,45; *De civitate Dei* 18.49; *De fide et operibus* 5.7. Più in generale, sulle fonti patristiche delle *Cinque Piaghe* cfr. Quacquarelli, 1991, 19–54; l'introduzione e gli indici di N. Galantino nell'ediz. citata, 1997, 69–70 e 414–418; Bettetini / Peratoner, 1997, 515–519.

34 Convinzione di Rosmini è che «solo de' grandi uomini possono formare degli altri grandi uomini» (n. 27).

quali trae conferma dell'opinione che «il popolo ha un diritto divino di avere una qualche parte nell'elezioni de' Pastori che il debbano pascere e condurre a salvamento.»³⁵ Origene sembra però occupare una posizione di preminenza: anzitutto, è la prima fonte patristica (più precisamente, la prima fonte non scritturistica in assoluto) citata in questo capitolo IV dell'opera. Basterà qui menzionare uno solo dei luoghi in cui l'Alessandrino viene evocato da Rosmini su questo tema. Affermando che la presenza dell'intero popolo dei fedeli, nell'elezione del vescovo (ma anche nel caso di altri uffici ecclesiastici), è garanzia che la scelta ricada sul candidato migliore per dottrina e prassi, Rosmini cita subito – e direttamente – Origene:

Origene nell'*Omilia XXII sui Num.*, e nella VI *sul Levit.* dice che “nell'ordinazione del Vescovo, oltre all'elezione di Dio, si ricerca la presenza del popolo, affine che tutti sien rassicurati, che si elegge in Pontefice il più eccellente e più dotto che sia, e il più santo, e il più distinto in ogni virtù. Il popolo sarà dunque presente, perché nessuno abbia a dolersi, e che sia tolto ogni scrupolo” (n. 77, nota 6).³⁶

Il riferimento alla sesta omelia sul *Levitico* torna più avanti, dove si cita il medesimo passo (relativo all'elezione di Aronne al sacerdozio, alla presenza del popolo, *Lv* 8,3–4), ma più in esteso e con parte del testo latino (n. 113, nota 124 = hom. in *Lev.* 6.3). Lo stesso passaggio verrà citato ancora, stavolta esclusivamente in latino, nella prima *Lettera sopra le Elezioni Vescovili*, dove torna anche il rimando alla ventiduesima omelia sui *Numeri*.³⁷

Come accennato, Origene è inoltre una delle fonti principali di Rosmini per la tesi del sacerdozio dei fedeli (concettualmente, niente affatto disarticolata da quella dell'elezione dei vescovi “a clero e popolo”), fondata sulla teologia battesimale.³⁸ Nella *Filosofia del diritto* Rosmini parla di «*carattere sacerdotale* di ogni fedele» (parte II, n. 891): appone subito una

35 A. Rosmini, *Sopra le elezioni vescovili a clero e popolo. Lettera I*, in: Id., *Cinque Piaghe*, 1997, 355–383 (374); cfr. *Cinque Piaghe*, n. 77: nei primi secoli vigea il principio «IL CLERO GIUDICE, IL POPOLO CONSIGLIERE».

36 Cfr. Or., hom. in *Num.* 22.4, GCS 30, 208–209; hom. in *Lev.* 6.3, GCS 29, 362–363. La citazione rosminiana, più precisamente, mi sembra riferirsi al passo delle *Homiliae in Leviticum*, non a *Homiliae in Numeros*, anche se con qualche scostamento. Ecco il passo origeniano nella trad. latina: *Licet ergo Dominus de constituendo pontifice praecepisset et Dominus elegerisset, tamen convocatur et synagoga. Requiritur enim in ordinando sacerdote et praesentia populi, ut sciant omnes et certi sint quia qui praestantior est ex omni populo, qui doctior, qui sanctior, qui in omni virtute eminentior, ille eligitur ad sacerdotium et hoc adstante populo, ne qua postmodum retractatio cuiquam, ne quis scrupulus resideret.*

37 Rosmini, *Lettera I*, rispettivamente 368 e 369.

38 Cfr. Quacquarelli, 1980, 64; Id., 1991, 92. 133–147. Ma anche Id., *La lezione liturgica di Antonio Rosmini. Il sacerdozio dei fedeli*, Stresa 1970.

nota rinviando alla fonte biblica, *1Pt* 2,9, e aggiungendo che «di questo primo grado di sacerdozio di cui sono rivestiti tutti i fedeli, parlano i più antichi Padri della Chiesa.»³⁹ Le *auctoritates* richiamate qui sono Ireneo, Tertulliano e Origene: in particolare, per quest'ultimo il riferimento è a hom. in Lev. 9.9 (su *Lv* 16,12), dove si legge «tutti quelli che sono stati unti con l'unguento del sacro crisma, sono divenuti sacerdoti, come anche Pietro dice a tutta la Chiesa: *Voi stirpe eletta, regale sacerdozio, nazione santa* [*1Pt* 2,9]. Siete dunque *stirpe sacerdotale* e perciò avete accesso al santuario.»⁴⁰

Agisce, in questa concezione di Rosmini, la sua sottolineatura dell'*unità* della Chiesa, interpretata come corpo mistico di Cristo nel quale il battesimo introduce. Egli però distingue nettamente questo «primo grado di sacerdozio» (come viene definito nel passo poc'anzi citato), ovvero il sacerdozio comune a ogni cristiano, battesimale, da quello ordinato, conferito per imposizione delle mani: il primo era da Rosmini chiamato anche «sacerdozio interno» o «privato e individuale», mentre il secondo «esterno» o «pubblico e sociale» (*Filosofia del diritto*, II, n. 894).⁴¹

3. Nell'impossibilità di seguire qui la traccia di tutti i riferimenti rosminiani a Origene è opportuno concentrarsi ora sul tema del *progresso*, quello principalmente da tematizzarsi in questa sede. Se si dovesse rispondere a una domanda secca riguardo l'appartenenza o meno di Rosmini alla «tradizione origeniana del progresso» (come teoria del progresso teologico), provando ad esempio a rintracciare degli indicatori di tale appartenenza come la dottrina dell'apocatastasi oppure la traiettoria de-dogmatizzante o meta-dogmatizzante, forse la (prima) risposta dovrebbe essere negativa. Rosmini non recupera le dottrine più peculiari di Origene, né può essere definito un autore che relativizza il dogma: la sua posizione contro il *razionalismo teologico* è ben nota (sebbene possa essere interessante notare che,

39 «I. Petr. II, 9. Di questo primo grado di sacerdozio di cui sono rivestiti tutti i fedeli, parlano i più antichi Padri della Chiesa. Sant'Ireneo († 201) *Contra haereses*, IV, 20. — Tertull. († 215) *De Orat.*, c. XXVIII. — Origene († 234 [ma 254]) *Homil. IX, in Levit.* n. 9. — La Chiesa greca separata ha mantenuto la stessa dottrina circa il sacerdozio privato di cui partecipa ogni fedele, e che si chiama anche *spirituale o mistico* per distinguerlo dal *sacerdozio sacramentale* proprio de' soli preti» (A. Rosmini, *Filosofia del diritto*, a cura di M. Nicoletti / F. Ghia, 4 voll., Roma 2013–2015, parte II, n. 891, nota 1).

40 Ho utilizzato qui la trad. di M.I. Danieli in: Origene, *Omellerie sul Levitico*, Roma 1985, 227; per il testo vedi GCS 29, 436. Su queste omellerie origeniane cfr. M. Maritano / E. dal Covolo (eds.), *Omellerie sul Levitico. Lettura origeniana*, Roma 2003.

41 Cfr. anche A. Rosmini, *Dell'educazione cristiana*, a cura di L. Prenna, Roma 1994, n. 304.

tra i “razionalisti” generati dal platonismo alessandrino, egli collocava gli gnostici ma non Origene).⁴² Se si volesse schematizzare la storia del pensiero cristiano a partire dall’influsso esercitato dai due giganti della letteratura cristiana antica, Origene e Agostino, dunque (certo con una semplificazione) in “origenismo/i” e “agostinismo/i”, come due polarità opposte, Rosmini – sia dal punto di vista della dottrina della grazia che, più in generale, nell’impostazione teologico-filosofica – si situerebbe in una “cattolica” *via media*. Tuttavia sarebbe un errore limitarsi agli elementi più evidenti e incamminarsi verso immediate banalizzazioni, senza seguire la traccia che emerge da altri dati. I numerosi elogi che Rosmini, come si è visto, ha tributato a Origene non vanno certamente considerati una pura espressione retorica. In Rosmini sono presenti quelli che possono essere definiti degli “elementi alessandrini”, e qui proprio il concetto di progresso torna a giocare un ruolo non marginale. Nel pensiero rosminiano, macchina di sintesi che recepisce ed elabora originalmente le proprie molteplici fonti, agiscono *determinati* elementi alessandrini/origeniani, pur venendone esclusi altri della medesima tradizione speculativa, così come, per altro verso, la ricezione rosminiana di Agostino ne accoglie l’ontoteologia trinitaria ma ne “disattiva” la dottrina della grazia indebita e predestinata.⁴³

Nella considerazione di questi elementi ci si imbatte ancora nel Rosmini “dialettico” cui si è accennato all’inizio di questo contributo, ovvero un autore che, come il suo contemporaneo Newman, si interroga su come conciliare «autorità, dogma e tradizione» con «libertà, razionalità e modernità»,⁴⁴ ossia garanzia dogmatica con sviluppo (o progresso) della libera riflessione teologica. La soluzione che entrambi propongono è il principio dialettico dello *sviluppo della dottrina cristiana* o dello sviluppo del dogma. Ad esso Newman dedica *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845),⁴⁵ opera conosciuta – anche se forse solo tramite

42 Cfr. anzitutto A. Rosmini, *Il razionalismo teologico*, a cura di G. Lorizio, Roma 1992.

43 Su quest’ultimo aspetto cfr. A. Annese, *La dottrina della grazia in Rosmini. La dialettica tra naturale e soprannaturale*, in: Rivista Rosminiana 111 (2017), 111–138.

44 Cfr. G. Lettieri, *Newman alessandrino*, Postfazione a J.H. Newman, *Lo sviluppo della dottrina cristiana*, a cura di L. Obertello, Milano 2003, 421–452 (426). Su Rosmini e Newman, con particolare attenzione per questo aspetto, cfr. A. Annese, *Rosmini, Newman e la critica al razionalismo teologico. La dialettica tra ragione, kerygma e autorità e il principio dello sviluppo dottrinale*, in: Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni 82/2 (2016), 1009–1042.

45 Sulla teoria newmaniana dello sviluppo dottrinale cfr. O. Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman. The Idea of Doctrinal Development*, Cambridge 1957; I. Ker, *John Henry Newman. A Biography*, Oxford 2009, 257–315.

mediazioni, e probabilmente non letta integralmente – e citata da Rosmini nel suo incompiuto e postumo *Il linguaggio teologico* (la cui stesura iniziò nel 1854 e non fu mai completata a causa della morte dell'autore l'anno successivo).⁴⁶ Questo testo di Rosmini era stato concepito come risposta alle accuse di «oscurità o di noviloquio»⁴⁷ mossegli dai critici. Qui il Roveretano intendeva mostrare come vada intesa l'*oscurità* del linguaggio teologico, e come vi sia un'oscurità dalla funzione "positiva", quella delle parabole e allegorie contenute nelle Scritture, atte a velare «la soverchia luce della dottrina», finché gradualmente non la si possa comprendere.⁴⁸ In questa vita, scrive Rosmini, le «cose divine» sono per l'uomo un misto di luce e tenebre, e si deve insistere nel tentare di illuminare le tenebre, «sebbene il velo non si possa rimuovere del tutto giammai»; «questa è quella sapiente economia, che Iddio usò cogli uomini.»⁴⁹ Per realizzare questo tentativo sarà necessario e

46 «Fra i quali eretici non mancarono di quelli, che [...] videro che la Chiesa di Cristo, appunto perché non era qualche cosa di morto, ma una società vivente per tutti i secoli, era consentaneo che avesse il suo naturale sviluppo come un effetto della sua vita; e questo fu il filo che segnò loro la via e li fece rinvenire la porta della Cattolica Chiesa. Nominerò due soli di questi Carlo <Ludwig von Haller> [...] e <Giovanni Enrico> Newman, che su questo svolgimento naturale della dottrina e delle pratiche Cristiane compose quel libro, che fu il preludio della sua conversione» (A. Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, a cura di A. Quacquarelli, Roma 1975, 64–65). Su *Il linguaggio teologico* (e con riferimenti al tema dello sviluppo) cfr., oltre all'*Esame storico-critico* di Quacquarelli (ivi, 103–145), anche Menke, 1997, 235–237; Lorizio, 2005, 393–398; sul progresso teologico si veda anche Quacquarelli, 1991, 93–94.

47 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, 21.

48 Ivi, 27. Il passo può riecheggiare toni origeniani/alessandrini: «come il Maestro degli uomini velava colle parabole o con una forma enigmatica, la soverchia luce della dottrina, e n'apriva il mistero a' suoi discepoli di mano in mano che potevano sopportarne la grandezza, così anche l'inviato di GESÙ Cristo può e deve adattare il suo insegnamento a' vari generi di persone, e talvolta gli può venir bene lasciare qualche parte perché non involga equivoco intorno alle verità da crederci, per eccitare opportunamente il pensiero e stuzzicare il desiderio di penetrare più addentro nella loro intelligenza di que' tra suoi discepoli che sono più ferventi». Sul «velo delle parabole» cfr. anche Rosmini, *Teodicea*, n. 924.

49 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, 35; cfr. 41, sulle «cose altissime e misteriose della Religione» dove si trova «una propria oscurità non mai del tutto superabile». Tra i diversi brani di Rosmini che si potrebbero citare ancora, cfr. almeno *Teosofia*, a cura di M.A. Raschini / P.P. Ottonello, 6 voll., Roma 1998–2002, n. 33; *Teodicea*, nn. 51 e 74; *Antropologia soprannaturale*, a cura di U. Muratore, 2 voll., Roma 1983, vol. 1, 107–108: «Fra queste tenebre e fra questa luce cammina il cristiano in questa vita per un alto ordine della divina Provvidenza: acciocché cioè colle tenebre più meriti credendo, e colla luce più gli s'acuisca il suo desiderio dell'eterna luce, e sia da questo saggio di visione e da questo desiderio sostenuto, ed

naturale uno *sviluppo*, un *progresso* della teologia e del suo linguaggio; la dottrina cristiana è come un “seme” che deve svilupparsi.⁵⁰ La metafora del seme e della pianta è finalizzata a sostenere che il *depositum fidei* non viene alterato, né diminuito, né accresciuto: lo sviluppo era già insito in esso (come la pianta “è” nel seme), non è un’aggiunta estrinseca. Il «progresso» e l’«incremento», l’«accrescere» la dottrina, vanno intesi come un approfondire, connettere, illuminare.⁵¹

Queste affermazioni trovano significativa analogia con le tesi dell’*Essay* di Newman. Per i due pensatori (come, in parte, anche per Möhler),⁵² il cristianesimo è sviluppo, progresso, è qualcosa di *vivente*. La riflessione teologica cristiana, conseguentemente, non può che configurarsi come uno sviluppo progressivo, poiché non tutto ciò che era contenuto nel deposito “rivelato”, kerygmatico, poteva essere compreso subito: di qui quella che Newman chiama la «teoria dello sviluppo dottrinale [*the Theory of Development of Doctrine*].»⁵³ Attraverso tale sviluppo – che sarebbe provvidenzialmente previsto e guidato,⁵⁴ rientrando nell’economia divina – la “verità” rivelata in origine viene dispiegata e chiarita. Ma anche per Newman il “mistero divino” manterrà un lato mai totalmente esauribile nella sua trascendenza.⁵⁵ La chiave ermeneutica che l’esegeta può adottare sarà in particolare l’interpretazione allegorica delle Scritture, che ne sappia illuminare lo *spirito* oltre la *lettera*.⁵⁶ Newman è più esplicito di Rosmini nel parlare di “metodo

avvalorato nelle sue operazioni e nella sua aspettazione»; ma anche altri passi da quest’ultima opera, ad es. ivi, 62–65.

50 Qui Rosmini fa esplicito riferimento alla parabola del granello di senape (cfr. *Mc* 4,30–32 e paralleli), significativamente interpretato come simbolo dello «sviluppo» della «dottrina» (*Il linguaggio teologico*, 67–68; cfr. 54 per l’immagine della «pianta»). La stessa parabola è interpretata con la medesima finalità in Newman, *Lo sviluppo*, 104.

51 Cfr. *Il linguaggio teologico*, 49–55, in partic. 49: «il deposito consegnato da Cristo agli apostoli e da questi tramandato [...] non può essere né diminuito, né accresciuto, né in alcun minimo apice mutato»; 54: «nulla aggiungendo che sia novo sostanzialmente».

52 Vedi però C.M. Shea, *Newman, Perrone, and Möhler on Dogma and History: A Reappraisal of the “Newman-Perrone Paper on Development”*, in: *Newman Studies Journal* 7 (2010), 45–55 (in partic. 49), sulle differenze tra Newman e Möhler.

53 Newman, *Lo sviluppo*, 66; per il testo inglese cfr. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, London 1878, rist. 1909 (*uniform edition*), 29–30.

54 Newman, *Lo sviluppo*, 96, 104–105.

55 Ivi, 102–103.

56 Ivi, 328–335 per l’allegoria; 90–92 per la dialettica lettera/Spirito. Su tutti i temi appena citati, e la loro ispirazione “alessandrina”, cfr. Lettieri, 2003, in partic. 422–423. 429–430. 433. 444–445. 448–449.

allegorico», che equipara qui all'«interpretazione mistica [*mystical interpretation*]» (termine che comunque sembra preferire);⁵⁷ Rosmini, in generale, non usa molto il termine «allegoria» (che infatti è assente nel *Linguaggio teologico*),⁵⁸ ma nei contenuti il suo pensiero è affine. Sia ne *Il linguaggio teologico* che nell'*Antropologia soprannaturale*, in particolare, egli sostiene che le Scritture non contengono *letteralmente* tutto ciò che Dio voleva rivelare:⁵⁹ occorre uno sviluppo teologico, un'interpretazione più profonda, in un certo senso *allegorica*.⁶⁰ Tale processo di sviluppo teologico ed esegetico è, per il Roveretano, accompagnato dall'assistenza dello Spirito (che Gesù promise «alla sua Chiesa»,⁶¹ con riferimento al Paraclito di *Gv* 14,26): nel *Linguaggio teologico* egli cita la nota affermazione paolina «la lettera uccide, lo Spirito vivifica» (*2Cor* 3,6),⁶² e il punto chiave della sua posizione è proprio che la teologia sia concepita come qualcosa di vivente, progressivo.

Secondo questa concezione, tale sviluppo o progresso non va lasciato all'arbitrio individuale, ma sarà guidato e garantito dogmaticamente da un'*autorità*, anch'essa prevista dall'economia divina: la Chiesa.⁶³ Ciò garantirebbe

57 Cfr. in particolare *Lo sviluppo*, 328 (338 nell'originale ingl.).

58 *Allegoria* è termine poco presente negli scritti di Rosmini: cfr. *Antropologia soprannaturale*, vol. 2, 121–123, sul linguaggio simbolico (vedi anche 22. 26–28); 297–299, sull'eucaristia, dove Rosmini afferma che le parole di Gesù in *Mc* 14,25 (cfr. *Mt* 26,29), «io non berrò più del frutto della vite fino al giorno in cui lo berrò nuovo nel regno di Dio», non vanno intese in senso «puramente allegorico e figurato» (298): Gesù avrebbe lì fatto riferimento a un vino *reale* ossia a una futura celebrazione dell'eucaristia dopo la sua resurrezione. Cfr. poi *Del divino nella natura*, a cura di P.P. Ottonello, Roma 1991, n. 88 (sulle interpretazioni allegoriche dei miti classici); *Logica*, a cura di V. Sala, Roma 1984, n. 735 (il parlare allegorico come potenziale origine di «sofismi»).

59 Si veda almeno *Il linguaggio teologico*, 67–68; *Antropologia soprannaturale*, vol. 1, 166–167; vol. 2, 21–22. 88 (la Scrittura chiama a «penetrar[e] il senso nascosto» dei suoi simboli/segni/enigmi).

60 In generale Rosmini, nell'esegesi, si pone in una *via media* tra allegorismo e literalismo, e utilizza diffusamente la lettura tipologica. Cfr. L. Losacco, *La lettura biblica di Rosmini ne «L'introduzione del Vangelo secondo Giovanni commentata»*, Stresa 1986; B. Salmona, *La Sacra Scrittura come fonte di Rosmini*, in: *Rivista Rosminiana* 91 (1997), 301–371; G. Ferrarese, *La Scrittura nella genesi della teologia rosminiana*, in: *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 16/1 (1999), 241–272.

61 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, 67.

62 Ivi, 68.

63 Per Rosmini cfr. ad es. ivi, 35–36. 49. 52. 67. Per Newman cfr. *Lo sviluppo*, 105–119, in partic. 108 (78 nell'ediz. ingl.): «Proporzionalmente alla probabilità di veri sviluppi nella dottrina e nel culto, vi è anche la probabilità che nel piano divino sia stata predisposta un'autorità esterna a cui spetta pronunciarsi su di essi e che possa, quindi, separarli dalla massa delle speculazioni affatto umane, dalle stravaganze, dalle corruzioni e dagli errori, nei quali e fuori dai quali vengono

il mantenimento di un'identità (comunque dinamica) pur nel fluire del progresso, al di là delle «apparenti incongruenze e alterazioni [*apparent inconsistencies and alterations*]» – per usare le parole di Newman –⁶⁴ riscontrabili, lungo i secoli, nella dottrina e nel culto cristiani. Garantirebbe, inoltre, la “correttezza” del progresso teologico, ossia la distinzione tra la novità «pia e commendabile» e quella «profana», «riprovevole» (così si esprime Rosmini), o tra il «grano» e le «impure zizzanie.»⁶⁵ Ecco allora la dialettica cui si accennava, tra l'autorità e la libera riflessione personale: la garanzia autoritativa avrebbe lo scopo non di «indebolire la libertà o il vigore del pensiero umano nel campo della speculazione religiosa, ma quello di resistere alle sue stravaganze e di disciplinarle».⁶⁶ Lo sviluppo teologico dovrà inoltre seguire un canone, un principio guida⁶⁷: qui sia Rosmini che Newman si confrontano con Vincenzo di Lérins (V secolo), ma – significativamente – non è il ben noto “canone” di Vincenzo (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est, Commonitorium 2.5*)⁶⁸ che essi pongono al centro, bensì l'analogia tra crescita della dottrina e crescita del corpo umano, ad indicare il permanere della medesima (id)entità. Entrambi citano lo stesso passo del *Commonitorium* (23.4–5): *Imitetur animarum religio rationem corporum, quae, licet annorum processu numeros suos euoluant et explicent, eadem*

a crescere. È questa la dottrina dell'infalibilità della Chiesa [*the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church*].»

64 Ivi, 49 (9 nell'ediz. ingl.).

65 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, rispettivamente 57 e 53. Sull'autorità ecclesiastica come garante, attraverso il dogma, della “correttezza” dello sviluppo teologico, cfr. ad es. il passo seguente: «Le verità, che si contengono nel deposito della fede [...] vennero col progresso del tempo, per le fatiche de' santi e dotti uomini, e soprattutto per le dogmatiche decisioni della Chiesa ad arricchirsi, e prendendo unità di disegno, di ordine, e metodo, a costituire la scienza della sacra Teologia» (ivi, 35–36, cors. mio).

66 J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, a cura di F. Morrone, Milano 2001, 393; cfr. 385 sull'infalibilità della Chiesa come mezzo provvidenziale, stabilito da Dio «per frenare quella libertà di pensiero che naturalmente in sé è una tra le nostre più grandi doti naturali, e per salvarla dai propri eccessi suicidi». Cfr. A. Rosmini, *Degli studi dell'Autore*, nn. 30. 38. 41. 42 (in: Id., *Introduzione alla Filosofia*, a cura di P.P. Ottonello, Roma 1979), per la posizione analoga espressa dal Roveetano.

67 Rosmini lo sintetizza sostanzialmente come «il principio della coerenza con ciò che è rivelato» (*Il linguaggio teologico*, 54); Newman delinea sette diversi criteri (cfr. la Parte II dell'*Essay*).

68 Vincenzo di Lérins, *Commonitorium*, ed. R. Demeulenaere, CCSL 64, Turnhout 1985.

*tamen quae erant, permanent. [...] Parua lactantium membra, magna iuuenum: eadem ipsa sunt tamen.*⁶⁹

Vorrei insistere sul piano ecclesiologico appena menzionato, che insieme a quello ermeneutico è al cuore della concezione rosminiana del *progresso* teologico. È la Chiesa stessa, ossia l'autorità che deve promuovere lo sviluppo (ermeneutico) teologico e vigilare su di esso, ad essere concepita da Rosmini come una «società vivente», con un suo «naturale sviluppo.»⁷⁰ Essa, per il Roveretano, è un organismo vivente, è il corpo mistico di Cristo, in evoluzione e cammino verso la sua perfezione ultima.⁷¹ Come «Gesù *progrediva* [προέκοπτεν] in sapienza ed età e grazia» (così Rosmini traduce *Lc* 2,52), «così si può dire [...] che anche la Chiesa, fatta ad immagine e similitudine di Cristo, venga continuamente crescendo in età e sapienza»;⁷² in tale progresso le dottrine – sviluppo del *depositum fidei* – vengono formate, consolidate, custodite (ma non alterate), spiega Rosmini citando ancora, dal latino, Vincenzo di Lérins (*Comm.* 23.17–18 e poi 23.9), e commentando: «questo è quel solo progresso [*profectus* è nel testo di Vincenzo, 23.9] che è possibile nella Chiesa, il solo incremento di cui è suscettivo lo stesso dogma, secondo Vincenzo Lirinese, tutto consistente nelle forme, e nelle manifestazioni ognora più esplicite» (mentre la dottrina, *in sé*, resta la medesima). Ma la concezione dinamica ed organica della Chiesa consente anche un collegamento con un altro tema fondamentale: ciò che si potrebbe chiamare il *riformismo* di Rosmini, cui si è accennato in apertura parlando delle *Cinque Piaghe*. Se la Chiesa è una società vivente in continuo sviluppo, ne consegue per Rosmini che essa possa e debba riformarsi dopo periodi di crisi o di corruzione – o, ancor più significativamente, che essa debba rinnovarsi *costantemente*, come giustamente è stato notato da Giovanni Miccoli.⁷³ Nelle *Cinque Piaghe* si auspica appunto un consistente rinnovamento interno alla Chiesa e un ritorno di essa allo “spirito” dei primi secoli. Il tema

69 Per Rosmini vedi *Il linguaggio teologico*, 51–55. 59; per Newman, *Lo sviluppo*, 49–64. 148. 180. 189. 214. 397; la citazione da *Commonitorium* 23 è a p. 51 in Rosmini (che riporta quasi l'intero capitolo del testo di Vincenzo) e 189 in Newman. Il “canone” di Vincenzo non è nemmeno citato in quest'opera di Rosmini, mentre nell'*Essay* di Newman se ne sottolinea la problematicità (cfr. in partic. 49–64).

70 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, 64 (cit. *supra*, nota 46).

71 Cfr. Rosmini, *L'introduzione del Vangelo secondo Giovanni*, lez. LIX e XC; *Degli studi dell'Autore*, nn. 102–103; *Filosofia del diritto*, II, nn. 713–716. 724–725.

72 Rosmini, *Il linguaggio teologico*, 53, cors. mio.

73 Cfr. Miccoli, 1985, 53: «La concezione della storia della Chiesa che Rosmini enuncia [nelle *Cinque Piaghe*] comporta del resto una necessità di rinnovamento costante, che già la *Mirari vos* aveva bollato come pretesa “assurda e sommamente oltraggiosa”».

del progresso si è rivelato dunque in grado di connettere e intrecciare diversi fili dipanatisi fin qui.

In chiusura si può tentare un provvisorio bilancio dei dati emersi. In questa sede non era possibile proporre che una selezione dei moltissimi riferimenti rosminiani a Origene e alla tradizione alessandrina, così come dei “temi alessandrini” rintracciabili nel pensiero del Roveretano. Oltre ai puntuali riferimenti a Origene, in particolare nelle *Cinque Piaghe*, si è fatto cenno a temi più generali come la *disciplina arcani* (con i vari riferimenti rosminiani a Clemente)⁷⁴ e soprattutto la concezione della dispensazione progressiva delle verità rivelate e della conseguente progressività dell’interpretazione umana di esse: in aggiunta al citato *Il linguaggio teologico*, si possono ricordare diverse sezioni dell’*Antropologia soprannaturale* (tra cui alcuni passi citati *supra*), come pure i passi della *Teodicea* (ad esempio il n. 338) che descrivono l’azione della grazia divina come *pedagogia progressiva*. Ulteriori tematiche da approfondire potrebbero essere quella del cosmo come sistema simbolico («complesso di simboli» o «segni») significante le realtà spirituali/soprasensibili (o l’intero universo «sensibile-soprasensibile»)⁷⁵ o quella dell’inserimento della filosofia nella storia della salvezza (qui Rosmini, nell’*Introduzione alla Filosofia*, recepisce apertamente Clemente, ad esempio citandone la metafora dei “tre testamenti”),⁷⁶ e gli spunti potrebbero moltiplicarsi.⁷⁷ In ogni caso, si può concludere affermando che se una caratteristica sostanziale dell’“origenismo” – come è stato sostenuto – è il tematizzare il progresso della libera razionalità della creatura nella comprensione del dogma (e della dottrina cristiana), senza mai esaurirli (e in dialettica con la

74 Va comunque rilevato che Rosmini, su questo aspetto, pur riferendosi a Clemente mostra una posizione meno radicale dell’Alessandrino.

75 Cfr. soprattutto la prima parte del IV libro dell’*Antropologia soprannaturale*, in partic. vol. 2, 17–18. 21. 37. Si veda anche *Teodicea*, nn. 673. 676.

76 Rosmini, *Degli studi dell’Autore*, n. 71, nota 31 (con riferimento a Clem., str. 6.8,67,1; cfr. 6.5,42,1–3). In questo testo rosminiano, più in generale, grande è l’influenza di Clemente, che viene citato più volte, e sempre in luoghi “strategici” (come l’esergo della parte III o la conclusione dell’opera, dove si riprende l’esegesi allegorica alessandrina dell’episodio biblico di Agar e Sara). L’Alessandrino è qui importante fonte di Rosmini sulla relazione tra ragione e *kerygma* e tra filosofia e cristianesimo. Cfr. Annese, 2014, 37–54.

77 Ad esempio, in *EpC*, n. 3548, vol. 6, 657–660, ad Antonio Mazzetti a Rovereto, Rovereto 21 giugno 1838, Origene è *auctoritas* in favore del celibato ecclesiastico (con citazione da hom. in Num. 23.3).

progressiva “*paideia* rivelativa” divina),⁷⁸ Rosmini può ben essere inserito nella traiettoria dei pensatori che, certo in molteplici e differenti modi, trasmettono l’eredità del grande teologo alessandrino.

78 Cfr. G. Lettieri, *Progresso*, in: A. Monaci Castagno, *Origene. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Roma 2000, 379–392; Id., 2003, in partic. 423, 433, 451–452 (sull’“origenismo” di Newman); Id., *Progress: A Key Idea for Origen and Its Inheritance* (in partic. i parr. 2, 9, 16), in questo volume.

Enrico Cerasi

Two Types of Christian Apokatastasis: Origen and Karl Barth

Abstract: This essay studies the presence of Origen in Karl Barth's theology. At first sight, Origen seems to have little relevance in Barth's work. But if one studies the doctrine of apokatastasis matters change. Apokatastasis seems to be an unsolved problem for Barth's theology. Barth does not accept what he calls Origen's "philosophical optimism", but at the same time he thinks that God's grace must be absolutely more powerful than any resistance.

Keywords: Apokatastasis, Grace, Philosophical optimism, Creation

A Gaia, per il passato e per il presente

Notably,¹ Karl Barth's theology – including his *magnus opus*, the unfinished *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932–1967) – does not contain a considerable number of Origen's quotations. Indeed, I have counted just 26 of them: not so many in a work of more than 9,000 pages, especially in relation to the 234 times he cites Luther, the 132 Augustin, and 396 times Calvin! Surely one cannot estimate an author's influence just by counting the quotations. Yet, Origen is quoted less, and occasionally, without a serious discussion of his theology. The only notion that attracts Barth's attention is the one of Christ as God's *autobasileia*. Particularly in the latest volumes of the *Dogmatik*, Barth quotes it more and more, suggesting agreement with Origen at least on this point. However, in my opinion, under the appearance of agreement lies a deep difference, as we shall see at the end of the present work.

The same goes for the concept of *Apokatástasis*. This word appears only four times, all of them in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1 – that is in the doctrine of God, while we would expect to find it in the doctrine of redemption. Anyway, Barth's discussion of the concept is far from clear. On the one hand he is attracted by this doctrine, because he does not see any possibility for objecting to it. On the other hand, though, he cannot subscribe to it. In his opinion, an evangelical theologian cannot affirm the *Apokatástasis panton*. Not because it is in itself false, but because it is an abstract concept that is assumed without taking Christ into consideration. In other words, *Apokatástasis* is a philosophico-anthropological doctrine, assumed by setting

1 See T. Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation. Restoring Particularity*, Oxford 2009.

aside God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and is therefore incompatible with God's freedom. *Apokatástasis* results from an historical-anthropological optimism, not from Christ. An evangelical theologian can neither affirm nor deny *Apokatástasis*, as it is an unsolvable mysterium. Only God knows it.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, Barth's radical Christo-centrism is the only basis of his Apokatastatistical theology. Let us consider the doctrine of creation, as it results from *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/1. Perhaps this is not Barth's most famous topic, yet it is emblematic. In the *Preface* Barth confesses the embarrassment he feels when dealing with it. I remember that in the first two parts of *Kirchliche Dogmatik* – the rightly famous *doctrines of the Word of God* and *of God* – he showed that God is not Unitarian but Trinitarian, knowable only by His revelation in Jesus Christ, and never by natural knowledge. In Barth's opinion the Thomistic doctrine of *analogia entis* – which is the philosophical basis of natural theology – is Antichrist's invention (and, incidentally, the only reason not to be catholic) because it denies that God is totally different from the world.² We know God only because he revealed himself through Jesus Christ; but in Jesus Christ God revealed himself as a Trinitarian God, that is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Who is the Father? In the doctrine of God, Barth affirms that the Father is the one who freely loves Jesus Christ, the one who has eternally elected Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ is eternally at the heart of God's life, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.³

In this way Barth designs a doctrine of God that is thoroughly Christ-centred; but what about the *doctrine of creation*? At first, it seemed reasonable to him to compare the Bible's witness with the discoveries of natural sciences.⁴ Which theologian, in effect, does not work in this way? Nowadays it's impossible to ignore the discoveries of natural sciences. However, Barth decided that an evangelic theology must be non-apologetic, i.e. any attempt to demonstrate that Christian faith is not in disagreement with natural sciences must be avoided *a priori*. Apologetic, in fact, is the attempt to demonstrate that Christian theology – in particular modern Protestant theology – does not disagree with (and perhaps supports) science and culture.⁵

2 See K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1: *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur Kirchliche Dogmatik*, München 1932.

3 See K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1: *Die Lehre vom Gott*, Zürich, 1940.

4 See K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/1: *Die Lehre vom der Schoepfung*, Zürich 1945.

5 See K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Zürich 1946. On the apologetic, see also: H. W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, edited by G. Hunsinger / W. C. Placher, New Haven and London 1992. See also: W. C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology. Christian voice in a Pluralistic Conversation*, Louisville, Kentucky 1989. See also: E. Cerasi, *Verso un'ermeneutica post-critica. L'influenza*

In any case, in Barth's opinion an apologetic theology contradicts God's revelations in Jesus Christ. It follows that an evangelic doctrine of creation must be based on the Christian (and in particular St. John's) *kerygma* of the creation of the World in Jesus Christ. Creation is not an act of God which is antecedent to and independent from Jesus Christ, as both the Fathers and the Reformers have taught. Rather, in Barth's opinion creation is the *conditio sine qua non* of the Covenant. For the Covenant between God and man to be possible, creation is necessary, because it is nothing but the *theatre* of the Covenant. It follows that it is impossible to conceive the World (that is the Being of philosophers) setting aside God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The consequences of this unusual doctrine emerge in a paragraph of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik: Got und das Nichtige*.⁶ What is *das Nichtige*? In which relation is it with God? In Barth's opinion, *das Nichtige* has no ontological independence; it has no reality but the negation which is a necessary part of God's "Yes" to the Covenant. Creation is God's "Yes", the Yes to the Covenant, but this amazing Yes has as necessary condition: a "No", that is, something which God does not want, a negation, a not-creating will! To create something he had to not-create, i.e. to leave in the Nothing the not-wanted. In other words, to will God had to refuse the not-wanted; to affirm, God had to deny – but this denial became dramatically real in human sin. Sin is an ontological contradiction because its content is Nothing, while Nothing is a *real* contradiction, and humans have become slaves of its paradoxical not-real reality.

Christ's cross is God's judgment about *das Nichtige* and therefore his final overcoming. *God's judgement!* Contrary to Heidegger and the twentieth century's existentialism, Barth affirms that *das Nichtige* is in first place God's problem and not a human one; indeed, God and not humans has overcome the Nothing in the cross and the resurrection of Christ. Since Christ is risen there is no place for this negation, for this paradoxical not-real reality.

Anyway, to understand the meaning of the cross we must go back to the doctrine of God, and in particular to the discussion of Calvin's doctrine of predestination.⁷ In my opinion, this is maybe the most absorbing part of *Die*

di Karl Barth sulla teologia post-liberale, Torino 2009. See also E. Cerasi, *Quale ermeneutica narrativa? La critica di Frei a Ricoeur*, in: «Protestantesimo» 62 (2007), 111–135.

6 See K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/3, Zürich, 1950, § 50: *Gott und das Nichtige*. There is an Italian translation of this paragraph: K. Barth, *Dio e il Niente*, ed. R. Celada Ballanti, Brescia 2000.

7 See K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/2, Zürich 1942, §§ 3235. There is an Italian translation of this part of the *Dogmatik*: K. Barth, *La dottrina dell'elezione divina. Dalla dogmatica ecclesiale di Karl Barth*, a cura di A. Moda, Torino 1983.

Kirchliche Dogmatik, and one of the major discussions of this topic. It is a notoriously controversial topic for modern thought. From Wesley to Kant, till Max Weber and beyond, moral responsibility – that is, one of the major achievements of western civilisation – has been considered incompatible with predestination. On the contrary, Barth thinks that in Calvin's opinion predestination is a way to guarantee God's freedom, that is, his free will, in the absence of which we necessarily get Hegelian absolute idealism.

In other words, Calvin just wanted to preserve God's freedom, because the Christian God is a God who has preferences and aversions. In Barth's opinion this is undeniable, but the point is to think of God's election Christologically. While Calvin explains – or better, he renounces explaining – God's election through the *ad hoc* hypothesis of an obscure and absolute decree of God which divides humans in elected and damned, Barth stresses that the *ratio* of election must be found in Jesus Christ, and only in him. Electing Jesus Christ, loving forever and ever the man Jesus, God has freely determined himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, the God who has freely and forever said "Yes" to Jesus Christ. In other words, there is no God but the God who elected Christ. And there is no elected but the man Jesus Christ. It is useless to look for the identity of the elected by using human reason to separate them from the damned. Puritans, who looked for signs of their own election in their conscience or in their economic success, have misunderstood the evangelic revelation. They looked for signs of the election in the wrong place. According to the evangelic witness, only Christ is the elected and the saint of God.

Nevertheless, as seen above, election needs a correspondent damnation. Electing Christ, God must damn. Contrary to the logic of § 55 about *Got un das Nichtige*, in this case the object of damnation is Jesus Christ himself. In Barth's opinion, Christ is the only elected and the only damned. The man beloved by God is the only one on whom the wrath of God fell down. A terrible wrath, really catastrophic, but suffered only by Christ. If Christ is the only man elected by God, he is the only damned too. There is no wrath of God but the cross of Christ.

Barth expounds his very radical opinion by means of a large number of biblical quotations, especially from the Old Testament. Yet in the present work I would like to stress the consequences of this unconventional theology. If in the cross and in the Eastern morning God revealed his overcoming of the Nothing, what about the sacred history, as it is witnessed by Scripture?

Contrary to what he wrote in the *Römerbrief*, in *die Kirchliche Dogmatik* Barth does not deny history.⁸ In his opinion, the election-damnation of Jesus

8 See E. Cerasi, *Il paradosso della grazia. La teo-antropologia di Karl Barth*, Prefazione di G. Lettieri, Roma 2006. See also E. Cerasi, *L'umanità di Israele*.

Christ implies the election-damnation of the community. Notice that there is just one community. According to Barth, there are not an old and a new Covenant (the Covenant is unique and undeniable because it is wanted by God); but there are two times: the time of waiting (for Christ) and the time of memory (of Christ). As the community of waiting, Israel is the first time; as the community of memory, the Church is the second time of God's people. Israel and the Church are the two *ecstasies* of the unique time of God.

It follows that Israel is elected not just as itself, but rather as people who wait for the event of Christ. Despite that, if this event were really *absolutus*, i.e. in no relation with anything, as it appears in the *Römerbrief*, it would be unconceivable. Instead, to be conceivable and therefore theological, it must have a time; but – as I said – not a past (as if Christ were not already present in Israel) but a waiting; and not a future (as if after his death and resurrection he were not still present) but a time of memory. Christ has neither a past nor a future, because there is no time in which he was not already present or a time in which he will not still be present; but there are – in Israel and in the Church – waiting and memory of Christ.

This is the paradoxical reasoning lying behind Israel's election: Israel has been elected as the time of waiting for the Christ. However, Israel itself could be damned if it aimed at taking possession of its election. If it were to "own" its election, it would lose its faith, as eventually happened. But, in Barth's opinion, according to *Rom.* 11 it is unconceivable that Israel remains in an endless incredulity. Why? Because the content of incredulity is... – *das Nichtige*, which has been overcome by God in the cross and in the resurrection of Christ. Israel's separation from the Covenant cannot be real: it has no real content; it is just an illusory appearance. In other words, even if Israel refused Christ, its refusal gains no reality after God overcomes *das Nichtige*, as the sin does not have any content left.

It is long-winded but not very difficult to apply this logic to human beings. Let us consider the case of Judas –⁹ the damned par excellence. Judas is the one who, according to all the Gospels, voluntarily refused the Lord's grace even if he too was sanctified during the Last Supper. He separated himself from Christ. Undoubtedly, he is the Traitor. Separated forever? On the basis of the previous considerations about the *Apokatastasis*, we should give no answer to this question. But Barth does answer! Who is Judas? He is defined by his actions, not by his "soul". Judas is the one who delivered Christ to

Note sulla teologia della storia di Karl Barth, «Il Pensiero. Rivista di filosofia», XLV, 1, (2006), 85–99.

9 See E. Cerasi, *Il paradosso di Giuda. L'altra faccia della teologia di Karl Barth*, in M. Marchetto (ed), *L'ira degli Dèi*, Venezia 2006, 141–158. See also Cerasi, 2006, 221–227.

the pagans, who in turn crucified him. Therefore, he is clearly a reprobate. Nevertheless, his action is the same and the opposite of that of Saint Paul. According to *1 Cor.* 11, Saint Paul too delivered Christ to the pagans – the same Christ who Judas delivered to the unbelievers. Hence Judas’ and Paul’s deliveries are opposite but specular actions.

Should we say that Judas and Paul are in a *complexio oppositorum* relation? Maybe, but I consider this concept somewhat “static” for describing Barthian theology. I prefer to say that Judas and Paul are two “shadows”, or better – as for the time of waiting and the time of memory – two ecstasies of the same event, the same delivery. Certainly, Judas’ is the action of one who is damned, whereas Paul’s is the action of a saint, even considering that Paul too was a persecutor of Christ before the Damascus revelation. According to the biblical narrative, it is impossible to separate their actions, for they are just two ecstasies of the same event. But theology does not just have a narrative rationale.¹⁰ One cannot differentiate Judas’ from Paul’s actions just because they are “shadows” of the first and amazing delivery: the one of God! According to *Rom.* 1, before Judas and Paul did it, God led humans to the sin, while according to *Rom.* 4, 28 God himself conducted his Son to die, overcoming in this way the first delivery. In other words, Judas’ and Paul’s actions are just shadows of the delivery by which God has overcome Sin and the Nothing.

In my opinion, this is the “literal” meaning of Barth’s discourse. It is not hard to see the consequences of this theology. Even if Barth does not say it, *Apokatástasis* is the meaning of what happened in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. Nothing escapes this event because Nothing itself is overcome by this event. Human incredulity is without content; it might be the case that there are men who imagine themselves to be without God, but there is surely no God without men.

If what we noticed in this work is true, why is Barth so cold about *Apokatástasis*? As we have seen, in his opinion it is more of a philosophical than theological concept, which is based on an anthropological optimism more than on God’s revelation in Christ. Nevertheless, we have seen that *Apokatástasis* is nothing but the consequence of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. Why, therefore, does Barth not subscribe to this doctrine?

10 On theology and narrative, see H. W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven and London 1974. See also H. W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, edited by William C. Placher / G. Hunsinger, New Haven and London 1993. See also: N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Toronto 2006.

Maybe Barth, becoming less paradoxical and more orthodox than in the *Römerbrief*, preferred to be more careful about topics as this one.¹¹ But actually he did not become less paradoxical and more orthodox!¹² In my opinion, the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* is as paradoxical as the *Römerbrief*. The consequence of God's revelation in Jesus Christ in the *Dogmatik* is maybe more radical than in the *Römerbrief*. Through the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God overcame the Nothing; secular history is nothing but the time of memory (sometime of the lack of memory!) of this event. Is it possible that Barth had felt a little bit of fear for his doctrine? Is it possible that with the denial of the *Apokatástasis* Barth was actually retracting his radical Christological theology?

I do not think so. Neither do I think that Origen's theology of *Apokatástasis* results from a historico-anthropological optimism and not from Christ, as Barth said. Instead, in Origen's theology the *Apokatástasis* arises from the firm belief that Christ's action is still in progress¹³ and the eternal Gospel is not already revealed. Contrary to this, Barth holds that since Christ is the eternal decision of God, the future is not "open", and it is not "opaque". In other words, in Barth's theology the future does not have any relevance for theology. If Christ really is the *autobasileia* of God, as Origen said, it is very difficult to still hold that revelation is in progress. One can struggle for political progress, or fight against Hitlerian totalitarianism,¹⁴ but one cannot think that God's decision is still open.

This is, I think, is the radical difference between Barth and Origen. Therefore, in Barth's terms we could say that Origen's theology is not Christological enough to be Apokastatic. Conversely, in Origen's opinion, *Apokatástasis* signifies that God's revelation in Christ did not yet express its true meaning. In other words, we can read Origen and Karl Barth as two different types of *Apokatástasis*. Barth's *Apokatástasis* depends on God's *once-and-for-all* decision in Jesus Christ; Origen's depends on an idea of cosmic

11 See H. U. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, Einsiedeln 1976.

12 See B. L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936*, Oxford 1995; see also G. Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace. Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Grand Rapids-Cambridge 1999.

13 See Lettieri, *Progresso*, 2000.

14 See D. Cornu, *Karl Barth et la Politique*, Genève, 1967. See also S. Rostagno (ed.), *Barth contemporaneo*, Torino 1990. See also E. Cerasi, "Più che leninismo". *Note sulla teologia politica di Karl Barth*, in: «Per la filosofia», XX, 57 (2003), 1–17. See also E. Cerasi, *Anarchismo nel cristianesimo? La voce di Karl Barth*, in: «Giornale critico di storia delle idee», eds. A. Tagliapietra / S. Ghisu, 4 (2011), 31–51.

progress toward the universal salvation, which implies the development of revelation. In short, we can express Origen's point of view through the following words, taken from one of Newman's sermons:

Scripture, I say, begins a series of developments which it does not finish; that is to say, in other words, it is a mistake to look for every separate proposition of the Catholic doctrine in Scripture. [...] For instance, the Athanasian Creed professes to lay down the right faith, which we must hold on its most sacred subjects, in order to be saved. This must mean that there is one view concerning the Holy Trinity, or concerning the Incarnation, which is true, and distinct from all others; one definite, consistent, entire view, which cannot be mistaken, not contained in any certain number of propositions, but held as a view by a believing mind, and not held but denied by Arians, Sabellians [...] and other heretics. That idea is not enlarged, if propositions are added, nor impaired if they are withdrawn: if they are added, this is with a view of conveying that one integral view, not of amplifying it. That view does not depend on such propositions: it does not consist in them; they are but specimens and indications of it. And they may multiply without limit. [...] The question, then, is not whether this or that proposition of the Catholic doctrine is *in terminis* in Scripture, unless we would be slaves to the letter, but whether that one view of the Mystery, of which all such are the exponents, be not there [...]. One thing alone has to be impressed on us by Scripture, the Catholic idea, and in it all are included.¹⁵

Certainly, Barth did not want to be a slave of the letter. Scripture is nothing but the exponent of the God's decision, revealed once and for all in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While for Origen the meaning of Christ is still progress until *Apokatástasis panton*, for Barth *Apokatástasis* is the *once and for all* revealed in Christ.

15 John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford*, in John H. Newman, *Scritti filosofici*, ed. M. Marchetto, Milan 2005, 602–604.

Elisa Zocchi

Origen as Hegel: The Notion of *Aufhebung* in Balthasar's Interpretation of Origen

Abstract: In his works, Hans Urs von Balthasar traces a parallelism between Origen's and Hegel's theological synthesis based on the idea of sublation (*Aufhebung*). Two notions are pivotal for him: spirit and progress. For each of them, Balthasar gives two possible interpretations that bring Origen closer or farther from Hegel.

Keywords: *Aufhebung*, Spirit, Hegel, Titanism

1. Introduction

In 1938 Hans Urs von Balthasar published an anthology that clearly presents Origen as a master of spiritual life, titled *Spirit and Fire*.¹ *Spirit and Fire* itself is the narration of the soul's spiritual progress towards God, "a suggestive anthology of many short Origenian passages put together, arbitrarily but genially, in order to describe the phases and the development of spiritual life".² In 1936, three years before the publication of *Spirit and Fire*, Balthasar had already published the long essay *Le Mysterion d'Origène*, presenting a reading of Origen in sacramental terms.³ In this short but dense essay, Balthasar discovers a parallelism between the Alexandrian and Hegel. Both Origen and Hegel are fundamental names in the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar, as will become evident later in his production. As for Origen, Balthasar says that "I never feel so at home elsewhere as I do with him"⁴; Origen is "the most sovereign spirit of the first centuries, who has set

1 Von Balthasar, 1984.

2 M. Simonetti, *La teologia dei padri*, in: G. Canobbio / P. Coda (ed), *La teologia del XX secolo – un bilancio. Prospettive storiche*, Roma 2003, 359–389 (375) n. 67. Simonetti also worked on an anthology which, similarly to Balthasar's *Spirit and Fire*, presents the Origenian idea of the soul's journey to God: M. Simonetti / G. Bonfrate / P. Boitani, *Il viaggio dell'anima*, Milano 2007.

3 H. U. von Balthasar, *Le Mysterion d'Origène (I)*, in: *Recherche de Science Religieuse* 26, no. 5 (1936) 513–562, here 553; H. U. von Balthasar, *Le Mysterion d'Origène (II)*, in: *Recherche de Science Religieuse* 27, no. 1 (1937) 38–64. This will be collected in 1957 in one volume, without modifications: H. U. von Balthasar, *Parole et Mystère chez Origène*, Paris 1957.

4 "Origenes bleibt für mich der genialste, der weiträumigste Ausleger und Liebhaber des Wortes Gottes." H. U. von Balthasar, *Geist und Feuer. Michael Albus: Ein*

his mark for good or ill on the totality of Christian theology,”⁵ “the most inspired, the most wide-ranging interpreter and lover of the Word of God.”⁶ Balthasar admits *Spirit and Fire* to be “the weightiest (book) of all I have published”⁷ and the book that “gives me greatest joy.”⁸ Despite many critiques, it has been widely demonstrated that Hegel is one of the most present names in Balthasar’s work and a constant term of comparison for his theology.⁹ Years after his studies of the Alexandrian, Balthasar acknowledges the strong connection between the two thinkers: “Origen, who was for me, as once for Erasmus, more important than Augustine, became the key to the entire Greek patristics, the early Middle Ages and, indeed, even to Hegel and Karl Barth.”¹⁰ How is Origen a resource to understand Hegel? The key to this statement is offered by the *Epilogue to Le Mysterion d’Origène*, the only

Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar, in H. U. von Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, Einsiedeln 2000², 103–132 (131).

- 5 “Ein anderer Freund, Henri de Lubac, wies auf die Alexandriner, und so kam, dass ich Origenes fand und staunend in ihm den überlegensten Geist der ersten Jahrhunderte erkannte, der die ganze christliche Theologie im Besten wie im Schlimmen gestempelt hat; eine Auswahl, die ich nicht anders nennen konnte als Geist und Feuer, sollte sein inneres Bild in seiner ganzen verwegenen Höhe neu erstehen lassen, und dies wenig erkannte Buch scheint mir noch heute das gewichtvollste von allem, was ich vorlegen konnte.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, 2000, 10–11; eng. tr. H. U. von Balthasar, *My Work. In retrospect*, San Francisco 1993, 11.
- 6 “Nirgends ist mir so wohl wie bei ihm.” von Balthasar, 2000, 131.
- 7 Cfr. n. 5.
- 8 von Balthasar, 1993, 108–109. “Wurde ich gefragt, an welchen von meinen eigenen Büchern ich am meisten Freude habe, welche ich vielleicht zuweil noch in die Hand nehme, so wäre die Antwort: sicher meine Origenes-Auswahl Geist und Feuer, denn in Origenes erkannte ich jene Genialität für das Katholische, der ich nachstreben möchte.” von Balthasar, 2000, 92.
- 9 As an example, Hegel is mentioned 280 times just in Balthasar’s trilogy (115 times in *Herrlichkeit*, 115 times in *Theodramatik* and 50 in *Theologik*). “From his first book to his last, von Balthasar thinks eye to eye with Hegel.” P. Henrici, *Zur Philosophie Hans Urs von Balthasars*, in K. Lehmann-W. Kasper (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Gestalt und Werk*, Köln 1989, 25–85; Eng. tr. *Hans Urs von Balthasar. His life and work*, San Francisco 1991 (157). The most recent contribution on this is C. O’Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity. Volume 1: Hegel*, Chestnut Ridge 2014. See also S. Zucal, *L’interpretazione teologica di Hegel nel primo Balthasar*, «Filosofia oggi» 3 [1985], 523–548; id. *L’ambiguità prometeica dell’escatologia hegeliana nell’interpretazione teologica di H. U. von Balthasar*, in: *Verifiche* 14, no. 2–3 (1985): 211–256.
- 10 “Origenes (für mich, wie einst für Erasmus, wichtiger als Augustinus) wurde zum Schlüssel für die ganze griechische Patristik, das Frühmittelalter, bis ja hin zu

text where Balthasar exposes a detailed connection between the two thinkers. The text is dense and synthetic, but allows for a complete understanding of the link between these fundamental thinkers for Balthasar. Specifically, the parallelism is drawn in *Le Mystèrien d'Origène* on the term *Aufhebung*. In this contribution I will present the meaning this term assumes, for Balthasar, in the thought of Origen. Balthasar's understanding of *Aufhebung* (translated in the English edition as "sublation") revolves around two fundamental notions: spirit and progress. These two terms are pivotal in the thought of both Origen and Hegel, and it is on these two fundamental ideas that Balthasar draws his analysis. Two interpretations of each notion can be drawn in Balthasar's work.

There are two possible interpretations of the notion of spirit, the first being Titanism (I1), and the second what Balthasar calls "the law of love" (I2).

- (I1) Titanism: the difference between the spirit of man and the spirit of God is not clearly formulated; Origen did not allow the Logos to be Logos but reduced him to the Pnuma; the goal of man is therefore to fight, as the Titans did, to win the lost condition of gods.
- (I2) The law of love: in Origen's words on God's sacrifice for humanity, Balthasar sees the overcoming of Titanism. Spirit is not conceived in a tragic, dualistic way, but rather as the divine gift of love through Christ.

A useful resource to understand Balthasar's reflections on spirit is his interpretation of Maximus the Confessor as a "corrective" to Origen. For Balthasar, Maximus' reflection on movement solves the problematic risk of Titanism ran by Origen.

The issue of movement introduces Balthasar's reflection on the notion of progress, to which he gives two possible interpretations:

- (I1) Temporal progress: the pilgrimage of the soul on earth will end with death and judgment; in the final condition there is no movement and progress anymore.
- (I2) Eternal progress: in the final condition progress and movement remain present, although in a non-material form.

Reflecting on the idea of spiritual and ontological progress in Origen, I will present these two interpretations as Balthasar exposes them. A useful resource to understand the notion of progress is Balthasar's interpretation of Joachim of Fiore.

Hegel und Karl Barth." H. U. von Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk*, 2000, 76; eng. tr. *My work*, 1993, 89.

At the end of the exposition of the notions of spirit and of progress and of their two possible interpretations, I will delve into the tension itself between I1 and I2. This tension is visible not only in Origen but also in Balthasar himself, who does not seem willing to let the tension be simply solved by choosing a more “Hegelian” or less “Hegelian” Origen.

2. *Aufhebung*: The Shared Achievements

If one must pass a critical judgment of the whole of his [scil. Origen’s] theological synthesis (...) we are tempted to compare it to that of Hegel, whose advantages as well as whose dangers it seems to share. The idea of superseding, *Aufhebung*, seems to us to be the nerve-centre of the two systems. With both authors, an obscurity is refracted which is not accidental: the restoration of the world in God, of what is material in what is spiritual, of symbol in truth, is the restitution of the original state. Origen gives this cyclic movement an expression which is wholly mythical and metaphorical; Hegel gives it a construction which is wholly intellectual. But the basic idea has not changed.¹¹

The first common feature between Origen and Hegel is the idea of the eschatological condition as the restitution of an original state. More than this lies, however, behind the *Aufhebung*. *Aufhebung* means superseding the original condition by reaching a higher state that however still contains what is superseded. Balthasar uses the example of the flesh in Origen: the flesh is only a moment in the circular movement of eternity, a step. Nevertheless, the flesh is not completely eliminated, exactly as the New Testament is not simply spiritual, *contra* the letter of the Old Testament; rather it is the letter pervaded with spirit. The question therefore becomes whether the material, the letter, is overthrown or upheld. To find an answer we can move to the other occurrences of the term *Aufhebung* in Balthasar’s work on Origen.

The term appears two times in *Spirit and Fire* and twice in Balthasar’s personal notes.¹² The first occurrence is in section II – *Word*, chapter *Word*

11 von Balthasar, 1957², 113. “S’il fallait porter un jugement critique sur l’ensemble de cette synthèse théologique, - synthèse, du reste, trop schématique, trop rigide, nous en convenons, pour l’esprit mobile d’Origène, - nous serions tenté de la comparer à celle de Hegel, dont elle semble partager les avantages mais aussi les dangers. L’idée de *Aufhebung* nous semble le nerf des deux systèmes. Chez les deux auteurs, une obscurité non accidentelle s’y reflète: la restitution du monde en Dieu, du matériel dans le spirituel, du symbole dans sa vérité, est la restitution de l’état primitif. Origène donne de ce mouvement cyclique une expression toute mythique et imagée, Hegel une construction tout intellectuelle. Mais l’idée de fond ne varie pas.”

12 I express much gratitude to the Balthasar’s Archive in Basel, especially to Claudia Müller, who allowed me to have access to and work on the preparatory material to *Origenes. Geist und Feuer*.

as *Flesh*, in the last paragraph, entitled *The law of sublation* (*Das Gesetz der Aufhebung*). The second occurrence is in section III – *Spirit*, chapter *Life in the spirit*, first paragraph (*The Spiritual God*).

3. The Law of Sublation

The whole objective salvation-historical event: the incarnation of the WORD in scripture, in Christ and in his mystical body, the Church, stands under the same formal basic law which is set forth here (in the Hegelian double meaning) as sublation [*Aufhebung*]. In the creaturely bipolarity of image and truth, the fundamental movement goes from the first to the second, from body to spirit. But this takes place in such a way that the bodily image is both broken off and preserved. Origen consistently expresses this event in the image of shining upon and being shone upon. Old and new covenant, above all Moses and Christ, as well as John and Christ stand in this relationship; but also the earthly Christ and the eternal Christ, indeed the earthly Christ and the Church (to the extent that its fate is symbolically represented in the life of Christ), and finally, the whole earthly salvation event (Moses-Christ-Church) and the eschatological, otherworldly, fulfilling event.¹³

Aufhebung is described as the formal basic law of Origen's salvation-history, and therefore of incarnation. *Aufhebung* describes in fact the movement from the body to the spirit, from image to truth. This is not a simple overcoming: the body/image is both broken off and preserved in the spirit/truth. Here we find the answer to the previous question: the material world is not simply overthrown but upheld. As a way of example, Balthasar quotes Origen's *Commentary to Romans* 3,2: "No one of the saints nor the Lord himself destroys the law; rather its temporal and transient glory is destroyed and superseded by the eternal and perduring glory." In virtue of this

13 von Balthasar, 1984, 175. "Das Gesetz der Aufhebung. Das gesamte objective heilsgeschichtliche Geschehen: die 'Inkarnation' des WORTES in der Schrift, in Christus und in Seinem mystischen Leibe, der Kirche, steht unter die gleichen formalen Grundgesetze, das hier als 'Aufhebung' (im Hegelschen Doppelsinn) herausgestellt wird. In der geschöpflichen Doppelpoligkeit von Gleichnis und Wahrheit geht die Grundbewegung vom ersten zum zweiten, vom Körper zum Geist. Dies aber so, dass das körperliche Gleichnis zugleich abgebrochen wird und bewahrt bleibt. Origenes drückt dieses Geschehen durchgehends im Bild des Überstrahlens und Überstrahlterwerdens aus. In diesem Verhältnisse stehen Alter Bund und Neuer Bund, vor allem Moses und Christus, Johannes und Christus. Aber auch der irdische Christus und die Kirche (sofern deren Schicksal gleichnishaft im Leben Christi dargestellt wurde), endlich das gesamte irdische Heilsgeschehen (Moses-Christus-Kirche) und das eschatologische, jenseitige, erfüllende Geschehen." von Balthasar, 1938, 254 f.

preservation we can speak of progress in Origen – otherwise we would have a mere repetition of the beginning with no progress at all. The circularity of the system tracked by Balthasar lies indeed in this *Aufhebung*: the movement is “forwards” and not simply “back”.

Balthasar’s recognition of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is visible also in his interest for the Origenian topic of the spiritual senses and spiritual body. In the eschatological condition the level of the letter/body is not simply physically lost, but spiritually elevated. The *Aufhebung* is therefore spiritual, not ontological: the letter is elevated, not annihilated.

A confirmation of the importance of the *Aufhebung* is found in the drafts in preparation to *Spirit and Fire*. In the aforementioned chapter *Word as Flesh*, the very first section is *Christ*. This is once again divided into sections; the first is *Old covenant and new covenant*, divided into two parts: *Demolition of what was preliminary* (*Abbruch des Vorläufigen*) and *The definitive in what was preliminary* (*Das Engültige im Vorläufigen*). The titles of these sections in the draft are indeed, respectively, *Negativ der Aufhebung* and *Positiv der Aufhebung*. In the section on the negative – i.e. on what is overthrown – Balthasar claims that “all the embodiment of the Word in scripture is only preparation for his incarnation in the flesh”. In this sense, Christ is not utterly a fulfilment of the Old Testament, but also a “rejection of the people’s servitude to the letter.”¹⁴ The passages then quoted are texts on the letter being broken, on the passage to spirit (HLv 2,2), and on Christ who “destroys what seemed great on earth, and transferred the worship of God from the visible to the invisible” (HNm 23,1).

In the section on the positive of *Aufhebung* Balthasar then shows that the fulfilment is more than just rejection or destruction. The “definitive in what was preliminary” implies that already the preliminary itself has a definitive aspect, and it is destined somehow to remain.

But in the very demolition, the eternal form of the law comes to the fore. This form is so much taken up with pointing to Christ and educating to him that the order of salvation itself encompasses and contains both. Law is thus understood as in transition, but can be brought to completion only through Christ. In Christ, the dead letter has become thundering word, Moses and Elias take up into him. Christ, in fulfilling the types, is only taking back what is his own: even the just ones of the old covenant are already members of his mystical body.¹⁵

14 von Balthasar, 1984, 113. “Das ganze Verleibung des WORTS in der Schrift ist nur Wegbereitung Seiner Menschwerdung im Fleische. [...] Christus ist nicht nur Erfüllung als Überholung des Gleichnisses, sondern Erfüllung als Verwerfung des buchstabendienenden Volkes.” von Balthasar, 1938, 173.

15 von Balthasar, 1984, 117. “Aber im Abbruch selbst tritt die Ewigkeitsgestalt des Gesetzes hervor. Diese Gestalt hat es in seiner Hinweisbeziehung zu Christus, als Erziehung zu Ihm in, so sehr, dass die Heilsordnung beides umspannt und in sich

Through Christ, the Old Testament and the entire order of salvation are not simply destroyed, but contained and brought “back” to him. Balthasar reports passages on the transfiguration (HLv 6,2; CMt 12,43), where Origen explains the presence of Moses and Elias in the glory of Christ as the inclusion and elevation of the law in the revelation. These passages show what Balthasar considers an achievement of both Origen and Hegel: the idea of progress as preservation of what is upheld and not as merely surpassing something negative.

4. Life in the Spirit

We can now move to the second occurrence, in the following section (*III – Spirit*).

Jesus said, if I do not go away, the Holy Spirit will not come to you. If the whole sense-perceivable and sacramental salvation-event does not get “sublated” [*aufgehoben*], it has failed to fulfil its purpose, namely, to be internalized as life within souls. This internal appropriating of the revelation of the WORD as SPIRIT is the re-forming of a sinful, fleshly human being into a temple of God the Father.

Only in Christianity did it become clear what it really means to say God is a Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the heart of the mystery of the Christian idea of God: Spirit as person. The Holy Spirit is a co-agent in the salvation-event and dispenses grace.

This is a straightening up of the warped human being, entrance into God’s intimacy, inner life, prayer, divine wisdom, that union with God whose first fruit was Christ, guaranty of beatitude.

Everywhere then, as in Paul, Irenaeus, Justin, and most of the theologians before Origen, as a result of the theory of the triple division of the human being, the Holy Spirit and the human spirit overlap without sharp boundaries. Now Origen did expressly emphasize their difference. However, the idea of grace as a participation of the human spirit in the divine and as a living indwelling of the divine in the human spirit makes this border fluid. That is why Origen and the majority of the great Greek Fathers speak so often of “divinization”.¹⁶

fasst. Gesetz wird also begriffen um Übergehen, dies aber kann nur durch Christus vollzogen werden. In Christus ist der tote Buchstabe tönendes Wort geworden, Moses und Elias in Ihn hinein vergangen. Christus nimmt, indem Er die Sinnbilder erfüllt, damit nur das Seine in Sich zurück: durch die Gerechten des Alten Bundes sind schon Glieder Seines mystischen Leibes.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Geist und Feuer*, 1938, 179.

16 von Balthasar, 1938, 183. “Jesus hat gesagt: Wenn ich nicht hingehe, so wird der Heilige Geist nicht zu euch kommen. Wenn das gesamte sinnbildliche und sakramentale Heilsgeschehen nicht aufgehoben wird, dann hat es seinen Sinn nicht erfüllt: sich als Leben in den Seelen zu verinnerlichen. Diese innere Aneignung der Offenbarung des WORTES als GEIST ist die Umbildung des sündigen, fleischlichen Menschen zu einem Tempel Gottes des Vaters. Der folgende Teil schildert diese Neugestaltung in ihrem Werden und ihren Stufen, der Schlußteil (“Gott”)

In this passage Balthasar clearly recognises that the purpose of the entire worldly history of salvation is to be upheld and finally internalised within the soul.¹⁷ We reach one of the fundamental elements of Origen's thought, the idea of divinisation: the internal appropriation of the revelation makes the human being a temple of the spirit.

After this first overture on the occurrences of *Aufhebung* in Balthasar's texts on Origen, we can delve into its use, specifically in the understanding of two concepts: spirit and progress. Both notions present a tension in Origen that Balthasar addresses in the above mentioned *Epilogue of Le Mysterion d'Origène*. Starting from the notion of spirit, I will present the two elements in tension, in order then to show how the same tension is mirrored in the issue of progress. I will call the first element of the tension I1 and the second I2.

5. The Notion of Spirit

The Shared Risks: Titanism and Daimonic Struggle (I1)

The "overlapping" of Holy and human spirit is one of the most complex doctrines in Origen's theology, which Balthasar oversimplifies with "Origen did expressly emphasize the difference."¹⁸ In the very same passage, however, he also acknowledges that "the idea of grace as a participation of the human spirit in the divine and as a living indwelling of the divine in the human spirit makes this border fluid."¹⁹ Later in time, he similarly acknowledges

wird das Eintreten der Seele in das Reich GOTTES, des Vaters, beschreiben. Erst im Christentum wurde offenbar, was das wirklich heißt: Gott ist ein Geist. Der Heilige Geist ist das Herzgeheimnis der christlichen Gottesidee: Geist als Person. Der Heilige Geist wirkt mit beim Erlösungsgeschehen und spendet die Gnade. Diese ist Aufrichtung des verkrümmten Menschen, Eintritt in die Vertraulichkeit Gottes, inneres Leben, Gebet, göttliche Weisheit, jene Einigung mit Gott, deren Erstling Christus war, Pfand der Seligkeit. Überall also gehen, wie schon bei Paulus, Irenäus, Justin und den meisten Theologen vor Origenes, infolge der Lehre von der Dreiteilung des Menschen, der Heilige Geist und der Menscheng Geist ohne starre Grenze ineinander über. Zwar hat Origenes ausdrücklich ihre Unterscheidung betont. Aber die Idee der Gnade als Teilnahme des menschlichen Geistes am Göttlichen und als lebendige Einwohnung des Göttlichen im menschlichen Geiste macht diese Grenze gleichsam flüssig. Darum spricht Origenes und die Mehrzahl der großen griechischen Väter so oft von 'Vergottung'." von Balthasar, 1938, 265 f.

17 All the passages quoted in this section are on the line of the famous Origenian statement "what good is it to me if the Word comes to dwell in the world, but I have no part in him?"

18 Cfr. n.16.

19 Cfr. n.16.

the overlapping of divine and human spirit as a shared risk between Origen and Hegel: “Hegel did not permit the Spirit to be Spirit: he reduced him to the Logos, just as Origen did not allow the Logos to be Logos but reduced him to the Pneuma.”²⁰ For Balthasar, this fluid notion of spirit is the first risk shared by Origen and Hegel. The fluid and loose border between human and divine spirit in both Origen and Hegel produces the transformation of the idea of spiritual progress into what Balthasar calls Titanism. Titanism is the most important element behind the risks shared by Origen and Hegel in Balthasar’s “genealogical” approach to the notion of spirit.

In Origen’s cosmology, man acquires a body as a consequence of the fall. In this sense, the earthly life is described by Balthasar, following Maximus the Confessor, with the term *πεῖρα*.

The metaphysics of Origen’s *On First Principles* was a metaphysics of *πεῖρα*: a necessary, if also painful, ‘experience’ of sin and distance from God. This seemed to be the only way to imbue the soul with enough of a sense of dependency, and of longing for the lost blessings it once had, to prevent it - at least for a long time - from falling away from God again. We have shown elsewhere how much this theory is influenced by Origen’s intellectualism and from the old Platonic tradition of the daimons.²¹

Balthasar is referring to the epilogue of *Le Mysterion d’Origène*, where he tracks the common feature at the basis of the idea of *Aufhebung* in both Origen and Hegel: the Greek daimon. In both systems “something of the Greek daimon survives: the struggle and its beauty have an absolute value. So, the world and God remain in a secret but tragic opposition.”²² “Over and over, down to Hegel and Bardjaev, this speciously deep thought was

20 “Aber Hegel hat den Geist nicht Geist sein lassen, sondern ihn auf den Logos reduziert, ähnlich wie Origenes den Logos nicht Logos sein ließ, sondern ihn auf das Pneuma reduzierte.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, Einsiedeln 1988, 104; eng. tr. *Explorations in Theology III – Creator Spirit*, San Francisco 1993, 115.

21 von Balthasar, 2003, 129. “Die Metaphysik des Peri Archon war in der Tat eine Metaphysik der *πεῖρα*, das heißt der notwendigen, wenn auch schmerzlichen ‘Erfahrung’ der Sünde und der Gottferne. Nur so schien eine genügende Anhänglichkeit und Sehnsucht nach dem verlassenen Urguten der Seele eingeflößt werden zu können, die sie – wenigstens für lange – vor einem erneuten Abfall von Gott zu bewahren vermöchte. Wir zeigten anderswo, wie sehr diese Lehre vom Intellektualismus Origenes’ und von alter platonischer Dämonie beeinflusst ist.” von Balthasar, ³1988, 125.

22 “[...] survit quelque chose du *δαίμων* grec pour qui la lutte et sa beauté ont un sens absolu, pour qui donc le monde et Dieu doivent rester en une secrète mais tragique opposition.” von Balthasar, 1957, 114.

to haunt Christian metaphysics: that love without pain and guilt remains simply a joke, a game.”²³

What does Balthasar mean with *Greek daimon*? The main feature of this “old Platonic tradition” is for Balthasar the reduction of the notion of eros. Movement is thought of as the attempt to overcome the distance between subject and object without any acceptance of this distance as positively given. This distance is not given by a creator, and therefore valuable in and of itself, but rather something to eliminate with human strength, through the pain of the ascent. The connection between spiritualism and Titanism is clear: if the divine and human spirits are identical, man is nothing else than a *göttliche Funke*, as Balthasar elsewhere recognises in Origenism.²⁴ In this sense, the love for God is nothing else than a struggle to go back to an original, lost condition of Gods – exactly as the Titans. The struggle assumes an absolute value, rather than being only a medium to reach God. Balthasar elsewhere accuses Origen of Titanism:

Origen, who otherwise can look right into the eye and the heart of scriptural texts with incomparable candor, not uncommonly, before the decisive words about the “folly of the cross”, the “helplessness” and the “weakness” of the Christian, begins to blink and squint. For, like so many today, *he confuses in the end the heroic and the Christian*. The heroic is an exalted form of the natural virtue; the Christian, however, is the supernatural form of the death and resurrection of Christ extended to the whole natural world of values.²⁵

The categories of “Titanism” and “heroic” point to the same features – the reduction of the supernatural intervention of God and the principle of human virtue as the only element at play in the divinisation of man. Balthasar’s reference to “so many today” provides evidence to the legitimacy of the

23 von Balthasar, 2003, 130. “Immer wieder, bis auf Hegel und Bardjajew, wird dieser schein tiefe Gedanke in der christlichen Metaphysik sein Wesen treiben, dass die Liebe ohne Schmerz und Schuld nur ein Scherz und ein Spiel bleibe.” von Balthasar, 1988, 125.

24 H. U. von Balthasar, *Patristik, Scholastik und wir*, in: *Theologie der Zeit 1939* n.3, 65–104 (70); eng. tr. H. U. von Balthasar, *The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves*, in: *Communio* 1997, 347–396 (354).

25 H. U. von Balthasar, *Spirit and Fire*, 1984, 18, italics added. “Origenes, der sonst mit unvergleichlichem Freimut den Schrifttexten ins Auge und ins Herz zu schauen weiß, beginnt nicht selten vor den entscheidenden Worten von der ‘Torheit des Kreuzes’, der ‘Ohnmacht’ und ‘Schwäche’ des Christen, gleichsam zu blinzeln und zu schielen. Denn wie heute so manche verwechselt er im Letzten das Heldische und das Christliche. Das Heldische ist ein erhabener natürlicher Tugendwert, das Christliche dagegen ist die über die ganze natürliche Wertewelt gebreitere übernatürliche Form des Todes und der Auferstehung Christi”. H. U. von Balthasar, *Geist und Feuer*, 1938, 37.

connection between “Titanism” and “heroic”. If we look at Balthasar’s production in this time, we will notice that in 1937, exactly between the publication of *Le Mysterion d’Origène* and *Geist und Feuer*, Balthasar publishes the first volume of his revised and expanded doctoral dissertation on the eschatological principle in German culture: *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*.²⁶ In 1947, the same work will be edited again with no changes in content but with a different, significant title - *Prometheus. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*.²⁷ The myth of Prometheus is fundamental to understanding Balthasar’s approach to idealism and especially to Hegel, “Schlußgestalt der Prometheus-Welt.”²⁸ The fact that Balthasar, writing on Origen, refers to the heroic, proves that the connection between these two interests of his study is more than merely chronological. If we examine a later definition of Titanism, it becomes even clearer:

In all forms of Titanism, ultimately, the person is sacrificed. This is also what happens in Hegel, even though in him alone reason and spirit remain the all-embracing reality. Hegel is able to describe in the most graphic terms the lower level of individual existence, of the subjective spirit linked to a body, of the heart with its anticipatory intimations, of a consciousness initially imprisoned within itself; but in the end, after all, the individual standpoint must be abandoned, for reconciliation is brought about by the objective Spirit, and it allows no absolute claims to challenge the all-embracing reality. The claim of the individual man, Jesus Christ, cannot be ultimate in the Hegelian system but only symbolic. But the principle of the system itself is drawn from Johannine theology.²⁹

26 H. U. von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*. Bd. I: *Der deutsche Idealismus*, Salzburg 1937.

27 H. U. von Balthasar, *Prometheus. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*, Heidelberg 1947. A third edition is edited by Johannes Verlag in 1998.

28 H. U. von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*. Bd. I: *Der deutsche Idealismus*, Einsiedeln³1998, 611.

29 H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*. Vol. 2. *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, San Francisco 1990, 423. “In allen Formen des Titanismus wird in letzter Folge die Person geopfert. Sie zerglüht im Bauch des Moloch des Absoluten, mag dieser der Wille oder das Leben oder der Tod sein. Sie zerglüht auch bei Hegel, dem als einzigem die Vernunft, der Geist, das Umfassende bleibt. Hegel kann die unteren Stufen des individuellen Daseins, des leibverbundenen subjektiven Geistes, des Herzens mit seinen antezipierenden Ahnungen, des zunächst in sich selbst gefangenen Bewußtseins aufs anschaulichste beschreiben, aber schließlich muß der Einzelstandpunkt doch aufgegeben werden, der objektive Geist ist das Versöhnende, der keine Absolutheitsansprüche dem Umfassenden gegenüber duldet. Der Anspruch des einzelnen Menschen Jesus Christus kann in Hegelschen System kein endgültiger, sondern nur ein symbolischer sein. Aber das Systemprinzip ist aus johanneischer Theologie hergeleitet.” H. U. von

The same is stated in *Apokalypse I*, where Balthasar, analysing the kind of unity brought by the Spirit, claims that in Hegel this unity is given by knowledge, in an openly Titanic way. It is important to understand Balthasar's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy as a speculative Valentinian gnosis, which he derives from Baur.³⁰ It is exactly this Gnosticism that brings Origen closer to Hegel in Balthasar's reading. In fact, Balthasar considers Hegelian metaphysics under three genealogical categories: Neo-Platonic (in its Proclean form), apocalyptic (in its Joachimist form), and Gnostic (in its Valentinian form). These genealogical categories "are used to describe German Idealism and its theological trajectory which, for Balthasar, functions as a major derailment of Christian theology precisely because it seems to be so respectful to Christianity and to speak its language so well."³¹ It is of primary importance to notice that these elements appear in a very similar shape in Balthasar's consideration of Origen – in both their positive and in their problematic features. I will show Balthasar's admission of a possible Joachimite reading of Origen's eschatology of progress – and how Balthasar characterises Joachimism as a pneumatic, "Jewish-Gentile" form of Gnosticism.³² Furthermore, much could be said about the idealistic reading of Neo-Platonism popular in France in the years of Balthasar's formation, the major example being Émile Bréhier. As for Gnosticism, Balthasar's reading of the intellectualistic and Titanic tendency in Origen's concept of progress is clearly connected to his consideration of a certain gnostic tendency.

We can now move a step further in the analysis of *Aufhebung*. Behind the idea of a synthesis that is never to be reached is for Balthasar the concept of movement. This consideration is drawn in comparison with Maximus

Balthasar, *Theodramatik. Bd. II: Die Personen des Spiels, 1. Teil: Der Mensch in Gott*, Einsiedeln 1976, 388. Interestingly, Balthasar affirms: "such a principle is unknown in the ancient world. (...) The Faustian, Promethean attitude, which dominates the Age of Idealism, draws its nourishment from the anthropological heightening of tension introduced by Christianity". Ibi, 421. "Ein solches Prinzip ist der alten Welt unbekannt. (...) Das Faustisch-Prometheische, dass das Zeitalter des Idealismus beherrscht, zehrt von den anthropologischen Überspannungen, die das Christentum eingeführt hat." H. U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik. Bd. II: Die Personen des Spiels, 1. Teil: Der Mensch in Gott*, Einsiedeln 1976, 386.

30 C. O'Regan, *Balthasar and Gnostic genealogy*, in: *Modern Theology* 22/4 (2006), 609–650; id., *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, Albany 2001; id., *Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology*, in: *Gregorianum* 77/2 (1996), 227–260.

31 O'Regan, 2006, 624 f. O'Regan then asks whether one of these categories is "more disclosive, more alethic"; his answer will be Gnosticism.

32 H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. Vol. 4. The Action*, Einsiedeln 1994, 446.

the Confessor, who strongly criticises the spiritualism accepted by many Origenists. The reasons behind the choice of looking at Maximus are two. First, in the chapter of the *Kosmische Liturgie* Balthasar once again openly relates Origen and Hegel. Secondly, the pivotal points of this connection are the issues of spirit and progress.

6. A Useful Resource: Maximus the Confessor in the *Kosmische Liturgie*

While motion, for Origen, *rested completely on the creature's undetermined freedom of will*, and while this freedom, due to its extreme instability, was *doomed to plunge the creature sooner or later into sin*, for Maximus motion is fundamentally an orientation of nature, which as such is good. The freedom of the creature is no longer *elevated to some quasi-divine height and left there completely by itself*; it rests on the solid base of nature, whose previously indicated direction it simply has to realize for itself.³³

Balthasar considers motion, in Origen, as a concept associated only to the creature's undetermined freedom of will. This freedom is unstable because of a weak orientation of nature towards the good. Or, we could say, in light of what he stated on Titanism, it is because of the victory of the *Greek daimonic* over goodness in itself. In this interpretation of the spirit, God and the world (i.e. the pre- and post-lapsarian conditions) are dialectically opposed: the pre-lapsarian condition seems to be fully known as good only in virtue of the post-lapsarian painful experience. Therefore, the current earthly condition is only dialectically established from the thesis as a result of the freedom of choice of the rational creature. Balthasar quotes Maximus's famous critique of Origenism in a passage that clearly focuses on this point:

If they say to us that the intellects *could* have [scil. adhered to the divine goodness], but simply *would* not do so, because they wanted to experience something different, then Beauty, in their eyes, would not be a good necessarily worth desiring simply because of itself, because it is beautiful, but would only be [scil. desirable] because of its opposite - not as something loveable absolutely, through its own nature.³⁴

33 von Balthasar, 2003, 130, italics added. "Während Bewegung bei Origenes ganz auf der indifferenten Wahlfreiheit des Geschöpfes beruhte und diese es bei ihrer äußersten Labilität früher oder später unvermeidlich in Schuld stürzen mußte, ist Bewegung bei Maximus auf einer Sinnrichtung der Natur gegründet, die als solche eine gute ist. Die Freiheit des Geschöpfes ist nicht mehr in eine quasi-göttliche Höhe emporgetrieben und ganz allein auf sich selbst gestellt, sie ruht auf einem Grund von Natur auf, deren vorgezeichnete Richtung sie nur mitzuvollziehen hat." von Balthasar, 1988, 126.

34 Balthasar quotes from PG 91, 1069C.

For this reason Balthasar sees Origen, together with Hegel, as a thinker of progress in the sense of *Aufhebung*: they both fall into the temptation of considering being-with-God only dialectically good - not desirable in and of itself, but because of the experience of its opposite. The final synthesis is achieved only because of the antithesis, and not in virtue of its desirability *in se*. In Origen(ism), motion is negative, as Balthasar continuously states in *Cosmic Liturgy*: it is because of motion that the rational creatures fell away from God.³⁵ On the contrary, Balthasar explains, in Maximus freedom rests on the solid ground of nature: God shaped the rational creatures already in movement to be with him – motion as such is good. The problem for Balthasar lies in the notion of *beginning*. “Maximus – like Origen – was convinced of the finitude of all motion, both in the [scil. material] world and in the wider realm of the *aeon*. Yet their convictions had different reasons behind them. For Origen, motion was connected with the fall, while for Maximus it was an ontological expression of created existence.”³⁶ While motion for Maximus is natural, for Origen and this first interpretation it is not.

The problem is the confusion of stability as the product of becoming and movement as the product of stability. For Maximus it is clear: stability is not a potential condition of becoming, but rather the end stage of the realisation of a potency that must be already contained in the creature. Stability is the contradictory of motion, not of becoming. For this reason, stability for him can only be the end-point of the process, and absolutely different from the beginning, which can only be “becoming”. The relation between rest and movement is therefore in Maximus triadic: *coming to be – movement – coming to rest*. Movement (freedom) is up to man, but comes from a divine initiative (coming to be). In this structure, motion is a consequence of the first moment, the coming-to-be initiated by God. “The middle concept

35 One further example: “In Origen there is also a connection between number and movement: the latter is simply the philosophical name for sin and the fall. For that reason, movement is only an unnatural condition of the creature, something that will ultimately end; the very numerical sequence strives to return to a unity that is above number”. H. U. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 2003, 107. “Nun besteht freilich auch bei Origenes [...] ein Zusammenhang zwischen Zahl und Bewegung; diese letztere ist nichts als der philosophische Name für Sünde und Abfall. Darum ist Bewegung nur ein naturwidriger und aufzuhebender Zustand des Geschöpfes, der Lauf der Zahl strebt in die überzahlenhafte Einheit zurück.” von Balthasar, 1988, 101 f.

36 von Balthasar, 2003, 141. “Maximus [...] mit Origenes von der Endlichkeit aller Welt- und äonischen Bewegung überzeugt war. Freilich aus verschiedenen Gründen: für Origenes war Bewegung an Abfall geknüpft, für Maximus ist sie ontologischer Ausdruck des Geschaffenseins.” von Balthasar, 1988, 136.

of these three, movement, expresses the insight that although the origin and goal, the coming to be and the coming to rest, of finite being are in themselves identical, they are not identical for finite being.³⁷ This non-identity is for Maximus a certain distance (*Abstand*, διάστημα) in the finite being itself, and it is in virtue of this undeniable distance that movement continues. The reason for Maximus' ability to integrate movement as a positive element in his system is the Aristotelian concept of ἐνέργεια, of a natural activity of the substance. "As soon as motion (*kinesis*) is no longer seen simply (in Platonic fashion) as a sinful falling away but is seen (in Aristotelian fashion) as the *good ontological activity of a developing nature*, the highest ideal [scil. for existence] can also be transformed from a Gnosis that conquers the world by seeing through its reality into a *loving, inclusive affirmation even of finite things*".³⁸ For Balthasar, Origen lacks this affirmation of finitude because of a lacking Aristotelian ἐνέργεια.³⁹

We can now read Origen's and Maximus' notion of movement in Hegelian terms. In Origen the triadic movement is the opposite of Maximus': *stasis* (pre-lapsarian condition), *kinesis* (movement, the fall), *genesis* (becoming, the earthly life). The antithesis (movement) is established by the thesis (stability), but the reason for the transition to the synthesis (the earthly life) is only dialectical: there is no real distance between rest and becoming, since stability is not the contradictory of becoming, but of motion. Indeed, freedom in the pre-lapsarian condition and freedom as movement (fall and post-lapsarian) is the same (with the exception of the burden of the flesh). Origen does not set a distance between becoming and movement. Consequently, he assimilates becoming and rest: the result is a tragic restlessness. On the contrary, for Maximus becoming is a fundamental element (thesis): it is the beginning of every movement. Its antithesis (movement) is its natural (and not dialectical) development, making the synthesis (rest)

37 von Balthasar, 2003, 137. "Der mittlere Begriff dieser Dreiheit, die Bewegung, drückt aus, dass, obwohl der Ursprung und das Ziel, der Entstand und der Stillstand des endlichen Seins, an sich identisch sind, sie es doch nicht für das endliche Sein selbst sind." von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 1988, 132.

38 von Balthasar, 2003, 135, italics added. "Sobald die Kinesis nicht mehr (platonisch) schuldhafter Abfall, sondern (aristotelisch) gute Seinsbewegung einer sich entfaltenden Natur ist, kann das oberste Ideal sich aus einer Gnosis überwindenen Durchschauens in die Agape wahrenen Bejahens auch der Endlichkeiten verwandeln." von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 1988, 130.

39 For a detailed comparison of the notion of perpetual progress in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor in relation to Origenism see P. M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress*, in: *Vigiliae Christ.* 46/2 (June, 1992), 151–171.

the natural contradictory of the antithesis (movement). There is no dialectical opposition here, but an *Abstand*, διάστημα, given by earthly movement (specifically, time and space). Since movement is a natural development of the beginning, and not its dialectical antithesis, it is not merely negative, but a positive development. The lack of this *Abstand* makes Origenism, for Balthasar, a “*Tragizismus*”⁴⁰: there is no distance between becoming and rest. If these are contemporary, movement is clearly negative and not natural anymore. The connection is clearly drawn by Balthasar: “we have shown elsewhere how much this theory is influenced by Origen’s intellectualism and from the old Platonic tradition of the daimons.”

To conclude, two elements of this analysis are in line with Balthasar’s idea of Titanism: the metaphysics of experience as the idea that “love without pain and guilt remains simply a joke, a game”⁴¹ and the tragic eternal opposition of rest and movement.⁴² Ultimately, the problem is given by the dialectic position of the antithesis to the thesis itself: becoming (antithesis) is not given by God, but by an absolute human freedom, in the falling away from God (movement). The experience of becoming is therefore a necessary experience to appropriate one-self, a titanic struggle. Because of the coexistence of becoming and rest, the experience (movement) is not loved as a gift, but a negative moment to fight against. In this titanic struggle, we see the element that brought Balthasar to compare Origen to Sartre.

In resisting Gnosticism and determinism, Origen takes up an extreme position that formally brings him close to modern views like those of Secrétan or Sartre: the creature is identical with freedom (that is, finite freedom, the freedom to choose), and so in preexistence all souls are essentially identical; they only attain their own particular nature on the basis of their decision.⁴³

40 von Balthasar, 1988, 124.

41 von Balthasar, 2003, 130. “Immer wieder, bis auf Hegel und Bardjajew, wird dieser schein tiefe Gedanke in der christlichen Metaphysik sein Wesen treiben, dass die Liebe ohne Schmerz und Schuld nur ein Scherz und ein Spiel bleibe.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 1988, 125. Balthasar refers here to G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Leipzig 1907, 13. As for Origen, Balthasar quotes here passages as “for it is not possible to get to the other side without enduring the temptations of waves and contrary wind”. Or., CMt 11, 5–6.

42 von Balthasar, 2003, 129. “Wir zeigte anderswo, wie sehr diese Lehre vom Intellektualismus Origenes’ und von alter platonischer Dämonie beeinflusst ist.” von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 1988, 125.

43 von Balthasar, 1990, 218. “Origenes geht, immer in der gleichen Abwehrbewegung, bis in ein Extrem, das ihn formal modernen Standpunkten wie dem Secrétans oder Sartre annähert: das Geschöpf ist identisch mit (endlicher, also Wahl-)Freiheit, deshalb sind in der Präexistenz alle Seelen wesensgleich und gewinnen ihre besondere Natur erst aufgrund ihrer Entscheidung.” von Balthasar, 1976, 197.

Movement is nothing more than freedom (“elevated to some quasi-divine height and left there completely by itself”); the consequence of this movement/freedom is becoming (experience, *πείρα*), which is the only way through which the creature experiences the radical positivity of the rest-in-God. This positivity is only dialectically experienced. Freedom is therefore ambiguous, as in Sartre: the earthly condition is a consequence of an act of freedom, and at the very same time a necessary experience.

The difference between this “Hegelian” Origen and Maximus is summarised by Balthasar: “A chasm separates Maximus from Hegel. For with Hegel, the *struggle* is *itself* the basis of synthesis; but with Maximus everything depends on a prior, unconstrained, free act of the person who steers the struggle from above and on the voluntary character of that person’s ineffable self-immolation.”⁴⁴ In Maximus, the origin of becoming lies in a free divine act, in the divine initiative. In this Hegelian Origen, on the contrary, the divine initiative does not find an adequate space.

After the comparison between Origen and Maximus, Balthasar suggests that “with [t]his reinterpretation, the Origenist philosophy of ‘experiencing the opposite’ as a way of coming to know the good is refuted in its demonic aspect, while *its central truth* is assimilated.”⁴⁵ What is the central truth of this metaphysics of experience? Despite apparently following Maximus in his critique of Origen, in fact, Balthasar has a different perspective on the issue, showing that what Maximus formulates is nothing else than the development of seeds already present in Origen.

7. Surpassing Hegel: The Law of Love (I2)

Behind Titanism in Origen lies a central truth. The second part of the *Epilogue* of *Le Mystèrion d’Origène* hints at this central truth. Here, after a long passage on the similarities between Hegel and Origen, Balthasar makes a list of the elements that brought Origen to surpass Hegel and, in general, the daimonic tendency.

1. “The text that describes the final unity between God and the creature come from an inspiration that is far from the ancient Greek genius”;

44 von Balthasar, 2003, 268 f. “Von Hegel trennt ihn ein Abgrund. Denn bei Hegel begründet der Kampf selbst die Synthesis, bei Maximus bleibt alles aufgehängt an einem vorgängigen, souveränen und freien Akt der Person, der von oben her den Kampf lenkt, und an der Freiwilligkeit ihrer unaussprechlichen Vernichtung.” von Balthasar, 1988, 266.

45 von Balthasar, 2003, 135 f., italics added. “Damit ist die origenistische ‘Philosophie der Erfahrung des Gegenteils’ als Weg zur Erkenntnis des Guten in ihrer Dämonie überwunden, in ihrem wahren Kerne aber angeeignet.” von Balthasar, 1988, 131.

2. “the unforgettable experience of the sin”;
3. “the eternal memory of the Passion (CfO 2,4)”;
4. “especially the deep awareness of the law of love: ‘no satiety of the good should ever seize us, but the more we perceive of its blessedness, the more the desire for it in us should be expanded and extended.’ (princ. I,3,8)”

These four elements make it possible for Origen to surpass Titanism and the daimonic tendency: “the eternally tragic and dualistic Eros leaves room to the love of Christ.”⁴⁶

These four elements show the relation between God and man, not anymore as a tragic dialectic opposition, but as a dramatic game of two freedoms. Every element of necessity is given up, and freedom is fully at play – not only on the human side, but also on the divine. In fact, they present the element of human freedom in relation to divine freedom. (1) The final unity is achieved by man in the relation between his freedom to follow Christ and the divine freedom in dispensing grace. (2) The experience of sin is the consequence of human freedom from the very beginning of creation. (3) The Passion is the greatest exercise of divine freedom, specifically the freedom of the Son in obeying the Father: the love of God for humanity, *passio Caritatis*, takes the shape of the sacrifice of the unique Son so that we can become adoptive children. (4) Freedom is continuously nourished by love: the more they experience the divine freedom of self-giving, the more creatures experience the desire to be with him.

These elements allow the similarity between God and man to be kept in their freedom (although being infinite for God and finite for man), while not merging them in a unique spirit. In a certain sense, we can consider

46 “Non seulement les textes pathétiques qui décrivent l’unité finale entre Dieu et les créatures sont issus d’une inspiration bien éloignée de l’ancien génie grec, mais l’expérience inoubliable du péché, le souvenir éternel de la Passion, et avant tout la connaissance profonde de la loi de l’amour – ”Plus nous connaissons cette béatitude éternelle, plus augmente et grandit en nous le désir que nous en avons...“, - tout cela entraîne loin de Platon. L’Éros éternellement tragique puisqu’il se nourrit d’un dualisme a déjà cédé à l’Amour du Christ.” von Balthasar, 1957, 115. CfO 2,4 is a passage deeply loved by Balthasar. Here Origen remembers the importance of the earthly suffering of Christ. “Now, in John’s vision, the Word of God as He rides on the white horse is not naked: He is clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood, for the Word who was made flesh and therefore died is surrounded with marks of the fact that His blood was poured out upon the earth, when the soldier pierced His side. For of that passion, even should it be our lot some day to come to that highest and supreme contemplation of the Logos, we shall not lose all memory, nor shall we forget the truth that our admission was brought about by His sojourning in our body.”

Balthasar's reading of Origen in light of the *analogia entis*: the affinity between divine and human spirit is not to be read as consubstantiality.⁴⁷ Between the two there is a distance that is not simply a negative, though necessary, experience, but rather a difference that allows the ever greater dramatic play. Tragedy is therefore overcome by the free love of God, opening up to a dramatic play. Already Balthasar recognises in Origen the element that he attributed to Maximus in his overcoming Hegel: the "prior, unconstrained, free act of the person who steers the struggle from above and on the voluntary character of that person's ineffable self-immolation"⁴⁸ – the person being Christ.

We start seeing how the issue of progress emerges parallel to the issue of spirit. The four elements show that the law of *Aufhebung* has to be understood not as a necessary development, but as a free progress. This connection is openly traced by Balthasar when, asking if there is "identity between the divine Logos and the logos in us", he answers:

There is infinite proximity, a proximity that allows the eternal movement, proximity that the term *παρουσία* reveals both as presence and to come (*adventus*, ἐπιδημία). It is always present, but as someone who never ceases to come: "Christ's words are always fulfilled and at the same time on their way to fulfilment; every day they are fulfilled and their fulfilment will never be exhausted" (CMt Ser 54). From this open space, always filled and still always open, flows the eternal movement of the creature, feature not only of the anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa and of Augustine, but already and fully of the anthropology of Origen.⁴⁹

The creatures move in the open space between presence and "to-come". The question to face now is exactly that of progress: is this an eternal progress or is it, as Maximus accused Origenism of, rather a progress limited to the earthly condition? Will the progress cease once the creatures are reunited with God, or does this *παρουσία*-feature reveal something of the ontological structure of the creatures and, maybe, of the Creator himself?

47 Lettieri, 2005, 207.

48 Cfr. n. 44.

49 "Proximité infinie, mais qui permet le mouvement éternel, proximité que le terme mystérieusement riche de l'Écriture *παρουσία* (parousie) révèle comme étant à la fois une 'présence' et un 'avenir' (*adventus*, ἐπιδημία). Il est toujours là, mais comme quelqu'un qui ne cesse d'arriver: 'Les paroles du Christ sont toujours accomplies et en même temps en train de s'accomplir; chaque jour elle s'accomplissent et leur accomplissement ne sera jamais achevé.' C'est donc de cet intervalle toujours comblé et toujours ouvert que naît ce mouvement éternel de la créature, qui ne caractérise pas seulement l'anthropologie de Grégoire de Nysse et d'Augustin, mais déjà pleinement celle d'Origène." von Balthasar, 1957, 21 f.

8. The Notion of Progress

Balthasar addresses Origen's idea of progress in *Le Mysterion d'Origène*. He considers the "historicity of the redemptive drama": "the history of God with humanity, figured in the life of Christ, phenomonic in the life of the Church, and told in the Bible, is movement and act."⁵⁰ A few lines later, Balthasar draws the clear connection with the Hegelian *Aufhebung*: "World and individual history are abstract (in the Hegelian sense) in relation to the big 'aeonian and noumenal' history (Bardjaev) that happens at the edge of time and eternity, between God and the world. The Church suffering on earth is nothing else than the Celestial Jerusalem."⁵¹ Once again we see how Balthasar finds a point of connection between Origen and Hegel, this time concerning the notion of progress. As anticipated, Balthasar delves deeper in this issue and asks: "does progress have a limit?"⁵²

Balthasar analyses both the possibility of progress as temporal (I1) and of progress as eternal (I2). The entire epilogue of *Le Mysterion* is in fact a continuous back and forth. Not only, as we have seen, between two interpretations of spirit, but also on two opposite interpretations of progress. These two possibilities are once again the centre of Balthasar's comparison of Origen with Hegel.

The first interpretation is that Origen limits progress to this life, while the beginning and the end are moments of rest in/with God. This is suggested, claims Balthasar, by some specific passages in Origen's corpus.⁵³ Following this interpretation, "in the other world we will see God *as He is*; faith, the free gift of self and foundation of all knowledge; hope, so strongly underlined; the role of suffering – these elements seem to find space only in this temporary life."⁵⁴ This interpretation will become the major thesis of many

50 "L'histoire de Dieu avec l'humanité, figurée dans la vie du Christ, 'phénoménale' dans l'histoire de l'Église, racontée par la Bible, est mouvement et acte." von Balthasar, 1957, 72.

51 "C'est l'histoire extérieure et l'histoire individuelle qui sont 'abstraites' (au sens hégélien de mot) par rapport à cette grande histoire 'éonienne et nouménale' (Berdiaeff) qui se déroule aux confins du temps et de l'éternité, entre Dieu et le monde. L'Église qui souffre sur terre n'est autre que la Jérusalem céleste." von Balthasar, 1957, 73.

52 "Le progrès indéfini a-t-il une limite?". von Balthasar, 1957, 23.

53 Or., Cels. 7.42; id., CRm 5,8.

54 "Certaines paroles d'Origène semblent le restreindre à cette vie. Dans l'autre monde nous verrons Dieu comme il est. La foi, libre don de soi et fondement de toute connaissance, l'espérance si fortement soulignée, le rôle dilatant de la souffrance, tout cela ne semble avoir une place que dans cette vie passagère." von Balthasar, 1957, 23 f.

Origenists, stressing the temporal role of the actual aeon as a struggle to go back to the pre-lapsarian condition of stasis. This is also the kind of Origenism that, as we have seen, Maximus the Confessor criticised and tried to overcome with his system. Balthasar, however, opens a second interpretation: “other expressions show that the eternity itself is a progress.”⁵⁵

“There is no change and no end in the love of God” (CCt 3). The new chalice that Christ promised to drink with us will be eternally new: ‘because the knowledge of the secrets and the revelation of the mysteries are *always renewed* by the Wisdom of God, not only for men, but also for angels and celestial virtues’ (CCt 2); the gnostic already possesses, Origen always searches (cfr. CRm 4,6); God always hides in order to awaken our desire (cfr. CCt 2).⁵⁶

Balthasar claims that if this second interpretation is correct, “Origen is not breaking the tradition that goes from Iraeneus to Gregory of Nyssa.”⁵⁷ In this sense, progress and movement are included in eternity, and not reserved to the present condition as a way of punishment. We can now analyse Balthasar’s two interpretations.

9. Temporal Progress: Origenism and Hegel (I1)

Paradoxically, the idea of daimonic struggle (I1) is not connected, as one might initially think, to an eternal progress, but only to a temporal one. If we start from the idea of the human spirit as a divine sparkle fallen away from a static pre-lapsarian total unity with God, Maximus would be right: if the creatures fell once, there is not enough fascination and goodness in God to keep them from falling again. In this sense, the virtuous dynamism of *Aufhebung* is limited to the earthly aeons and is not able to be maintained in the eschatological condition, since the eschatological condition has to be the complete rest in God. The titanic struggle is unable to be transferred to the eschatological level: the struggle remains continuous in the many aeons, but never truly eternal (in God). As rest in God was discovered as good only dialectically, once the antithesis will be overcome, movement will not be

55 “Mais d’autres paroles montrent assez que l’éternité même est un progrès.” von Balthasar, 1957, 24.

56 “Mais d’autres paroles montrent assez que l’éternité même est un progrès: ‘Il n’y a aucun changement ni aucune fin dans l’amour de Dieu’. Le ‘nouveau calice’ que le Christ a promis de boire avec nous sera éternellement nouveau: ‘Car toujours se renouvellent la connaissance des secrets et la révélation des arcanes par la Sagesse de Dieu, non seulement aux hommes, mais aussi aux anges et aux vertus célestes.’” von Balthasar, 1957, 24.

57 “Origène ne rompt donc pas avec la tradition qui va d’Irénée à Grégoire de Nysse.” von Balthasar, 1957, 24.

necessary anymore. For this reason, the first pole of Origen's thought presented by Balthasar in *Epilogue*, what I called I1 (Titanism), coincides with a notion of progress reduced to the earthly condition, but never eschatological.

The question to face now mirrors exactly the question that Balthasar faced in the *Epilogue*: is this Origen's real and only approach to the problem? We know that this is what will remain in Origenism, to the point that Maximus the Confessor will, as we have seen, strongly criticise this position and "complete" it with an Aristotelian notion of movement. If, however, spirit was not only to be read in the titanic frame, but also in light of the divine sacrifice and the law of love, do we maybe also find this "law of love" behind a different notion of progress?

Before answering this question, I believe the problem given by the interpretation of progress as only earthly (I1) to be more easily understandable through Balthasar's attitude towards an author whose forerunner has often been considered to be Origen himself.

10. A Useful Resource: Joachim of Fiore

A further way to understand the relation between Origen and Hegel in the eyes of Balthasar on the issue of progress is to look at a third name that often appears alongside them in Balthasar's analysis: Joachim of Fiore. His idea of an age of the spirit clearly shows, despite some important differences, many connections with Hegel's idea of final age of the spirit. Balthasar does not directly draw the line Origen-Joachim-Hegel, but we can easily reconstruct it by reading a passage of *Theo-Drama 3* where he presents the role of the spirit in the trinity. Balthasar openly states that in Christologies "like that of Origen and Hegel" there is a tendency towards the identification of the Son and the Spirit.

This kind of identification can seem to be based on the "twostage Christology": an obedient Jesus "according to the flesh" is exalted after the Resurrection and "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4), with the result that the identity can be proclaimed, thus: "the Kyrios is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17).⁵⁸

58 H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory. Vol. 3. The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, San Francisco 1993, 189 f. "Sie [scil. die Identifikation] kann sich scheinbar auf die 'Zweistufenchristologie' stützen, nach der ein zunächst 'dem Fleisch gemäß' gehorsamer Jesus nach der Auferstehung 'zum Sohn Gottes in Kraft gemäß dem Geist der Heiligung' erhöht worden wäre, so dass jetzt anscheinend Identität ausgesagt werden kann: 'der Kyrios ist der Geist'." H. U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik. Zweiter Band. Die Personen des Spiels. Teil 2. Die Personen in Christus*, Einsiedeln 1978, 173.

In a vision of the spirit as eschatological truth, the problem becomes the apparent secondary role of the Cross and the Resurrection. This is known to be one of the critiques that Balthasar directs at Origen in the foreword to *Spirit and Fire*. He also has a similar critique of Hegel. Referring specifically to his thought, Balthasar states:

At a level incomparably higher than that of Valentinian Gnosis, we find repeated here the same process of turning the mystery of the Cross into a piece of philosophy, and in both cases the God-man (the primordial Man), by his self-revelation coincides in the last analysis with the self-understanding of man himself.⁵⁹

This Christological issue mirrors the very same critique that de Lubac in the same year of *Theodramatik II-2* directs at Joachim of Fiore in his *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*.⁶⁰ Joachim is considered responsible for the weakening of Christocentrism in the Christian message. For de Lubac the problem of Joachim's thought is simple: even against his own intentions, his eschatology seems to reduce Christ as a mere sign for the Spirit, and "detached from Christ, the Spirit can become anything".⁶¹ Meaning, Joachim reduces the Trinity into a dynamic process enclosed in time and therefore finite. This critique of spiritualism very closely mirrors Balthasar's concern with Hegel and Origen's weak distinction between human and divine spirit, and the consequent weak role of the Cross. It is indeed clear that for Balthasar Origen and Joachim could be seen as very closely related for this reason.

We might be tempted to interpret Origen as a forerunner of Joachim because of his inclination to identify the glorified Christ with the Pnuma. Nevertheless, Origen's difference from Joachim stands out most markedly in the fact that he designates the Scripture of the Old Covenant, taken by itself, as "letter", while he regards the Scripture of the New Covenant as letter permeated by the Pnuma. In this respect,

59 "Auf einer unvergleichbar höheren Stufe als der der valentinianischen Gnosis wiederholt sich hier der gleiche Prozeß einer Verphilosophierung des Kreuzmysteriums, wobei in beiden Fällen der sich offenbarende Gottmensch (Ur-Mensch) schließlich mit dem Selbstverständnis des Menschen zusammenfällt." H. U. von Balthasar, *Theologie der Drei Tage*, Einsiedeln 1990, 60 f; eng. tr. H. U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, San Francisco 2000, 62.

60 H. de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore. Vol. I. De Joachim à Schelling*, Paris 1978; id. *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore. Vol. II De Saint-Simon à nos jours*, Paris 1981. De Lubac, quoting a letter of Moltmann to Karl Barth, affirms that "Joachim is more alive today than Augustine." Ibid, Vol. I (7). Similarly, Balthasar considered Origen to be "impossible to overestimate" and "to rank beside Augustine and Thomas". von Balthasar, 1984, 1; von Balthasar, 1938, 11.

61 de Lubac, 1981, 439.

Origen is the founder of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture from which Joachim will be the first to diverge.⁶²

This paragraph sheds light on Balthasar's double attitude. A few years earlier he accused Origen of reducing the Logos to Pneuma, while here he stresses the clear distinction between them. While it could be considered a problem, I think Balthasar's attitude mirrors the openness of the question in Origen himself, who often acknowledges his thought to be a living quest for answers and not a fixed list of truths. On the one hand, Balthasar openly admits that Origen could be considered a forerunner of Joachim in virtue of his idea of spirit. On the other hand, however, the value of the letter – i.e. the permanence of what is *aufgehoben* – distances Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Scripture from Joachim: the New Testament is the letter permeated by the spirit, not pure spirit. For this reason, Balthasar does not fully consider Origen a forerunner of Joachim. He therefore follows de Lubac, who, despite acknowledging the presence in Origen of a tripartite scheme shadow-image-truth that might sound similar to the Joachimite idea of progress, states a fundamental difference:

There is not really anything more in common between Origen and Joachim of Fiore than this name, eternal gospel – but this is a biblical title drawn from the Apocalypse – and the idea that this eternal gospel consists in the thorough spiritual interpretation of the Gospel. But they completely disagree on the nature and time of this interpretation.⁶³

De Lubac underlines the spiritual sense as being contained in the literal meaning of the Scripture. Between the two senses there is a clear “break” given by the Incarnation. What Joachim traces between the two Testaments is for de Lubac, however, a typological correspondence between two “literal senses” – diminishing therefore the new spiritual sense disclosed by the

62 “Wollte man Origenes als einen Vorläufer Joachims erklärend, weil er eine Neigung hat, den verkörperten Christus mit dem Pneuma gleichzusetzen, so sticht seine Unterscheidung von Joachim darin am stärksten heraus, dass er die Schrift Alten Bundes, für sich allein genommen, als ‘Buchstabe’ bezeichnet, während er die Schrift Neuen Bundes als einen vom Pneuma durchdrungenen Buchstaben ansieht. Hierhin ist er der Begründer jener geistlichen Schriftdeutung, von der Joachim als erster abgewichen ist.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Theologik. Zweiter Band. Wahrheit Gottes*, Einsiedeln 1985, 190 f.; eng. tr. H. U. Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic. Vol. 2: Truth of God*, San Francisco 2004, 209.

63 de Lubac, 2002, 251 f. “Entre Origène et Joachim de Flore il n’y a guère de commun que ce nom d’Évangile éternel – mais c’est une appellation biblique tirée de l’Apocalypse – et l’idée que cet Évangile éternel consiste dans l’interprétation spirituelle achevée de l’Évangile, – mais sur la nature et sur le temps de cette interprétation, ils s’opposent complètement.” de Lubac, 1950, 220 f.

Incarnation. Here we can clearly see the difference between I1 and I2. If Joachim grounds the fulfilment in the earthly future, meaning that the age of the spirit will happen in time, for Origen the eternal gospel is no longer in time: “Origen’s eternal gospel is the antithesis and anticipated antidote of that of the Calabrian monk. (...) In brief, it is completely eschatological.”⁶⁴ De Lubac’s discovery allows one to have a better understanding of Balthasar’s “preference” for the second interpretation: for Origen progress is not only limited to this earthly time, but rather eternity itself is progress.

The key to answering this question is Balthasar’s own attitude towards Joachim of Fiore. Balthasar is less negative towards Joachim than de Lubac, despite recognising a gnostic tendency in him and openly rejecting the identification of Logos and Spirit. He does in fact positively judge Joachim’s intuition of a relation between Trinity and time.⁶⁵ Balthasar, fascinated by the vision that Joachim had when working on the Book of Revelation, believes his understanding of the spirit to be the wrong development of a right intuition: the spirit as procession from the *concordantia* of Father and Son. Balthasar writes that Joachim “saw two things: the Revelation as *plenitudo* – and this as the result of the inherent relationship between Old and New Covenants.”⁶⁶ To be clear, considering the relationship between the two Covenants “inherent” and of concordance might not correspond to what Joachim actually wrote. Balthasar justifies his reading by explaining that the vision Joachim had “blinded him”, who, “unable to withstand the lightning flash of the vision, will attempt to translate this into an uncertain language of historical theology.”⁶⁷ The spirit is first and foremost a person in eternal relation to the other two persons of the trinity. In this sense Balthasar still speaks of progress, a progress which is an eternal dynamism rather than

64 de Lubac, 2002, 252. “L’Évangile éternel de celui-ci est l’antithèse et l’antidote anticipé de celui du moine calabrais. [...] Bref, il est tout eschatologique.” de Lubac, 1950, 221.

65 J. Servais, *De Lubac e von Balthasar: due approcci a Gioacchino da Fiore?*, in: *Rassegna di teologia* 381/2 (1997), 149–167, 160 f. For Balthasar’s analysis of the gnostic tradition following from Joachim, see the introduction to H. U. von Balthasar, *Irenäus. Gott in Fleisch und Blut. Ein Durchblick in Texten*, Einsiedeln 1981, 10 f.

66 H. U. von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III – Creator Spirit*, San Francisco 1993, 144. “Er sah zweierlei: die Apokalypse als plenitudo – und diese resultierend aus der innern Bezogenheit zwischen Altem und Neuem Bund.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Skizzen zur Theologie III. Spiritus Creator*, Einsiedeln 1967, 131.

67 H. U. von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III – Creator Spirit*, 1993, 144. “Joachim wird dieses – dem Blitz der Vision nicht standhaltend – in eine unsichere geschichtstheologische Sprache zu übersetzen suchen.” H. U. von Balthasar, *Skizzen zur Theologie III. Spiritus Creator*, Einsiedeln 1967, 131.

a dialectic movement enclosed in time. This interpretation underlines the Paulinian and Origenian idea that from the event of the Cross “the history of Christianity (both of visible and of invisible Christianity) is the portrayal of the fullness of Christ by the creative Spirit (Eph 1:23).”⁶⁸ A dimension of waiting remains, as Balthasar recognises in considering Origen’s system a metaphysic of *πείρα*: the mystical body experiences and suffers until the final day. “Intra-historically speaking, the truth is not only above, but also ahead.”⁶⁹ This applies not only to the historical level: as de Lubac, Balthasar makes Origen’s Homily on Leviticus 7 a constant reference for his idea of faith and hope present even inside the Trinity itself and in the eschatological time. Balthasar continues with his own theology of the procession of the spirit from the relationship between Father and Son, openly admitting that it is not actually Joachim speaking, but Balthasar himself. Balthasar’s considerations are nevertheless interesting for his interpretation of Origen, because the solution to the Joachimite “problem” comes from the same element that brings Balthasar to I2, and to an interpretation of Origen that does not fully coincide with the Hegelian solution: the “law of love”. After this excursus we can therefore go back to our question, analysing more in depth I2: eternal progress.

11. Eternal Progress: Origen beyond Hegel (I2)

I believe that the law of love, which has been characterised as a “good distance” between God and man due to their freedom, is strictly connected to the concept of eternal progress, allowing Origen to surpass Hegel.

When presenting the concept of *Aufhebung* we mentioned Balthasar’s interest in the spiritual senses and the spiritual body. For Balthasar the spiritual body is the sign of an ultimate non-identity between the Trinity and man, what I called distance. “This fundamental non-identity is the materiality of every creature.”⁷⁰ The spiritual body suggests also that *becoming* was already included in the beginning for Origen, and not only later for Maximus. Spiritual corporeality shows that there was no real stasis in the beginning, since where there is matter (however light and non-fleshly this can be) there is movement. By way of acknowledging a certain Aristotelian element in Origen, specifically the hylomorphism, we can understand the reason

68 von Balthasar, 1993, 170. “Die Geschichte der Christenheit (der sichtbaren und unsichtbaren) ist die Darstellung durch den schöpferischen Geist der Fülle Christi (Eph 1,23).” von Balthasar, 1967, 154.

69 Servais, 1997, 167.

70 “Cette non-identité foncière est la matérialité de toute créature, si pure soit-elle.” von Balthasar, 1957, 42.

Balthasar did not consider Maximus to be radically opposed to Origen, and why he also believed Origen was on the same line with tradition. These two points are clear in Origen's own description of the beginning:

Now the fact that he said "he made him in the image of God" and was silent about the likeness points to nothing else but this, that man received the honour of God's image in his first creation (*prima conditione*), whereas the perfection (*perfectio*) of God's likeness was reserved for him at the consummation (*in consummatione*). The purpose of this was that man should acquire it for himself by his own efforts to imitate God, so that while the possibility (*possibilitate*) of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning (*in initiis*) through the honour of the "image," he should in the end (*in finis*) through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect "likeness".⁷¹

Motion is not merely described as a falling away from God, but as a teleological progress implicit in the very moment of creation – before the fall. Movement is therefore part of the creature. What is the reason behind this? Why should it be better to freely progress towards God instead of necessarily being with him? If we don't pose this question, we would be stuck in the non-sense that Maximus accuses Origen of: if we were with God and decided freely to move away from him, the logical consequence would be to admit that divine beauty is not strong enough to fascinate us.

Despite the complexity of the issue, I think Balthasar is correct in his suggestion to move beyond the passages where the beginning is described as a static condition, and to try to consider this issue in the broader frame of Origen's system. If likeness has to be achieved, the final unity is richer than the initial condition. In this sense, we see that what Balthasar stated in the *Epilogue of Le Mysteron* ("the synthesis is never achieved [scil. because] ... the final unity is not richer than the abstract unity of the beginning") is not fully true. Balthasar himself states that by being "created in the image of God, the creature has to assimilate herself [scil. to God] to become *what he will never actually be*. This is his way to imitate the generation of the Son, eternally renewed."⁷²

The idea of striving for something that will never be achieved could still remind us of Titanism, of a lost battle. We understand, however, that the struggle to conform oneself to the likeness is not titanic, but good in and of itself as a struggle. This passage, in fact, not only states the presence of a certain distance (represented by the spiritual body) between God and man,

71 Or., princ. 3.6,1.

72 "Créée à l'image, la créature devra s'assimiler pour devenir ce qu'elle ne sera jamais. Ce sera façon d'imiter la génération du Fils, éternellement renouvelée." von Balthasar, 1957, 41.

but also acknowledges the positivity of this distance: it is good because it imitates the eternal generation of the Son. Progress therefore has its roots in the presence of a certain dynamism in the divine itself – precisely, in the difference between the Father and the Son.

Balthasar's statement brings us back to Hegel: through *Aufhebung* Hegel brings movement and progress into God, as Balthasar positively recognises. The question becomes, therefore: why? What moves the thesis to reach a synthesis? In Hegel it is because of an element dialectically posed. Meaning, it is because of something lacking in the thesis which needs to be reached and successively overcome. For Hegel, the spirit is not a third person who transcends the world, but God's achievement through the world. In this sense, creation is due to a lack, to something negative. Consequently, the Covenant is not an act of divine free love, but rather an act of divine need. Balthasar seems to share the idea of contemporary scholars, but differs from them slightly. Hegel, as many Fathers, thinks of the Trinity within the *exitus-reditus* scheme but, differently from the Fathers, does not arrive to God's love and abundance, but to God's lack of it.⁷³ Love, despite playing an important role for Hegel, is for Balthasar not properly Johannine and agapic, coming from an ontological abundance, but rather a desire whose only aim is to fulfil a lack.

This mirrors Maximus's critique to Origenism, the idea of a metaphysics of *πεῖρα* and of an only dialectically achieved progress to the spiritual. Balthasar, without denying this aspect, reads Origen in a different light. He shows how experience can be seen not only as the dialectical opposition of the spirit, but also as its analogical reflection. The *πεῖρα* is for Hegel only a moment for the absolute to reach itself. There is more in Origen, where the experience seems to be more than a simple product of the human fall. Hegel is paradoxically more Neo-Platonic than Origen. For Hegel, unity precedes multiplicity. Origen, on the contrary, moves from the Johannine indication that the Word was originally with God: from the very beginning there is a relation between the Father and the Word. For this reason Hegel's antithesis remains entangled in a tragic monism, while Origen's *πεῖρα* is a moment of a dramatic relationship.

Balthasar means this when he underlines that the contrary tendency to an idea of progress that is only negative (I1), i.e. only present in this mortal life, is the law of love dilated to the eternity (I2). "This [scil. the Hegelian] tendency is counterbalanced by what is deeper in Origen. He knows that the real knowledge is love: 'The friendship with Christ in the Holy Spirit, this

73 A. Chapelle, *Hegel et la Religion*, vol. 2, Paris 1964–1971, 106.

is the knowledge of God’ ”.⁷⁴ For this reason, Balthasar claims that Origen was already very close to the solution that Gregory of Nyssa will achieve “by stepping beyond the tragic attitude”. Gregory’s synthesis of movement and rest is achieved by “excluding from the eternal vision of God the possibility of satiety”: not by eliminating the movement in itself, but by eliminating only its tragic dualism and by introducing movement into rest itself, i.e. into God. The introduction of movement is not due to lack but to superabundance. Balthasar believes Origen to have already formulated this solution: in the unique sacrifice of Christ God made himself “becoming”.

It won't be enough to take off our sandals; in order to walk in this life, we have to let our feet be washed by Jesus, and take off everything what we have: money and bag, mantel and stick, “because this path is rich enough to provide you with all what you will need along the way” (Clo 1.26). *Isn't it in fact that God made himself becoming for us?*⁷⁵

The above quoted passage on image and likeness from *Peri Archon* clearly expresses the difference between Origen and Hegel. In the passage we acknowledge with Balthasar the presence in Origen of a dramatic dynamism taking over the Greek tragedy. God creates a free man, therefore running the risk of a fall with all its consequences. The framework of Origen is wholly different than that of Hegel: if in Hegel it is the Absolute who, in order to become himself, establishes the negation; for Origen, God does not create man in order to fulfil himself, but completely out of gratuitous love. The necessary point is to understand the reason behind God’s “making himself becoming/movement for us” and of the eternal generation of the Son. We find here the beginning of what will become Balthasar’s own theology: why is it good not only for man, but also for God, to run the risk of becoming?

12. The Reason behind Origen’s Ambiguity

The *Epilogue of Le Mysterion d’Origène* is a continuous back and forth between Origen “not daring to this solution” because of the “mark of the daimon” and his being “already very close” to the resolution, the law of

74 “Mais cette tendance se trouve dans cesse démentie par ce qu’il y avait de plus profond en lui. Origène sait que le vrai savoir est l’amour: ‘L’amitié avec le Christ dans le Saint-Esprit, telle est en effet la connaissance de Dieu.’” von Balthasar, 1957, 116.

75 “Il ne suffira même pas de quitter ses sandales, il faudra encore se laisser laver les pieds par Jésus pour marcher dans cette voie, et même se dépouiller de tout: monnaie et sac, manteau et bâton, ‘car cette voie est assez riche pour subvenir par elle-même à toutes les nécessités du voyage.’ N’est-elle pas Dieu, qui s’est fait Devenir pour nous?” von Balthasar, 1957, 76.

love. Balthasar presents both attitudes, and states what he believes to be the real answer for Origen. Particularly interesting for us is Balthasar's recognition of the *reason* behind Origen's ambiguity.

The reason for this ambiguity lies for Balthasar in the role of mediation and of the symbolic structure of reality in Origen. For Balthasar, progress is continuous for a very specific reason: because the hermeneutical process in the God-World relation is *substantially* eternal. God *always* reveals himself in a mediated form, through a veil, with the consequent growth of our desire for him.⁷⁶ The same happens in the eschatological condition: we will enjoy an ever-greater richness of the spirit, and not a static condition, because of the eternity of the matter, because of the spiritual body.

But the letter, opaque as mortal flesh, is not less temporary, and overcomes itself towards a Word that will be full Truth, eternal Good News. This will not anymore be made out of fleshly words, but of spiritual words, although, being *eternal* matter, the speaking Word and the spoken word never fully coincide.⁷⁷

Balthasar traces the ambiguity of Origen's idea of progress back to his idea of symbol. For Balthasar the synthesis of movement and rest is not completely achieved in Origen because of his intellectualism and forgetfulness of the eternal value of the symbolic structure of the world - i.e. the forgetfulness of the positive value of mediation and difference. In Origen there is always "a tendency to overcome the symbols, to rip up the ultimate veils, to overcome even the Logos to 'see' the abyss of the Father, to know rather than live, to overrate the sign of the Word underrating the sign of Love."⁷⁸

It is true that Origen, in his thirst for knowledge, has maybe minimized the eternal value of the structure of the symbol. Clemens of Alexandria knew it better: "Truth is always greater and more splendid when discovered through a veil. It happens here what happens with those fruits seen through the transparency of the water or

76 "God hides in order to awake more and more our desire", says Balthasar commenting Cant. Comm. 2. "Dieu se cache pour exciter toujours davantage nostre désir." von Balthasar, 1957, 119, note 13.

77 "Mais la lettre, opaque comme la chair mortelle, n'en reste pas moins provisoire, en tend à se dépasser elle-même dans le sens d'une Parole qui, elle, serait tout entière Vérité, éternelle Bonne Nouvelle; qui ne serait plus faite de paroles sensibles, mais de paroles spirituelles, bien que, la matière étant éternelle, la Parole parlante et la parole parlée ne doivent jamais coïncider tout à fait." von Balthasar, 1957, 75.

78 "Tendance à survoler les symboles, à déchirer les dernier voiles, à dépasser même le Logos pour "voir" l'abîme du Père, à savoir au lieu de vivre, à surestimer enfin le signe de la Parole en sous-estimant celui de l'Amour." von Balthasar, 1957, 116.

with those bodies whose grace is underlined or suggested by the clothes” (Strom. 5.56,5).⁷⁹

The minimisation of the eternal value of the symbolic structure is for Balthasar the fruit of a certain tendency towards intellectualism and Gnosticism in Origen’s thought; the same that moves him towards a titanic and heroic interpretation of the life of the Christian. By sometimes diminishing the role of mediation (in its many forms: the flesh, Christ, the letter...), Origen drifts towards the risks he shares with Hegel.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that while for de Lubac Joachim operates a “secularization” of the eschatological promise, for Balthasar Hegel is the greatest example of a secularisation of metaphysics, to which the antidote is the doctrine of the *analogia entis*. It is not without meaning that Joachim of Fiore was condemned in the Fourth Lateran Council, the same council where the doctrine of *analogia entis* was formulated in the shape that Balthasar so often implicitly refers to in his works on Origen. The absence of mediation is exactly the contrary of the solution that Balthasar will propose, not only in his reading of Origen, but also in his own theology: the doctrine of *analogia entis*.

13. Conclusion

To conclude, Balthasar appreciates the similarity between Origen and Hegel in the sense of *Aufhebung*, but considers a fundamental difference between them. The difference lies in an alternative understanding of spirit: utterly intellectualistic and spiritualistic for Hegel, dominated by the law of love as abundance and sacrifice in Origen (although not without ambiguities). In virtue of this law of love, Balthasar recognises that in Origen progress is not limited to this life but destined to remain in eternity. Exactly because the human spirit and the divine spirit are not the same, the tension is eternal.

Taking a step further, we recognise that the reason behind this difference lies in the moment of creation: if for the German Idealist creation happens as an act of lacking, for Origen it happens as a creative act of love, of superabundance. God, in his generosity, provides the rational creatures their freedom in order to be freely loved as He freely created them. The mystery of love in Balthasar’s own theology will take the shape of intra-trinitarian

79 “Il est vrai qu’Origène, dans sa passion de savoir, a peut-être minimisé la valeur éternelle de la structure du symbole. Clément en savait davantage: ‘La vérité paraît plus grande et plus auguste quand on la découvre à travers un voile: il en est d’elle comme de ces fruits vus à travers la transparence de l’eau ou de ces formes dont les vêtements soulignent et insinuent la grâce’ (Strom. 5.56,5).” von Balthasar, 1957, 135, n. 48.

freedom, the mystery of the relation between the three persons: the Father “allows” the Son to be, and from their mutual love proceeds the Spirit. This mysterious law of filial love revealed by the Gospel, especially in the Prologue of the Gospel of John (a fundamental text for both Origen and Balthasar) is for Balthasar exactly the element that “saves” Origen from the risks of the *Aufhebung* – the logical necessity. At the same time, it is this element that allows Origen to “sublate” the Valentinian Gnosis (the same that, for Balthasar, is present in Hegel) into a truly Christian Gnosis. The elevation to the spiritual level is not a titanic achievement already included in a necessary order of the elected, but a gift coming from the free relation with a free God. The law of love is therefore law of freedom. If in Hegel progress is always enclosed in a determinism of the Spirit which reduces God’s freedom to a logical necessity, in Origen human freedom appears to always be related to the free creative act of love of God. This opens up the dramatic struggle and the everlasting progress, which is ultimately rooted in the ever-greater freedom and irreducible otherness of God himself.

Ludovico Battista

Myth and Progress: Hans Blumenberg's Reading of Origen of Alexandria

Abstract This article is dedicated to an analysis of the passages that the philosopher Hans Blumenberg dedicated to Origen of Alexandria within his interpretation of the genesis of modern rationality. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of a modern “Origenian” tradition, exemplarily represented by Nicola Cusano and Giordano Bruno as protagonists of the “epochal threshold”. On the other hand, however, it shows how Blumenberg rejects the idea of a Origenian “humanistic” and rationalistic theological “matrix” at the basis of modernity, reinterpreting Origen as a completely Platonic thinker and even a remythologizer – therefore “paganizer” – with respect to biblical theological devices, originally eschatological and apocalyptic in their nature. In other words, according to Blumenberg, Origen could not but become heretical for the Christian orthodox tradition – which would settle on a Pauline-Augustinian dominant line – and consequently his modern rediscovery and reception would have “anti-Christian” outcomes.

Keywords: Modernity, Augustine, Metaphor, Gnosis, Bruno, Cusano

One of the main focuses of Blumenberg's philosophy is probably the attempt to define the connection between Christianity and modern thought. The first period of his research culminated in his masterpiece, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (first edition in 1966),¹ which brought to an end a long work on the history of Christian theology. This work was originally started by the identification of the Christian devices of historicisation and deconstruction of the ancient metaphysics. In his first academical works *Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie* (1947), and *Die ontologische Distanz* (1950), a young Blumenberg had suggested that the possibility of a critique of the old static and metaphysical conception of the world should be identified right in the Augustinian tradition. According to this first interpretation, Augustin was the first to develop, in his doctrine of illumination, an apocalyptic and historicising conception of “truth” that even contemporary philosophy (e.g. Heidegger) would inherit. By suspending the tendency of knowledge to metaphysical objectification of the world, the doctrine of God's *absoluteness* and the conception of his illumination as an “event” of grace allow us to reach the historical nature of

1 H. Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt 1966.

the human ways of “signification”, their “facticity” and “performativity”. In other terms, Blumenberg recognised in Augustinian thought a system of demythologisation that allows reaching the primary – not absolute, but historical – narrative substructure of the philosophical conceptuality, and in this way the philosopher provided several crucial arguments in favour of a Christian origin of modern “historicization processes”.²

However, by facing the theoretical and political risks resulting from the identification of a connection between the nature of modern political and juridical structures and Christian theology, Blumenberg gradually became conscious of the need to avoid every secret apology of religion that would be implied in the thesis of the modern age’s debt to it. In order to ward off any theological conception that would endanger the autonomy of modern rationality, the later Blumenberg so distinguished between a theological principle of deconstruction and destruction of the ancient worldview, and the modern, anthropocentric re-foundation of knowledge based on a radical rejection of the anti-humanistic logic of any theological absolutism. Therefore, he changed his point of view, portraying a new anti-theological image of modern rationality. According to this premise we can understand the main purpose of his masterpiece *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, which meant to disjoin the connection between the Augustinian deconstruction of metaphysics and modern self-affirmation, by identifying in Augustinianism the cause of the crisis and the fall of the medieval world, and by defining the modern age in terms of de-Christianisation, or in other words, as a radical liberation

2 About this reconstruction, I dare to suggest my monograph, L. Battista, *Blumenberg e l'autodistruzione del cristianesimo. La genesi del suo pensiero: da Agostino a Nietzsche*, Roma 2021. Blumenberg’s first reformulation of phenomenology recognises the crucial role played by the Christian experience of *Endlichkeit* (finiteness) and *Geschichtlichkeit* (historicity). Blumenberg attempted to mediate between Heidegger’s and Husserl’s philosophy by rediscovering the metaphorical language of philosophical tradition. Such an attempt, however, implicitly ties in with the Augustinian deconstruction of Greek metaphysics. Evidently, the question of secularisation, before becoming the controversial topic of his masterpiece, the *Legitimacy of modern Age*, is already present here. The subsequent disclosure of the consequences of this first interpretation makes it possible to understand the importance of the later confrontation with the secularisation category, but also the ongoing relevance of Augustine, although his thinking increasingly emerges as a paradigm to be overcome. For a reconstruction of the evolution of Blumenberg’s thought see the great volume by K. Flasch, *Hans Blumenberg. Philosoph in Deutschland: Die Jahre 1945–1966*, Frankfurt 2017; and the first part of the fundamental work of P. Stoellger, *Metapher und Lebenswelt*, Tübingen 2000, 17–69.

from what preceded it.³ Blumenberg wanted to highlight the legitimacy of self-affirmation, and consequently he was forced to change his perspective by adopting Nietzsche's perspectivism, in which man should become the sole point of reference of his rational performances, substituting God as "creator" of meaning. Augustinian theology is now tendentially defined as a failure in human history for its inability to provide answers to the human need for meaning. Only a new start, a new paradigm for knowledge, intrinsically humanistic and anthropocentric, and opposed to the theocentric one of Augustin, can provide what modern men need.

The position expressed by Blumenberg in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* rejects every philosophical thesis that would acknowledge a causal relationship between Christian theology and modern thought, for example, that of K. Löwith about the derivation of modern faith in progress from Christian faith in providence, but primarily C. Schmitt's and E. Voegelin's theses, which use it as ground for a new political theology.⁴ However, Blumenberg seems to identify *tout court* Christian theology with Absolutism, Augustinianism and an Augustinian line of thought in the later Middle Ages. Therefore, it seems also possible to problematise this thesis, by noting that in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* Blumenberg himself situates the epochal threshold between the medieval and the modern world right in that period which straddles the Copernican revolution, between two philosophical figures who, though they do not belong to an Augustinian trajectory of thought, do really deal with history of Christian theology: Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno.

On closer inspection, we might note that already since a 1957 article, *Nachahmung der Natur. Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen*,⁵ the starting point for understanding the modern figure of man

3 On closer inspection, however, the previous conviction regarding the role of Augustinian devices of historicisation is still present in the *Legitimacy of modern Age*. One may think, for example, about Blumenberg's interest in the debate between Clark and Leibniz on Newton's philosophy, in which Blumenberg recognizes that the "radical materialization of nature" is in some way a consequence of theological absolutism. The modern revival of epicureism is to be counted among the materialistic consequences of that omnipotence theology that forbids thinking of reality as a connection of fixed, unchangeable and ontological structures. Cf. Blumenberg, 1966, 103–111.

4 K. Löwith, *Von Hegel Zu Nietzsche*, Stuttgart 1939, ²1945; Id., *Meaning in History*, Chicago 1949; C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Berlin 1922, München ²1934; E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago 1952.

5 H. Blumenberg, *Nachahmung der Natur. Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen* in: *Studium Generale* 10 (1957), 266–283, now in Id., *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, Frankfurt 2001, 9–46. I also recall

as “creator” was represented by Cusanus, whose *Idiota* is considered as the *terminus a quo* for the history of the human self-attribution of a technical, creating power, not only reproducing nature. As Blumenberg explains, the real turning point from an ontological point of view is not the concept of omnipotence, but its combination with that of infinity, which allows us to experience the world as a “fact”, that is, as a reality that does not exhaust the infinite scope of possibilities.⁶ But there is also another implicit motivation to explain Cusanus’ choice. The preference for Cusanus over Augustine is based on a crucial reason for the entire self-restructuring of Blumenberg’s analysis: the identification of a similar theological device based on God’s transcendence, the *docta ignorantia*, which historicises and deconstructs any claim to reach the truth of God, but that can, however, be framed within a humanistic horizon that prevents any pessimistic condemnation of the human desire for knowledge. The true key notion for understanding the modern “metaphorisation” and “technicisation” of knowledge cannot be the absoluteness of God, but it must be identified in the concept that replaces it, “infinity”, which is compatible with the anthropological need of

the fact that in 1957 Blumenberg edited a selection of Cusanus’ writings, *Nikolaus von Cues: Die Kunst der Vermutung*, with a long introduction.

- 6 Blumenberg, 2001, 34–35: „[...] erst wenn die *potentia* Gottes als *potentia infinita* gesehen wird, tritt die logische Nötigung auf, das *possibile* nicht mehr von der *potentia* (und den in ihr implizierten Ideen) her, sondern umgekehrt die *potentia* vom *possibile* her zu definieren. Damit erst wird der *logische* Umfang des Möglichkeitsbegriffes maßgebend und zugleich der Ideenkosmos für die Frage, was das *omnia* als Umfang der *omnipotentia* bedeute, gleichgültig. Das hat zur Folge: der Begriff der *Rationalität* wird auf den der *Widerspruchlosigkeit* reduziert, während noch bei Augustin der Begriff der *ratio* nicht von dem der exemplarischen Idee zu lösen war, also einen endlich-gegenständlichen Bezug implizierte. *Jetzt* erst kann der für unsere Frage nach dem ontologischen „Spielraum“ des Schöpferischen entscheidende Schritt Fuß fassen: der als endlich gedachte Kosmos schöpft das unendliche Universum der Seinsmöglichkeiten – und das heißt: der Möglichkeiten der göttlichen Allmacht – nicht aus und *kann* es nicht ausschöpfen. Er ist notwendig nur ein faktischer Ausschnitt dieses Universums, und es bleibt ein Spielraum unverwirklichten Seins – der freilich noch auf lange unbefragtes Reservat Gottes sein wird und zu der Frage des Menschen nach seinen eigenen Möglichkeiten noch nicht in Bezug tritt. Aber zum erstenmal wird in der Erörterung des Allmachtbegriffs dieser Spielraum überhaupt ontologisch impliziert und als Hintergrund der Weltrealität mitverstanden. [...] Die Welt als Faktum – das ist die ontologische Voraussetzung für die Möglichkeit der Erwägung, schließlich für den Antrieb und die Lockung, im Spielraum des Unverwirklichten, durch das Faktische nicht Ausgefüllten, das *originär Menschliche* zu setzen, das authentisch „Neue“ zu realisieren, aus dem Angewiesensein auf „Nachahmung der Natur“ ins von der Natur Unbetretene hinaus verzustoßen.“

approaching progressively to God. The following investigations on Bruno, in this sense, will specify this profound intuition about the emancipating and humanistic effects (not fully emerged with Cusanus) of a theology of God's "Unendlichkeit", "infinity". Therefore, it seems legitimate to ask whether he did not disregard the possibility of identifying an "other", not Augustinian Christian theological tradition that could allow us to consider in a different way the relationship between theology and modern thought.⁷

The figures of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno remind us of a theological tradition that we could generically define as "Origenian". This tradition is characterised by the affirmation of the spiritual progress of the creatural desire, thanks to which man obtains autonomy and dignity, becoming free and responsible for his own salvation. The Origenian tradition claims men's free will, and relativises theological dogmas and religious practices as mere symbols of the inner, moral progress of the human soul, which should elevate itself to the higher, rational meaning of Christian revelation. On the one hand, the Origenian reinterpretation of the biblical notion of man as "made in the image of God" connects the freedom of the will to the "divine" power of the human intellect, capable of an anagogic progression from the material world to the first principle, God. On the other hand, this platonic, anagogic movement towards God tends to mitigate the radical dualism between God and His creation: the Origenian tradition relativises any ontological and metaphysical datum as a temporary stage or step in the self-revealing of God, as a mere "cypher" or "trace" (metaphor) of divine transcendence that should be transcended by the human seeking for God. The history of Origenism testifies to the progressive affirmation of an allegorical method of interpretation of the Scriptures that allows reconnecting any religious practice, dogmatic conception, and biblical story to its anthropological meaning for the progress of human soul towards perfection.

It could be very interesting to analyse some passages in Blumenberg's *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* about Nicholas of Cusa, where he shows

7 I consider valuable the volume by E. Brient, that raised the crucial problem of identifying a possible missing side of Blumenberg's reflection, that of medieval mysticism, from Scotus Eriugena to Meister Eckhart and then to Cusanus. The great limit of Brient's work, however, is precisely that of tracing this trajectory only back to Plotinus' reflection, rather than back to the Origenian patristic side – in particular to Gregory of Nyssa – which would have made it possible to connect in a more intrinsic way the problem of the immanentisation of the infinite, starting from the reflection on an Origenian Christological device, not merely (neo-) Platonic. Cfr. E. Brient, *The Immanence of Infinite*, Yale 2002. See also E. Brient, *Blumenberg Reading Cusanus. Metaphor and Modernity*, in M. Moxter (ed.) *Erinnerung an das Humane*, Tübingen 2011, 122–144.

that the emancipative power of the modern metaphorising of knowledge emerges in relation to Cusanus' doctrine of "*docta ignorantia*". According to him, truth is the goal of an infinite progress: this means that in each divine revelation there can be found only what may be described as *traces or vestiges* of the divine. God leaves traces to excite human desire: traces, or metaphors, which are „*als die [...] Verweisung eines flüchtigen und zu verfolgenden Zieles*“.⁸ Cusanus insists that in our attempt to know we inevitably speak in symbols, in metaphors that are not analogical and static references to something that can be simply considered as truth, but “self-destructing metaphors”, because they need to be immediately destroyed after being conceived, in order to pursue the goal of the infinite and ever-elusive truth of God.⁹ The infinite (as Cusanus' example of God as “infinite sphere” shows) explodes the “metaphor” as a mere provisory step pointing the transcendence of truth. But Cusanus' formula is not a resigned acceptance of the impossibility of reaching a true knowledge of God, but a method for approaching the ever-elusive truth that also involves “a critical reflection on the surpassability of the state of knowledge at any time.”¹⁰ As Elizabeth Brient stated in her research on Blumenberg's reading of Cusanus, the *docta ignorantia* abandons the metaphysical and epistemological pretension of traditional scholasticism with “its passive contentment with the static intended stock of knowledge.”¹¹ Cusanus and Bruno reject both the belief in the definitiveness and completeness of the stock of inherited knowledge, and transform the *sacrificium intellectus* into the necessary procedure of intelligence that must renounce being satisfied with all finite content in order to pursue true fulfilment. The knowledge becomes conjectural. The conception of a knowledge that is not merely static but procedural is the true presupposition of the *docta ignorantia*, which can be understood as the “mystical” condition – a symbolic immersion in darkness – of the relationship with truth as “hunting”: only ignorance can become wise, because only the insipient can relentlessly search for the infinite divine wisdom. If God transcends our ability to grasp it definitively and adequately, we engage ourselves in a

8 Blumenberg, 1966, 461.

9 Cf. Blumenberg, 1966, 454.

10 Blumenberg, 1966, 463: „Die Wahrheit ist im Bilde keineswegs gegenwärtig, wenn nicht das Bild immer sogleich als solches aufgehoben wird. Denn jedes Bild repräsentiert zwar die Wahrheit, ist aber zugleich als Bild schon von ihr abgefallen und hoffnungslos entfernt. Dieses Generalrezept will sowohl auf die Sprache der Offenbarung und der Mystik als auch auf die Bildlichkeit der Welt selbst angewendet werden, die nur „funktioniert“, wenn sie als Spur im Sinne jenes das Denken in Bewegung setzenden Signals verstanden wird.“ See also Brient, 2011, 126–130.

11 Brient, 2011, 130.

process of transcendence that corresponds to the self-transcendence of the human knower.

Of course, this procedural dimension of knowledge opens the way to the birth of modern science, and to a conception of progress as the development of the human spirit that produces its emancipation from the state of constraint in which nature holds him. It is therefore clear why Cusanus represents such an important episode in the analysis of the genesis of modernity. The discourse on the “metaphorical” status of knowledge in Cusanus is, however, also extraordinarily meaningful for understanding Blumenberg's entire reflection, as we consider the philosopher's research about “metaphor” and his project about a “metaphorology” as resulting from his analysis of Cusanus' *“Sprengmetaphorik”*.¹² In the same years of these analyses, Blumenberg elaborated a philosophical project that wanted to rediscover the inconceptual, metaphorical, and rhetorical background of Western conceptual and metaphysical reflection, in order to historicise its theoretical performances by reconnecting them to their anthropological, existential, and historical background. The whole “inconceptual” project of Blumenberg's philosophy is clearly inseparable from the need to clarify the ground of legitimacy for modern self-understanding of rationality.¹³ If the philosopher is now able to go back to those metaphorical roots that surreptitiously guide the same rational discourse, it is also because Western rationality has passed through a turning point, by deconstructing the static and metaphysical nature of ancient cosmological knowledge. This deconstruction was initially attributed by Blumenberg to an Augustinian trajectory, but, after his radical rejection of the implicit anti-humanism of Augustin, it is rather attributed

12 Blumenberg, 1966, 463, 465: „Die Heterogenität von Begrifflichkeit und Bildlichkeit fällt in sich zusammen, wenn einmal beide als Mittel vorläufiger Anweisungen des Denkens in Richtung auf eine nie ganz zu erreichende, zu ver-einnahmende, zu bewältigende Gegenständlichkeit gesehen worden sind. Solche Disjunktionen, solche Alternativen verschwinden für die *docta ignorantia* in dem Augenblick, in dem sie sich als Aspekte einer Bewegung herausstellen: *docta vero ignorantia omnes modos, quibus accedi ad veritatem potest, unit.* [...] Die Polemik zwischen Herrenberger und Cusaner zeigt, dass die „wissende Unwissenheit“ zunächst das traditionelle Schema von Begriff und Metapher, von Eigentlichkeit und Bildlichkeit der Rede durchbrochen hat.“ See also H. Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* originally in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6 (1960), 7–142; re-edited and commented by A. Haverkamp, Frankfurt 2013, 174–180 (174–175): „Die Metapher ist zur Bewegung fähig, kann Bewegung darstellen, wie es die zum Transzendieren anleitende Sprengmetaphorik Cusaners am eindringlichsten bestätigt, die mit den geometrischen Figuren operiert und sie transformiert.“

13 Therefore, to clarify Blumenberg's argument about the genesis of modernity also implies facing the problem of the status of the “metaphorological” project.

to the figure of Cusanus, who constitutes, together with Bruno, a new trajectory of the genesis of the modern conception of rationality, that from the point of view of the history of theology, we could define “Origenian”.

Bearing in mind Blumenberg’s interest and competence in the Patristic sources of Christian theological reflection, it is therefore surprising that he had not dedicated any specific attention to Origen. Origen’s name is certainly hidden in his crucial analysis about heretical gnosis, which occupied him during all the 1970s. It is not possible here to consider all these analyses. However, in one of his most famous essays, titled *Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos*,¹⁴ we find a couple of pages dedicated to Origen, which are very interesting in briefly clarifying the philosopher’s point of view. First of all, Blumenberg declares his appreciation for Origen, describing him as the greatest thinker of the Greek patristic, if not of the entire patristic:

Vielleicht war Origenes gerade deshalb der größte Denker der griechischen, wenn nicht der gesamten Patristik, weil er im Prozess der Auseinandersetzung von antiker Metaphysik und biblischer Lehre den äußersten and kühnsten Versuch einer Versöhnung machte.¹⁵

According to Blumenberg, the theology of Origen is characterised by the epochal and extreme attempt to find a *Versöhnung*, a reconciliation, between two antithetical worldviews: on one side the biblical conception of God, according to which He is a personal, absolute and omnipotent figure, *creator ex nihilo*; on the other side, the Greek philosophy, mainly Platonic, which tends to rationalise the divine, and to include it in a metaphysical system that has a certain stability and immutability which is guaranteed by the eternal repetition of historical cycles or eons. The fundamental feature of the biblical worldview is the notion of divine omnipotence, which has peculiar effects upon the conception of men and world: the absoluteness of God prevents the possibility for man to know Him, to elaborate knowledge of Him and to secure it in a humanly acceptable logic. The notion of divine election produces the crisis of human devices of *Selbst-Behauptung*, self-affirmation facing God. The idea of omnipotence blocks any human attempt to decrease the experience of the absoluteness, namely it denies any value to magical practices, to myths and other human strategies for making the experience of

14 H. Blumenberg, *Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos*, originally in M. Fuhrmann (ed.) *Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, München 1971, 21990, 11–66, riedited in H. Blumenberg, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, Frankfurt 2001, 327–406.

15 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

reality tolerable.¹⁶ Actually, early Christianity is an eschatological variation of ancient Judaism, which implies the radicalisation of the omnipotence and of the personality of God, since it waits for a final saving divine intervention. Therefore, Christianity is characterised by an anti-mundane ethic. It demythologises the world by denying any natural presence of God in it, but it also implies a pessimistic view of man and of the natural order. Christian man is in a limited situation, in a series of ending events, with the consequence of an interpretation of history as linear and precarious, because of the inner exigency to leave an open space for the saving intervention of God, which is definitive and unrepeatable, and therefore absolute.¹⁷

16 Blumenberg, 2001, 335: „Das Verbot des Dekalogs (*Exodus* 20,7), den Gottesnamen unnütz zu gebrauchen, ist die eigentliche und strikte Gegenposition zu aller Mythologie und ihrer Leichtigkeit, mit der unfixierten Gestalt und Geschichte des Gottes und der Götter umzugehen.“ Ibid, 338: „Der Mythos stellt nicht vor Entscheidungen, er fordert keine Verzichte. [...] Das biblische Verbot, den Gottesnamen unnütz zu gebrauchen, zwingt ebenso in die Richtung der Abstraktion wie in die der unerbittlichen Ausschließlichkeit; es weiß um die entbannende und entpflichtende Kraft der mythischen Freiheit des Umgangs mit den Götternamen, den Götterbildern und den Göttergeschichten.“ Ibid., 355: „Dagegen sollte die Entschiedenheit des biblischen Gottes und seines Heilswillens stehen, ohne jeden Ausweg in allegorische Deutbarkeit und Bedeutsamkeit. An diesem Punkt wendet sich der Wahrheitsbegriff der Theologie viel entschiedener und reflektierter gegen den der Mythologie als in der Frage der Pluralität oder Unizität des Göttlichen.“ We also must notice that these and the following themes will have a similar focus in H. Blumenberg *Arbeit am Mythos*, Frankfurt 1979, although we are not going to go into this text in detail.

17 Blumenberg, 2001, 375–376: „In der radikalen Eschatologie der neutestamentlichen Heilserwartung ist am wenigsten von jenem „Spielraum“ der Umständlichkeit; die Verbindung zwischen dem Heilsbedürfnis und der Heilserfüllung ist als die kürzeste aller möglichen verheißen, die Macht der Gottheit wird unmittelbar auf elementare Weise als wirksam erwartet. [...] Der Schwund der *Eschatologie* gibt Raum für ein Anwachsen der *Mythologie*. Wenn nicht alles täuscht, war es die kritische Energie des genuinen biblischen Monotheismus, seiner absolutistischen Züge und vor allem seiner Schöpfungs idee, was die Remythisierung des Christentums zum Stillstand brachte und spätestens mit Augustin die Züge einer Dogmatik prägte, die mit Allmacht und Freiheit Instrumente zur „Ökonomie“ aller Fragen besaß. Der an der Radikalisierung der Schöpfungs idee entwickelte Begriff der Allmacht wurde zum spekulativen Lieblingsprinzip der theologischen Scholastik, die die Umwege und Umständlichkeit der göttlichen Heilsfürsorge auf ein konsistentes System von Heilsnotwendigkeiten zurückzuzwingen suchen mußte.“ Cf. U. Wilckens, *Zur Eschatologie des Urchristentums. Bemerkung zur Deutung der jüdisch-urchristlichen Überlieferung bei Hans Blumenberg*, in H. J. Birkner / D. Rössler (eds.), *Beiträge zur Theorie des neuzeitlichen Christentums*, Berlin 1968, 127–142

The Greek mentality, on the contrary, does not tolerate one definitive story, because it is familiar with the proliferation of variations of the same myth: with its repetitions and constantly different receptions, the Greek myth allows a continuous elaboration and reinterpretation of itself, namely the possibility to rationalise its meaning for human societies.¹⁸ The myth does not tolerate the idea of “omnipotence” of a God,¹⁹ and it does not tend towards “absoluteness”, but in the opposite direction with respect to the categories that underlie religion and metaphysics:²⁰ it has „*eine elementare Disposition, sich nicht an den Abgrund des Absoluten treiben zu lassen.*“²¹ Greek religion was therefore malleable to anthropological exigencies: in this sense, philosophy is born thanks to the highly sophisticated religion of the Greeks, and the same Platonic philosophy is the *Aufhebung* of myth’s work, because it inherits and preserves its functioning device, that is, the explanation of multiplicity and differences of things by considering them as variations or copies of archetypes.²²

Therefore, according to Blumenberg’s point of view, the encounter between ancient Christianity and Hellenism is particularly ambiguous, because of the unavoidable collision between two different perspectives on history: on the one hand, a linear structure, on the other a circular one. This encounter should have rapidly produced an attenuation of the eschatological

18 Blumenberg 2001, 335: „Dadurch erscheint alles am Mythos als Kontrast: seine Leichtigkeit, seine Unverbindlichkeit und Plastizität, seine Disposition für Spielbarkeit im weitesten Sinne, seine Ungeeignetheit zur Markierung von Ketzern und Apostaten. Mythologie spricht von ihren Gegenständen wie von etwas, was man hinter sich hat, nicht nur im Epos mit der Freude, die aus dem Abstreifen und Hintersichlassen traumatischer Ängste und Drohungen gespeist sein könnte, sondern auch in der Tragödie [...] Nicht der Stoff der Mythos, sondern die ihm gegenüber zugestandene Distanz des Zuschauers ist das entscheidende Moment.“
Ibid., 341: „Die mythologische Tradition scheint auf Variation und auf die dadurch manifestierbare Unerschöpflichkeit ihres Ausgangsbestandes angelegt zu sein, wie das Thema musikalischer Variationen darauf, bis an die Grenze der Unkenntlichkeit abgewandelt werden zu können. [...] es darf Vertrautes vorausgesetzt werden, ohne daß eine besondere Sanktion besäße oder dem Zwang einer konservativen Behandlungsweise unterworfen wäre.“

19 Blumenberg, 2001, 372: „Von herausragender Wichtigkeit für den Mythos und seine Rezeption ist dabei die Negation des Attributes „Allmacht“. [...] Allmacht verwehrt es im Grunde, von ihrem Träger eine Geschichte zu erzählen. Geschichten sind, topographisch vorgestellt, immer Umwege, während absolute Macht sich im Diagramm der kürzesten Verbindung zweier Punkte auslegt.“

20 Blumenberg, 2001, 344: „Der Mythos tendiert nicht ins Absolute, sondern in der Gegenrichtung zu den Kategorien, die Religion und Metaphysik bestimmen.“

21 Blumenberg, 2001, 373.

22 Cfr. Blumenberg, 2001, 363–364.

projection to the end of the cosmos and a rediscovery of the positive meaning of the world and its institutions. But, at the same time, it should have threatened the deepest conception of biblical thought: divine omnipotence. Regarding Origen, this equivocal process became evident in its heretical consequences: according to Blumenberg, Origen would inexorably become heretical, because, by attempting a full harmonisation, he was reintroducing the "myth" right into the heart of his theological system.

Zu der wohl exemplarischen Kollision von mythologischer und geschichtlicher, zyklisch-geschlossener und linear-offener Grundfigur kam es, als zu Beginn des 3. Jahrhunderts Origenes die kosmische Wiederkehr zur christlichen Metaphysik machen wollte.²³

Blumenberg individuates the focus of Origen's theological reflection in the fact that the destruction of the world for him is no more the last, unique eschatological event, which brings our history to a definite end, but a recurring episode that is part of the more general, providential economy by which God governs the cosmos and human affairs. Through the succession of countless worlds and their destruction, God aims at the progressive education and edification of His creatures, who are free to choose their destiny, and who, at the same time, have multiple chances to make the good choice and return to God. In this view, the succession of worlds is like a cosmic ritual, and the possibility of multiple existences borrows the strategy of mythical and platonic thought.

Der theologischen Heilsgeschichte nahm er die vom antiken Wirklichkeitsbegriff her notwendig anstößige Faktizität des Einmaligen. Er verlieh dieser Geschichte dafür die höchste Sanktion, die ein aus der mythischen Grundfigur herkommendes Weltverständnis zu vergeben hatte, nämlich die der Wiederholung [...].²⁴

The Origenian cosmic order, according to Blumenberg's reading, does not vanish definitively after the judgment, but it is destroyed and reconstructed again.²⁵ The eschatological punishment is valid for just one eon; it is medicinal, not final. Each world's cycle reflects the free progression of the creaturely desire in the race towards God. Every soul occupies its place in the cosmic order according to its previous merits and faults. The possibility for

23 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

24 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

25 Blumenberg, 2001, 387: „Hatten zuvor nur die Gegner des Christentums zur Verwechslung der biblischen Eschatologie mit der stoischen Ekpyrosis geneigt und den Anhängern des neuen Glaubens beschleunigende Wünsche hinsichtlich des Weltbrandes vorgeworfen, so soll nun das endgültige Ende der Welt zum innerweltlichen Ereignis, zur wiederkehrenden Episode eines kosmischen Rituals werden.“

demons to get salvation also implies going beyond the straight seriousness of a unique story, and the idea of the inexorability of evil.²⁶

God does not need to definitively revoke the Creation; therefore, the divine judge does not come into conflict with the creator. The structure of repetition allows the reconciliation between grace and nature: grace does not come down to earth “from above”, as a miracle, but it is finally reabsorbed into the inner and natural participation in the gift of the divine Image. In other words, the divine gift is not eschatological, but it is the ontological and natural gift of human freedom. The theme of the intellects’ boredom or satiety does not have the same seriousness of the forthcoming Augustinian doctrine of “original sin”,²⁷ because it explains the presence of evil in the world as an unavoidable tortuosity planned by God himself. Consequently, Origen does not have any positive conception of God’s infinity or omnipotence: the cosmos is inserted at the core of the theological system, as necessary self-limitation of God.²⁸ The world cannot be the opaque manifestation of a fathomless will, but it should be intended as the necessary unfolding of a uniform and rational divine plan that guarantees the freedom of the creatures. The world is part of the become-other of God, as temporal duplication of His eternal Trinitarian Becoming, and eternal reconciliation of God with His creature. The uniqueness of historical facts is dissolved into the eternal becoming of the Spirit.

But – and this is the crucial point – all these anti-eschatological achievements are made possible, according to Blumenberg, by the revival of the fundamental feature of the ancient worldview: the mythical cyclicity or circularity.

Das System des Origenes ist noch nicht theologisch im Sinne der späteren Tradition, sondern es bringt noch einmal [...] die Umständlichkeit einer mythischen Struktur zur Geltung.²⁹

26 Blumenberg, 2001, 388: „Was hier interessiert, ist die Verbindung dieses Prinzips der begrenzten göttlichen Macht mit der Auflösung der Einzigkeit der heilsgeschichtlichen Fakten im Schema der Wiederholung des Weltlaufs ohne Festlegung der Akteure jeder Weltperiode auf ihre in der vorhergehenden eingenommenen Rollen.“

27 Cf. Blumenberg, 2001, 389.

28 Blumenberg, 2001, 388: „Der mythische Akzent liegt auf der Welt, nicht auf der Macht, die über sie verfügt. Am deutlichsten wird dies am Verhältnis des Origenes zum neu heraufkommenden theologischen Prinzip der Omnipotenz, das die theologische Spekulation des folgenden Jahrtausends als der Epoche zwischen Mythologie und Wissenschaft bestimmen sollte.“

29 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

The theologian of Alexandria transfers the mythical device to an ontological level. But this way, according to Blumenberg, Origen inevitably had to become heretical, because of the explicit mythisation of the Christian worldview. The complexity of the mythical structure collides with the biblical doctrine, in particular with the absolutism of a theological metaphysics that later would prevail over the first, with Augustinian and scholastic theology.

Origenes ist an der Unvereinbarkeit der Wirklichkeiten gescheitert, die er zusammenzwingen wollte. Sein Entwurf beruhte einerseits auf dem Grundriß einer Struktur, die noch hinter die traditionsbestimmende antike Metaphysik auf Kategorien des Mythos zurückgreift, andererseits auf einer Anerkennung des absoluten Ranges der Freiheit aller Subjekte, einer Konzeption, die den Schöpfer nur noch als Richter zu integrieren vermochte.³⁰

Blumenberg's reading of Origen is a good illustration of his entire interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and Western rationality. The philosopher is not interested in an accurate reconstruction of Origen's work and thought, but mainly in the problem of explaining the genesis and the development of the modern deconstruction of the absoluteness of God that would explode in the modern age. Blumenberg is interested in showing that the essence of myth conflicts with any theological absolutism, and precisely for this reason the rediscovery of classical culture and myth in the Renaissance was to produce the same contradictions and the same process of neutralisation of theological absolutism that was already visible in Origen.³¹ In this way, Blumenberg rejects the idea of a christian (Origenian) "humanistic" and rationalistic theological "matrix" at the basis of modernity, by reinterpreting Origen as a completely Platonic thinker and even a

30 Blumenberg, 2001, 391.

31 Blumenberg, 2001, 391: "Aus dem Scheitern des Origenes folgte, daß die Endgültigkeiten des einmaligen Heilsprozesses zwischen Schöpfung und Gericht der Geschichte dieser *einen* Welt absoluten Rang gaben. Konsequenz war aber auch die Ungeheuerlichkeit der Vorstellung von der *massa damnata* als eines ebenso unabänderlichen wie zur Ertaubung humanen Empfindens zwingenden absolutistischen Verhängnisses; ihre Artikulation erfolgte als Widerspruch zur Apokatastasis des Origenes und der mit ihr gegebenen Möglichkeit der Ablösung selbst noch des Satans in seiner Rolle wie der Dämonen und der Verdammten. Hier wird die Antithese von Mythos und Geschichte, von Wiederholungs- und Endgültigkeitsstruktur am deutlichsten, zugleich damit das Potential der Mythologie, zum Ausdrucksmittel des Vorbehalts und Widerspruchs gegenüber den Absolutismen einer theologischen Metaphysik zu werden." About the connection between myth and history in Blumenberg, and about the risk of remythization of history, cf. F. Cassinari, *Il mito della storia. La dialettica della ragione storica nella riflessione di Hans Blumenberg*, in A. Borsari (ed.), *Hans Blumenberg. Mito, metafora, modernità*, Bologna 1999, pp. 227–256.

remythologizer – therefore “paganizer” – with respect to biblical theological devices, originally eschatological and apocalyptic in their nature.

This strained interpretation of Origenian thought is also evident from other short passages on Origen, for example in the *Passion according to Matthew*:

Sogar Origenes, tiefgründigster der frühen Theologen, hatte *nicht* behauptet, dass bei seiner *Apokatastasis* Gottes Widersacher vom untersten Pfuhl der Hölle heraufgezogen werde; er hatte nur bei der Wiederholung des Weltlaufs offenlassen wollen, dass jeder wieder alles, von oben bis unten, werden und sein *könne*.³²

Blumenberg tends to describe Origen's thought as not really apocatastatic (tending towards a definite end of universal salvation), and therefore eschatological, but rather radically cyclical: God's immense mercy in no way implies a determinism (not even natural or ontological) of salvation, so it is not certain that the devil will finally be saved, because the problem is not identifying a real end of the world: rather, at stake is the assurance of total freedom of spiritual positioning within the eternal system of the worldly roles of evil and good.³³

In this way, according to Blumenberg, questions of eschatological salvation, as well as of grace and forgiveness, i.e. the traditional instruments of a theological-political logic of world government, tend to disappear into a mythical-platonic structure. Worried about admitting the idea of modern thought being indebted to Christian theology, Blumenberg always outlines an historical antithesis between two different tendencies or principles. On the one hand, the dogmatic assertion of the absoluteness and omnipotence of God, identified *tout court* with the core of Christian religion, on the other hand, a pagan, anti-theological, mythical way of emancipation from it that allows men to assume a positive role in the cosmic order, and to break free from every overly strict metaphysical boundary through the power of imagination, of narrations, and through the work of platonic idealisation.³⁴ Consequently, modern progress has more in common with the “myth” than

32 H. Blumenberg, *Matthäuspassion*, Frankfurt 1988, ⁸2015, 292.

33 Blumenberg, 2001, 388–389: „Die Harmonisierung von mythischem Zyklus und heilsbezogener Freiheit der individuellen Subjekte besteht darin, dass zwar in jedem Umlauf der Welt dieselben „Stellen“ im System, vom Engel bis zum Satan, zu vergeben sind, dass aber ihre Verteilung Resultat des Gerichts über die vorhergehende Weltepoche ist. Die Freiheit bringt jedesmal wieder Bewegung in das Reich beseligter Ruhe und Ungeschiedenheit des göttlichen Geistes und der den Gott genießenden Geister.“

34 This results also from the considerations on gnosticism which will be carried out in *Arbeit am Mythos*.

with faith in the sovereignty of God, because it necessarily conflicts with the anti-humanistic and nihilistic heart of the kerygma of Christian origins.

Now it is becoming (hopefully) clearer why Origen does not occupy any privileged role in Blumenberg's analysis. According to the philosopher, his figure is ambiguous, and his theological system is too equivocal, because of the compromise between the efforts of Platonic philosophy that would be renewed at the threshold of modern age and the dogmatic residues of theological absolutism. The turn of modernity has a connection with Origenian theology insofar it renews its mythising and anti-theological effects, letting modern men emancipate themselves from any theological metaphysics. At the same time, this way it becomes possible to problematise Blumenberg's thesis, by noting his strained interpretation, which has the paradoxical consequence of dividing Origen from the essence of Christianity. The philosopher of the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is obliged to recognise a discontinuity inside Christian history, between two different sources: one biblical and the other Hellenistic. In this way, the whole Origenian tradition, including Cusanus and Bruno, is surprisingly described as having an anti-Christian destiny. As the author writes emblematically in *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, every Pelagianism tends to increase the quality of the Creation, and, by allowing nature to absorb the entire quality of the divine, tends to become pantheistic, as in Giordano Bruno's and Spinoza's thought:

Insofern ist, ganz unabhängig von Zusammenhängen ihrer Herkunft, die Metapher vom Buch der Natur ihrer dogmengeschichtlichen Zuordnung nach pelagianisch. Sobald es auf Abwehr von Dualismen nicht mehr ankam und die Natur die ganze Qualität der Gottheit in ihrer Selbstausschüttung zu absorbieren begann, mußte sie antichristlich werden und wurde es. Jeder Pelagianismus tendiert, wie weit der Weg auch sein mag, darauf, die Qualität der Schöpfung unlimitiert zu steigern, und damit auf einen Pantheismus wie den Giordano Bruno und Spinoza.³⁵

The Pelagian (and Origenian) idea of the human freedom and capacity to reach God on the basis of good works or merits testifies to a paradigm that subordinates divine power, and consequently the theological structure that mediates with it, to human spiritual autonomy. This fact does not mean that Blumenberg denies that there would be a Christian humanism, but only that, as time went on, the ambivalence between anthropocentric and theocentric motifs inside Christian theology would prove to be antinomic. The anthropological interest seems to demand the pantheistic overcoming of Christian dualism.

This interpretation explains why Blumenberg ended up inserting Cusanus inside an epochal threshold whose completion is actually Giordano Bruno.

35 H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt 1981, ²1986, 35–36.

In this way, indeed, Blumenberg points out how the category of infinity can produce the modern self-affirmation only with Bruno's final rejection of Christological dogmatics. Cusanus is considered only as a forerunner of the epochal threshold, because he forces the theological-eschatological perspective into a single, unstable structure, that is, the need of maintaining the factor of God's transcendence, but at the same time the contradictory approaching of man and, through him, of the cosmos to the qualities of that transcendence. According to Blumenberg, the concept of divine infinity should paradoxically lead to the overcoming of the dualistic and hierarchical relationship between mundane copies and origin, since the notion of copy or trace has to absorb the entire ambit of human thinkability and knowability. If Creation is neither an act of authority nor the decree of a Sovereign who reserves the right to govern it, but the expression of God's gift of infinity, indirectly this means the exponential growth of the quality of creation, as in a movement of absorption of the prerogatives of the absolute by the world, which makes it the "self-limitation of God":

Aber schon hier, beim Cusaner, ist klar, daß die Schöpfung nicht mehr der bloße Hoheitsakt der Gottheit ist, nicht mehr das souveräne Dekret beliebigen Inhalts, das die Nominalisten als Inbegriff der Transzendenz ansahen, sondern ein Akt, in den die Essenz des Urhebers unausweichlich investiert werden mußte, bei dem es keinen willkürlichen Vorbehalt geben konnte. Das Universum ist Gleichnis des Absoluten, es entfaltet in Zeit und Raum die ursprüngliche Einheit, die *complicatio*, und daher ist Bewegung die Grundbestimmung der Natur, denn sie ist die Entfaltung ursprünglicher Einheit, die *explicatio quietis*.³⁶

Making the world the appearance of the invisible God also means making God "the invisibility of the visible."³⁷ The difference between earthly and otherworldly sight tends to disappear, and the world can become the place of the relationship with the divine truth, which no longer has eschatological-metaphysical dimension.

What distinguishes Cusanus from Nolanus is the persistence of the theological framework, which does not allow the former to carry out the pantheistic effects of his doctrine. Cusanus bases the possibility of the relationship between creation and God on the truth of the Incarnation. Though by making it the revelation of the eternal logic of determination and contraction of God in the world, that is, of the manifestation of the invisible infinity of God in the finite limit, the whole system of the *docta ignorantia* finds its own keystone in the second person of the Trinity. This is the only singular and

36 Blumenberg, 1966, 474–475.

37 Blumenberg, 1966, 465: „Die Welt ist nicht nur die Erscheinung des unsichtbaren Gottes, sondern Gott ist die Unsichtbarkeit der Sichtbaren selbst.“

paradoxical point of tangency between finite determination and the indeterminate infinity of God the Father, or rather the impossible overlap – dogmatically postulated – between the circumference and the polygon inscribed in it towards which Creation tends. This device allows Cusanus' Platonism to preserve a theological government of the dialectics between the invisible (and proper) essence in God and its earthly revelation. Cusanus' system remains a compromise between theological personalism and the rediscovery of the quality of the world.³⁸ The “paradox” of the Incarnation guarantees the possibility of temporal progress and a hierarchy between sensible and supersensible, as well as the necessity of faith as a meta-intellectual leap in the absolute centre; in other words, a way of eschatologically reaching the coincidence of divine and human, unity and difference, inside the Trinity. From this point of view the cosmos is still subject to theological hypotheca, being conceivable only as an ambiguous and momentary self-limitation of God, who can never exhaust the ulteriority of the divine abyss.³⁹

38 Blumenberg, 1966, 545–547: „Die Verleiblichung des Wortes war beim Cusaner Ergänzung und Vollendung der Schöpfung, *complementum et quies*, wie es in der Predigt *Dies Sanctificatus* heißt. Erst in dieser göttlichen Selbsteinfügung in die Schöpfung aktualisiert sich die Macht Gottes vollends [...]. Das aber hatte zur Voraussetzung, daß die Zeit, durch die ein Abstand zwischen der Schöpfung und der Inkarnation inmitten der Geschichte gelegt wird, ein rein menschliches Maß der Sukzessivität ist, das an die innere und wesentliche Einheit des göttlichen Handelns angelegt wird. Dem entsprach die Theorie des Cusaners von der Zeit als einer aus dem Menschengestalt produzierten Kategorie. In der Zeitform menschlicher Rede ist es dann zulässig und notwendig zu sagen, daß die Schöpfung unvollständig und unvollendet war und einen Vorbehalt des der Gottheit Möglichen enthielt, bevor sie ihr christologisches Komplement empfing. [...] Trotz der Anstrengung, das voluntaristische Element aus seiner Metaphysik zu eliminieren, hatte doch auch der Cusaner es nur gleichsam weiter zurückverlegt, im Dunkel der spekulativen Vorgeschichte der Schöpfung schwerer erkennbar werden lassen. [...] Man kann greifen, daß dies ein verzweifelter Versuch ist, die Faktizität der Welt als rationales Ärgernis zu beheben und gleichzeitig die Personalität Gottes zu retten; aber gerade die Angestrengtheit dieses Versuches markiert den Weg, der statt auf die als unmöglich erscheinende Lösung des Problems auf seine Eliminierung hinführt.“

39 Blumenberg, 1966, 520: „Hier gerät das Nachdenken über die Allmacht, das bewegendste Motiv der spätmittelalterlichen Spekulation, in eine seiner Antinomien: wenn das Universum die schöpferische Potenz seines Ursprungs erschöpfte, wäre es zugleich die Begrenzung dieser Potenz, insofern es das Nichtmehr-Können manifestierte; insofern das Universum aber das Werk des höchsten Weisheit und Güte sein soll, die sich in ihm manifestiert, ist es unvorstellbar, daß jene Potenz sich in ihrer Selbstverschwendung nicht vorausgab haben und das größte ihr Mögliche nicht realisiert haben könnte. So muß die Schöpfung einerseits die höchste mögliche Vollkommenheit besitzen und darf doch andererseits nicht die Grenze des in ihrem Ursprung Möglichen erreichen. Anders formuliert: wenn

The sense of Cusanus' speculation is still that of reaching a soterical otherworldliness and an eschatological gnosis: it is in the final apocatastasis of all reality that the movement of reunification between God and creature is resolved: it is in Jesus Christ that God has given Himself totally, not in the world.⁴⁰ It should be noted that also in this case Blumenberg – exactly as in the case of Origen – deconstructs Cusanus' philosophy as a failed attempt to hold together irreconcilable reasons:⁴¹ anthropological against theological.

Wenn der Cusaner versucht, den Menschen als ein Geschöpf der göttlichen Selbstverschwendung zu beschreiben, so handelt er dabei, als sei ihm bewußt, daß sich beim Versagen dieser Anstrengung die Steigerung des Menschen nicht *mit* der Theologie, sondern *gegen* die Theologie vollziehen würde.⁴²

The relevance of the Nolanus consists of producing the definitive collapse of the theological-escatological system, through which the possibility of escaping from the dualistic configuration of the Christian world is definitively reached.⁴³ The problem with which Cusanus had struggled, and with which every confrontation with the crisis at the end of the medieval era had

Gott die Welt nicht zu dem höchstmöglichen vollkommenen Werk machen konnte, weil er dabei sich selbst widersprochen hätte, dann hätte er dieses Werk nicht wollen dürfen. Darauf beruht der in dem Predigtzitat ausgeführte Gedanke, daß das Universum überhaupt nicht wäre, wenn es nicht zur Vollkommenheit hätte gebracht werden können. Diese Antinomie wird durch die Inkarnation „gelöst“.“

40 Blumenberg, 1966, 499: „Für den Cusaner war es noch ganz fraglos, dass die Welt trotz ihrer Unendlichkeit dem Menschengest keinen wesensgemäßen, voll genügenden Gegenstand darbieten konnte.“

41 Blumenberg, 1966, 487–488: „Der Cusaner hat versucht, zwischen der Scylla des scholastischen Rationalismus und der Charybdis des Nominalismus hindurch zu manövrieren. [...] Aber dabei kommt heraus, wie wenig dieses Lehrstück für die dem Cusaner sich geschichtlich stellende Aufgabe wirklich leistet, sobald es nicht mehr und nicht nur mystische Verdunkelung, sondern Harmonisierung destruktiv unverträglicher Positionen zustande bringen soll.“

42 Blumenberg, 1966, 497–498.

43 Blumenberg, 1966, 524: „Bruno starb für einen Widerspruch, der sich gegen das Zentrum und die Substanz des christlichen Systems richtete.“ See also *ibid.* 527: „An dieses Universum hat sich die Gottheit bereits in der Schöpfung voll ausgegeben, und da sie gegenüber der Unendlichkeit der Welten nichts zurückhielt und zurückhalten konnte, bleibt ihr gegenüber keinem Wesen dieser Welt etwas nachzuholen, keine Möglichkeit des „Übernatürlichen“. Nur der unendliche Kosmos selbst kann Phänomenalität, so etwas wie Verleiblichung der Gottheit sein, die als Person – also an ein bestimmtes, durch eine Zeitstelle faktisch gemachtes Weltwesen gebunden – zu denken, dem Nolarer unvollziehbar geworden ist. Beim Nolaner sind die im System des Cusaners sorgfältig verhehlten oder noch geschichteten Konflikte voll durchgehalten, im Ternar von Theologie, Kosmologie und Anthropologie sind Alternativen gestellt und entschieden.“

to deal – the stabilisation of the world against theological absolutism – is now achieved by the overlapping of deity and worldliness. This could only be reached, however, by overcoming the dogma of the Incarnation on which the whole tradition was based, precisely because it was a paradoxical, divine medium between the finite and the infinite.⁴⁴

Christ's place, that of the second person of the Trinity and the generated manifestation of the divine, could be taken by the divinisation of the cosmos itself, that cosmos which Christianity had once relegated to a place of shadow and sin. If the world is the supreme theophany, the only-begotten, it now becomes the eternal emanation of God himself, the self-reproduction or self-exhaustion of his donating and generative power in the physical infinity of the universe.⁴⁵ Without an absolute centre, high and low, above and below, true and false, they lose their absolute significance; history can once again have a cyclical conformation, and man no longer has a final direction towards which to direct his curiosity, but he can ground his theoretical performances on himself and on his needs.⁴⁶

44 Blumenberg, 1966, 540: „Das Problem, mit dem der Cusaner gerungen hatte und mit dem jede Auseinandersetzung mit der endmittelalterlichen Krise es zu tun haben mußte: die Stabilisierung der Welt gegenüber der Infragestellung durch den theologischen Absolutismus, wird nun nicht mehr über eine Bildlichkeitsbeziehung, sondern durch die Kongruenz von Gottheit und Weltlichkeit erreicht. Man kann dies getrost als „Naturalisierung“ bezeichnen, weil es die Stelle der göttlichen Willenshoheit mit der Notwendigkeit der Selbstübertragung des Göttlichen in das Weltliche [...] umbesetzt.“

45 Blumenberg, 1966, 545: „Das Universum des Giordano Bruno, als die notwendige und rückhaltlose Vollstreckung der *potentia absoluta* des Schöpfergottes, besetzt den systematischen Stellenraum, der beim Cusaner durch die innertrinitarischen Zeugung einer göttlichen Person, durch die Erschaffung der Welt und durch die Verklammerung beider in der Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes besetzt worden war“.

46 Blumenberg, 1966, 549–551: „Damit ist zugleich etwas gesagt über die Weise, wie Welt in der Gottheit gründet und aus ihr hervorgeht: nämlich als die sich manifestierende Unverborgenheit des sich nicht vorenthalten könnenden Gottes. Daß eine Welt ist, liegt im Wesen, nicht im Willen der Gottheit begründet. Die Welt ist das Korrelat der Impersonalität Gottes, und deshalb ist sie Manifestation, aber nicht Offenbarung. Offenbarung setzt das Verbergenkönnen und Fürsichbehalten als Möglichkeit voraus. Die Welt ist nicht Mitteilung der Gottheit, und darum nicht das „Buch der Natur“, sie ist nicht ausdruckschaft akzentuiert, nicht „Ordnung“ im Sinne einer dem Willen und seinen Setzungen entspringenden und einem anderen Willen verbindlich zu machenden Beurkundung. Die Natur des Nolaners provoziert nicht die Hermeneutik einer *lex naturalis*. Sie ist azentrisch, indifferent in jeder ihrer Gestalten gegenüber jeder anderen und auf jeder ihrer Stellen gegenüber allen anderen; daher ist sie erfüllt von Bewegung und von der Metamorphose der Gestalten, daher ist sie [...] beherrscht von *principium rationis insufficientis*,

As a result, the human desire can finally legitimately enjoy the world and rediscover the sensible realities as its legitimate objects.⁴⁷ The progress of the human intellect, which passed from the sensible to the supersensible and to the eternal truths in God, no longer finds a point of vertical arrest in the faith in Christ, but it is forced into an incessant horizontal movement, an eccentric, heroic fugue: it is forced to pass from one object to another, since there is nothing that can exhaust its critical fury, in the absolute relativisation of any metaphysical hierarchy. The universe becomes a set of traces, signs, or varied manifestations of the inscrutable abyssal infinity of God. The human desire, by crossing and consuming every determination in the movement of erotic fusion with nature, finally finds pleasure in the search itself, in the insatiability of wandering; it discovers nothing behind the phenomena but itself and its own necessity, and this discovery causes the positive liberation

soweit man irgendeine andere Frage als die nach dem Seinsrecht des Ganzen stellt. „Pluralität der Welten“ ist hier nicht nur rhetorische Hyperbel, sondern notwendiger Ausdruck des Prinzips der Vorbehaltlosigkeit im Ursprung des Wirklichen. [...] Das Pathos der Pluralität der Welten [...] beruht auf der metaphysischen Versicherung, daß die Gottheit alles hergegeben und der Welt überlassen habe, in der deshalb aus allem alles werden kann. Mag das hier auch noch nicht als Appell an den Wirkungswillen des Menschen aufgefaßt werden können, so impliziert es doch so etwas wie einen metaphysischen Urbefehl, wie ihn Bruno in der Vorrede zu den *Eroici Furori* der Verwandlerin Kirke in den Mund legt, die Welt von Gestalt zu Gestalt zu durchlaufen und sich im Kreislauf der Formen Realität um Realität zuzueignen. Wenn die Welt so nichts anderes als die wesenhafte Unverstelltheit der Gottheit selbst ist, der Ding gewordene Widerspruch zum *deus absconditus* der Theologie, dann kann es auch in der Zeitlichkeit ihres Bestehens keine ausgezeichneten Augenblicke geben, dann hat es keinen Sinn, von einem Anfang zu sprechen, in dem der Bestand der Welt als eine eidetisch feste und sich immer erhaltende oder immer wieder regenerierende Substanz gesetzt worden ist, so daß alles Weitere nur von diesem „Anfang“ abhängig wäre. Die Zeit selbst wird vielmehr zur realen Dimension der stetigen, aber in jedem ihrer Augenblicke gleichwertigen Selbstreproduktion Gottes“.

47 Blumenberg, 1966, 538–539: „Sie [die implizite Kritik an den theologischen Grundvorstellungen des Christentums] wendet sich gegen die voluntaristische und nominalistische Begründung der „Rechtfertigung“, also gegen die dem späten Mittelalter und der Reformation gemeinsame Doktrin des unergründlichen Dualismus von Erwählung und Verwerfung. Was Wohlgefälligkeit des Menschen bei der Gottheit sein kann, darf weder der Verborgenheit noch einer rational nicht zugänglichen Offenbarung überlassen sein. [...] Die Bäume, die in den Gärten des Gesetzes wachsen, sind von den Göttern dazu bestimmt, Früchte zu bringen, und zwar solche Früchte, von denen die Menschen sich nähren und erhalten können und an denen die Götter kein anderes Interesse und Wohlgefallen haben als dieses – das ist deutlich gegen ein Paradies gerichtet, in dem verbotene oder der Gottheit allein vorbehaltene Früchte wachsen.“

of *libido* and *curiositas*. The cyclical and anti-eschatological structure of myth, through Platonism, triumphs again over theological absolutism, as was also shown about Origen's theology.

In this regard, an explicative note on Origen (number 34 of part VI, chapter III) is also contained in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. In this note, Blumenberg cites the preface to *De gli eroici furori*, in which Bruno makes the sorceress Circe pronounce the command to traverse the world from form to form and to appropriate reality after reality in the succession of forms, recalling the fact that in this context Bruno himself refers to Origen. He points out, however, that the Nolanus' interpretation is somewhat misleading, because Origen's apocatastasis must not be conceived as the "lawfulness of a physical revolution" of the contents of the world, but as the institution of new worlds "in a temporal succession", because of the need to respect the free moral decision of the previous stage. In this way, Blumenberg emphasises the difference between Bruno and Origen: while in Bruno the universe is an "impersonal" eternal becoming of worlds, and for this reason the infinite succession of worlds is also simultaneously conceived of spatially, in Origen the universe remains structured according to a "theological personalization", for which the plurality of worlds is "a succession of judgment and creation in time."⁴⁸ Despite this due clarification, the comparison presupposes the identification of a similar assertion about the cyclical structure as a way of human relief (*Entlastung*) from absoluteness (of time and God).⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the philosopher's reading confirms the

48 Blumenberg, 1966, 550n: „Kirke personifiziert hier die *omniparente materia*. Aufschlußreich ist die in diesem Zusammenhang gegebene Fehlinterpretation der Apokatastasis des Origenes, die als Gesetzmäßigkeit einer physischen Revolution des Weltbestandes aufgefasst ist, während bei Origenes selbst die jeweils neue Weltsetzung Ergebnis und Gestaltwerdung der freien sittlichen Entscheidung der vorhergehenden Weltphase ist [...]. Dieses beiläufige Mißverständnis ist deshalb so aufschlußreich, weil der Nolaner die gerade seine Authentizität indizierende Differenz zu dem großen Weltsystematiker Origenes übergeht, die in der durchgehenden Personalisierung des Universums dort, in der konsequenten Impersonalität hier besteht. Dem entspricht, daß die Pluralität der Welten bei Origenes eine Folge von Gericht und Schöpfung in der Zeit, bei Bruno eine Gleichzeitigkeit im Raume ist.“

49 About the notions of absolutism as a key-term for understanding the spirit of Blumenberg's philosophy, see O. Marquard, *Entlastung vom Absoluten*, in F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens*, Frankfurt 1999, 17–22. The theme of absolutism will keep a constitutive role also in Blumenberg's complex reflection on myth. Blumenberg uses the phrase "absolutism of reality" to indicate an anthropological, de-theologised concept, which allows explaining the roots of our experience of "finiteness" (*Endlichkeit*). See B. Merker, *Bedürfnis nach Bedeutsamkeit. Zwischen Lebenswelt und Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit*,

crucial value of Origen to facing the problem of modern rationality's debt towards Christian theology.

Conclusion

To problematise Blumenberg's perspective on Origen, one may question whether we should not consider even him as an heir of a German philosophical trajectory that, from Cusanus to Leibniz, Lessing, and the so-called *Liberalität*, has its theological roots in the radical and rationalist religious movements that have arisen with the rediscovery of Origen during the Reformation. Is Blumenberg's study about metaphors as "non-conceptual" temporary tools to elaborate our experience of reality not itself historically dependent on the Origenian way of considering the process of knowledge? Does the philosopher's metaphorology not reveal a "christian" background, the protrusion of the absolute, or of the gratuitous (originally conceived theologically), inside the immanence of the subject, that justifies the creative dynamism and freedom of human imagination, open to the future? Does the Origenian tradition not condition his strained interpretation of the pagan myth, conceived of as being capable of an anti-dogmatic process of historicisation and "dissemination" of meaning? It is difficult to deny the philosopher's dependence upon the *Liberalität* tradition, and upon hermeneutics of unavailable and elusive ulteriority, specially when considering his biographical trajectory of research that leads to Cusanus and Nolanus, which had started from the purely theological investigations of Augustine and had then searched other humanistic and non-Augustinian restitutions of the transcendence. The same continuous, close confrontation with Christian theology, even after the anthropological turning point of his philosophy, confirms that Blumenberg developed his reflection on the metaphor and on the non-conceptual through the analysis of this "Origenian" trajectory of thought. This impression is further reinforced by the author's strained re-interpretation of Origen, Cusanus and Nolanus, which seeks to distinguish within the history of Christian theology between a Greek-platonic, Pelagian

in: F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens. Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, Frankfurt 1999, 207–225., 68–98; P. Caloni, *La ragione sulla soglia tra assolutismo e contingenza della realtà*, in: *Dianoia* 27 (2018), 149–161. About Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology, see also J.C. Monod, *L'interdit anthropologique chez Husserl et Heidegger et sa transgression par Blumenberg*, in: *Revue Germanique Internationale* 10 (2009), 221–236; F. Gruppi, *Dialettica della caverna. Hans Blumenberg tra antropologia e politica*, Milano – Udine 2017.

and ultimately anti-Christian principle, and an Augustinian, eschatological-apocalyptic personalism or absolutism.⁵⁰

On the other hand, Blumenberg's refusal to interpret in this way modernity and his own metaphorology depends on the theoretical and philosophical necessity to contrast any theological device of metaphysical insurance with the self-legitimizing anthropological background of modern knowledge, which the thesis of self-assertion makes evident. He is aware of the historical problems that Origen represents, of the link between modern rationality and theological devices that he brings to light, but he wants to outline an alternative, mythologising and anti-Christian conception of the

50 I find noteworthy the investigation carried out by E. Brient into Cusanus, where the author demonstrates the possibility of reversing Blumenberg's argumentations. Brient 2002, 250–251: “[...] Cusanus' Christology serves the fundamental 'assertion need' or measure. This is a need which Bruno does not yet recognize, but one which becomes more and more pressing as celebration of the world's infinity gives way to an uncanny sense of homelessness and orientationlessness in the newly infinitized universe. [...] Blumenberg is surely correct when he identifies human self-assertion as a characteristically modern existential attitude toward the world, and he is right to identify the primary expression of that self-assertion in the extraordinary productivity and progress of modern science. The possibility of that progress, however, presupposes an understanding of nature as a law-like and yet inexhaustible field of investigation directing thought 'toward an objectivity', to use Blumenberg's formulation, 'that is never entirely to be reached, received or accomplished'. The peculiarly modern notion of such a regulative ideal, guiding the (potentially unending) progress of knowledge, finds its origins precisely in that limited concept which Cusanus took to be the intersection of two orders of infinity: the mind's unending capacity to transcend itself, and the absolute infinity of reality, which is not other than what it is.” What Brient overlooks, however, is precisely the fact that in Blumenberg's perspective the same category of progress is ambiguous, for the theological background that remains in the idea of a teleology of reason that should progressively gain a definitive truth and assert itself against every myth. On the contrary, the choice of Bruno as paradigm for the epochal threshold confirms the point of view of an inconceptual theory, which, by completely getting free from any teleological system, affirms reason in its mythopoietic and metaphorical capacity. Blumenberg's investigation, therefore, is not an apology of Enlightenment modernity as a project of universal and absolute rationality, but a reflection on the weakened and functional status of reason, that rediscovers the function of the myth, echoes Nietzschean reflections, and aims at a complete anthropologisation of knowledge. See this lapidary statement by J. Goldstein about Blumenberg's theory of modern age: «Modernität ist Perspektivität», which opens the article: J. Goldstein, *Deutung und Entwurf. Perspektiven der historischen Vernunft*, in *Deutung und Entwurf. Perspektiven der historischen Vernunft*, in: F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens. Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, Frankfurt 1999, 207–225.

genesis of modern rationality. Blumenberg wants to delete or remove any genetic trace of Christian theology, considering the only way to emancipate rationality to be the inevitable overcoming of Christian apocalyptic, absolutism, and dualism. The case of Origen perfectly demonstrates this radical attempt.

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Edited by Anders-Christian Jacobsen,
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